

**Gaeilge labhartha na bpáistí i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge i
dTuaisceart na hÉireann**

***The spoken Irish of pupils in Irish-medium schools in Northern
Ireland***

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December 2010

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This report describes a broad-based study of the spoken Irish of Year 7 pupils in Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland.¹ The purpose of the study was to investigate the linguistic features of Irish-medium pupils' spoken Irish and to try to explain why these features are present. The study comprised a corpus-based analysis of the use of Irish in a naturalistic, task-focussed setting. Twenty-four students, drawn from four different Irish-medium schools, were video-recorded while engaged in a collaborative task. Extracts from these recordings were used in a stimulated recall activity where pupils were prompted to comment on the quality of their spoken Irish, to correct their mistakes and to discuss factors that influence linguistic performance more generally. Results from these sessions show that pupils were surprised and disappointed by the level of code-mixing in their Irish. They reported that they do not critically monitor their spoken output when speaking Irish, and they gradually consolidate these errors through habitual use. On reflection, immersion pupils were able to correct some kinds of errors but not others. The findings indicate that it is difficult to improve immersion pupils' spoken accuracy in the target language once communicative sufficiency has been reached.

1.1 Background

Irish-medium education has experienced continual growth in Northern Ireland since the first such school was established by parents on the Shaw's Road in West Belfast in 1971. This school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, has now grown from its humble beginnings with originally 9 pupils to become the largest Irish-medium primary school in Northern Ireland with almost 300 pupils.

There are currently more than 80 centres in Northern Ireland providing excellent standards of education through the medium of Irish, for children and young people from the early age of 3 years right through to 18 years, and this number continues to grow. Of these 80 or so centres 43 are at nursery level, 34 are at primary level and there are presently 4

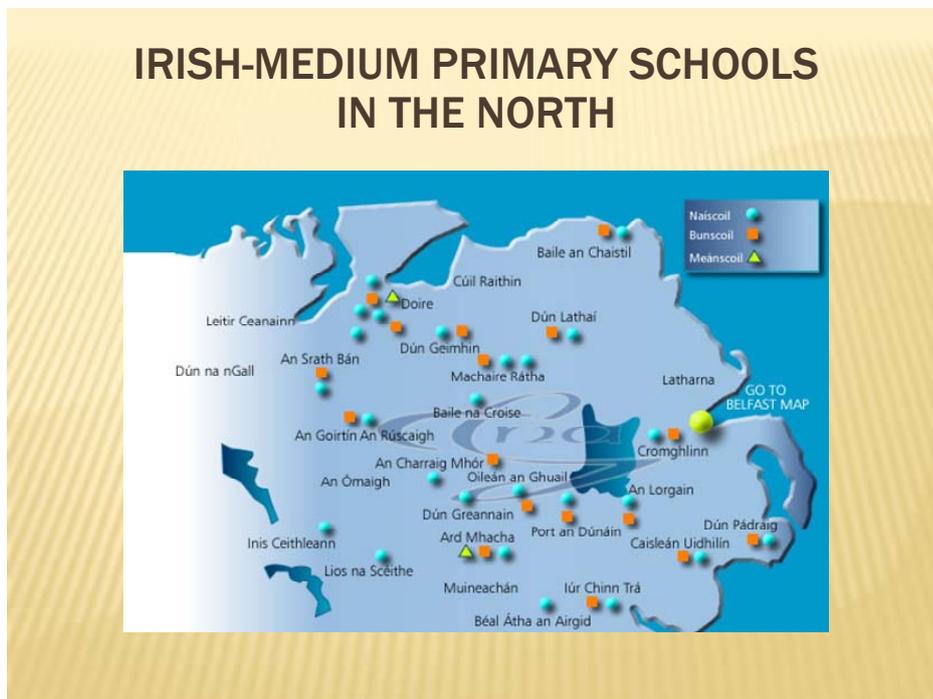
¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the receipt of a research grant from Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) to assist them in carrying out this research.

centres providing Irish-medium education at post-primary level in Northern Ireland (http://www.comhairle.org/school_listing.php).

According to the Northern Ireland Census 2001, 0.167 million people have some knowledge of Irish representing 10.4% of the total population (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2004). Approximately 1.5% of pupils received their education through the medium of Irish (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2004)

As can be seen from in Figure 1.1 below, Irish-medium settings cover a wide geographical area over Northern Ireland. This growth has seen a movement from mainly urban based Irish-medium schools initially, in the likes of the cities of Belfast and Derry, to a large growth in Irish-medium provision in many rural areas across Northern Ireland. Irish-medium primary and post-primary provisions follow the models of either independent free-standing Irish-medium schools or as Irish-medium units based in English-medium schools, although the four schools chosen for the purpose of this study are all free-standing Irish-medium schools.

Figure 1.1
The Location of Irish-medium Schools in Northern Ireland



All Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland employ a total early immersion policy for the first three years of primary schooling, with the majority of the children having also attended an Irish-medium nursery school for at least one year prior to starting primary school. Although Irish-medium pupils follow the same curriculum as their English-medium peers in Northern Ireland, there is a version of the Northern Ireland Curriculum Document specifically for Irish-medium schools in which all of the learning areas have been developed to reflect the unique context of the Irish-medium learning environment (www.nicurriculum.org). Irish-medium literacy development begins with a two year Nursery programme. In nursery and Foundation stage classrooms the children are totally immersed in the Irish language and early reading skills are developed and consolidated in Irish before the children are introduced to English reading and writing in years 3 or 4, depending on the school language policy. The introduction of the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum, which became statutory in 2006 initially for Years 1 and 5 (www.ccea.org.uk) didn't change the approach in the Irish-medium schools to the same degree as in English-medium schools. There was always an emphasis on oral language development and language through play in Irish-medium schools. An important feature in the Irish-medium literacy curriculum is the emphasis on Listening, Understanding and Talking in contrast to Talking and Listening in the English-medium curriculum (www.nicurriculum.org).

Irish is the communicative language of the school and pupils are expected to converse in Irish at all times within the school environment including the school playground at break-time. This provides the pupils with opportunities for output and social interaction outside the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature review²

Research studies conducted over many years have consistently shown that immersion pupils achieve high levels of fluency in the target language and their receptive skills of listening and reading are close to those of native speakers (Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990; Baker & Jones, 1998; Day & Shapson, 1996; Harley, 1987, 1993; Lazaruk, 2007; Lyster, 1987; Nadasdi, Mougeon, & Rehner, 2005; Swain, 2000). Their productive skills of speaking and writing however contain many non target-like forms that appear to persist over time (Baker, 2001; Genesee, 1985; Hammerly, 1991; Harley, 1993; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Lyster, 1987; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Neil, Nig Uidhir, & Clarke, 2000; Rebuffot, 1993; Salomone, 1992; Swain, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1982, 2008). The pedagogical approach in early immersion programmes has been identified as an experiential one where the primary focus is on meaning (Harley, 1993; Stern, 1990). The pupils are required to interpret the meaning of the teacher's verbal utterances and the nonverbal clues of the classroom context and it is through this negotiation of meaning that they acquire the second language (Genesee, 1985). While this approach leads to the development of good fluency in the target language and near native-like ability in the receptive skills of reading and writing, it is less successful in developing grammatical accuracy (Allen et al., 1990; Harley, Cummins, Swain, & Allen, 1990; Lyster & Mori, 2008; Mac Corraidh, 2008; Stern, 1990).

What appears to be lacking in experiential learning are the analytical strategies for organising learning in a more conscious way or more explicit learning (N. C. Ellis, 1994). Arising from a study by Allen et al. (1990) that examined the teaching strategies in both French immersion and core French classes, Stern (1990) made a tentative recommendation that more attention should be paid to analytic strategies in immersion programs. He emphasised that both analytic and experiential strategies should be viewed as complementary and part of a continuum. Other writers have suggested that older learners can cope with a more analytic approach (Philp, Mackey, & Oliver, 2008). Lyster (1998) maintained that in an immersion programme, the integration of an experiential and analytic

² A concise literature review highlighting the major issues that influenced the design and rationale of the study is included here. The reader who wishes to read a more detailed explication of these issues is directed to Ó Duibhir (2009).

approach will be most beneficial and he has developed the counterbalance hypothesis to explain the underlying rationale:

Instructional activities and interactional feedback that act as a counterbalance to the predominant communicative orientation of a given classroom setting will be more facilitative of interlanguage restructuring than instructional activities and interactional feedback that are congruent with the predominant communicative orientation. (Lyster & Mori, 2006, p. 294)

In an early immersion programme where the predominant focus is on meaning, an analytic approach is likely to be more successful in focusing learner's attention on form. Lyster (1998) suggested that a critical component of effective analytic language teaching is focusing learners' attention on form, and reflection on communication. This could be facilitated through a jigsaw task as in Lyster's (1998) study or a Dictogloss task (Wajnryb, 1990) as other studies such as (Kowal, 1997; Kowal & Swain, 1997) have demonstrated. The recording of pupils' speech as reported in the present study also provides a context for reflection on communication that can alert the learner to non-target like output features. Research studies of Irish-medium programmes have been limited in number and scope. Nonetheless, studies of Irish-medium pupils in the Republic of Ireland show that pupils achieve high levels of fluency and comprehension, levels that considerably exceed those achieved by pupils taking Irish as a school subject (Harris, 1984; Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile, & O'Gorman, 2006). These advantages are achieved without cost to their literacy skills in English (Department of Education, 1991; Parsons & Liddy, 2009). Similar to other immersion settings, concern has been expressed that the productive skills of speaking and writing acquired by Irish-medium pupils, do not reach native speaker levels, and their speech includes a range of resistant deviant forms (Henry, Andrews, & Ó Cainín, 2002). No comprehensive study of the features of Irish spoken in Irish-medium, based on speakers from the full range of such schools, has yet been carried out. Neither has there been any systematic attempt to explore the origins and maintenance of these features, or to establish the views of the pupils themselves on them. This study, therefore, represents a first attempt to make good an important research deficit in Irish-medium.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlining the design of the study consists of four sections. Section one, this introductory section, provides an overview of the chapter and lists the objectives of the study. Section two gives an account of the different methods used in the study. This is followed in Section three by a description of the participant pupils and schools, the manner in which they were selected, and the underlying rationale for this selection. Finally, section four reports on the data gathering instruments employed in the study.

The study set out to obtain a broad picture of the Irish-medium pupils' Irish in Northern Ireland, the range and nature of the linguistic errors encountered and to investigate pupils' awareness of and attitudes to the features of the Irish spoken by them and of the extent to which it deviates from native-speaker norms. As this is a replication of a previous study conducted in the Republic of Ireland (Ó Duibhir, 2009) it also sought to compare the features of pupils in both jurisdictions. It should be noted that the pupils in the Ó Duibhir (2009) study were in 6th class which is the eighth year of primary school in the Republic of Ireland whereas the pupils in Northern Ireland were in Year 7 or their seventh year in primary school and were in general a year younger than their peers in the Republic of Ireland. The pupils in both jurisdictions were in their final year of primary school and it was for this reason that those groups were chosen.

A key focus of the research was to investigate the broader communicative and sociolinguistic context within which the pupils' variety of Irish develops. To try to identify the source of these errors including the possibility that their occurrence might be linked to the kind of exposure to and use of Irish by pupils, the availability of good models of correct language use, and the social stimulus to correct the errors that they were aware of. Ultimately it was intended that the study would provide the foundation for a preliminary programme or the outline of a pedagogic approach that would improve the quality of Irish-medium pupils' Irish. Finally, it was hoped that the study would help to define more clearly the kind of programme of research that is needed to provide a comprehensive account of the particular variety of Irish spoken by Irish-medium pupils.

3.2 *Methodology*

3.2.1 *Objectives*

In order to obtain a broad picture of the pupils' linguistic features a range of objectives were identified as follows:

- to gather speech samples from Year 7 pupils in a range of Irish-medium schools in order to describe the features of the Irish spoken by them
- to compile a corpus of the speech of Year 7 pupils and to perform a lexical and syntactic analysis on this corpus leading to a documentation of the most common linguistic errors made by them
- to distinguish between those errors which pupils are capable of correcting when stimulated to reflect on them and those which are more fundamental in character (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; 2006)
- to ascertain the judgements of teachers on the kind of proficiency acquired by their pupils (using a semi-structured interview).

A number of different research methods were employed to achieve these objectives. While much of the data gathered in the study was through qualitative methods, quantitative methods were used to analyse that data where appropriate. An ethnographic approach was adopted in analysing the pupils spoken Irish while they were engaged in a collaborative task and in the stimulated recall. A phenomenological approach was deemed to be most suitable in order to interview the teachers and to explore their views and experiences of the grammatical accuracy in pupils' spoken Irish.

3.2.2 *Ethnomethodology: collaborative task and stimulated recall*

The approach to the study of pupil's Irish was ethnomethodological in character. This approach derives from social anthropology where an attempt is made to describe the situation from the perspective of the group members (Coolican, 2004). The data were gathered through the audio and video recording of the peer-peer interaction as the pupils worked on a collaborative task. The context created was one that was as close as possible to typical peer-to-peer interaction. The researcher(s) did not participate in the discourse other than for clarification purposes where requested, placing them at the non-participant end of

the participant observation continuum (Coolican, 2004; Patton, 2002). As there was full disclosure to the pupils of the purpose of the study in the consent letter that they received, a 'Hawthorne effect' may have occurred to some extent, i.e. the pupils' performance may have been affected by the knowledge that they were being observed (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1964). It is also likely that some or all the teachers would have encouraged the pupils, before the researcher(s) arrived, to use only Irish while they were working in their groups.

The data collected in these recordings provide an extensive corpus of Irish-medium learner language. The focus of the analysis of the data here is on lexical and syntactic items (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000) and the pupils' language use rather than on a conversational analysis and communicative interaction type approach. It is necessary to exercise care when these observable data are being analysed however, as it may not always accurately reflect the underlying linguistic knowledge of the pupils. Pupils engaged in the type of collaborative task used in this study may make grammatical errors because their attention is on the task in hand and on communicating their thoughts rather than on the linguistic form in which they are communicating them. An initial perusal of the corpus may lead the reader to assume that the pupils only have access to a narrow range of vocabulary. Seedhouse (2004) however, maintains that when two or more people interact, they do not express every single aspect of their intended meaning, but rely on mutually understood features of the context and background. He further draws attention to the fact that 'utterances are not treated literally but are understood by reference to context and assumptions about the other party' (p. 6). The collaborative task in the present study is located in the here and now and it facilitates the use of non-verbal messages. It is often in these non-verbal messages between the interactants that meaning is relayed (Brown & Rodgers, 2002).

In order to explore the pupil's insights and the thought processes underlying their own linguistic performance while they engaged in the collaborative task, a stimulated recall was utilised. The use of a stimulated recall enables the pupils to correct any mistakes that they made in the chosen extracts. This allowed a thorough exploration of the limits of their underlying communicative competence. Stimulated recall has been described as an introspective method that can be used as 'a means of eliciting data about thought processes involved in carrying out a task or activity' (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 1). Groups of pupils

in each school were chosen to view a recording of themselves participating in the collaborative task. They were given an opportunity to reflect on what thought processes they might have used while engaged in the task. They were also asked to give their opinions on their linguistic performance and on their knowledge of Irish grammar. The stimulated recall methodology is explained in greater detail in section 3.4.2.

3.2.3 Quantitative approach: analysis of pupil speech

The samples of the pupils' speech gathered through the collaborative task were analysed using WordSmith tools (Scott, 2004). This analysis, which is described in detail in Chapter 5, enabled the most common features of the pupils' spoken Irish to be quantified providing a list of the high frequency words used by the pupils while engaged in the task, and a comparison of the correct and deviant use of these words.

3.2.4 Phenomenology

The objective of the interviews with principal and class teachers was to explore their views and experiences of grammatical inaccuracy and deviation from native speaker norms and related problems in the speech of Irish immersion pupils. A phenomenological design (Denscombe, 2003), that focuses on the human experience of the teacher in the classroom and school, was adopted. The grammatical inaccuracy on the part of immersion pupils has been reported in the research literature as outlined in Chapter 2. The possibility of teachers having different reactions to these is suggested by the fact that studies of teachers in general have revealed significant differences in their reactions to errors (James, 1998). Adopting a phenomenological approach opened up the possibility of developing a greater understanding of 'immersion speech' in all its complexity within the environment of individual classrooms and schools (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated not just the exploration of what was happening in classrooms but also the teachers' understanding of why and how it was happening.

3.3 Participants

The study concentrated on pupils' in Year 7, boys and girls 11 years of age. As the data gathering occurred at the end of Year 7, pupils had almost completed eight to nine years in immersion, if one includes their pre-school year, or two years in many cases, which for the

majority of them was through the medium of Irish. This represents approximately 6,000 hours of instruction through the medium of Irish prior to the study. As the research design had been employed previously in the Ó Duibhir (2009) study it was not necessary to conduct a pilot study.

A purposive sample of four Irish-medium schools was chosen from a total of 33 such schools in existence in June 2009. The schools selected represent the full range of different types of Irish-medium school found in the Northern Ireland and were carefully chosen against a set of criteria that would represent the different characteristics present in Irish-medium schools. These criteria included school size, geographical location, the number of years in existence, and the socio-economic status of the pupils' parents. Twenty-four pupils from these schools, organised in groups of three, were video-recorded while engaged in a collaborative design task as part of the first stage of the study. The first 20 minutes of speech from the selected groups were transcribed and compiled into a corpus of over 14,000 words based on two hours and forty minutes of pupil dialogue. Analysis of the corpus revealed that the most common features of Irish that had not yet been mastered by immersion pupils were use of the copula, the dependent form of verbs and verbal noun clauses. The incidence of code-mixing and the mapping of English syntax onto Irish in the corpus were also established. Selecting a simple random sample of schools would not have ensured that variations in these important factors were represented in the sample of schools chosen for the present study.

The data from two Gaeltacht or native-speaker schools, from Irish-speaking heartland areas, from the Ó Duibhir (2009) study were included to enable a direct comparison of the linguistic output of pupils in Irish-medium schools located in an English-speaking area of Ireland, with that of native-speaker pupils of the same age and stage of development living in Gaeltacht communities. In a similar fashion, Day and Shapson (1996; 1987) used a Francophone comparison group when assessing the oral communicative skills of French immersion pupils in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The Gaeltacht schools included in the present study were chosen from areas where 67% or more of the community speak Irish on a daily basis. Areas with this level of daily Irish usage have been identified by Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) as the strongest areas in which Irish is spoken.

The Irish-medium schools selected for the study are located in cities or small towns which is where the vast majority of Irish-medium schools are situated, as it requires a critical mass of parents to create the demand for an Irish-medium school. It was not possible to list the geographical regions in which the schools were located, as it might have identified some of the schools. The two Gaeltacht schools selected have been included in the DEIS action plan for rural schools. They are deemed representative of Gaeltacht schools as the majority of Gaeltacht schools are located in isolated rural areas and are included in the DEIS action plan.

3.3.1 Invitation to participate in the study

In order to invite schools to participate in the study an information letter was drafted for school principals. This letter was posted and was followed by a telephone call to the principals. All principals contacted agreed to participate in the study and were very supportive of the project. A date for data collection was selected and letters were drafted for parents and pupils giving them information about the study and seeking their consent to participate in it. An information letter was also prepared for the class teacher.

3.4 The research instruments

An account is given in this section of the research instruments used to gather data in the study. The following instruments were used:

- collaborative task for pupils
- stimulated recall exercise for a subgroup of pupils
- interviews with principal teacher and class teacher

The principal method of gathering data in the study was by means of a collaborative task that was developed in the pilot phase of the project. This section commences with an account of its development and administration. The account continues with a description of the use made of excerpts from the video recordings of this task as a stimulated recall exercise. The school principal and class teacher in each school were interviewed, where they gave their consent, to explore their judgements concerning their pupils' proficiency in Irish.

3.4.1 *Playground-design task*

The pupils were asked to design a playground for children in a school in Zambia. A story about a girl called Maggie attending a school in Zambia was read to the pupils. A photograph of Maggie and map of Africa and Zambia were given to each group to support the story. The story was chosen in order to introduce an affective dimension into the task. The girl in the story was of a similar age to the children but her life experience had been very different to that of children in a developed country. The task was conducted during regular class time and all the pupils in each class participated in them. Similar tasks could be easily replicated in any classroom.

Following the story the pupils were asked to design a playground for Maggie's school within a budget of £3,000. A list of equipment and prices was supplied together with a map of the playground. The pupils had to bear in mind the ages of the children the weather in Zambia and safety issues, as they designed the playground.

Recording took place while the pupils drew a design for the playground on a sheet of A3 paper that was supplied to each group. The recording equipment consisted of three video cameras, six tape-recorders depending on the size of the class. The task generated an animated discussion among the pupils and was deemed suitable for eliciting samples of their speech in as naturalistic a situation as possible. The recordings were later transcribed and the speech of the pupils was analysed with a particular focus on their use of English, the children's first language, and grammatical errors in Irish.

3.4.1.1 Transcription

Experience in the Ó Duibhir (2009) study established that video recordings were easier to transcribe than the audio recordings, as it was possible to see which pupil was speaking and on occasions, to lip-read, which considerably increased the accuracy of the transcription. The video recordings also facilitated the stimulated recall as described in 3.4.2. For the purpose of generating a corpus of the pupils' speech, it was decided to transcribe the first twenty minutes of the video recordings in each school. The first twenty minutes were chosen, as this was the period, which from experience, generated the greatest level of energy and discussion from the pupils. After this period there were a greater number of pauses where the pupils concentrated on the drawing of their design. It would also have been prohibitive in the context of this study to transcribe and analyse the entire

recording for each group, which averaged 30 minutes. In total 2 hours and 40 minutes of the pupils' speech in Irish-medium schools was successfully recorded and transcribed. A further 60 minutes of pupils' speech in Gaeltacht schools was available to enable a comparison between the all-Irish schools pupils and native speakers of a similar age.

The transcripts of the pupils' speech were subsequently compiled into a corpus. Transcription conventions were developed based on the work of ten Have (1999) in particular with modifications drawn from the work of Cameron (2001), Harris and Murtagh (1999), and Swann (2001). The excerpts selected in the text have been translated into English but it was beyond the scope of this research to translate all the transcribed speech.

3.4.2 Stimulated recall

One means of allowing a subject to reflect on their language use is to video-record them and to show them the video-recording a short time after the data gathering exercise. These recordings can then be used to ask participants to explore their perceptions while they were performing the task (Sato & Lyster, 2007). This type of study can be classed as a retrospective study (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). This is where the exploration takes place after the data gathering. The retrospective method used in this study has been called a stimulated recall (Chaudron, 2003; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Gass & Mackey, 2000; Mackey, 2002; McDonough, 1995; Polio, et al., 2006). In a stimulated recall the researcher can prompt participants regarding thoughts they had while engaged in a task (Gass & Mackey, 2000). While asking 10 and 11 year old pupils to explore their states of consciousness may not be possible or reliable (Brown & Rodgers, 2002) the recorded extracts allow the pupils to reflect on their performance of the task and on the language used. The stimulated recall presents the pupils with his/her own speech as an object upon which to reflect. The researcher attempts to help the learner to externalise his/her thinking and to gain insights into the current state of the learner's interlanguage. The pupils are given an opportunity to reflect on their output and to correct it upon reflection thus giving more reliable evidence of their underlying linguistic competence. This provides richer data than would be available if one relied merely on the evidence of the linguistic performance in the initial recording.

The interactive tasks designed for this study focussed pupils' attention on the completion of the exercise itself rather than on the language being used. The stimulated

recall process allows the researcher to seek clarification of issues which might not otherwise be capable of interpretation (Polio, et al., 2006). The issues the learners notice in a stimulated recall are also important as it gives an indication of where their attention was focussed during the interaction. Polio et al. (2006) caution against drawing conclusions from what is not noticed in the transcripts. In such cases it may be necessary to draw the pupils' attention to grammatical errors in order to check their understanding of the correct forms.

There were three phases to the stimulated recall activity. In the first phase the pupils viewed recorded video excerpts and gave their general thoughts on the extracts. As they cited language related issues the researcher focussed the reflection on these issues easing them into the activity in a non-threatening way and to gain their confidence and trust. In this way they were enabled to share their observations and insights into their thought processes with an interested enquirer. In the second phase the pupils were given a transcript of the excerpt that they had just viewed and shown the recording a second time. After the second viewing they were invited to correct any mistakes that they had noted in the recording or in the transcript. The third phase focussed on the mistakes that the pupils corrected. The issue of why they made mistakes when they knew the correct form was explored with them together with their thought processes as they were engaged in the collaborative task. As it transpired the pupils engaged in the process with enthusiasm and appeared to enjoy the experience. The stimulated recall activity was replicated in all school in the main study. Excerpts from the transcripts of the stimulated recall sessions are examined in detail and the results are reported in Chapter 6.

3.4.3 Principal and class teacher interviews

On the first visit to each school the principal and the Year 7 teacher were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007) that were scheduled to take place on the second visit to the school. Three principal teachers and three Year 7 teachers agreed to be interviewed giving a total of six interviews.

Participants were given a Plain Language Statement and an Informed Consent Form so that they were fully aware of the format of the interview and the issues that were to be discussed. A reasonable estimate of the time commitment required was offered. The issue of confidentiality was discussed and participants were assured that no information would be

disclosed to a third party without their consent. All records and data were kept at a secure location and all identifiable details were altered to ensure that disclosure of participants was avoided and to safeguard their privacy. Consent was obtained in writing having ensured that participants had a full understanding of what the study involved. The consent explained that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Chapter 4: Description of corpus of pupils' speech

4.1 Introduction

One of the main purposes of the present study was to gather speech samples from Year 7 pupils in Irish-medium schools in order to describe the features of their spoken Irish. A collaborative task was designed for this purpose as described in section 3.3.1. Recordings were made of twenty-four Year 7 pupils in four Irish-medium schools in different parts of Northern Ireland and it is these recordings that form the basis of the corpus that is analysed in this chapter. The corpus also includes recordings of 15 pupils in two Gaeltacht schools and 65 pupils in all-Irish schools in the Republic of Ireland for comparison purposes.

The remainder of this chapter contains five sections. The first section commences with a description of the corpus and provides a quantitative analysis of the data. This description and analysis is complemented by a more qualitative analysis in Chapter 5. The first section of the present chapter describes how the corpus was compiled and the methods used to analyse it. The second section generates word-lists that compare the 50 most common words used by Gaeltacht, all-Irish and Irish-medium pupils to see if there are differences in the words used by each school type. This is followed in the third section by an error analysis where the number of utterances with errors will be calculated with a view to providing a general description of the corpus.

Section four examines the pupils' behaviour in both school types in relation to code-mixing and code-switching. An examination is made of the word-lists generated in section two to see whether the English words used by the pupils fall into the code-mixing or code-switching category. The chapter will conclude with a summary and discussion of the findings.

4.2 Description of corpus

4.2.1 Analytic systems

In order to supplement a qualitative type analysis of the pupils speech with a more comprehensive quantitative one the WordSmith (2004) computer software package was used. WordSmith contains two tools in particular that were useful in the present study. The first tool is WordList which can produce word frequency lists that enable a comparison of

the range of vocabulary used by the Gaeltacht, all-Irish school and Irish-medium pupils. It also counts the number of tokens (words) and types (distinct words) in a selected text. It will calculate the percentage of each word in the text together with a type/token ratio. The other WordSmith tool that is particularly useful is Concord. This tool allows a search of the corpus by word or phrase. With this tool it is also possible to view the local linguistic context in which each word or phrase was used and helps to describe and possibly explain the conditions under which the correct and incorrect forms were used i.e. the concordances. WordSmith has the ability to reduce large amounts of language to manageable lists and concordances which can facilitate the identification of patterns in the text (Scott & Tribble, 2006).

Table 4.1 summarises the statistics from these wordlists. Columns 1-3 identify the school, the number of pupils whose speech was transcribed and the length in minutes of the transcripts.

4.2.2 Preliminary type/token analysis

Column 4 in Table 4.1 shows the number of tokens (words) transcribed in each school. This figure ranged from 1,274 (School 9) to 6,168 (School 14). The number of types (distinct words) is shown in column 5. This ranged from 274 (School 9) to 648 (School 4). As the texts were of different lengths it was necessary to use a standardised type/token ratio (STTR) in order to compare them. The tokens in this case are the number of words in the text, and the types are the different or distinct words. WordSmith was set to compute the type/token ratio every 1,000 words as it goes through each text file. A running average is thus calculated, and the average type/token ratio is based on consecutive 1,000-word chunks of text (Scott, 2004). This allows a comparison of the STTR where there are texts of differing lengths. It can be seen then in column 6 that the STTR for Irish-medium and all-Irish schools ranges from 18.0 (School 15) to 25.4 (School 4). In the case of the Gaeltacht schools the STTR ranges from 23.4 to 29.2. The overall average for each school types is 21.5 for Irish-medium, 23.3 for all-Irish and 24.9 Gaeltacht schools. The STTR that stands out in column 6 is 29.2 (School 10). This may indicate that the pupils in this school had greater lexical density than the other schools. Scott (2004) cautions however, that the STTR value is a rather crude measurement of lexical density.

Table 4.1 gives summary statistics for each school type based on the results of the analysis of the WordList tool in WordSmith, the next section will compare the 50 most common words used by school type.

Table 4.1
School by school summary of the basic features of the corpus of all-Irish and Gaeltacht pupils' spoken Irish

School ID	No. of pupils whose speech was transcribed	No. of minutes transcribed	No. of tokens (words) transcribed	No. of types (distinct) words	Standardised type/token ratio
Irish-Medium schools (NI)					
School 13	6	40	2,945	397	22.7
School 14	9	60	6,168	539	21.5
School 15	6	40	3,578	361	18.0
School 16	3	20	1,693	388	24.9
Total Irish-medium schools	24	160 (2 hrs. 40 mins.)	14,394	890	21.5
All-Irish schools (RoI)					
School 1	6	40	2,504	348	22.0
School 2	9	55	4,286	523	23.1
School 3	6	26	2,933	395	23.9
School 4	9	60	5,438	648	25.4
School 5	9	56	4,334	453	22.8
School 6	11	51	4,144	489	22.0
School 7	6	40	3,482	428	22.6
School 8	6	31	2,388	396	23.0
School 9	3	21	1,274	274	23.2
Total all-Irish schools	65	380 (6 hrs. 20 mins.)	30,783	1,527	23.3
Gaeltacht schools					
School 10	6	17	1,451	330	29.2
School 11	9	43	3,106	408	23.4
Total Gaeltacht schools	15	60	4,557	556	24.9
Total for all school types	104	600 (10 hrs.)	49,734	1,919	22.2

4.3 50 most common words: Variations by school type

The purpose of comparing the 50 most common words used by each school type is to see if there are any significant variations or patterns to be found in word usage between Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht. The composite list for Irish-medium schools in the study will be compared to the all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. This list is based on the combined transcripts of the four Irish-medium schools in the study analysed together. This may highlight similarities or differences between the pupils in the different school types that would merit further investigation. It might be expected for example that native Irish-speaking pupils would use a wider range of verbs in completing the task than their peers in Irish-medium and all-Irish schools. As noted in Chapter 2, immersion pupils have been found to use a number of high-coverage items and stretch these to meet their needs in a variety of contexts (Harley, 1992; Harley, Cummins, Swain, & Allen, 1990; Johnstone, 2002; McKendry, 2007). It should be borne in mind however, in the context of the present study that the three subcorpora were based on a similar task and were thus constrained by the subject matter and context of the discourse. The native-speaker pupils may not have been extended in the context of the task to display the full range of their ability.

One method of checking if this is the case in the corpus in the present study is to compare the most common words used by pupils in each school type. Another area of interest is the pupils' use of English discourse markers and words borrowed from English. The compilation of common word lists may also shed light on this area. Table 4.2 below presents the 50 most common words used by the Gaeltacht pupils in order of frequency and the percentage usage of each word is compared with that of the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils.

Column 1 in Table 4.2 shows the 50 most common words used by the Gaeltacht pupils. We can see the frequency order of the words used in column 2. The number of times each word was used is shown in columns 3, 6 and 9 for Gaeltacht, Irish-medium and all-Irish schools respectively. The figures that are of immediate interest in this table are the percentages in columns 4, 7 and 10 that give the percentage for the number of times each word was used out by school type. The total percentages are given at the bottom of these columns 4 and 7. We can see then in column 4 that the 50 most common words used by the Gaeltacht school pupils represent 56.4% of all the words spoken in their corpus. An

examination of column 7 reveals that the same 50 words represent 49.2% of all the words spoken by the Irish-medium pupils. Column 10 shows that the same 50 words represent 51.0% for the all-Irish pupils. It appears from this analysis that there is a large degree of similarity between the three school types in their frequency of usage of these 50 words.

It may be of interest to note that some of the 50 most common words in the Gaeltacht school list appear further down the frequency order of the Irish-medium and all-Irish schools. The corresponding frequency order for Irish-medium and all-Irish schools is given in columns 5 and 8 respectively.

When the frequency percentages in columns 4, 7 and 10 in Table 4.2 are compared for individual words a number of notable differences emerge. These differences are listed below and highlighted in the table with an asterisk *:

- The personal pronoun *é* ‘it’, is used with equal frequency by Gaeltacht and Irish-medium pupils (2.29%) in row 4 but only half as frequently as the all-Irish school pupils (4.06%) as compared to the. Although there are many other words used twice as frequently by one school type as compared to another, *é* is significant because of its high placing in the frequency order for both school types.
- The personal pronoun *acu* ‘at them’ is used almost 60 times more frequently by the Gaeltacht pupils (1.83%) than the Irish-medium pupils (0.03%) and 30 times more frequently than the all-Irish pupils (0.06%) in row 6.
- The eclipsed number *gcéad* (*céad*) ‘hundred’ is used almost three times as frequently by the Gaeltacht pupils (0.94%) as compared to the Irish-medium (0.31%) and the all-Irish pupils (0.33%) in row 23.
- The personal number *beirt* ‘two’ in row 24 is used almost 11 times more frequently by the Gaeltacht pupils (0.87%) than the Irish-medium pupils (0.08%) and just over seven times more frequently than the all-Irish pupils (0.12%).
- In row 34 we see that the lenited form *mhíle* ‘thousand’, was used almost three times more frequently by the Gaeltacht pupils (1.21%) than the Irish-medium pupils (0.24%) and almost twice as frequently than the all-Irish school pupils (0.62%).

Table 4.2 The 50 most common words in frequency order as used by the Gaeltacht, Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils

Words	Gaeltacht schools			Irish-medium schools (NI)			All-Irish schools (RoI)		
	Frequency order	No. of times used	%	Frequency order	No. of times used	%	Frequency order	No. of times used	%
sin	1	251	5.47	1	975	6.77	1	1859	6.03
tá	2	176	3.84	5	390	2.71	4	998	3.24
an	3	150	3.27	3	407	2.83	2	1433	4.65
é*	4	105	2.29	6	329	2.29	3	1252	4.06
a	5	85	1.85	8	316	2.20	6	570	1.85
acu*	6	84	1.83	303	4	0.03	216	20	0.06
agus	7	84	1.83	2	434	3.02	5	758	2.46
againn	8	77	1.68	28	110	0.76	30	200	0.65
chéad	9	77	1.68	32	106	0.74	9	440	1.43
sé	10	74	1.61	13	179	1.24	8	499	1.62
ag	11	71	1.55	10	199	1.38	11	421	1.37
ceann	12	66	1.44	20	146	1.01	22	250	0.81
bhfuil	13	57	1.24	18	152	1.06	14	329	1.07
so	14	54	1.18	11	199	1.38	13	335	1.09
dhá	15	53	1.16	9	303	2.11	10	427	1.39
yeah	16	50	1.09	24	118	0.82	7	535	1.74
seo	17	46	1.00	33	104	0.72	29	213	0.69
ar	18	45	0.98	16	163	1.13	16	301	0.98
go	19	45	0.98	23	119	0.83	18	279	0.91
níl	20	45	0.98	36	95	0.66	19	277	0.90
no	21	45	0.98	31	110	0.76	12	350	1.14
rud	22	45	0.98	26	112	0.78	15	350	1.14
gcéad*	23	43	0.94	72	45	0.31	67	103	0.33
beirt*	24	40	0.87	185	12	0.08	158	37	0.12
le	25	40	0.87	25	116	0.81	49	129	0.42
trí	26	37	0.81	37	95	0.66	41	144	0.47
cúig	27	35	0.76	34	103	0.72	27	215	0.70
beidh	28	31	0.68	42	77	0.53	45	139	0.45
míle	29	31	0.68	14	171	1.19	83	83	0.27
ó	30	30	0.65	65	53	0.37	26	236	0.77
bord	31	29	0.63	107	28	0.19	60	111	0.36
cad	32	29	0.63	15	164	1.14	33	184	0.60
euro/punt	33	29	0.63	50	71	0.49	50	128	0.42
mhíle*	34	29	0.63	89	34	0.24	63	107	0.35
fágtha	35	28	0.61	49	71	0.49	53	123	0.40
right	36	28	0.61	21	143	0.99	55	121	0.39
na	37	27	0.59	19	150	1.04	21	255	0.83
sleamhnán	38	27	0.59	55	64	0.44	47	132	0.43
fá	39	26	0.57	127	22	0.15	114	59	0.19
fhios	40	26	0.57	91	33	0.23	93	78	0.25
seacht	41	26	0.57	53	66	0.46	91	81	0.26
ach	42	25	0.55	43	76	0.53	56	118	0.38
atá	43	25	0.55	93	32	0.22	80	84	0.27
ansin	44	24	0.52	27	111	0.77	17	294	0.95
mise	45	24	0.52	40	82	0.57	48	130	0.42
tú	46	24	0.52	48	72	0.50	20	266	0.86
iarraidh	47	23	0.50	265	6	0.04	144	44	0.14
agam	48	22	0.48	110	26	0.18	84	82	0.27
caithfidh/ caithfidh	49	22	0.48	45	73	0.51	61	110	0.36
choinne	50	22	0.48	125	22	0.15	184	28	0.09
Total		2,587	56.4%		7,088	49.2%		15,717	51.0%

As we have seen in Table 4.2 while there are many similarities in the most common words used by pupils in the two school types, differences that merit further examination have been highlighted. Among the differences are the use of prepositional pronouns *acu* ‘at them’ and *againn* ‘at us’, the use of the pronoun *é* ‘it’ and the use of numbers such as *beirt* ‘two’, *gcéad* ‘hundred’ and *mhíle* ‘thousand’. These and other differences that emerge will help to inform the qualitative analysis in Chapter 5.

Table 4.3 shows words that were in the 50 most common words used by the Irish-medium school pupils but not in the top 50 for Gaeltacht schools. There were 13 words in total in this category. Column 2 shows the frequency order for the Irish-medium schools and this can be compared to columns 5 and 8 that show the frequency order for the all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. Similarly the percentage usage in columns 4, 7 and 10 can also be compared. When these columns are compared the most striking features that emerge are the following:

- The noun *céad* ‘hundred’ (Row 1) is used three more frequently by the Irish-medium pupils (2.72%) than the all-Irish pupils (0.81%) and 18 times more frequently than the Gaeltacht pupils (0.15%).
- While the verb *Thig* ‘to put’ (Row 3), is used more frequently by the Irish-medium pupils than either of the other school types, this is a feature of the Ulster dialect of Irish.
- While the English affirmative particle ‘yeah’ (Row 5), is used less frequently by the Irish-medium pupils than either of the other school types, when a similar word ‘aye’ (Row 13) is added the differences are less significant.
- Finally, the numeral *ceathair* ‘four’ (Row 9) is used more often by the Irish-medium (0.63%) than either of the other school types, all-Irish (0.21%) Gaeltacht (0.37%). In the context of the task in the present study one would expect the word *ceithre* ‘four’ to be used. It is this latter form that is used in Irish when combined with a noun such as *ceithre luascán* ‘four swings’.

These differences from Table 4.3 together with those previously observed from Table 4.2 will be analysed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Table 4.3
A comparison by school type of the most common words used by the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils which were not in the top 50 words used by the Gaeltacht pupils (Table 4.2 above)

Irish-medium schools (NI)				All-Irish schools (RoI)			Gaeltacht schools		
Word	Freq. order	No. of times used	%	Freq. order	No. of times used	%	Freq. order	No. of times used	%
céad*	4	392	2.72	23	250	0.81	151	7	0.15
mar	12	246	0.80	23	250	0.81	59	19	0.41
thig*	17	156	1.08	181	30	0.10	113	10	0.22
do	22	137	0.95	66	106	0.34	56	19	0.41
yeah*	24	118	0.82	7	535	1.72	18	50	1.08
caoga	28	111	0.77	55	121	0.39	107	10	0.22
fuair	30	110	0.76	105	67	0.22	102	11	0.24
faigh	35	97	0.67	40	157	0.50	90	12	0.26
ceathair*	38	90	0.63	106	66	0.21	69	17	0.37
ní	39	89	0.62	43	143	0.46	66	18	0.39
just	41	80	0.56	32	196	0.63	88	13	0.28
eile	46	73	0.51	38	170	0.55	65	18	0.39
aye*	47	72	0.50	546	3	0.01	261	2	0.04
Total		1,771	11.39%		2,094	6.75%		206	4.46%

Table 4.4 summarises the statistics in columns 4, 7 and 10 in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 above. When the totals for the percentage usage of the 50 words in Table 4.2 and the 13 words in Table 4.3 are added we get a total of 60.6% for the Irish-medium pupils and 57.8% for the all-Irish pupils and 60.9% for the Gaeltacht schools. These 63 words then represent a very similar proportion of the corpus for each school type. It is the relative difference in percentage usage of each word, however, that is most informative for the analysis in the present study.

Table 4.4
63 words in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 as percentage of corpus for each school type

	Irish-medium schools (NI)		All-Irish schools (RoI)		Gaeltacht schools	
	No. of times used	%	No. of times used	%	No. of times used	%
50 words in Table 4.2	7,088	49.2%	15,717	51.0%	2,587	56.4%
13 words in Table 4.3	1,771	11.4%	2,094	6.8%	206	4.5%
Total	8,859	60.6%	17,811	57.8%	2,793	60.9%

4.4 Analysis of corpus for the presence of errors

The description of the corpus above was supplemented with a manual analysis for the presence of linguistic errors³ at a lexical and syntactic level. Deviations from native speaker norms were marked for further investigation. The Gaeltacht school corpus was also examined for errors and it was found that while there were some errors they were very few in number (see Table 4.6 below). It will be recalled that the Gaeltacht schools chosen were in Irish-speaking heartland areas defined as Category A areas where over 67% of the population speak Irish on a daily basis (Ó Giollagáin, et al., 2007). The groups whose speech was selected for transcription were those whom the teacher considered to contain the pupils with the strongest home background in Irish. Due to the prevalence of immigration to Gaeltacht areas (Mac Cóil, 2003; Ó Riagáin, 2008) it was not possible to ensure that every child recorded and transcribed was a native Irish speaker from birth.

The impressionistic view that the reader gets from reading through the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpus is that there are many deviations from native speaker norms in the pupils' speech. The purpose of the error analysis in this section is to quantify the error rates in Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. Excerpts representing 10% of Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpora were sent to native speakers and near native speakers who were asked to underline an utterance that contained an error. The presence of borrowings from English in an utterance was not to be considered an error.

Column two in Table 4.6 shows the number of utterances with errors in each excerpt of 190 utterances. Columns 3 and 4 show the percentage of incorrect and correct utterances respectively. Based on the total figure for Irish-medium and all-Irish schools in Column 3 we can expect to find errors in almost every three utterances out of ten in the corpus, 32.1% for the Irish-medium pupils and 29.2% for the all-Irish pupils. There is a substantial difference in the percentage of errors across the schools. School 1 Group 2 for example, has 20.0% of errors whereas School 4 Group 1 has 41.6% of errors. This is not to imply that the quality of the pupils' Irish in School 4 is twice as poor as those of School 1. It does however, as stated at the outset, give a measurement of the number of pupil errors and confirm the impressionistic view that there are many deviations from native speaker norms in the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpus.

³ Although a distinction has been made between mistakes and errors all deviations from native speaker norms are treated as errors in this stage of the analysis.

The final two rows of Table 4.5 report the results of two Gaeltacht school groups. It can be seen that there were very few errors in the Gaeltacht school corpus. No errors were found in School 10 Group 2 and there were only five errors in School 11 Group 1. It is interesting to note that it was the same pupil that made all five errors in School 11 Group 1. This pupil may not have a strong home background in Irish.

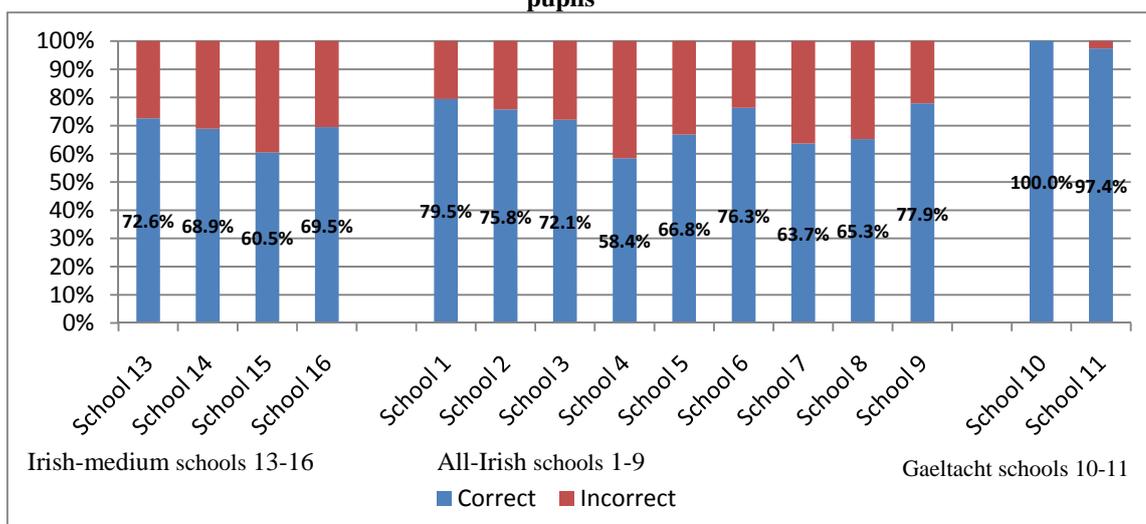
Table 4.5
Error analysis of selected excerpts (N=190 utterances) from the four Irish-medium, nine all-Irish schools and two Gaeltacht schools

School and Group	No. of utterances with errors	% of utterances with errors	% of utterances without errors
Irish-medium schools			
School 13 Grp 1	52	27.4%	72.6%
School 14 Grp 2	59	31.1%	68.9%
School 15 Grp 1	75	39.5%	60.5%
School 16 Grp 1	58	30.5%	69.5%
Total Irish-medium schools	248	32.1%	67.9%
All-Irish schools			
School 1 Grp 2	39	20.5%	79.5%
School 2 Grp 1	46	24.2%	75.8%
School 3 Grp 3	53	27.9%	72.1%
School 4 Grp 1	79	41.6%	58.4%
School 5 Grp 2	63	33.2%	66.8%
School 6 Grp 1	45	23.7%	76.3%
School 7 Grp 1	69	36.3%	63.7%
School 8 Grp 1	66	34.7%	65.3%
School 9 Grp 1	42	22.1%	77.9%
Total all-Irish schools	499	29.2%	70.8%
Gaeltacht schools			
School 10 Grp 2	0	0%	100%
School 11 Grp 1	5	2.6%	97.4%

This error analysis exercise enabled a quantification of the number of deviations from native speaker norms that exist in the Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht school corpus. The Irish-medium pupils have a mean error rate of 32.1% and the all-Irish pupils have a mean error rate of 29.2%. Both of these error rates are very similar and are close to

three incorrect utterances in every ten. This error rate varies substantially from school to school with four out of ten utterances in School 4 containing errors compared to two out of ten in School 1. It is not intended however, to equate a lower rate of errors with a greater proficiency in Irish. The next chapter will examine the features of those errors in greater detail.

Figure 4.1
School by school variations in the proportion of errors in the utterances of all-Irish and Gaeltacht pupils



4.5 Code-mixing and code-switching

An examination of the corpus reveals that pupils from all school types use English words while speaking Irish. This phenomenon is quite common among bilinguals (Ritchie & Bhatia, 2006) and we distinguish between code-mixing and code-switching in pupils' use of English. For the purposes of the present study, code-mixing will be taken to mean 'the use of various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses and sentences)... within a sentence' (Ritchie & Bhatia, 2006, p. 337) or intrasentential use. Code-switching is understood as 'the use of various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses and sentences)... across sentence boundaries within a speech event' (Ritchie & Bhatia, 2006, p. 337) or intersentential use. The next section looks at the use of English words in general. This is followed by an examination of the code-mixing behaviour of pupils with a particular focus on the most common English words used by the pupils in each school type.

4.5.1 *Intrasentential use: The 25 most common English words*

The word-list generated by WordSmith was examined to find the most common English words used by pupils in each school type. A systematic examination of the Irish-medium and all-Irish school word-list revealed that there was a pattern to English word usage. The words fall into three frequency groupings. The first comprises the eight words in Section A of Table 4.6. The second group comprises the 17 words in Section B of Table 4.7.

It can be seen from the first section of Column 1 in Table 4.6 that there are eight English words that are used more frequently by the Irish-medium pupils than the remainder. They are; ‘so’, ‘right’, ‘yeah’, ‘no’, ‘just’, ‘like’, ‘then’ and ‘okay’. Two of them ‘yeah’ and ‘no’ will be termed here as affirmative or negative (aff./neg.) particles and the remaining words (‘so’, ‘right’, ‘just’, ‘like’, ‘then’ and ‘okay’) as discourse markers. Discourse markers have also been termed pragmatic markers (Andersen, 2001), but it is the former term that will be employed here.

These seven words represent 5.12% of the Irish-medium corpus, 6.41% of the all-Irish corpus and 4.67% of the Gaeltacht corpus (Subtotal A Table 4.6). The difference in percentages is perhaps smaller than might have been anticipated given the differences between the native speakers in the Gaeltacht and the other two groups. The relatively high percentage usage of the aff./neg. particles ‘yeah’ and ‘no’ may be determined by the fact that there are no simple words in Irish for ‘yes’ and ‘no’. For agreement/disagreement conversationally in Irish it is normal to echo the positive or negative form of the verb or to use the copula (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960). Even if this factor influences the Irish-medium and all-Irish school children who are L1 English speakers, it does not however, explain the high usage of these particles by Gaeltacht pupils who are L1 speakers of Irish. The practice of prefacing their answers in Irish with the aff./neg. particles ‘yeah’ and ‘no’ has however, been noted in the speech of Gaeltacht speakers in Connacht e.g. ‘*beidh tú ag goil ann? No, ní bheidh.* [you will be going there? No, I won’t.] (Ó hUiginn, 1994, p. 608). The use of these particles may be for stylistic reasons and to add emphasis rather than due to a lack of vocabulary.

Table 4.6
The 25 most common English words used by Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht pupils divided into two groups by order of frequency

Word	Irish-medium schools			All-Irish schools			Gaeltacht schools		
	Frequency order	No. of times used	% of corpus	Frequency order	No. of times used	% of corpus	Frequency order	No. of times used	% of corpus
so	11	199	1.38	13	335	1.09	14	54	1.18
right	21	143	0.99	12	121	0.39	36	28	0.6
yeah	24	118	0.82	7	535	1.74	16	50	1.09
no	31	110	0.76	12	350	1.14	21	45	0.98
just	41	80	0.56	31	196	0.64	87	13	0.28
like	78	42	0.29	37	169	0.55	180	5	0.11
then	116	25	0.17	226	19	0.06	538	1	0.02
okay	135	21	0.15	24	246	0.80	59	19	0.41
Subtotal A		738	5.12%		1,971	6.41%		215	4.67%
know	149	18	0.13	209	22	0.07	157	6	0.13
but	164	15	0.10	189	26	0.08	153	6	0.13
see	176	14	0.10	275	13	0.04	N/A	0	N/A
there	207	10	0.07	430	6	0.02	N/A	0	N/A
wait	209	10	0.07	267	14	0.05	N/A	0	N/A
what	210	10	0.07	199	24	0.08	555	1	0.02
it	220	9	0.06	246	15	0.05	N/A	0	N/A
and	224	8	0.06	235	16	0.05	N/A	0	N/A
that	235	8	0.06	429	6	0.02	N/A	0	N/A
you	236	8	0.06	182	29	0.09	N/A	0	N/A
look	243	7	0.05	310	10	0.03	N/A	0	N/A
on	246	7	0.05	232	17	0.06	N/A	0	N/A
two	253	7	0.05	474	5	0.02	N/A	0	N/A
don't	260	6	0.04	1092	1	0.003	N/A	0	N/A
now	268	6	0.04	313	10	0.03	N/A	0	N/A
or	269	6	0.04	N/A	0	N/A	211	4	0.09
to	273	6	0.04	547	4	0.01	N/A	0	N/A
Subtotal B		155	1.08%		218	0.70%		17	0.37%
Total		893	6.20%		2189	7.11%		232	5.04%

The remaining 17 English words in Section B of Table 4.6 are used less commonly by the Gaeltacht school pupils (0.37%) than their peers in the Irish-medium (1.08%) and all-Irish (0.07%) schools.

4.5.2 *The general use of English words*

The use of English words is a feature of the recorded speech of the pupils in both school types in the present study. In order to examine the code-mixing and code-switching behaviour of all-Irish school pupils a search was conducted for all the English words used by the pupils in the corpus using the WordList tool in WordSmith. Table 4.7 presents a summary of that search. It can be seen from the second row of the table that the Irish-medium pupils used 235 different words in English on 1,261 occasions, the all-Irish pupils 415 words in English on 3,087 occasions and that this represented 8.75% and 10.03% of their corpora respectively. The Gaeltacht pupils used 54 different words on 305 occasions and this represented 6.65% of their corpus.

Table 4.7
Use of English words by school type

	No. of words in English	No. of times used	% of English words in school corpus
Irish-medium schools	235	1,261	8.75%
All-Irish schools	415	3,087	10.03%
Gaeltacht schools	54	305	6.65%

It can be seen that the Irish-medium pupils used an English word for almost one out of every 11 words, the all-Irish pupils used an English word for one out of every 10 words and their Gaeltacht peers used an English word for one out of every 15 words. In her study of two Gaeltacht communities O'Malley Madec (2007) found that adult speakers in the core Irish-speaking heartland community, used English words 2.7% of the time in her corpus. The figure of 6.65% for the use of English words by Gaeltacht pupils in schools 10 and 11 in the present study is almost two and a half times this rate. This difference may be explained by the nature of the task in the present study that elicited speech in fairly densely interactive, task-based communication. O'Malley Madec's sample on the other hand was drawn from informal discourse with adults. It is important nonetheless that when we examine the spoken production of Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils that we compare them with their peers of a similar age engaged in the same task.

4.5.3 Pupil-pupil exchanges: Language related episodes

When the pupils' speech in the collaborative task was being transcribed for the corpus it was noted that on the occasions where pupils code-mixed or code-switched that their peers corrected them and displayed their disapproval either verbally or with gestures. (1) below illustrates a typical example of this type of exchange. In this case Pupil L uses the word 'swing' instead of the Irish equivalent *luascán*, a word that was available on the sheet with the list of equipment. A peer (F) discreetly corrects Pupil L by pointing to the word on the sheet. Pupil C says the correct form and then Pupil L says the correct form and apologises.

(1AI) 09_01_126-129

- L *Scríobh isteach cad a bhfuil sé (sic), ó agus cuir na swings anseo.* [Write in what it is, oh and put the swings here.]
C *Ceart go leor.* [All right]
C <F points to the Irish word for swing on the sheet> *Na luascáin.* [The swings]
L *Na luascáin, tá brón orm.* [The swings, I'm sorry.]

In (2) when pupil J says 'more fun' her utterance is translated by pupil D.

(2IM) 16_01_41-42

- J *Agus tá sé more fun.* [And it's more fun.]
D *Tá se níos sultmhar, ní deireann tú fun.* [It is more fun (using Irish equivalent), you don't say 'fun'.]

A similar instance was recorded in Gaeltacht School 10 as can be seen in (3). Pupil P uses the word 'idea' and pupil D supplies the Irish equivalent *smaoineamh*. Pupil P then rephrases in Irish to show that he has accepted the feedback. Pupil A joins in with the reprimand *Ná abairt (sic) Béarla*. And Pupil P rephrases once again.

(3G) 10_04_35-39

- P *D tá idea agam, tá idea agam.* [D I have an idea, I have an idea.]
D *Smaoineamh, tá smaoineamh agat.* [Idea, you have an idea.]
P *Tá smaoineamh agam.* [I have an idea.]
A *Ná abairt (sic) Béarla.* [Don't speak English.]
P *Tá smaoineamh agamsa.* [I have (with emphasis) an idea.]

These type of instances where learners ‘question their language use, or correct themselves or others’ (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 326) have been referred to as ‘language-related’ episodes. A thorough search of the corpus revealed that there were 10 instances in total of this type of episode in the all-Irish school corpus and one [(3) above] in the Gaeltacht corpus. In all 11 cases a pupil was corrected for using English. In no instance in the seven hours and twenty minutes of transcription in the corpus was a pupil corrected by another for making an error in Irish. The only instance that was found that did not relate to the use of English was (4) below where Pupil J engages in a hypothesis-testing episode (Shehadeh, 2002) where he checks the initial mutation of the word *picnic* by repeating *Don phicnic*. Pupil S confirms that he was correct in the first place.

(4) 03_03_250-252

J ... *mar caithfidh sé bheith ar an áit don phicnic*. [...because it has to be on the place for the picnic.]

J *Don phicnic?* [For the picnic?]

S *Don phicnic*. [For the picnic]

This type of interaction is typical of what might be expected in negotiation of meaning type tasks where errors may be ignored in order to create an effective social interaction (Swain, 2000). It may also be that because the errors in Irish did not interfere with the speakers’ message and did not lead to a breakdown in communication, attention was not drawn to them (García Mayo & Pica, 2000). These findings are in keeping with those of Oliver (1998, 2002) and Van den Branden (1997) where it was found that children did not negotiate for form in interactions with their peers.

4.6 Discussion of results

The recording of the 24 Irish-medium and 65 in all-Irish schools pupils has led to the compilation of a substantial corpus of immersion pupils’ spoken Irish. The analysis of that corpus and of the 15 pupils in Gaeltacht schools in this chapter has yielded some interesting results. There is a considerable degree of similarity in key linguistic features in the spoken Irish between the three school types despite the differences in language background. One indication of this was that the 50 most common words used by the pupils in each school types were quite similar and when a further 13 common words used by the Irish-medium pupils were added, it was found that these 63 words accounted for 60.6% of

all words used by Irish-medium pupils, 57.8% of words used by all-Irish pupils and 60.9% by Gaeltacht pupils. At a word level then, no major differences emerged between the three school types. Although the most common words may have been very similar, Chapter 5 examines the syntactic features of the pupils' Irish to ascertain if this aspect of their language use distinguishes the two school types.

An error analysis of the utterances revealed that almost one in three utterances by the Irish-medium (32.1%) and all-Irish (29.2%) pupils contained an error. To state it another way, approximately three out of every ten utterances by Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils contained an error. The presence of errors in the Gaeltacht examples was very few however (2.6%). The error rate of 32.1% and 29.2% for Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils respectively after approximately 5,000 hours of instruction through Irish may appear high. Chapter 2 recalled that a study of Grade 12 immersion students, were reported to have an error rate of 54% after about 7,000 hours of instruction in French (Pellerin & Hammerly, 1986). This figure is very close to the 52.2% error rate found in a study of Grade 5 and Grade 6 early French immersion pupils (Spilka, 1976). A further study in the French immersion context carried out by Lyster and Rannta (1997) got an error rate of 34% in student to teacher turns. This also included unsolicited uses of the L1. It is not suggested that it is possible to directly compare these results, as they were the product of different studies using different methods. It does, however, give an indication of the extent of immersion pupils' errors.

In the present study, English words accounted for 8.75% of the Irish-medium corpus, 10.03% of the all-Irish corpus and 6.65% of the Gaeltacht corpus. While the Irish-medium and all-Irish school rates are higher than the Gaeltacht school rate, a previous study of native-speaking adults in the Gaeltacht only found a 2.7% rate of English word usage (O'Malley Madec, 2007). This reinforces the importance of comparing all-Irish pupils with native speakers of their own age performing a similar task.

The code-mixing behaviour of pupils was then examined. It was found that eight words 'yeah' and 'no' (affirmative/negative particles), 'so', 'right', 'yeah', 'no', 'just', 'like', 'then' and 'okay' (discourse markers), accounted for the majority of the code-mixing and for the English words used by pupils in all school types. These eight words accounted for 5.12% of all words used by Irish-medium pupils, 6.41% of all words used by all-Irish school pupils and 4.67% of all words used by Gaeltacht pupils. Although the all-Irish

school pupils engaged in code-mixing so too did their native speaking peers in the Gaeltacht. While it was speculated above that the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' English L1 and the fact that there is no direct way of translating 'yes' and 'no' in Irish, may influence the all-Irish school pupils' code-mixing, it could also be linked to a language contact issue where they use the same discourse markers in Irish as they use when speaking English.

A significant finding resulting from the analysis of the corpus was that there were very few examples of language related episodes where pupils corrected one another's Irish. In all instances where correction took place it was for code-mixing or code-switching. In no case did a pupil correct another for using an incorrect form in Irish. The school norm of speaking Irish appears to exert a strong influence on the pupils and their interpretation of this is, not to speak English or use any English words. It does not appear to extend to speaking Irish with accuracy. This may confirm that when pupils have reached a level of communicative sufficiency in Irish, they lack the sociopsychological motivation to improve on this level (Day & Shapson, 1987; Kowal, 1997).

The analyses reported in this chapter, which are generally at the macro-level, are complemented by a more detailed analysis of the linguistic features of Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' Irish in the Chapter 5. That analysis examines the syntactic and lexical features of the pupil's Irish at a micro-level. Differences that emerged in Table 4.2 relating the use of words by Gaeltacht, Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils helped to inform the analysis. Those issues include use of verbs such as *cuir* 'to put' and *déan* 'to do' and numbers such as *dhá* 'two', *gcéad* 'hundred'.

Chapter 5: The syntactic and lexical features of Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupil's Irish

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 the similarities between the pupils in Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools regarding the words that they used in performing the task assigned to them, and in the manner in which they code-mixed were noted. They differed greatly however, in the number of utterances that contained errors. Given that approximately three out of every ten utterances of the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils in the present study contain errors, it is important to analyse more closely the features of the pupils' Irish. A description will be given of the features present in the most common errors. An examination will be made of the number of instances where particular aspects of Irish are used correctly or incorrectly. By presenting the features in this way it is intended to inform teachers and schools as to the features that in general, are not being acquired before Year 7 in Irish-medium or 6th class in all-Irish schools and to inform pedagogical practice.

Before reporting on that analysis it is necessary to explain some aspects of Irish linguistics that are relevant in the context the errors made by the pupils. This is not intended to be a comprehensive account of linguistic differences between Irish and English but a brief account that will help to anticipate some of the deviant features of the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' Irish and provide a greater insight into why such deviations are present in the pupils' speech.

5.2 Syntactic and morphological features of Irish

The main areas that will be dealt with in this section are initial mutations in Irish. The word order or syntax in main clauses and subordinate clauses in Irish will then be examined. This will be followed by an explanation of the operation of the copula *Is* and the substantive verb *Bí*. Initial mutations in Irish will then be explained. The characteristics of the use of irregular verbs by pupils as they pertain to the present study will then be examined. Other areas such as the use of numbers, indirect speech, prepositional pronouns, interrogative pronouns and the pronoun *é* 'it' will be explained in the introduction to the analysis of those features as they occur in Section 5.3.

5.2.1 Initial mutations in Irish

Initial consonants in Irish can undergo mutation under certain circumstances. This is also a feature of other Celtic languages. The two mutations that are of interest in the context of the present study are lenition and eclipsis. Lenition is represented orthographically by the insertion the letter ‘h’ after the initial consonant and it is said to soften the sound of the consonant. One function of lenition is to distinguish gender in Irish nouns. In the following example the noun is feminine and feminine nouns in nominative singular are lenited after the definite article. E.g. *bean* ‘woman’, *an bhean* ‘the woman’. A masculine noun on the other hand in genitive singular is lenited e.g. *barr an bhoird* ‘the top of the table’. Some possessive pronouns also cause lenition such as *mo pheann* ‘my pen’. Another instance of lenition is that triggered by certain preverbal particles such as *ní* in *ní chuireann tú* ‘you don’t put’. In the Ulster dialect of Irish, the dialect of the Irish-medium pupils, one of the all-Irish schools and one of the Gaeltacht schools, lenition follows the preposition *ar an* ‘on the’ e.g. *an bord* ‘the table’ *ar an bhord* ‘on the table’.

The effect of eclipsis is to suppress the sound of the initial consonant and replaces it with a new sound. It is represented orthographically by the insertion of the letter of the new sound in front of the initial consonant. While lenition follows the preposition *ar an* ‘on the’ in the Ulster dialect above, it triggers eclipsis in the Connaught and Munster dialects. This is the dialect of eight of the all-Irish schools and one of the Gaeltacht schools. E.g. *an bord* ‘the table’ *ar an mbord* ‘on the table’, the letter ‘m’ is inserted before the initial consonant ‘b’ in the latter case. Certain numbers such as *seacht*, *ocht*, *naoi* and *deich* (seven, eight, nine, and ten) also trigger eclipsis which is of interest in the present study. Another relevant aspect is that certain preverbal particles such as *an* ‘is’, an interrogative particle also triggers eclipsis.

5.2.2 Word order principles in main clauses

Canon Peter O’Leary, whose papers were collected by T. F. O’Rahilly in 1922, stated that syntax is critical for the successful revival of Irish:

By far the most important matter for consideration in connection with the revival of our language is the syntax. *If the syntax be good, we have good Irish, even if half the words were foreign. If the syntax be bad, the language is not Irish at all, even though each separate word be the purest Irish.* (Italics in original) (O’Leary & O’Rahilly, 1922, p. 85)

While this statement might be regarded as quite unscientific it gives an indication of the critical role of correct syntax in the acquisition of Irish. The typical subject, verb and object (SVO) order that applies to English and many other languages is different in Irish. Basic sentences in Irish have a VSO order where the verbs come before the subject (Bloch-Trojnar, 2006; Hickey, 1992; Stenson, 1981) and the verb raises out of verb phrase (VP) (Henry & Tangney, 1999). Another aspect of Irish, which is different to English, is that adjectives generally follow the noun (Stenson, 1981), and Irish has a high incidence of prepositional pronouns that are inflected (Ó Murchú, 2008).

5.2.3 *Word order principles in verbal noun clauses*

Another feature of Irish that differs considerably from English and other languages is the word order of verbal noun clauses. This type of clause has been described as ‘one of the most complex categories of Irish grammar’ (Bloch-Trojnar, 2006, p. 15). In order to illustrate this see sentence (a) below. In English the object comes after the verb, that order is reversed in Irish with the insertion of the preposition *a* + lenition (Bloch-Trojnar, 2006). Thus the syntax in Irish is: object+*a* (preposition)+verbal noun (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960, p. 249).

- (a) We are going to put them beside the school.
Táimid chun iad a chur in aice na scoile.

In order to translate ‘to put’ into Irish in the sentence above, we use the verbal noun *cur* preceded by the preposition *a*. This preposition causes initial mutation of the verbal noun where possible, hence *a chur*. Other phrases that are followed by the verbal noun in this way are: *Tig le ...* ‘Is able’, *Caithfidh ...* ‘I have to’ and *An bhfuil cead agam...?* ‘Have I permission to...?’ When the substantive verb *Bí* follows *Caithfidh ...* or *An bhfuil cead agam...?*, the following structure is used:

- (b) We can colour in the things.
Thig linn na rudaí a dhathú isteach.

When *tig* is followed by other verbs such as *déan*, *cuir*, *tarraing* the object must be placed before the verbal noun with the insertion of the preposition *a* as in (a) above.

- (c) You can’t do that.
Ní thig leat seo a dhéanamh.

As noted by Bloch-Trojnar (2006, p. 63) this configuration is also found in other modal constructions expressing ability, success or failure. Where the pupils use the following verbs similar configurations would be expected e.g. *Is féidir liom...* ‘I can...’, *Tá orm...* ‘I must...’, *Ba mhaith liom...* ‘I would like ...’ and *D’éirigh liom* ‘I succeeded...’.

Another aspect of the verbal noun that can cause difficulties is where a pronoun is the object of the verbal noun. An example of this would a pupil expressing ‘doing it’ in Irish as *ag déanamh é* instead of *á d(h)éanamh*. This construction has been found in the early speech of native L1 Gaeltacht children (Harrington, 2006) and may be a developmental error rather than the influence of English.

5.2.4 *The copula Is and substantive verb Bí*

A further area of difficulty for English speakers who are second language learners of Irish is the use of a substantive verb and a copula to express ‘to be’. Irish is similar to Spanish in this respect in that there are also two verbs in Spanish to express ‘to be’, *ser* and *estar* (Genee, 1998; O’Connor, 2002). The two lexical items in Irish to express the verb ‘to be’ are *Bí* and *Is*. Many writers have remarked that the use of the copula is an aspect of the language which is difficult for learners to master (Ó Domhnalláin & Ó Baoill, 1978). The difficulty for learners of Irish whose first language is English is that the verb ‘to be’ in English is expressed by two different verbs in Irish. There is the copula *Is* ‘is’ and the substantive verb *Bí* ‘to be’ (Stenson, 1981). Research on post-primary school pupils, in both all-Irish and English-medium schools, revealed that many of them had difficulty with the correct use of the copula and substantive verb (O’Connor, 2002; Walsh, 2005). It might be anticipated then that this aspect of Irish would emerge as a difficulty for the pupils in the present study. An understanding of the forms of the copula and the substantive verb described below is crucial for the investigation of how Gaeltacht and all-Irish pupils use these forms and the analysis that follows.

The substantive verb *Bí* can be used to express ‘it is ...’ or ‘he is ...’ in cases such as the following, where temporary states are being described:

It is raining. = *Tá sé ag cur báistí.*
He is in the house. = *Tá sé sa teach.*

It cannot be used however, where a permanent state is being described such as for classificatory purposes where one wishes to describe what ‘a noun or a pronoun is or is not’ (Mac Congáil, 2004, pp165). In such instances the copula *Is* must be used.

He is a teacher. = *Is múinteoir é.*

It’s a ball. = *Is liathróid í.*

To make matters more complicated for the learner, when the copula is used with the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’, the copula and the personal pronoun can be omitted (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960; Stenson, 1981). Thus the following three sentences are all acceptable ways to express the same thing i.e. ‘That is the table’.

Sentence (a) contains the copula *Is* and the personal pronoun *é*:

- (a) *Is é sin an bord.*
Is é sin an bord
is-COP it-M-3SG that-DEM the table-M-SG

Sentence (b) omits both the copula *Is* and the personal pronoun *é*:

- (b) *Sin an bord.*
Sin an bord
that-DEM the table-M-SG

Sentence (c) omits the copula *Is* but contains the personal pronoun *é*:

- (c) *Sin é an bord.*
Sin é an bord
that-DEM it-M-3SG the table-M-SG

In summary then, the substantive verb *Bí* should be used to express temporary states. The copula should be used to describe permanent states. When the copula is used with the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’, the copula *Is* or the copula *Is* and the pronoun *é* can be omitted.

5.2.5 Irregular verbs

As well as the substantive verb *Bí* which is irregular, there are 10 other irregular verbs in Irish (Mac Murchaidh, 2002; Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, 1975). The main verbs that are of concern to the present study are *déan* ‘to do’ or ‘to make’ and *faigh* ‘to get’ as they were the most common irregular verbs used by the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils in completing the task in the present study. A verb is considered irregular if its root changes from tense to tense (Mac Congáil, 2004). In the case of *déan* the root changes in the past tense and there is both an independent (*rinne*) and a dependent form (*dearna*) (Na Bráithre

Críostaí, 1960). There is also an alternate dialect form, *dhein* that is also acceptable. *Faigh* is subject to greater change than *déan* as its root changes from *faigh* to *fuair* in the past tense and there are different dependent and independent forms in the past tense (*fuair*, *bhfuair*), future tense (*gheobhaidh*, *bhfaighidh*) and conditional mood (*gheobhadh*, *bhfaigheadh*) (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960). The analysis of the pupils' use of these verbs will examine all forms of the verbs used by them paying particular attention to the irregular forms of these verbs.

The acquisition of these aspects of syntax will be described in the context of the studies below, some of which examined written and conversational errors in both immersion and non-immersion contexts.

5.3 *The syntactic and lexical features of all-Irish pupils' Irish*

This section will examine the features of the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' Irish with a focus on lexical and syntactic issues. The data summarised in Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) on the most common Irish words used by the Gaeltacht, Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils will be examined from a qualitative perspective. If, as has been noted, there are similarities between the words used, it was hypothesised that those words were used in different ways by the pupils in each school type in order to account for the differences in the error rate. The following categories were chosen in order to analyse the features of the pupils' Irish. These categories emerged from two sources, firstly the differences tabulated in Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) and the Ó Duibhir (2009) study where many of the most common features were identified:

- word order
- use of copula *Is*
- use of substantive verb *Bí*
- morphology of the other most common verbs
- indirect speech
- prepositional pronouns
- use of numbers
- interrogative pronouns
- pupils use of pronoun *é* 'it'
- mapping of English syntax onto Irish

Each feature will be examined in detail and exemplified with evidence from the corpus. While the primary focus will be on the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpora, reference will be made to the Gaeltacht school corpus where relevant. In some instances the comparison with the Gaeltacht school corpus will be very informative and will be dealt with in greater depth. Where no reference is made to the Gaeltacht school corpus it can be assumed that the Gaeltacht pupils used a particular feature correctly as would be expected.

5.3.1 *Layout of glosses*

Examples of pupils' speech will be selected from the pupils' corpus to illustrate how the pupils used the different features listed above. The examples are presented in two-line or three-line glosses as in (Example 1) below. The first line presents the utterance under consideration preceded by the identification of the speaker. Thus in utterance (1a) in the next section, '01_' is School 1, '02_' is group 2 in that school, '256_' is the line number in the text and 'A' is the initial of the pupil. Line one in the gloss presents the utterance, line two provides a translation in normal speech (Lehmann, 1982). If the utterance deviates from native speaker norms it is preceded by a star '*' symbol, and the target form is provided on line three. Where examples of speech by Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils are being compared and contrasted the examples will be identified by 'IM' and 'AI' as in 1AI and 1IM below.

(Example 1) School_Group_Line no. _Pupil initial

Line 1* *Pupil utterance as it appears in corpus.*

Line 2 English translation.

Line 3 Target form where the original deviated from native-speaker norms.

5.3.2 *Syntactic features of pupils' Irish*

The evidence from the transcribed data is that the children in Irish-medium and all-Irish schools in the study succeed in mastering word order of Irish without difficulty i.e. VSO. English, as L1, does not appear to interfere with the syntax of Irish in their spoken production in Irish. This may be because this aspect of Irish is salient in the input and is acquired in the early stages of acquisition.

The other aspect that differs from English is noun adjective order. There are not many examples of the use of adjectives in the transcribed data, but where there are, they are

used correctly. The final two words, *páistí beaga* ‘small children’, in (1) below illustrate a pupil using the correct noun adjective order.

(1A) 01_02_256_A

...i gcomhair na páistí beaga?
‘...for the small children?’

(1IM) 13_01_91_A

Is maith lena like páistí beaga ehm ...
‘The small children like like ehm ...’

Successful mastery of verb subject object and noun adjective order was also noted in the study of pupils in Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland (Henry, et al., 2002). These rules are quite consistent in Irish and although they are the reverse of the pupil’s first language, they do not appear to require specific instruction.

5.3.3 Use of the copula ‘Is’

As discussed above in 5.2.3, the acquisition of the copula can prove to be difficult for second language learners and the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils in the present study are no exception to this. An examination of Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 reveals that the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’ is the most commonly used word in the corpus of pupils’ speech. This is true for pupils from all school types and represents 5.47% of the Gaeltacht, 6.77% of the Irish-medium and 6.03% of the all-Irish pupils’ speech. Although the copula is continually referred to as *Is*, it should be noted that the word *Is* does not appear in the 50 most commonly used words. *Is* was only used 11 (0.24%) times by the Gaeltacht pupils, 13 times (0.09%) by the Irish-medium pupils and 70 (0.23%) times by the all-Irish pupils⁴.

Due to the complexities of copula use in Irish, an examination of how pupils used the two words *Is* and *sin* will be central to this section. Another aspect that will also be important in the analysis is the use of the substantive verb *Bí* ‘to be’. When the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils’ corpora were examined it was found that there were many examples of pupils using the substantive verb *Bí* incorrectly instead of the copula. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the most common reasons for these errors was using the substantive verb to describe permanent states or inserting *Tá* ‘be’ (3SG- PRS of *Bí*) where

⁴ The word *is* appears more often than this in the corpus for both school types. In the other instances however, it is used as a contraction *is=agus* ‘and’.

the copula 'Is' was omitted. The analysis of pupils' speech that follows will focus in particular on these features and on the different ways Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils and Gaeltacht school pupils deal with these aspects of the copula.

5.3.3.1 Use of copula for classificatory purposes

The examples of the pupil errors in (2)-(5) are all instances of the employment of the substantive verb *Bí* for classificatory purposes. They represent four errors of this type. The first in (2IM) is the inappropriate insertion of the substantive verb *Tá* where the copula has been omitted.

(2IM) 16_01_1_J

- * *Tá sin rud maith.*
'That's a good thing.'
Sin rud maith.

The second error in (3AI) is the use for the substantive verb *Tá* for classificatory purposes where the copula *Is* should have been used.

(3AI) 09_01_18_C

- * *Tá sé bord mór.*
'It is a big table.'
Is bord mór é sin.

In (4AI) the error is similar to (3AI) except that the negative form of the substantive verb was used where *ní*, the negative form of the copula, should have been used.

(4AI) 04_02_113_G

- * *Níl sin túr.*
'That's not a tower.'
Ní túr é sin.

Finally in (5IM), the dependent form of the substantive verb *bhfuil* 'be' has been employed where the interrogative form of the copula *an* should have been used.

(5IM) 15_02_171_D

- * *An bhfuil sin an sleamhnán?*
Is that the slide?
An sleamhnán é sin?

5.3.3.2 Use of *Is* - the present form of the copula

The target forms presented in (2)-(5) above represent basic forms of copula use in the present tense. WordSmith (Scott, 2004) concordance tools were used to search the corpus of pupils' speech for instances of correct use of the copula for both all-Irish and Gaeltacht school pupils. The Irish-medium pupils used the present form of the copula in 13 utterances, the all-Irish school pupils used it in 70 utterances and the Gaeltacht pupils used it in 11 utterances. Table 5.1 summarises the different uses of the copula *Is* by the pupils in all school types. It can be seen in Column 3 of Table 5.1, that the majority of utterances containing *Is* by the all-Irish pupils comprises phrases such as *Is féidir liom*. 'I can/I am able to' (54), *Is maith le* 'I like', *Is breá liom* 'I really like', *Is fearr liom* 'I prefer', *Is cuma liom* 'I don't mind/care'. There is evidence from the work of Mhic Mhathúna (2005) that these structures are acquired at an early stage in an immersion context as formulas or unanalysed chunks. By 6th class (AI) or Year 7 (IM) the children have learned to manipulate these structures by interchanging the noun and prepositional pronoun. It is not clear however, that they recognise them as copular structures. Apart from these phrases there are nine other utterances that contained the copula *Is*. None of these use the copula for classificatory purposes.

The corpus of the pupils' speech in Gaeltacht schools was examined to ascertain how native speaker pupils' use the copula *Is*. Column 4 of Table 5.1 shows that the Gaeltacht pupils used it 11 times. Four of them were of the form *Is... le/liom*, the form most common in the all-Irish pupils' use. Examples of the remaining six utterances are listed in the lower half of Column 3. It is interesting to note the frequent use of the structure *Is féidir ...* 'can/able to' by the all-Irish school pupils whereas the Gaeltacht pupils do not use this structure at all. This may have been one of the ways in which the all-Irish pupils expressed a possibility while avoiding the conditional mood. The pattern of use of the copula *Is* by Irish-medium pupils is closer to the Gaeltacht than the all-Irish pupils. Three utterances were of the *Is maith le* 'I like' variety in Row 2. The other most common type were *is sine* 'oldest', *is fóirsteanáí* 'most suitable' in Row 9.

Table 5.1
Use of present form of copula *Is* by Irish-medium (IM), all-Irish (AI) and Gaeltacht (G) school pupils

Phrases containing copula <i>is</i>	Irish-medium pupils – no. of instances	All-Irish school pupils - no. of instances	Gaeltacht school pupils - no. of instances
Is féidir liom/linn ‘I can/I am able to, We can etc.’ Is maith le/is breá liom ‘He/she likes’/‘I really like’ Is cuma... ‘It doesn’t matter’	3	61	4
Other forms of copula <i>is</i>			
Cé chomh hard is atá sé? ‘How high is it?’	-	1	-
Sea is... ‘Yes it is...’	-	1	-
Is é. ‘It is’	1	2	4
Is le C é. ‘It is C’s/It belongs to C.’	2	1	1
...an ceann is fearr ‘...the best one’	1	3	-
Cuir an cinn is mó. ‘Put the biggest one.’	6	1	-
Is dócha/dóigh... It is likely/probable	-	-	2
Total	13	70	11

Following the concordance for *Is*, similar concordances were run for the following, which represent the other principal forms of the copula (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960): *ní*, *gur(b/bh)*, *nach*, *an*, *ba*, *b’*, *ab*, *nár*, *ar(b/bh)*, *níor(bh)* and *nár(bh)*. The results from the Irish-medium and all-Irish corpora reveal that in no instance is any form of the copula used for classificatory purposes. Indeed very few examples of the copula are to be found other than ones similar to those mentioned above such as, *Ní féidir liom* ‘I can’t/I am not able to’, or *Ba maith liom* ‘I would like’.

The only other examples in the data where these forms of the copula were found are the following two cases in (6)-(7)

(6 AI) 04_01_180_D

- * *An é seo an áit...?*
Is that the place?
An í seo an áit...?

(7 IM) 14_01_134_M

- * ... *b’fhéidir gur sin an fáth*
... maybe that is the reason

... *b'fhéidir gurb é sin an fáth*

Similar findings emerged from the Gaeltacht school corpus. It was found that the Gaeltacht pupils in the present study did not generally use these forms of the copula for classificatory purposes. As the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils experienced difficulty with this structure as seen in (2)-(5) above it was necessary to establish exactly how the Gaeltacht school pupils classified objects for use in their design. The next section reports on the results of that search.

5.3.3.3 Use of copula by Gaeltacht school pupils with demonstrative pronoun *sin*

When the Gaeltacht school corpus was searched it was found that they used the demonstrative pronoun *sin* 'that' and omitted the copula *Is* 'is' and the personal pronoun *é* 'it' in order to classify objects. Although the copula is omitted in these instances it is implied. WordSmith concordance tools were used to search for the demonstrative pronoun *sin* 'that' in the Gaeltacht pupils' corpus. The following examples, (8)-(10) were found where the copula and/or the pronoun *é* were omitted.

Pupil D could have said in (8) *Sin é an geata* (inserting pronoun *é*) or *Is é sin an geata* (inserting both pronoun *é* and copula *Is*). He chose to omit both instead. The meaning in each case would have been the same: 'That is the gate'.

(8G) 10_01_62_D

Sin an geata isteach chuig an scoil.
That is the gate into the school.

In (9) Pupil L could have said *Is sleamhnán fada é sin* (inserting the copula *Is*). Had she done so the meaning would not have changed.

(9G) 11_01_35_L

Sin sleamhnán fada...
That's a long slide...

In (10) Pupil A could have said ...*sin an bealach isteach* (omitting the pronoun *é*) or ...*Is é sin an bealach isteach* (inserting the copula *Is*). Once again the meaning would have remained the same.

(10G) 10_04_26_A

...sin é an bealach isteach.

That is the way in.

It should be noted that in no instance did a Gaeltacht school pupil use the substantive verb *Bí* inappropriately in place of the copula. The ability to use this feature correctly is one that differentiates the pupils in the three school types and is fundamental to mastery of Irish.

5.3.3.4 Incorrect use of copula by all-Irish school pupils with demonstrative pronoun *sin*

It will be noted in (8)-(10) above that the demonstrative pronoun *sin* is followed by a noun, a personal pronoun, a cardinal number or the definite article. WordSmith concordance tools were used to search the all-Irish school corpus for examples of the demonstrative pronoun ‘*sin*’. Utterances (11)-(13) show examples of the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’, where *sin* is followed by the definite article *an* ‘the’ and a noun. These were the only correct forms to be found using *sin*, where a noun or a pronoun followed *sin*.

(11IM) 14_02_140_C

Sin an túr...

That’s the tower...

(12AI) 04_02_242_G

Sin an áit ...

That’s the place...

(13IM) 14_01_151_S

* *I know, sin an rud atá mé ag abair..*

I know, that is the thing I am saying.

(14)-(17) demonstrate examples of pupils’ incorrect use of the substantive verb *Bí* ‘to be’ with the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’. Pupil D in (14) used the dependent present indicative form (*bhfuil*) of the substantive verb *Bí* ‘to be’. Had the personal pronoun *é* ‘it’ been used instead of *bhfuil* ‘is’, the utterance would have been correct.

(14IM) 15_02_171_D

* *An bhfuil sin an sleamhnán?*

Is that the slide?

An é sin an sleamhnán?

In (15) pupil C has repeatedly used the present indicative *Tá* 'is' of the substantive verb *Bí* 'to be'. Had *Tá* been omitted then the utterance would have been correct.

(15AI) 08_01_141_C

- * Now, *tá sin an slí isteach, tá sin an geata, tá sin an siúltán agus tá sin an scoil.*
Now, that is the way in, that is the gate, that is the corridor and that is the school.
Anois, sin an tslí isteach, sin an geata, sin an siúltán agus sin an scoil.

Similarly had pupil T in (16) omitted the present indicative *Tá* 'is' of the substantive verb *Bí* 'to be', the utterance would have been correct.

(16AI) 06_04_35_T

- * *Tá é sin seacht...*
That is seven...
Sin seacht...

Again in (17) it can be seen that if pupil C had omitted the relative form of the present indicative *atá* 'is' of the substantive verb *Bí* 'to be', this aspect of the utterance would have been correct.

(17AI) 01_02_152_C

- * *Cad atá é sin, an bord picnic?*
What is that, the picnic table?
Cad é sin, an bord picnice? or An bord picnice é sin?

Excerpts (2)-(5) and (14)-(17) above demonstrate the manner in which the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils use the copula incorrectly. When these examples are compared with the Gaeltacht school pupils in excerpts (8)-(10) we see that there are three manifestations of this type of error:

- I. the insertion of the substantive verb *Bí* 'to be' instead of the copula *Is*.
- II. the failure to omit the copula.
- III. the failure to omit the personal pronoun *é* when appropriate.

I. can be illustrated most clearly when we re-examine and compare (8) with (15) below. Pupil D, a Gaeltacht school pupil, said: *Sin an geata ...* which is the correct form,

whereas pupil C, an all-Irish school pupil, said: ...*tá sin an geata*... inserting the present form of the substantive verb *Tá*.

(8G) 10_01_62_D

Sin an geata isteach chuig an scoil. [That is the gate into the school.]

(15AI) 08_01_141_C

* ... *tá sin an geata*... [...that is the gate...]

Three forms of the copula are acceptable when used with the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’. The form most commonly used by the Gaeltacht pupils to perform the task assigned in the present study was the form in which the copula *Is* and the personal pronoun *é* are omitted as in (8) above. It appears that the pupils in Irish-medium and all-Irish schools may not be cognisant of this form or if they are, they do not think to use it. They tend to insert the substantive verb *Bí* before *sin* as in (15). In order to quantify the extent of this incorrect form WordSmith concordance tools were used to search the corpus for pupils’ use of the copula in different contexts.

The first feature examined was the pupils’ use of the form of the copula where the demonstrative pronoun *sin* ‘that’ is followed by the definite article *an* ‘the’. This is the form of the copula where the copula *Is* and the personal pronoun *é* are omitted. The first two columns in Figure 5.1 below show that Irish-medium pupils used this form correctly 83% of the time while the all-Irish pupils used it correctly 61% of the time. Where it was used incorrectly it was preceded in almost all cases by some form of the substantive verb *Bí* such as the example above in (15) above.

Due to the nature of the task set for the pupils they were required to compute the amount of money spent which required them to talk about numbers. The pupils’ use of the demonstrative pronoun *sin* with numbers was the next feature examined. Columns three and four in Figure 5.1 show that the Irish-medium pupils used this form correctly 89% of the time and the all-Irish pupils used it correctly 70% of the time. (16) is an example of incorrect use where the substantive verb *Bí* has been inserted before *sin*. As with the previous example the inappropriate insertion of some form of the substantive verb *Bí* was the most common feature of incorrect usage.

One further aspect of the pupils' use of the copula was then investigated. This concerned the manner in which pupils used the copula with nouns for classificatory purposes. In order to design the playground the children discussed the different types of equipment that they would buy. WordSmith concordance tools were used to search for instances of the following words in the all-Irish school corpus:

<i>túr</i> 'tower'	<i>bonn</i> 'tyre'	<i>bord</i> 'table'
<i>sleamhnán</i> 'slide'	<i>dréimire</i> 'ladder'	<i>fráma</i> 'frame'
<i>capaillín</i> 'horse'	<i>luascán</i> 'swing'	<i>rópa</i> 'rope'

In some cases the pupils used demonstrative pronoun *sin* and it is included in this section for that reason. There were a number of examples similar to (18). In these cases, had the pupils used the demonstrative pronoun *sin*, they would have been correct.

(18IM) 14_03_199_A

* ...*mar tá sé an dréimire rópa.*

... because it is the rope-ladder.

Sin an dréimire rópa. or *Is é sin an dréimire rópa.* or *Sin é an dréimire rópa.*

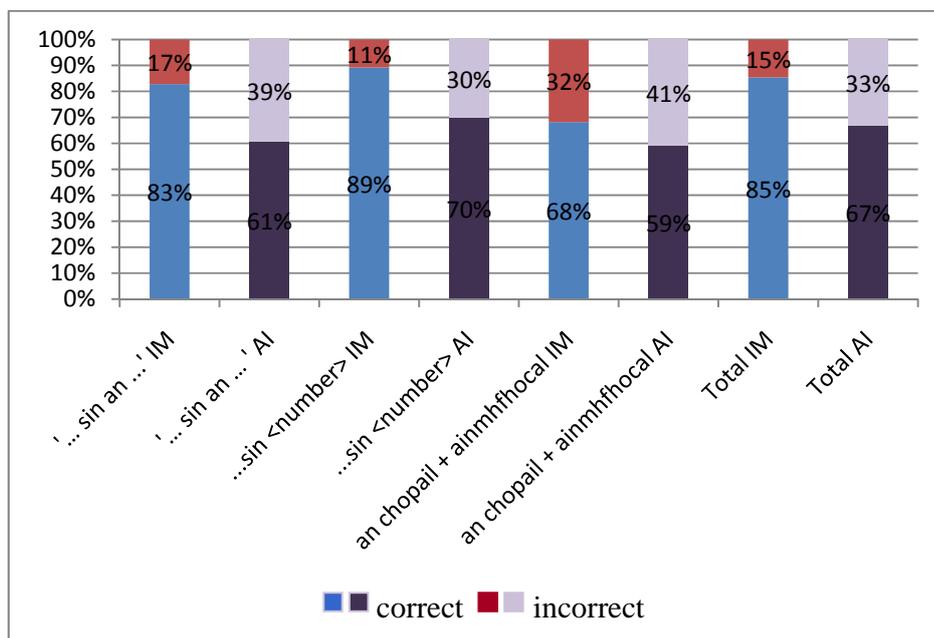
It can be seen then, in columns five and six in Figure 5.1 that the Irish-medium pupils used the copula with nouns correctly 68% of the time and the all-Irish pupils used it correctly 58% of the time.

The analysis of these three features revealed that pupils of both school types used them correctly more often than incorrectly. When the total number of instances of these features is calculated we see in columns seven and eight that the Irish-medium pupils used them correctly more often (85%) compared to their all-Irish peers (67%). Indeed the all-Irish pupils (33%) had an overall error rate that was over twice as high as the Irish medium pupils (15%) just over twice as often as they used them incorrectly.

5.3.3.5 Summary of copula use by all-Irish school pupils

The Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils in the present study demonstrate partial mastery of the copula *Is* in Irish. The facility to compare their use of this structure with the

Figure 5.1
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) school pupils' use of certain aspects of copula



Gaeltacht school pupils proved very revealing as it was found that none of the three groups of pupils made use of *Is* for classificatory purposes to any great extent. Part of the difficulty for the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils in attaining mastery of the copula may be that the information in the input is not salient. Although grammar books such as (Mac Congáil, 2004; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 1963; Mac Murchaidh, 2002) and the official standard for Irish (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, 1975) refer to the copula *Is*, the word *Is* was rarely used by the native speaker pupils in the unplanned oral production required for the task in the present study. For the L1 English speaking all-Irish school pupil '*sin an geata*' may appear to be incomplete as it translates literally as 'that the table'. They may not be aware that the copula *Is* is implied. They may be inserting the substantive verb *Tá* to complete the utterance resulting in errors such as (15) *Tá sin an geata* [that is the gate]. The analysis of the corpus in the present study suggests that the input received by the pupils may not be salient enough for them to notice this form.

5.3.4 The substantive verb *Bí*

There are 390 (IM) and 998 (AI) instances of *Tá* the present tense independent form of *Bí* in the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpora (Table 4.2). When the other tenses of

the substantive verb *Bí* are added, there are 782 (IM) and 2,023 (AI) instances representing 5.43% of the Irish-medium corpus and 6.57% of the all-Irish corpus. An analysis of how the pupils used the substantive verb will add to the understanding of the features of their Irish. As the present form *Tá* was used so often by the pupils this form will be analysed separately, this will be followed by an analysis of *bhfuil* the present dependent form which was used 329 times. The examination of the substantive verb will conclude with an analysis of all the remaining forms together.

5.3.4.1 Present tense *Tá* and *Níl*

WordSmith concordance tools were used to search for all the instances of *Tá* and *Níl* in the all-Irish school corpus. Figure 5.2 shows that there were 485 (IM) and 1,275 (AI) instances of *Tá* and *Níl*. The first two columns in Figure 5.2 shows that *Tá* and *Níl* were used correctly with different structures 92% of the time by Irish-medium pupils and 86% of the time by all-Irish pupils. As there are such a large number of instances, and they were used correctly in the majority of cases, it was not possible to categorise all the uses of *Tá* and *Níl*. It was considered more informative for the purposes of the present study to categorise some of the cases where there were errors. As was seen in the previous section, where errors were found it was the inappropriate use of the substantive verb in place of the copula that led to the errors in the majority of cases. These errors are quantified in columns three to six in Figure 5.2. Columns three and five show that the Irish-medium pupils used these forms correctly 71% and 75% of the time correctly while the all-Irish pupils had a better percentage of correct usage of *Tá/Níl sé* at 82% and a similar correct usage of *Tá/Níl sin* at 74%. These errors were similar to those in (15) and (16) above. (19) demonstrates a typical error of this type with the negative form *Níl*.

(19IM) 15_02_20_D

- * ... *tá sin mór ceann*.
- ... it is a big one.
- ... *sin ceann mór*.

The final three columns in Figure 5.2 displays the number of instances of a type of error with *Tá* and *Níl* that the all-Irish pupils made but which was not present in the Irish-

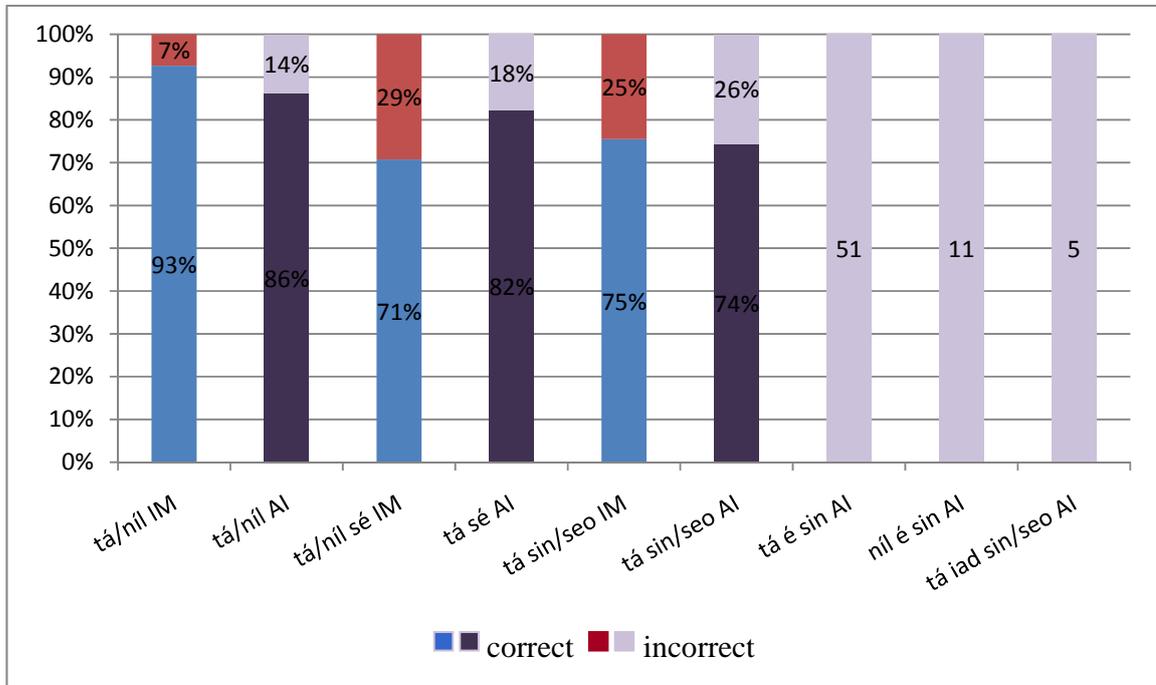
medium corpus. In these instances the all-Irish pupils inserted the preposition *é* ‘it’ or *iad* ‘them’ in their utterances where another form was required as in (20).

(20AI) 08_01_41_D

- * *Ach níl é sin isteach.*
But that one is not in.
Ach níl sé sin istigh.

It is errors of this type that account for the overall higher rate of error by the all-Irish pupils as compared to their Irish-medium peers in relation to *Tá/Níl*.

Figure 5.2
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils’ use of *Tá* and *Níl* - The present tense positive and negative form of the substantive verb *Bí*



If we exclude the inappropriate use of the substantive verb with the copula we see that the pupils in the present study appear to have mastered the other forms of *Tá* and *Níl*.

5.3.4.2 Present tense dependent form *bhfuil*

The present tense dependent form of the substantive verb *Bí* which is *bhfuil* will now be examined. There are 152 (IM) and 329 (AI) instances of *bhfuil* in the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpora respectively. The pupils handled many forms of *bhfuil* without

difficulty such as *Cá bhfuil* ‘where’. Where errors were made in the case of *an bhfuil?*, the interrogative form of *bhfuil*, the pupils used the substantive verb instead of the copula as in (21).

(21IM) 13_02_36_N

- * *An bhfuil sin an túr?*
Is that the tower?
An é sin an túr?

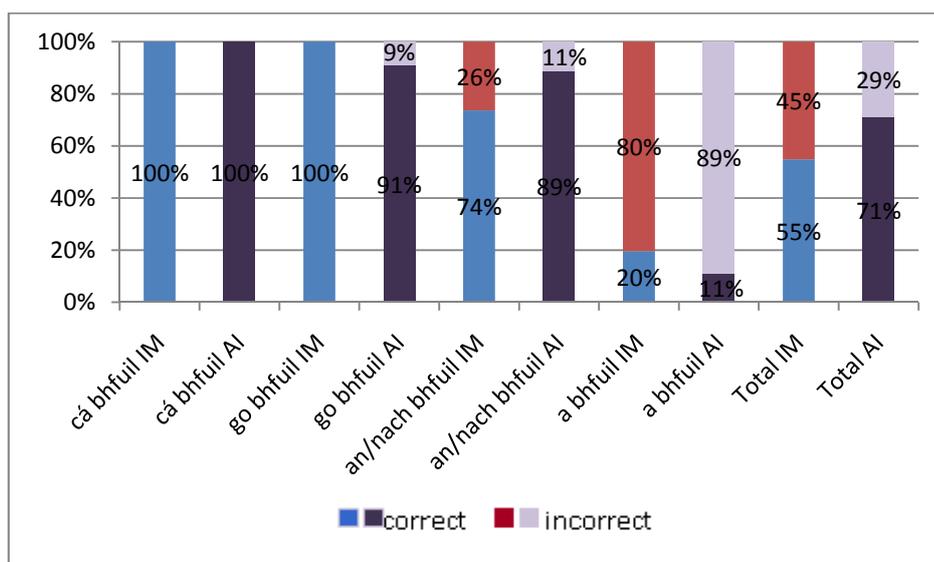
The other area that caused even greater difficulty is shown in the Columns 7 and 8, *a bhfuil*. The most common error that the pupils made here was to use the dependent form of the verb *bhfuil*, instead of the independent form *Tá* as in (22).

(22AI) 03_02_110_S

- * *Cé mhéad a bhfuil fágtha againn?*
How much do we have left?
Cé mhéad atá fágtha againn?

Overall it can be seen that while the all-Irish pupils use *bhfuil* correctly in 71% of cases the Irish-medium pupils only use it correctly 55% of the time.

Figure 5.3
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of *bhfuil* the present tense dependent form of the substantive verb *Bí*



5.3.4.3 Past tense, future tense, conditional mood, verbal noun and present tense relative form of the substantive verb *bí*

Figure 5.4 presents the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils' use of past tense *bhí* (independent form), *raibh* (dependent form), the future tense *beidh*, and the present tense relative form *atá* of the substantive verb *Bí*. In general it can be seen from the totals in Columns 9 and 10 that the pupils used these forms correctly 80% of the time in the case of Irish-medium pupils and 72% in the case of the all-Irish pupils. The areas where they had difficulty were the inappropriate use of the substantive verb instead of the copula as in (23), and the failure to use the dependent form where appropriate as in (24) which involves leniting the verb after the negative verb particle *ní*.

(23AI) 06_04_20_N

- * *Bhí é sin ceithre chéad.*
That was four hundred.
B'in ceithre chéad.

(24IM) 14_03_244_S

- * *Ní beidh seo sábháilte.*
Ní bheidh seo sábháilte.
This won't be safe.

5.3.4.4 Summary of substantive verb use by all-Irish school pupils

The evidence from the analysis of the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpus is that the pupils have reasonable mastery of the independent forms of the substantive verb *Bí* in its different tenses and forms. They have greater difficulty with the dependent forms however. As we saw in the analysis of the copula, they often use the substantive verb incorrectly on occasions where the copula should be used. When the totals for the substantive verb *Bí* in Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 are combined, we see in Figure 5.5 that the overall rates of correct usage at 82% for Irish-medium and 78% for all-Irish pupils are quite similar.

Figure 5.4
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of the following forms of the substantive verb:
Bhí, raibh, atá and Beidh

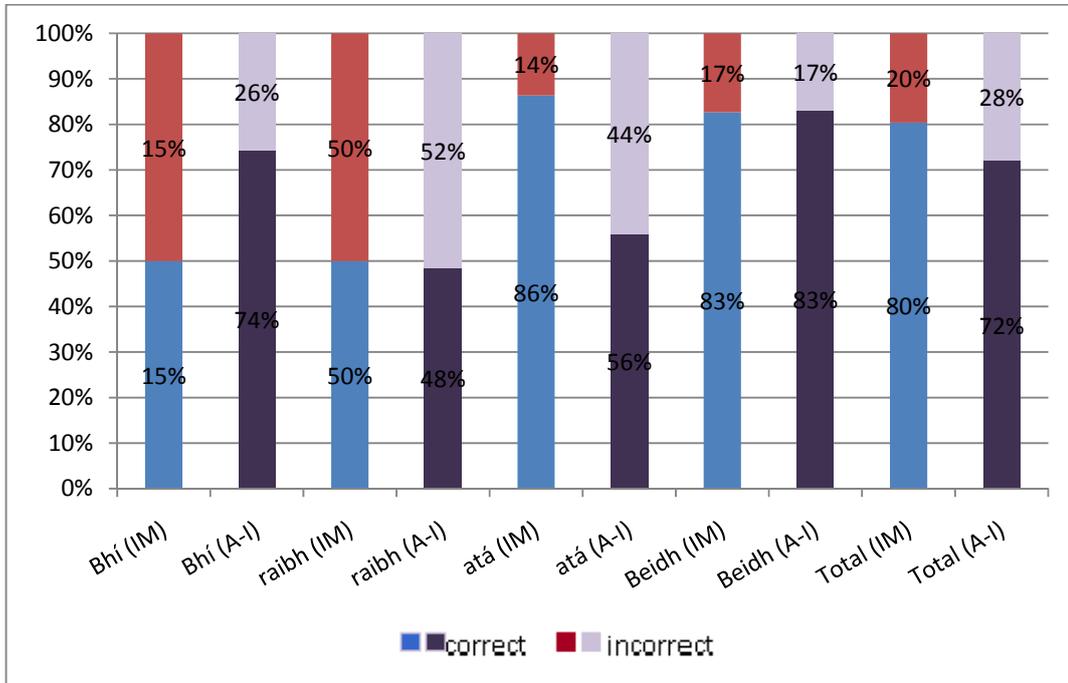
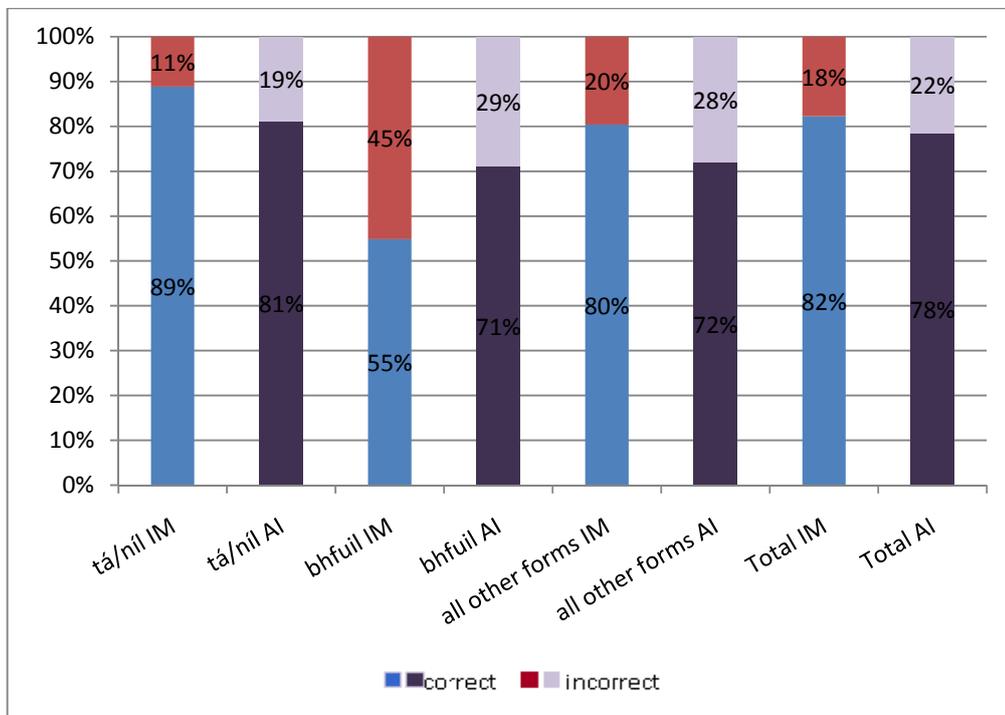


Figure 5.5
Summary of Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils' use of the of the substantive verb *Bí*



5.3.5 Morphology of the verbs *caith*, *cuir*, *déan* and *faigh*

In order to examine the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupil's mastery of other verbs in Irish, the list of the 50 most common words in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 (Chapter 4) together with the larger corpora were examined to see which verbs the pupils used most often. Apart from the various forms of substantive verb *Bí* the most common verbs were *faigh* 'to get' (No. 30/35 on Irish-medium wordlist), *caith* 'to spend' or 'to have to' in certain phrases (No. 45 on Irish-medium wordlist), *déan* 'to do' (No. 43 on Irish-medium wordlist). As both *déan* and *faigh* are irregular verbs in Irish, the wordlist containing the 100 most common words used the all-Irish school pupils was examined to find the next verb on the list which was *cuir* 'to put' (No. 69 on Irish-medium wordlist). This verb is also a regular verb.

5.3.5.1 The regular verb *cuir* 'to put'

WordSmith concordance tools were used to search the corpus for all forms of the verb *cuir*. There were 112 (IM) and 380 (AI) uses of some form of this verb and as can be seen from the final set of columns in Figure 5.6, they were used correctly 64% and 77% of the time by Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils respectively. When usage is categorised by mood and tense we see in Columns 1 and 2 that the imperative mood was used correctly by 97% (IM) and 91% (AI) of the time. Where it was used incorrectly it was where the pupils pronounced it with a velarised sound as in (25) rather than a palatalised sound.

(25AI) 04_02_193_D

- * *Cur é sin isteach.*
Put that in
Cuir isteach é sin.

It can be seen from Columns 3 and 4 that the pupils used *cuir* in the past and future tenses correctly 64% (IM) and 76% (AI) of the time. The times where they failed to use it correctly it were, in the interrogative form, failure to lenite the verb, failure to use the dependent form of the verb after *cén áit* 'where' as illustrated in (26), (27) and (28) respectively.

(26IM) 14_03_73_N

- * *An cuirfidh muid é le chéile anois?*

Will we put in together now?
An gcuirfidh muid é le chéile anois?

(27IM) 15_01_273_F

- * .. *agus cuir mé é suas go dtí sin*
... and I put it up to there
... *agus chuir mé é suas go dtí sin*

(28AI) 07_01_262_D

- * *Cén áit a chuirfidh an dréimire?*
Where will we put the ladder?
Cén áit a gcuirfidh an dréimire?

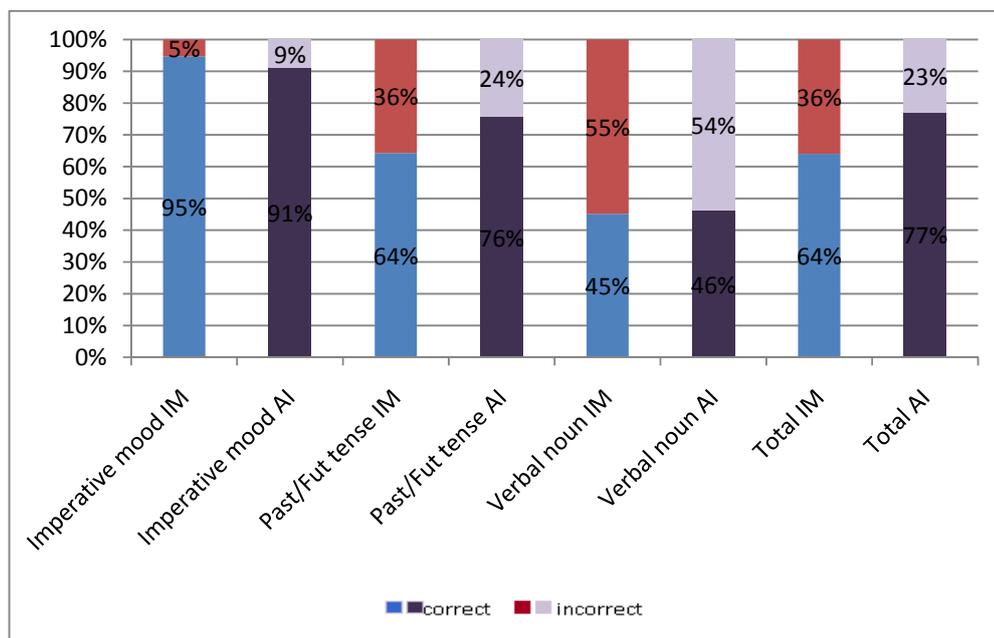
As explained in 5.2.1 above, certain structures, where there would be an infinitival clause in English, require a rearrangement in the word order in Irish. In these cases the object is placed before the verbal noun and the preposition *a* is inserted between the object and the verbal noun. Columns 5 and 6 in Figure 5.6 shows that the pupils incorrectly used the verbal noun 55% (IM) and 54% (AI) of the time. Example (29) was typical of this type of error.

(29IM) 14_02_144_C

- * *Cad é maith leat a cur... an maith leat cur sin anseo?*
What do you want to put ... do you want to put that here?
Cad é ba mhaith leat a chur... ar mhaith leat sin a chur anseo?

It appears from the evidence in the corpus that the pupils demonstrate reasonable mastery of the morphology of the regular verb *Cuir*. The aspects of it that have not been mastered are the use of the verbal noun, the interrogative forms and the correct use of the dependent form where appropriate.

Figure 5.6
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) school pupils' use of the regular verb *cuir* 'to put'



5.3.5.2 The regular verbs *caith* 'to have to' and *tig le* 'is able'

The verb *caith* can have a number of meanings in Irish depending on the context. The all-Irish pupils in the present study used it most frequently to mean 'to have to (must)'. The Irish-medium pupils on the other hand used the verb *tig le* 'is able' most frequently to express a similar meaning.

Where the verb *caith* is used to express a need as in the case of 'to have to', the future form of the verb must be used to express both present and future time (Na Bráithre Críostaí, 1960). It can be seen from Figure 5.7 that on many occasions pupils did not use the future form of the verb for this purpose.

As was noted above in the discussion on word order in 5.2.1, the verb *caith* when it means 'to have to' must be followed by another verb for example:

Caithfidh mé dul... = I have to (must) go...

or by the verbal noun preceded by the object and the preposition *a*:

Caithfidh mé peann a fháil. = I have to (must) get a pen.

It is the latter form that is by far the most common in the all-Irish school corpus. It should be noted that where they have a difficulty, is not with the verb *caith* itself, but with the verb that follows it and this needs to be borne in mind in the analysis below.

The structure of *tig le* is similar in that it must be followed by another verb for example:

Tig liom dul... = I can go...

or by the verbal noun preceded by the object and the preposition *a*:

Tig liom peann a fháil. = I can get a pen.

Using the WordSmith concordance tools it was found that the verb *caith* was used in various forms 252 by the all-Irish pupils to express a need such as ‘to have to’. The verb *tig le* was used by the Irish-medium pupils 164 times to express ‘is able to’.

The first set of columns shows that the Irish-medium pupils used the correct form of *tig le* correctly 37% of the time. Where they failed to use it correctly it was generally due to a failure to use the verbal noun form of the verb that followed it as (33) illustrates. This difficulty also manifested itself with the verb *cuir* above in Figure 5.6.

(30IM) 15_02_52_O

* *Thig le muid cur iad uilig le céile ...*

We can put them all together ...

Thig linn iad uilig a chur le chéile ...

In a similar way the all-Irish pupils failed to use the correct syntax with the verbal noun after *caith* 76% of the time. Pupil M failed to use the verbal noun of *tóg* and to adjust the syntax of the sentence accordingly.

(31AI) 06_01_125_M

* *Caithfidimid tóg amach é seo.*

We have to take this out.

Caithfidimid é seo a thógáil amach.

When the Gaeltacht school corpus was examined it was found that the verbal noun following *caith* was incorrectly used nine times out of twenty-six. It was pupils in School 11 in all cases that made the nine errors. This may be an indication the structure: *caith+a+verbal noun*, is difficult to master. A further search of the Gaeltacht corpus revealed that verbal noun of *cuir* was incorrectly used on two occasions out of eleven. Once

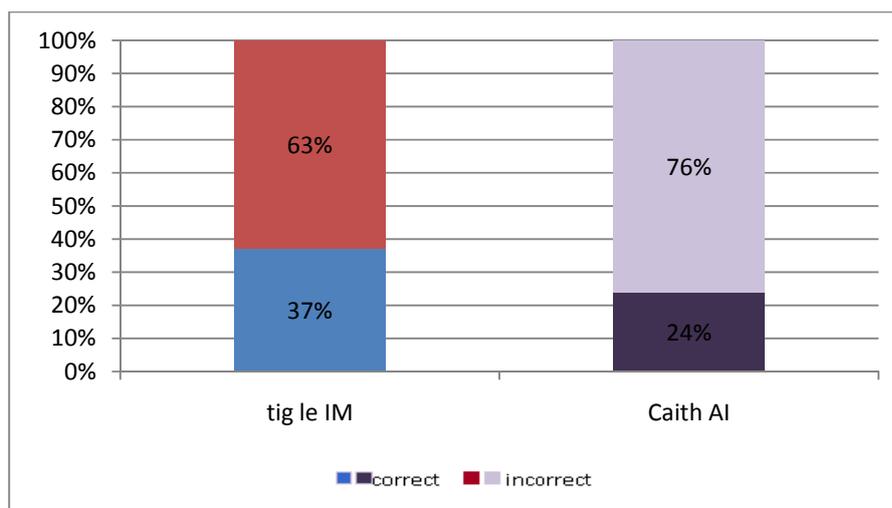
again, it was pupils from School 11 on both occasions. One of these instances is given in (32).

(32G) 11_08_110_M

- * *Thig linn cur na rudaí sin...*
We can put those things...
Thig linn na rudaí sin a chur...

These verbal noun clause structures may be difficult for learners of Irish to master and may require a greater amount of input and specific instruction than the pupils in the study had received.

Figure 5.7
Irish-medium (IM) pupils use of *tig le* 'is able to' compared to all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of the verb *caith* - 'to have to'



5.3.5.3 The irregular verb *déan* 'to do'

The Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' use of the verb *déan* 'to do' or 'to make', which is one of the 10 irregular verbs in Irish (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 1963; Mac Murchaidh, 2002), will now be examined. Its root changes in the past tense and there is both an independent (*rinne*) and a dependent form (*dearna*). When WordSmith concordance tools were used it was found that various forms of the verb *déan* were used 266 and 535 times respectively by Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils.

The first set of columns in Figure 5.8 reveals that the Irish-medium pupils used the imperative mood of *déan* correctly 69% of the time and the all-Irish pupils 87% of the time. Where both sets of pupils they failed to use it correctly, they lenited the verb *déan*, inserting a ‘h’ *dhéan* as in (33).

(33IM) 15_01_235_F

- * No *dhéan é, dhéan é, dhéan é.*
No, do it, do it, do it.
No *déan é, déan é, déan é.*

The pupils used the past tense correctly 74% (IM) and 65% (AI) of the time as can be seen from Columns 3 and 4. A higher error rate might have been expected here due to the irregular nature of the verb *déan* as discussed above. Where the children failed to use the past tense of *déan* correctly it was due in most cases to either not using the past tense root (*rinne*) as in (34) or failing to use the dependent root (*dearna*) as in (35).

(34IM) 15_02_180_D

- * ... *agus dhéan sí so déanfaidh mise sin ar dtús.*
... and she did so I will do that first.
... *agus rinne sí so déanfaidh mise sin ar dtús.*

(35AI) 05_03_277_S

- * ... *lig, mar ní rinne sé rud ar bith.*
...let, because he didn't do anything.
... *lig, mar ní dhearna sé rud ar bith.*

The evidence from the corpus indicates that the pupils have reasonable mastery of the past tense root *rinne* but have yet to master dependent root *dearna*. When we examine the pupils' use of the future tense of *déan*, in Columns 6 and 7 it can be seen that it was used correctly 77% (IM) and 65% (AI) by the pupils. When the errors were examined it was found that the majority of the errors by both school types was due to pupils leniting the future root of *déan* as in (36).

(36AI) 03_03_305_S

- * ... *dhéanfaidh mise an ceann eile.*
...I'll do the other one.
... *déanfaidh mise an ceann eile.*

As the future root of *déan* is regular this difficulty would not have been anticipated. This error is similar to the one that was made with the imperative mood of *déan* also where the root was incorrectly lenited as in (38) above.

Another area that caused difficulty for the pupils was the use of the verbal noun *déanamh*. As illustrated in the Columns 7 and 8 in Figure 5.8, the pupils failed to use the correct form *déanamh* 87% (IM) and 58% (AI) of the time. This form caused difficulties for them in a number of ways. The first case is where the pupils used a pronoun as a direct object of the verbal noun as in (38). This structure is not permitted in Irish however (Mac Congáil, 2004). A possessive adjective must be placed before the noun as in the corrected form in (38).

(38) 03_03_207_S

- * ... *an bhfuil tú ag déanamh é sin?*
...are you doing that?
...*an bhfuil sé sin á dhéanamh agat?*

The second aspect of the verbal noun that caused difficulty was the same as that experienced with *caith* and *cuir*, where the object and the preposition *a* must be placed before the verbal noun. This was the error in (39).

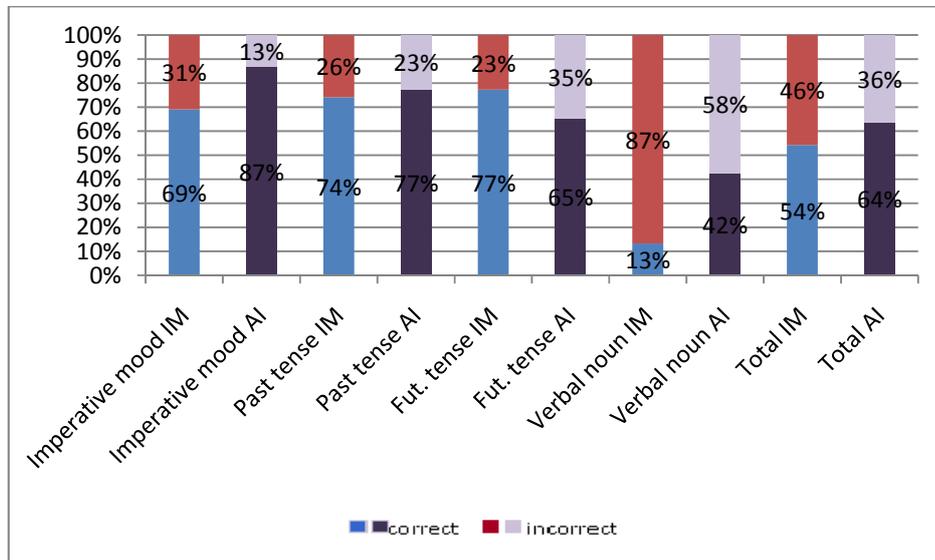
(39) 16_01_139_d

- * *Ehm, yes, caithfidh mé dhéanamh sin.*
Ehm, yes, I have to do that.
Ehm, yes, caithfidh mé sin a dhéanamh.

The third difficulty was where the pupils failed to lenite *déanamh* after the preposition *a*, and on other occasions they lenited *déanamh* when there was no need. The number of errors made by pupils in their use on the verbal noun *déanamh* demonstrates a lack of mastery of this form.

When the Gaeltacht school corpus was searched three errors were found in School 11, on two occasions the verbal noun of *déan* had not been applied after the verb *caith*. On the other occasion there was a failure to use the verbal noun after *thig linn* ‘we can’.

Figure 5.8
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of the irregular verb *déan* 'to do'



5.3.5.4 The irregular verb *faigh* 'to get'

The verb *faigh* is another one of the ten irregular verbs in Irish. It is subject to greater change than *déan* above as its root changes from *faigh* to *fuair* in the past tense and there are different dependent and independent forms in the past tense, future tense and conditional mood.

When the WordSmith concordance tools were used to compile the usage of the various forms of *faigh* it was found that there were 362 instances in the Irish-medium corpus and 394 instances in the all-Irish corpus. Columns 1 and 2 in Figure 5.9 show that the pupils used the past tense forms correctly 84% (IM) and 74% (AI) of the time. When it was used incorrectly it was generally due to a failure to distinguish between the dependent and independent forms. In (40) for example, the pupil failed to eclipse the verb in the interrogative form. It is interesting to note that the pupil used the correct preverbal particle *an* where *ar* would be the regular form for the past tense.

(40IM) 15_01_121_F

* *Agus sin, an fuair tú, an fuair muid sin?*

And that, did you get, did we get that?

Agus sin, an bhfuair tú, an bhfuair muid sin?

Columns 3 and 4 reveal that pupils had difficulties with the future tense of *fuair* with an error rate of 50% (IM) and 60% (AI). It was a failure to distinguish between the dependent and independent forms in the future tense that caused the difficulties. In (41), for example, the pupil used the independent form where the dependent form should have been used.

(41AI) 03_03_123_N

- * *An gheobhaimid fráma dreapadóireachta eile?*
Will we get another climbing frame?
An bhfaighimid fráma dreapadóireachta eile?

The present tense of *faigh* also presented difficulties for the pupils as shown in Columns 5 and 6 in Figure 5.9. The Irish-medium pupils failed to use it correctly on any occasion and the all-Irish pupils had an error rate of 67%. The most common error was a failure to lenite the verb after the particle *a*. An example of this can be seen in (42).

(42IM) 14_03_64_N

- * ... *ach nuair a faigheann na páistí níos mó...*
... but when the children get bigger ...
... *ach nuair a fhaigheann na páistí níos mó...*

The use of the verbal noun was the area that caused the greatest difficulty for pupils as illustrated in Columns 7 and 8. The pupils failed to use it correctly 72% (IM) and 86% (AI) of the time. As with the other verbs discussed above there were two common errors with this aspect of the verb. The first was a failure to use the correct form of the verbal noun as in (43) and the second was the incorrect use of a pronoun as a direct object of the verbal noun as in (44).

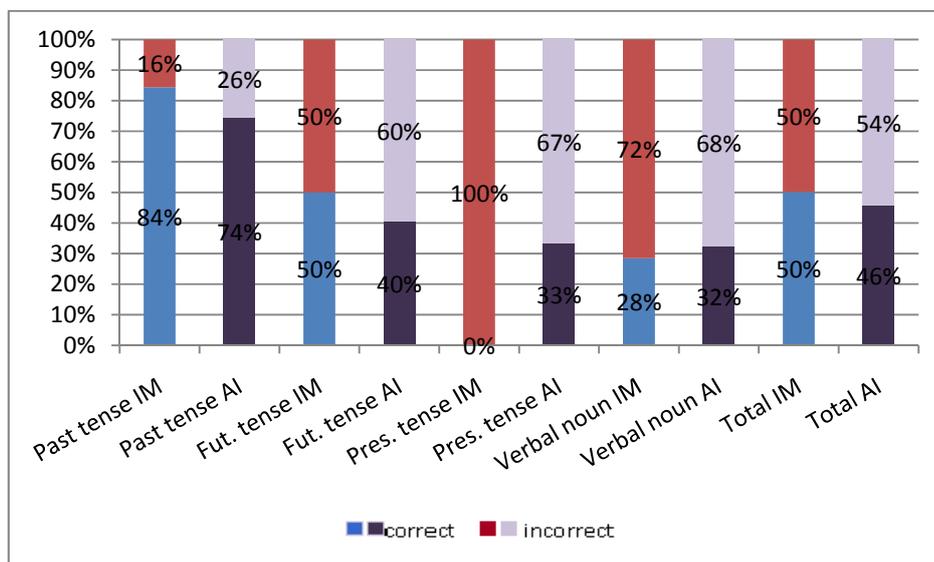
(43AI) 05_03_204_S

- * ... *thig leo faigh isteach.*
...they can get in
... *thig leo fáil isteach.*

(44IM) 15_01_51_S

- * *An bhfuil muid ag fháil sin?*
Are we going to get that one?
An bhfuil muid chun é sin a fhail?

Figure 5.9
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of the irregular verb *faigh* 'to get'



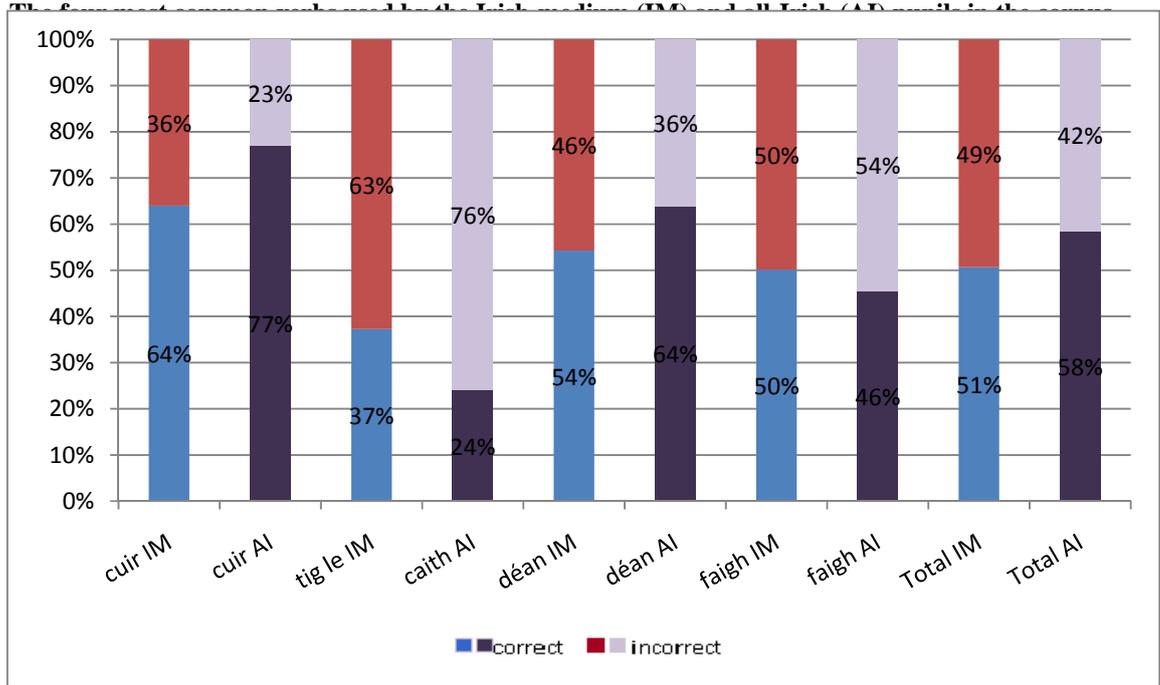
The verbal noun also caused difficulties for the Gaeltacht pupils in School 11. There were 30 instances of the verbal noun in the Gaeltacht school corpus. The pupils made errors in 13 of these. All 13 errors were made by five of the nine pupils whose speech was transcribed in School 11. The errors were similar to (44) above where the syntax of the sentence was not adjusted to place the object and the preposition *a* before the verbal noun. The verbal noun itself varied with three different forms: *Thig linn fáil*. *Thig linn fháil*. *Thig linn faigh* (we can get).

The verb *faigh* 'to get' has only been partially mastered by the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils on the evidence from the corpus with correct usage rates of 50% (IM) and 46% (AI) respectively. As this is an irregular verb it may be the case that the input that the pupils receive on the irregular forms is not sufficiently salient for them to master these forms of the verb.

5.3.5.5 Summary of the morphology of the verbs *cuir*, *caith*, *déan* and *faigh*

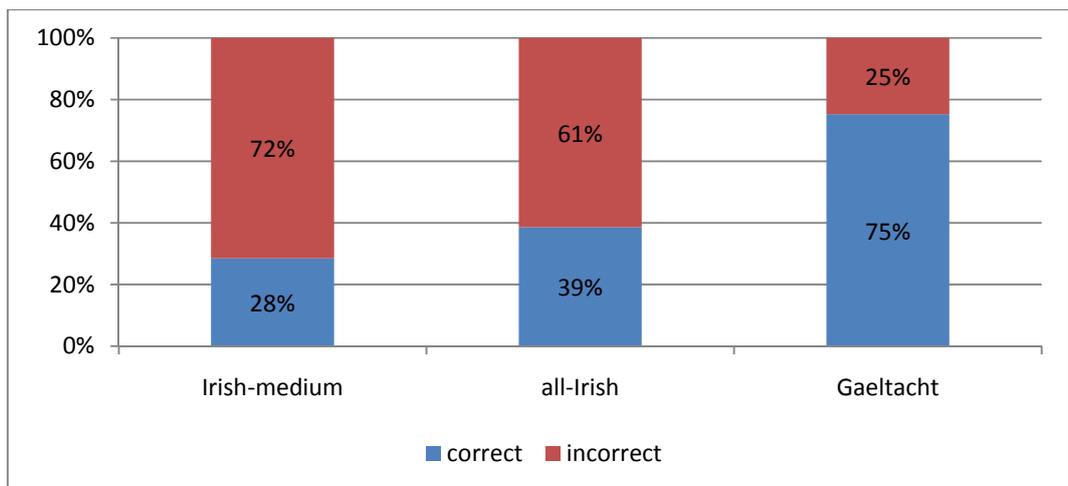
The four verbs most commonly used by the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils, apart from the copula *Is* and the substantive verb *bí*, were examined in this section. They were the verbs *cuir* 'to put', *caith* 'to have to', *tig le* 'is able to', *déan* 'to do', and *faigh* 'to get'. Figure 5.10 provides a summary of the correct and incorrect usage of those verbs. It can be seen from the totals in Columns 9 and 10 that the pupils used the correct 51% (IM) and 58% (AI) of the time.

Figure 5.10



The aspect of these verbs that caused the greatest difficulty was the correct use of the verbal noun. It was even found that some of the Gaeltacht pupils in School 11 had difficulty with this aspect. Ó Curnáin (2007) has also noted this phenomenon in the speech of native speakers in the area of *Iorras Aithneach*, an Irish heartland district in Connemara. Figure 5.11 presents the statistics in relation to verbal noun use by pupils in Irish-medium,

Figure 5.11
The Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht pupils' use of the verbal noun for the verbs *cuir*, *déan* and *faigh*



all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. It can be seen that the Irish-medium pupils have difficulty with this feature over seven times out of every ten (72%), the all-Irish school pupils have difficulty just over six times out of ten (61.4%). The Gaeltacht school pupils fail to use it correctly in just under a quarter of cases (24.7%). It should be noted that it was Gaeltacht School 11 that accounted for all of these 23 errors.

When the statistics on the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils presented in Tables 5.10 and 5.11 are examined it can be seen that many errors are accounted for by the failure to use the verbal noun correctly. If this feature could be mastered it would greatly improve the accuracy of their Irish. The other areas for improvement highlighted in this section are the correct use of the dependent and independent forms of the four verbs.

5.3.6 *Use of numbers*

The forms of numerals in Irish differ from English in so far as there are different cardinal numbers depending on whether the number is immediately followed by a noun or not (Mac Congáil, 2004) and there are different forms for personal and ordinal numbers also. Due to the nature of the task, numerals were used quite frequently by the pupils in calculating the amount of money that they had spent in their playground design.

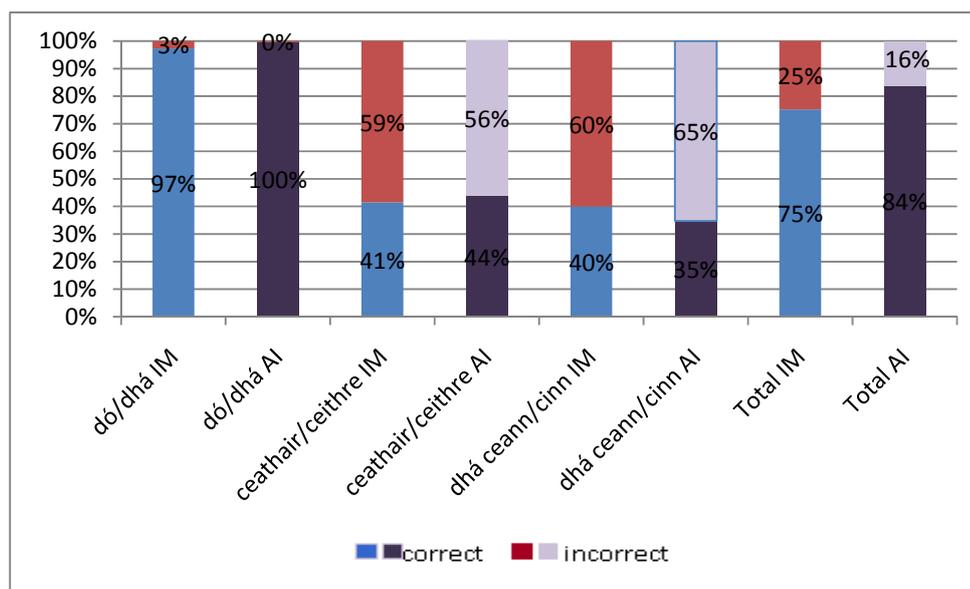
The issues that are of particular interest in this section are first, how the pupils handled *dhá* ‘two’ and *ceithre* ‘four’ because there are other forms of cardinal numbers for these when not followed by a noun in Irish. These are *dó* and *ceathair* respectively. The second area of interest is to examine how the pupils used the word *ceann* ‘thing’ after *dhá*. *Dhá cheann* is the correct form however, it was noted in the examination of the corpus that pupils used *dhá cinn* on occasions.

The evidence from the Columns 1 and 2 in Figure 5.14 is that the pupils chose the correct form of the numeral *dhá* ‘two’ to precede a noun in almost every situation. This contrasts with Columns 3 and 4 where *ceathair* ‘four’, the incorrect form to precede a noun was chosen 59% (IM) and 56% (AI) of the time.

Columns 5 and 6 in Figure 5.14 indicate that in relation to *dhá cheann* ‘two things’, the correct form was used in 40% (IM) and 35% (AI) by the pupils. This form may be difficult for the pupils to master, as it is an exception to the regular form of nouns after *dhá*. It is also a feature of Irish that is different to English.

Overall the mastery of the numbers examined in the corpus was good with particular areas that have exceptions in Irish being more difficult to acquire accurately such as *dhá cheann* ‘two things’, the different forms of four *ceathair* and *ceithre*, and the lenition of nouns after *aon* ‘one’, *dhá* ‘two’ and *trí* ‘three’.

Figure 5.14
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of the numbers: *dó/dhá*, *ceathair/ceithre*, *chéad/gcéad* and *dhá cheann/cinn*



5.3.7 Use of interrogative pronouns *Cad*, *Cad é*, and *Céard*

The next area to be examined in relation to the pupils' use of Irish in the all-Irish school corpus is their use of the interrogative pronouns *cad*, *cad é* and *céard*. These are the three most common forms in Irish used to express ‘what’ in English. They each have the same meaning and are associated with the three main dialects in Irish: *cad* with Munster Irish, *céard* with Connacht Irish and *cad é* with Ulster Irish. The difficulty that English L1 speakers learning these forms in Irish have is that they tend to use them to translate all forms of ‘what’ in English. As noted by Mac Murchaidh (2002) *cad* may not be used as a relative particle in Irish as in (45). In fact there was no need for the pupil to use the word *cad* at all in his utterance as one can see from the correct form in line five. The pupil appears to be translating the utterance from English almost word for word whereas this type of statement actually uses the past form of the copula *ba*.

(45AI) 09_01_291_L

* *Sin cad a dúirt mé.*

That's what I said.

B'in a dúirt mé.

There is a different type of translation illustrated in (46). The pupil appears to be trying to say, 'What are you like?' and translates it directly from English.

(46IM) 16_01_198_J

* *Cad é a amharcann sé mar?*

What does it look like?

Cad é mar a amharcann sé?

Columns 1 and 2 in Figure 5.15 show that there were 7 examples of this type of construction where *cad/cad é/céard* was used to directly translate 'what' in the case of Irish-medium pupils and 14 examples in the case of all-Irish pupils.

The investigation of verbs in Irish above illustrated that there is an independent and a dependent form. In the case of the substantive verb *Tá* and the irregular verbs *faigh* 'to get' and *déan* 'to do' the pupils had difficulty in choosing the correct form to use and generally used the independent form. When a verb follows *cad*, *cad é* or *céard* it is the independent form of the verb that should be used. Columns 3 and 4 in Figure 5.14 show that the pupils incorrectly used the dependent form on 70% (IM) and 66% (AI) of the time. (47) Exemplifies this error. Pupil C uses the dependent form *bhfuil* of the substantive verb in this case and also fails to use the correct verbal noun *rá* 'saying', and the correct syntax.

(47IM) 15_01_344_S

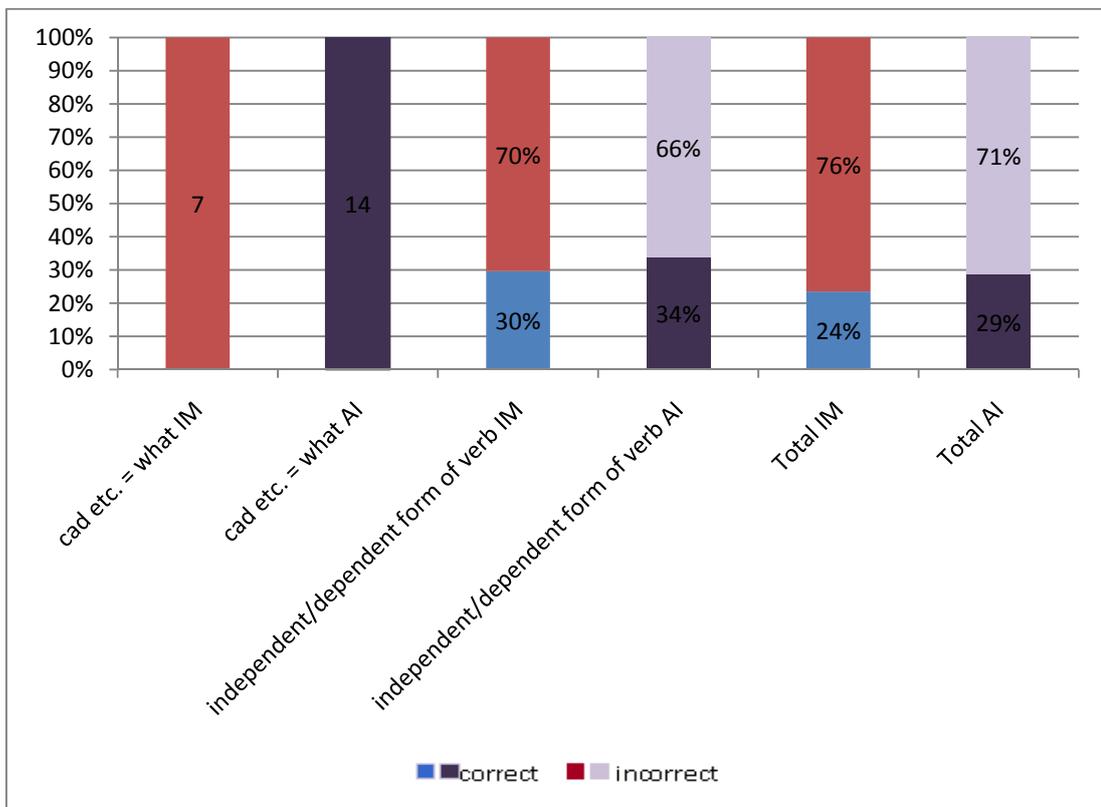
* *Cad é a bhfuil mise ag tarraingt?*

What am I drawing?

Cad é atá á tharraingt agam?

Although there are only 27 (IM) and 80 (AI) instances of utterances containing *cad*, *cad é* or *céard* in this way, the pupils fail to use them correctly 76% of the time in the case of Irish-medium pupils and 71% of the time in the case of all-Irish pupils. This is illustrated in Column 5 and 6 in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use of *cad*, *cad é* and *céard* 'what'



5.3.10 Pupils' use of the pronoun *é* 'it'

One issue that emerged from the examination of different categories above was the pupils inappropriate use of the pronoun *é* 'it' or the failure to use it in certain structures. The latter was the case in (14) for example we saw how pupil D used *an bhfuil sin*, instead of, *an é sin*. In (16) it was the former where pupil T said *Tá é*, which was not required as the copula is implied.

(14IM) 15_02_171_D

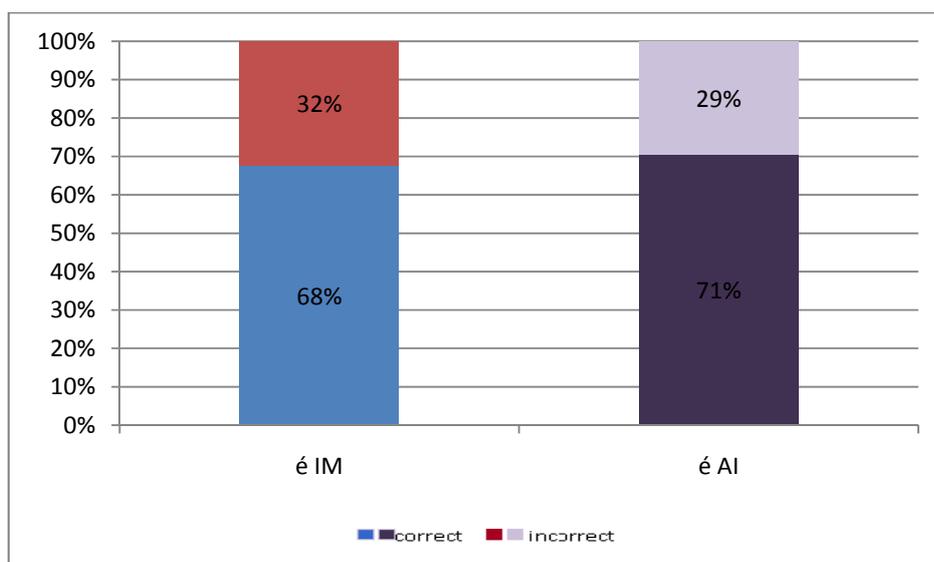
- * *An bhfuil sin an sleamhnán?*
Is that the slide?
An é sin an sleamhnán?

(16AI) 06_04_35_T

- * *Tá é sin seacht...*
That is seven...
Sin seacht...

Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) revealed that the Gaeltacht pupils used *é* 105 times, which represented 2.29% of their corpus. The Irish-medium pupils used *é* 329 times which also represented 2.29% of their corpus. The all-Irish school pupils on the other hand used it 1,252 times, which was 4.06% of their corpus or nearly twice as often as the Irish-medium and Gaeltacht pupils. WordSmith concordance tools were used to compile all the instances of *é* in the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpus. It was found when they were examined that 32% of the Irish-medium and 29% of the all-Irish utterances containing *é* were incorrect. This level of error is very similar to the number of utterances containing errors in Table 4.5 (Chapter 4), which was found to be 32.1% (IM) and 29.2% (AI). It can be stated then that approximately three in ten utterances for both Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils containing the pronoun *é* ‘it’ have errors. If the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils could master how to use this pronoun correctly it would lead to significant improvements in their accuracy.

Figure 5.16
Irish-medium (IM) and all-Irish (AI) pupils' use the pronoun *é* 'it'



The issue of mapping English syntax onto Irish will be discussed in the next section (5.3.11) below. At this point it is worth noting however, the influence that the English pronoun ‘it’ appears to have on the pupils’ Irish syntax. In (48) below, it can be seen how the pupil places *é* ‘it’ immediately after the verb, as an English speaker would do – ‘Will we leave it...?’ It should be noted that this form is quite acceptable in Irish but would

normally be used in this way in order to emphasise the object *é* 'it'. Similarly, in (49), the Irish-medium pupil places *é* immediately after the verb. This utterance is incorrect as he has lenited the imperative mood. In (50), the Gaeltacht pupil places 'it' at the end of a similar utterance where emphasis is not required. This form is more in keeping with the syntax of Irish.

(48AI) 09_01_1_F

- * *An fágfaimid é mar sin...?*
Will we leave it like that...?
An bhfágfaimid mar sin é...?

(49IM) 16_01_117_D

- * *Just fhág é mar sin.*
Just leave it like that.
Fág mar sin é./ Díreach fág mar sin é.

(50G) 11_01_200_M

- Fágfaimid go dtí an deireadh é.*
We will leave it until the end.

Issues such as this will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

5.3.11 Mapping English syntax onto Irish

As English is the first language of the vast majority of the all-Irish school pupils in the present study, the transcripts were examined for evidence of interference from English. Notwithstanding the mastery of verb-subject-object (VSO) order and noun-adjective order, as discussed in 5.3.2 above, there is evidence that other structures in Irish present more difficulties to the pupils.

Some samples from the data suggest that on certain occasions the pupils may be mapping English syntax onto Irish. This practice has also been observed in French immersion pupils in Canada (Lapkin & Swain, 2004). The influence of the English pronoun 'it' was discussed in the last section and is exemplified in (48) and (49). The Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpora was examined for other examples of English influence on Irish syntax. The examples found can be divided into two categories. The first is where there is English influence on Irish idiom (Mac Mathúna, 2008) and there appears to be a literal translation from English to Irish and the second is where a sentence appears to be partially

translated with the insertion of Irish words and a syntactic structure that is closer to English than to Irish.

5.3.11.1 Translation from English

The utterances (45) and (46) discussed above demonstrated examples where the interrogative pronouns *cad*, *céard* and *cad é* are being used to translate the English word ‘what’. They represent one form of translation from English that would grate on a native speaker’s ear. (51)-(54) below show other examples of the influence of English idiom on Irish where pupils employ phrases that are not native to Irish phrases to translate their thoughts. Although these utterances do not sound native to Irish they do demonstrate the creativity of the all-Irish speakers in complying with the school norm of speaking Irish and of communicating their thoughts at the same time. In (51) Pupil D literally translates ‘doing my head in’.

(51AI) 04_03_132_D

* *Tá mise faigh confused le sibhse, tá an bheirt de sibh ag déanamh mo cheann isteach.*

I’m getting confused with you, the two of you are doing my head in.

Tá sibh ag cur mearbhaill orm, cuireann an bheirt agaibh soir mé. (Possible translation)

In (52) Pupil S literally translates ‘over’, but the Irish word *thar* means ‘over’ in a different context.

(52AI) 03_03_9_S

Ag déanamh troid thar an balla dreapadóireachta.

Fighting over the climbing wall.

Ag troid mar gheall ar mballa dreapadóireachta.

In (53) Pupil A employs ‘*le* comparison’ a mixture of Irish and English. There is an attempt to frame it within Irish syntax where the *le* ‘with’ is placed before ‘comparison’. As it transpires the Irish version is *i gcomparáid le* with the ‘*le*’ following ‘*i gcomparáid*’

(53IM)16_01_205_D

Tá sí beag tiny le comparison don mo cheannsa.

It is small, tiny in comparison to my one.

Tá sí beag bídeach mo cheannsa.

Pupil E, a Gaeltacht school pupil in (54) translated the discourse marker ‘like’ but retained the English syntax in her utterance. The structure required here in Irish is the type discussed in 5.2.1 where the object and the preposition *a* should be placed before the verbal noun.

(54G) 11_02_121_E

* *Thig linn déan cosúil le, áit fá choinne bord picnic...*

We could do like, a place for the picnic table.

Thig linn áit a dhéanamh fá choinne bord picnic...

5.3.11.2 Partial translation

There are numerous examples in the corpus of what appears to be code-mixing behaviour as discussed in 4.5 (Chapter 4). In many cases however, it is not the insertion of an English borrowing into an Irish sentence, rather the insertion of Irish words into English sentences. It can be seen in (55) and (56) for example that the pupils’ utterances retains English syntactic structure.

(55) 05_03_228_A

No ‘cos already *fuair muid sin*.

No because we already got that.

Nílimid, mar fuaireamar é sin cheana féin.

(56) 14_03_220_A

Already *fuair muid ceann de sin*.

We already got one of them.

Fuair muid ceann acu sin cheana féin.

Similarly in (57) although there is only one English word in her utterance this Gaeltacht school pupil retains much of the English syntax. The exception is her partial translation of ‘good idea’ as idea *maith* where she employs Irish noun-adjective syntax.

(57) 11_01_80_R

Sílimse go bhfuil an túr idea maith.

I think that the tower is a good idea.

Sílimse gur smaoinemh maith atá sa túr.

There are many more examples of this type of structure to be found in the pupils' corpus. They illustrate the influence that English has on their oral production in Irish.

5.3.11.3 Summary of mapping English syntax onto Irish

An examination of the features of the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils' Irish would not have been complete without reference to the influence of English on both lexical choice and on syntax. Many of the features identified in previous sections such as the verbal noun, the use of the pronoun *é* 'it', indirect speech and copula use, involve issues of syntax and the influence of English syntax. It was seen in this section that the pupils in one Gaeltacht school were also influenced by English syntax. If the proficiency in Irish of Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils is to be improved a narrow focus on particular features and structures is unlikely to be successful without attention being paid to the broader issue of the influence of English on their lexical and syntactic choices.

5.4 *Discussion*

The recordings that have been transcribed in the Irish-medium and all-Irish school corpus reveal that pupils in the present study have developed a high level of communicative ability having spent over seven years in an immersion setting. They give an insight into the success of Irish-medium education in producing pupils that are fluent in Irish and that can communicate with one another with ease. They demonstrated the ability to access the vocabulary required to carry out the task assigned to them effectively. On average 67.9% (IM) and 70.8% (AI) of their utterances are accurate although they may be subject to the influence of English syntax and may contain English discourse markers. The areas identified in this chapter where the pupils deviated from native speaker norms will now be summarised and discussed. A focus of that discussion will be to highlight the main areas that contribute to the 32.1% (IM) and 29.2% (AI) error rate in the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils' utterances respectively and general suggestions as to how they might be remediated.

5.4.1 *Morphology of verbs*

The first area examined was the pupils' incorrect use of the substantive verb *bí* 'to be' instead of the copula *Is* 'is'. This manifested itself where pupils used the substantive

verb *bí* instead of the copula for classificatory purposes and where they failed to use the correct form of the copula with the demonstrative pronoun *sin*. The examination of how Gaeltacht pupils handle this feature of Irish revealed that the copula *Is* is omitted in many cases and that this feature may not be salient enough in the input for the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils to notice. It is interesting to note that the Irish-medium pupils error rate with the copula of 15% was less than half the of the error rate of all-Irish pupils at 32.7%.

The other verbs addressed in the analysis were the verbs *cuir* ‘to put’, *caith* ‘to have to, to spend’, *déan* ‘to do’, and *faigh* ‘to get’. These were the next most common verbs used by the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils apart from the copula and substantive verb. There were two areas in particular where the pupils experienced difficulty, the first was the correct use of the dependent and independent forms. This difficulty manifested itself with the two irregular verbs *déan* ‘to do’, and *faigh* ‘to get’ in particular. The second area was the correct use of the verbal noun. Overall across the four verbs, the verbal noun was incorrectly used just over seven times out of every ten by the Irish-medium pupils (72%) and just over six times out of every ten by the all-Irish pupils (61.4%). When all aspects of these verbs were taken together there was an error rate of 49% (IM) and 42% (AI).

As with the substantive verb and the copula above improvements in these rates of error would have a significant impact on Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils accuracy in Irish. The difficulty of this task should not be underestimated as some of the Gaeltacht pupils in School 11 were also found to have difficulty with the verbal noun. Walsh (2007) found that sixth year pupils in all-Irish post-primary schools continued to have difficulties with both the copula and the verbal noun.

The pupils’ use of the interrogative pronouns *cad*, *cad é* and *céard* ‘what’ highlighted difficulties with the dependent and independent forms of verbs with pupils incorrectly using the dependent form instead of the independent form after these pronouns.

5.4.2 *Use of numbers*

In general the pupils had achieved a good level of mastery of most of the forms of numbers examined in the corpus. Not surprisingly it was the forms that differ the most from the English number system or those with exceptions in Irish that caused the greatest difficulty. There were two main sources of error in the features examined in the Irish-

medium and all-Irish school corpora. They were the ability to differentiate between *ceathair* ‘four’ when counting and *ceithre* ‘four’ when followed by a noun, as in *ceithre bhord* ‘four tables’ for example. The other area of difficulty was the lenition of nouns after *aon* ‘one’, *dhá* ‘two’ and *trí* ‘three’.

The fact that the pupils learn mathematics through the medium of Irish probably helps with the mastery of numbers in Irish. The areas identified that cause difficulty for the pupils could be remediated in focus on form activities as part of the mathematics class.

5.4.3 *Influence of English*

A common theme throughout the analysis is the influence of English. This manifested itself in different ways in the corpora. As discussed in 4.5 (Chapter 4) the Irish-medium and all-Irish school pupils engaged in code-mixing and code-switching. It was also evident in their use of the interrogative pronouns *cad*, *cad é*, and *céard* for ‘what’.

The pupils incorrect use of the pronoun *é* ‘it’ also illustrated the influence of English on the pupils’ Irish. When the corpus was examined it was found that 32% (IM) and 29% (AI) of the utterances with *é* were incorrect. The difficulties with the pronoun *é* intersect with other areas such as, incorrect copula use, incorrect syntax and the failure to use the verbal noun correctly being the principal ones. In many cases the pupils inserted *é* where it was not required as it was understood or contained as part of another word such as a prepositional pronoun in Irish.

The code-mixing and code-switching behaviour of pupils was discussed in Chapter 4. It was viewed from a different perspective in this chapter however. Examples were provided in 5.3.11 above from the pupils’ corpus of this type of language use. It was illustrated how the use of English words interfered with Irish syntax. Although discourse markers represent 5.12% and 6.41% (Table 4.6) of the Irish-medium and all-Irish corpora respectively, it is when the literal translation and partial translation impose English syntax on the pupils Irish that gives rise to the greatest cause for concern (Nic Pháidín, 2003).

5.4.4 *Analytic teaching methodology*

The principal sources of the 32.1% (IM) and 29.2% (AI) error rate of Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils in the present study have been identified as difficulties with the copula, the morphology of verbs, prepositional pronouns, some aspects of number use and the

influence of English. These features of the pupils' Irish all involve syntactic difficulties that deviate from the natural flow of the Irish language. They are likely therefore to grate on native speakers' ears and to lead to disparaging descriptions of the pupils' Irish as *Gaelscoilis*. Pedagogic practice needs to address the high incidence of errors if pupils' accuracy in Irish is to be improved. It is suggested that a dependence on a largely experiential approach to language acquisition is unlikely to bring about the required improvement. Continuing to teach the copula as it has traditionally been presented in grammar books is unlikely to help pupils acquire the correct form when used with the demonstrative pronoun *sin*. A programme in which there are 'focus on form' activities, opportunities for 'pushed' output and a more analytic approach in general may help to improve pupils' accuracy in Irish.

It is also suggested that the targeting of particular features needs to take place at an earlier stage in pupils' acquisition of Irish in order to guard against their fossilisation. Walsh (2007) found in her study, that pupils in sixth year in post-primary all-Irish schools still had difficulty in mastering correct use of the copula and of the verbal noun. Continuing with current practice in the hope that the non target-like features identified in the present study will eventually be accurately acquired over time is unlikely to be effective. Recommendations regarding pedagogy will be discussed again later in the context of the overall findings of the present study.

Chapter 6: Pupils' reflections on their communicative performance in Irish

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the stimulated recall sessions (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Gass & Mackey, 2000; Polio, et al., 2006) where groups of pupils in each Irish-medium school⁵ viewed a video recording of excerpts of their work on a collaborative task. This reflective activity has a number of purposes:

1. to facilitate pupils' reflection and comment on the quality of the language that they used;
2. to investigate the underlying communicative competence of all-Irish school pupils with a particular focus on identifying the errors that they recognise and can correct, as opposed to those they do not recognise as errors;
3. to create an environment where the pupils' observations could be the starting point for a collaborative exploration of why their language contains the lexical and syntactic features identified in Chapter 5.

Pupils in each of the four Irish-medium schools engaged in a stimulated recall activity based on video-excerpts of their group work. This gave the participants in each school an opportunity to reflect on their language use and to self-correct the mistakes that they noticed. This process will be described in the next section. An account of the pupils' perceptions of the quality of their Irish follows in section 6.3. The pupils were provided with an opportunity to correct their mistakes and the results of this are reported in section 6.4. A further phase explored pupils' insights into the incorrect features of their Irish and this is described in section 6.5. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings in section 6.6.

6.2 Stimulated recall activity

The transcribed speech in the Irish-medium pupils' corpus resulted from the recordings of the pupils as they engaged in a collaborative 'playground-design' task. Eight groups were video-recorded as they engaged in this activity and it was these groups that

⁵ The discussion in this chapter focuses on the Irish-medium pupils. A detailed description of the stimulated recall sessions with all-Irish school pupils is contained in Ó Duibhir (2009).

participated in the stimulated recall. Excerpts of video recordings containing examples of the most frequent incorrect features analysed in Chapter 5 were chosen for presentation to pupils to give them an opportunity to reflect on them. These features were the copula, the verbal noun, the dependent form of verbs and code-mixing. The rationale for choosing the most frequent features was that they provide the most reliable evidence of linguistic competence compared to low frequency items (Chaudron, 2003). In general, the extracts for any one group lasted no more than three minutes and the sessions were conducted within seven to ten days of the initial recording.

The stimulated recall sessions were conducted with the pupils assembled in their original groups of three pupils each. The pupils were withdrawn from the classroom for this purpose, to a quiet location in the school and the sessions were also audio-recorded. There were three stages in the process. The first stage involved the pupils in viewing the selected excerpts on a laptop computer, in an attempt to capture their initial thoughts and reactions to the video excerpts and to the quality of their Irish in particular. A relaxed, collaborative atmosphere was created at this point where pupils could reflect on their use of Irish. Many of the groups were quite animated during the first viewing and commented on the strangeness of their voices and there was occasionally some mild embarrassment for pupils in looking at themselves on screen. Following this first viewing, the pupils were invited to comment on their initial impressions about their voices, how they had worked on the task as a group and particularly on the general quality of their Irish.

During the second stage, the pupils were provided with a transcript of the excerpts and asked to view the video recording again checking the accuracy of the transcript. They were encouraged in this way to enter the role of assisting the researcher in ensuring that their utterances had been captured correctly. This had the effect of focusing the pupils' attention on the language used in the playground design task. Following the clarification of issues concerning the accuracy of the transcription, the pupils were invited to correct any mistakes that they now detected on reflection and to comment on the quality of the Irish that they had used. Ability to later correct mistakes was of interest as this might indicate that their underlying competence was better than their performance on these tasks demonstrated. As they self-corrected some of their mistakes the discussion progressed to the third stage of the process which focussed on the pupils' linguistic performance.

During the third stage, the observations of the pupils were used to focus the discussion on the causes of the non-target like features that they had identified in their Irish. This approach advanced the process in a non-threatening way and gained their confidence and trust. In general, the groups required a good deal of prompting in order to get them to engage in this process. This was in contrast to the previous study in the Republic of Ireland where pupils were found to engage more enthusiastically in this process (Ó Duibhir, In press). Many pupils were reluctant to go beyond commenting in a general way on the text of the transcript. While some pupils found it quite easy to notice their mistakes and to self-correct, others had to be prompted to do so.

The recordings of the recall sessions were transcribed at a later date and the instances where pupils commented on their linguistic performance and general use of language were noted. These data were analysed using the NVivo software package (Richards, 2005). The transcripts were read and the pupils' contributions were coded and grouped into categories. Particular themes emerged from these groups. Examples from the transcripts are used in this chapter to illustrate the pupils' views and insights. These examples are identified in a similar fashion to Chapter 5 where 01_03 represents School 1, Group 3. The letter on the left before each utterance identifies the pupil in question, thus A represents Pupil A [see (1) below]. Where the comments and reflections of the pupils contained linguistic errors, attention was not drawn to them, as this was not the purpose of the exercise. An English version of the exchanges has also been provided but without the morphological glosses.

The analysis of the pupils' thoughts and insights is of a qualitative nature. Due to the time constraints involved in revisiting schools and withdrawing pupils from class it was not possible to go exhaustively through each error and count how many times an error was corrected or not. The non-target like features that were self-corrected and the insights provided by the pupils do however, give a clearer picture of some aspects of their underlying communicative competence and may have implications for how that competence might be improved.

6.3 Pupils' perceptions of the quality of their Irish and code-mixing

The pupils generally responded in one of two ways in assessing the quality of their Irish after the first viewing of the video excerpt. The first response was where they were generally satisfied. As Pupil O stated in (1):

(1) 16_01

O. *Bhí sé ceart go leor.* It was all right.

In the second type of response, the pupils note their use of English:

(2) 13_01

P. *Bhí cuid Béarla ann.* There was some English in it.

As the pupils made comments of this kind, they were asked if they were aware that they used English words:

(3) 13_01

P. *Ní raibh a fhios agam, díreach gur amharc mé ar sin.* I didn't know until I looked at that.

Seeing the speech transcribed appears to have helped the pupils to become more aware of their use of English. The researchers asked them why they thought they used English words. The response of Pupil A in (4) was typical of other pupils:

(4) 15_02

D.	<i>Bhí muid ag rá a lán rudaí nach raibh a fhios againn cad é a bhí muid a rá mar ...</i>	We were saying a lot of things that we didn't realise what we were saying because ...
R ⁶ .	<i>Bhfuil sampla agat?</i>	Do you have an example?
D.	So, right, yeah.	So, right, yeah.
R.	<i>Cén fáth go mbíonn 'so' 'right' 'yeah' agus rudaí mar sin in úsáid agaibh?</i>	Why do you use 'so' 'right' 'yeah' and words like that?
A	<i>Deir muid é uilig i Béarla agus so tá muid just ag ... see dúirt mé é ansin. So tá muid like á rá sa Gaeilge fosta. Níl sin Gaeilge ceart</i>	We say it all in English so we're just [A used the English word 'just'] ... see I said it there. So we're saying it in Irish as well. That is not correct Irish.

⁶ R. stands for researcher unless otherwise stated and is represented on bold type.

The use of English in their lives outside of school was also given as a reason by the pupils for their code-mixing in Irish as can be seen from (5) and (6) below. This can lead to habit formation as Pupils D (5) and P (7) point out.

(5) 16_01

R *Cén fáth go dtarlaíonn sé sin?*

D. Habit.

O. *Mar labhraímid Béarla ins an teach.*

Why does that happen? [use of English words]

Habit.

Because we speak English in the house.

(6) 16_01

J. *Tá sé deacair cos tá tú always ag labhairt Béarla i do bhaile agus when tá tú ar scoil like, deir an múinteoir libh labhair Gaeilge agus tá tú always ag labhairt Béarla still.*

It is difficult because you are always speaking English in your home and when you are at school like, the teacher tells you to speak Irish and you are always speaking English still.

The lack of exposure to Irish outside of school was offered as a reason why the pupils' Irish contained errors and words in English. These views were shared by pupils in other schools who confirmed that they had no exposure to Irish outside of school and mentioned it as a reason why their Irish contained errors and English words. On the whole then the pupils experience little exposure to Irish outside of school and this, in their opinion, affects their ability to speak Irish accurately in school.

Turning now to the issue of code-mixing, it will be recalled that Table 4.6 showed that English words accounted for 6.2% of the Irish-medium school corpus. The majority of these words (5.12%) were accounted for by two affirmative/negative particles ('no', 'yeah') and five discourse markers ('so', 'okay', 'just', 'like' and 'right'). The use of the stimulated recall process enabled the pupils to reflect on their language use and to comment on it. The pupils repeatedly stated that they were not aware that they used so many English words and it was this aspect above all others that disappointed them regarding the quality of their Irish.

Pupil P commented in (2) above that '*There was some English in it.*' When he was questioned about this in (3), he stated that he was not aware that they were using them and in (7) below that it was a 'habit'. It is interesting to note that the seven word sentence giving his assessment and reflection, itself contained three English words 'just', 'like' and 'habit', which serves to highlight how unaware the pupils are of code-mixing.

(7) 13_01

P. *Tá sé* just like *mar* habit ... *droch-nós*. It is just like a habit ... bad habit.

6.4 Correction of mistakes following reflection on output

In the second stage of the stimulated recall process, the pupils were invited to correct the mistakes that they noticed. They were asked to focus on their own utterances in particular, but the collaborative nature of the process allowed other pupils in the group to offer suggested improvements if they wished. The description will focus on the correction of the copula, verbal noun, dependent form of verbs, and the code-mixing and code-switching behaviour of pupils. The correction of those mistakes will be described below under those general headings.

6.4.1 Correction of specific mistakes

6.4.1.1 Incorrect forms of copula

It was shown in Chapter 5 that the Irish-medium pupils used incorrect forms of the copula 16% of the time and there was a higher rate of error for other verb forms depending on the form of the verb used. The stimulated recall sessions offered an opportunity to see if some of these incorrect forms were mistakes that could be corrected or evidence of underlying errors. Many of the extracts selected for the stimulated recall sessions contained examples of incorrect use of the copula. These generally involved the incorrect use of the substantive verb *Bí* 'to be'. In almost every stimulated recall session, pupils failed to notice these incorrect forms as mistakes. Polio et al. (2006) caution against drawing conclusions from what was not noticed and consequently pupils' attention was specifically drawn to these errors when they did not notice them themselves. The researchers drew the pupils' attention to incorrect use of the copula in four of the stimulated recall sessions. In one case the pupils were able to correct their error without a prompt but could not offer an explanation as to why the original utterance was incorrect. In the other three cases the researcher prompted the pupils as can be seen in (8) below. The original utterance by Pupil D is given first. When the pupils failed to notice any error in this utterance the researcher prompted the pupils as follows:

(8) 15_02

* D. *Bhuel tá sin bonn agus slabhra agus tá sin mór, tá sin mór ceann* = Well that is a tyre and swing [using substantive verb] and it is big [using substantive verb], it is a big one [using substantive verb].

R. *Dá mba rud é go ndúirt tú leis an múinteoir 'Tá sin ríomhaire' An mbeadh sí sásta?*

D. *Is ríomhaire é.*

A. *Ríomhaire atá ann.*

D. *Is ceann mór é. Is bonn agus slabhra é.*

If you said to the teacher, 'That is the computer.' [using substantive verb]
Would she be satisfied?

It is a computer.' [using copula]

It is a computer (using an alternative acceptable form of the substantive verb)

It is a big one. It is a tyre and chain. [using copula to correct original utterance]

Based on the evidence of the pupils' corpus and the stimulated recall sessions, it appears that Year 7 pupils in Irish-medium schools have partially mastered the use of the copula with the demonstrative pronoun *sin*. In general, when they are prompted in a particular way they can produce the correct form but it appears that it has not been internalised as part of their unmonitored spontaneous output.

6.4.1.2 Correction of incorrect forms of verbal noun clauses

The use of the verbal noun was noted as another area of difficulty for the Irish-medium pupils. This issue was explored with the pupils in the recall sessions in a similar way to the copula above. There were four instances where the researchers drew the pupils' attention to incorrect forms of verbal noun clauses. In all cases the pupils were only able to offer the correct form when prompted with similar structures by the researcher.

Pupil C's attention was drawn to Line 56 in (9) and asked what he thought about the sentence. He responded as follows:

(9) 13_02

T. **A Ch , amharc ar líne 56** [Ar mhaith leat cur ceann eile ar sin?]. **Cad é a shíleann tusa faoin abairt sin?**

C. Ní raibh an struchtúr ceart.

R. **An dtig leat an struchtúr ceart a insint dom?**

C [child's name], look at line 56 [Would you like to put another one on that – using incorrect form of verbal noun clause]. **What do you think of that sentence?**

The structure wasn't correct

Could you tell me the correct structure?

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| C. | Ba chóir cuir muid ceann eile ar sin. | We should put another one on that. [The pupil changed the meaning of the sentence but the incorrect verbal noun clause remains.] |
| R. | Éist arís leis. Abair go raibh tú ag dul a rá rud éigin le do mhúinteoir ehm. ‘Ar mhaith leat cur do leabhar síos?’ An mbeadh sé sin ceart? | Listen to it again. Say you were going to say something to the teacher ehm. ‘Would you like to put your book down?’ [using incorrect verbal noun clause.] |
| S. | Ar mhaith leat ceann eile a chur leis? | Would you like to put another one with it? [original utterance corrected by another pupil] |

In (9) above Pupil C appeared to know that there was an error in his utterance but was unable to correct it or indeed he may have guessed that that was the response expected of him by the researcher. Despite a number of prompts he was unable to correct his utterance. In the end Pupil S offered the correct utterance.

In general, the pupils were able to ‘self-correct’ their incorrect use of the verbal noun clause approximately 75% of the time once their attention had been drawn to it. On the other occasions when they were prompted by the researcher with a similar phrase that used the same structure in a context that they would be familiar with, they managed to see the connection and correct the verbal noun structure.

As seen in Figure 5.11 the verbal noun was incorrectly used 72% (le haghaidh *tig le*) of the time by the Irish-medium pupils in the corpus. The evidence from the recall sessions is that the pupils needed to have their attention drawn to the mistake before they noticed it and even at that, they could not correct it in many cases without significant prompting.

6.4.1.3 Correction of verbal errors

It was shown in Section 5 that the Irish-medium pupils used incorrect forms of the verb ‘cuir’ 34% of the time when completing the task. One of the errors involved was a failure to make initial mutations in dependent forms of the verb such as when asking questions. This type of error occurred with other verbs such as *faigh*, *déan*, and *tar* also. In (10) below the pupils were asked if they noticed anything about an utterance by Pupil C. This pupil changed the tense from present to future tense which is more accurate. None of the pupils

noticed that the dependent form of the verb was required when asking a question which would lead to an initial mutation [*An gcuireann/An gcuirfidh?*].

(10) 13_02

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| C. | *An cuireann muid an túr ansin? | Do we put the tower there? |
| R. | An bhfuil rud ar bith a sheasann amach do dhuine ar bith ansin? | Is there anything there that stands out for anyone? |
| C. | *An cuirfidh muid an túr ansin? | Will we put the tower there? |
| R. | An cuirfidh nó an cuireann? An bhfuil rud ar bith ansin? | An cuirfidh nó an cuireann? [Will we put or do we put?] Is there anything there |

This exchange was typical of other groups where pupils did not notice this type of error.

6.5 Pupils' insights into the incorrect features of their Irish output

Using the reflections from stages one and two as a starting point, the third stage of the recall sessions engaged the pupils in considering the reasons, in a more general context, why they had not spoken as accurately as they were capable of and why their Irish contained so many English words. The results of those discussions will be reported under the following headings: monitoring of output and translation from English.

6.5.1 Monitoring of output

Pupils A and D in (14) (reproduced below) was asked why they made mistakes when they knew the correct forms.

(14) 15_02

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| R. | <i>An raibh a fhios go mbíonn sibh ag rá rudaí mar sin?</i> | Did you know that you say things like that? |
| D. | <i>Ní raibh</i> | No. |
| A | <i>Nuair atáimid ag dul rud éigin a rá like ní smaoinimid just deir muid é amach agus like ... See tá mé ag rá 'like' anois.</i> | When we are going to say something like, we don't think, we just say it out and like ... See I an saying like now. |
| D | <i>Mar b'fhéidir nuair a bhí mise ag siúl síos, mar a dúirt mise, beidh mise ag rá rudaí ní raibh mé ag smaoineamh faoi.</i> | Maybe because when I am walking down, as I was saying, I will be saying things that I wasn't thinking about. |

This was a typical response from all groups and the issue of ‘not thinking’ arose repeatedly in the stimulated recall sessions. The discussion with the pupils in School 15 Group 2 returned to this issue later in the session when the researcher asked them about the challenge of speaking Irish all the time.

(15) 15_02

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>R. <i>An bhfuil sé deacair a bheith ag labhairt i nGaeilge an t-am ar fad?</i></p> <p>D. <i>Just mar tá tú ag rá focal nó ag rá abairt, b'fhéidir caithfidh tú rá an focal Béarla ‘cos níl tú ag smaoineamh cad é an focal.</i></p> <p>A. <i>Caithimid smaoineamh cad é a chaithfidimid a rá in ár gceann sula ráimid é sin in abairt.</i></p> | <p>Is it difficult to speak in Irish all the time?</p> <p>Just if you are saying a word or a sentence, maybe you have to say the word in English ‘cos you are not thinking what the word is.</p> <p>We need to think in our heads what it is we have to say before we say it in a sentence.</p> |
|--|--|

There was evidence in the recall sessions that pupils such as A above recognise the need to monitor their output more carefully when they are speaking. If pupils could be encouraged to do this more often there would be a degree of inhibition of incorrect forms by the pupils involved here which Hammerly (1989) suggests would be desirable.

6.5.2 Translation from English

Another issue raised with pupils was translation from English. Some pupils such as Pupil A in (16) responded:

(16) 15_02

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>R. <i>Nuair a deir tú focail i mBéarla an mbíonn tú ag smaoineamh i nGaeilge no i mBéarla?</i></p> <p>A <i>I Gaeilge like ach muna bhfuil a fhios againn focal cuirimid ceist ar an múinteoir cad é an focal.</i></p> | <p>When you say a word in English are you thinking in Irish or in English?</p> <p>In Irish like but if you don't know the word we ask the teacher what the word is.</p> |
|---|--|

Although it was noted in 5.3.11 that the pupils appeared to map English syntax onto Irish, the evidence from the responses of the pupil above and the other groups that participated in the stimulated recall is that the pupils do not consciously translate from English to Irish in the course of their everyday conversation. Thus, where the influence of English is detectable, it is very likely an embedded unconscious influence, not a transient effect of ‘translation’.

6.6 Discussion

The pupils in the selected groups were quite critical of their own Irish when they were given an opportunity to view a video-recording of their interaction and to see it transcribed. The aspect that they were most critical of was code-mixing. They failed to notice many grammatical errors unless their attention was drawn to them. It was reported in Table 4.6 that 6.2% of the Irish-medium school corpus was accounted for by borrowings from English and English discourse markers. It appears from the recall sessions that the pupils code-mixed considerably more than they were aware of. Indeed they expressed surprise at the number of English words that were present in the transcripts. When pupils were given an opportunity to correct their Irish on reflection, their most common response was to replace the English words. When they were questioned as to why they used so many English words they responded that it was just a 'habit' and that they were not monitoring what they were saying as they were focused on the task rather than on the form that they were using. They also cited a lack of exposure to Irish outside of school as a reason for the presence of so many English words.

Apart from code-mixing, the recall sessions focused on three other features of the pupils' Irish namely the copula, the verbal noun and dependent forms of verbs. When the pupils were given an opportunity to correct mistakes involving these three features in the transcripts, they rarely noticed any problem until their attention was specifically drawn to possible alternative forms. In the case of the copula they could correct the error if prompted in a particular way using a structure similar to the one in the transcript. They had more success with the verbal noun, correcting about 75% of the errors when their attention was drawn to them. The fact that the pupils were able to correct many of the mistakes that they had originally made while engaged in the playground design task when their attention was drawn to them, may indicate that they have an underlying communicative competence that may not always be fully displayed in their communicative performance.

Other issues that formed part of the analysis in Chapter 5, such as the morphology of verbs, indirect speech, prepositional pronouns, numbers and interrogative pronouns (*Cad/Céard/Cad é* 'What') incorrectly used, also arose in the stimulated recall sessions. Pupils' attention had to be specifically drawn to these issues and the pupils were unable to correct these errors unless prompts were provided. When attention was drawn to the use of

ceathair 'four' with a noun for example, pupils were able to correct it. When the pupils were presented with their incorrect use of the interrogative and dependent forms of verbs they still failed to perceive them as errors in the recall sessions and could only correct errors of this type when provided with suitable prompts.

With reference to Skehan's (1998) rule-based analytic and formulaic exemplar-based systems, the unmonitored language output of the Irish-medium pupils may result from incorrect language chunks that have been stored in their memory-driven formulaic exemplar-based system and are retrieved automatically by the pupils. When prompted by the teacher or in anticipation of negative feedback if they make a mistake, pupils may draw on their analytic rule-based system. It is the former however, that appear to be easiest for them to retrieve, whereas in the case of the latter, it requires a conscious effort to retrieve the correct form. This may indicate that monitoring their language output requires resources from working memory that reduces the attentional capacity (Skehan, 1996) at their disposal to plan for the content and form of the remainder of the utterance. If this is the case, there are implications for immersion pedagogy in raising pupils' awareness that would lead to a restructuring of inaccurate forms in their underlying interlanguage. It would also be helpful to understand how these incorrect forms are initially miscoded, if this indeed is what is happening.

There were examples in the transcripts shown to the pupils where it appeared that English syntax was being mapped onto Irish. When the pupils were questioned about this they stated that they did not consciously translate from English to Irish. The research suggests that focus on form activities may help learners attend to form, leading to change in their underlying interlanguage (Lyster, 2004a, 2007; Lyster & Rannta, 1997; Ní Dhiorbháin, 2010; VanPatten, 2002). If this issue is not addressed, then the Irish-medium pupils' propensity to habitually produce inaccurate forms may become embedded and lead to a degree of permanency (Hammerly, 1989).

The recording of pupils for the purposes of the reflective activity proved very effective in drawing the pupils' attention to their code-mixing behaviour. While it is not suggested that teachers should replicate this activity with their pupils, they could nonetheless record their pupils engaged in different activities and provide opportunities for the pupils to view the recordings. The pupils could be asked to transcribe short extracts of their dialogue and then be provided with a reformulation of this dialogue by the teacher.

Various research studies (Lynch, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2008) have shown that these strategies lead the pupils to notice gaps in their own interlanguage and this has led to longer term learning of targeted structures.

Chapter 7: Principal and class teacher interviews regarding their pupils' proficiency in spoken Irish.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the views of class teachers and principals regarding their pupils' proficiency in spoken Irish. In order to better understand the origins and possible causes of the distinctive characteristics in relation to weaknesses in the syntactic and lexical features of Irish-medium pupils' spoken Irish, it is important to ascertain the views of their class teachers and principals on the topic. As noted by Lapkin et al. (2006), very few studies have focussed on the views of teachers in this area. The collaborative design task employed in this study enabled the recording of the unplanned oral production of selected groups of pupils engaged in the task over a twenty-minute period. The teachers and principals have opportunities to observe their pupils' progression and development in Irish over the course of a school year and throughout their time in primary school. They are likely then, to have valuable insights to offer into the characteristics of their pupils' Irish, the grammatical errors they make, and the educational, social and linguistic factors that shape its emergence. The presentation of their views in this chapter will concentrate on the issues that emerged from the interviews, focussing in particular on how they perceived the grammatical inaccuracies of the pupils' Irish.

The objectives of this phase of the study were:

- to ascertain the attitudes of Irish-medium school principals and Year 7 teachers towards their pupils' proficiency in Irish
- to investigate the remedial strategies adopted by teachers when students make grammatical errors
- to identify the teachers' assessments of the nature and range of those grammatical errors
- to explore the teachers' views of the factors influencing pupils' grammatical accuracy in Irish and the plans that they have in place to improve it.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. This first section describes the background and purpose of the interviews. Section 2 describes the selection of participants and the data analysis. Section 3 gives an account of the main themes that arose in relation to the teachers' and principals' attitudes towards and their interpretation of the origins of the pupils' particular variety of Irish. The chapter concludes with a discussion of these themes in Section 4.

7.2 Method Study sample

Table 7.1 below shows that six teachers were interviewed (three principals and three class teachers). One of the principals interviewed was also the Year 7 class teacher. The principal from one of the schools was not available for interview. No distinction is made between the views of teachers and principals in the discussion of emerging themes that follows, and all are referred to as teachers. Their names have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality. They have varying degrees of experience teaching in an Irish-medium school, ranging from five years to greater than twenty years. None of them are native Irish speakers but all six have attained a near native-level of proficiency in Irish. Two of the principals came from Irish speaking homes although they state that English and Irish were both widely used at home. One of the teachers attended an Irish-medium primary school in Northern Ireland as a pupil but the remaining five all received their education through the medium of English. The selection of teachers for interview was determined by the purposive sample of schools invited to participate in the collaborative design task.

7.2.2 Interviews of teachers

Data were collected in four Irish-medium schools on the second visit to each school. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, to explore all dimensions of their experiences relating to their pupils' spoken Irish. The interviews took from 25-35 minutes to complete. An interview schedule was drawn up to ensure that the same information was obtained from each participant and to maintain its intended focus. The drafting of the schedule was informed by a similar study conducted by one of the researchers in the Republic of Ireland as part of a PhD study (Ó Duibhir, 2009). Each interview lasted between 25 and 35 minutes and was conducted in the participant's school.

All but one of the interviews were audio-recorded with the agreement of the participants, the interviewer made comprehensive notes during the remaining one interview. This allowed the researcher to ensure that information supplied by the teachers was fully understood and all responses captured accurately.

Table 7.1
Background information on principals and class teachers selected for interview

Teacher pseudonym	Role and School	No. of years teaching in Irish-medium school
Ciara	Year 7 class teacher, School 1	11-14
Séamus	Year 7 class teacher, School 2	1-5
Máire	Principal teacher, School 2	11-14
Mairéad	Year 7 class teacher, School 3	1-5
Sinéad	Principal teacher, School 3	11-14
Aoife	Principal teacher & Year 7 class teacher, School 4	>20

7.2.3 Data analysis

A qualitative approach was adopted for the analysis of the interviews. Each interview was transcribed. The transcripts were coded and grouped into categories and certain themes emerged from these (Dörnyei, 2007). Analysing the data in this way made it possible to become immersed in the data in order to adequately reflect the experiences, thoughts and ideas of the teachers. Representative quotations from the teachers have been included in the account and combined with the researchers' interpretations to produce an interpretive-descriptive account (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researchers' own experiences as teachers and principals in Irish-medium schools, and as teacher educators, helped to inform this interpretation. All identifiable details have been altered to ensure that disclosure of participants is avoided and to safeguard their privacy.

7.3 Results

Five main categories emerged from the analysis of the teachers' interviews:

- teachers' general satisfaction with their pupils' proficiency;
- specific weaknesses in the pupils' spoken Irish identified by the teachers;
- pupil willingness to speak Irish;

- school planning to address identified weaknesses; and
- teachers' professional development needs in order to better address weaknesses in the pupils' Irish.

7.3.1 Teacher satisfaction with students' proficiency in Irish

7.3.1.1 Good fluency but need for improvement

In general, teachers felt that their pupils were quite proficient in Irish but that the standard could be improved. As Mairéad stated:

<i>Tá siad ábalta cuid mhór a rá ach deireann siad go contráilte go minic é!</i>	They are able to say a great deal but they often say in incorrectly!
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One of the strengths that the majority of the teachers identified was their pupils' fluency and their ability to communicate their ideas without any apparent difficulty. Séamus raised other issues:

<i>Tá réimse leathan cumais ann ach is cinnte go bhfuil líofacht mheasartha, ar a laghad, acu uilig. Ní bheadh siad ar dhóigh ar bith inchurtha le cainteoirí dúchais áfach.</i>	There is a wide range of ability but they all definitely have at least a satisfactory level of fluency. They would not have native like fluency however.
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The picture that emerges more generally from most of the teachers' comments is one of virtually all pupils having very good communicative ability in Irish. They are able to get their meaning across with relative ease but this is achieved in a way that lacks grammatical accuracy and does not conform to native speaker norms. One teacher in particular felt however that a number of the pupils struggled communicatively also in Irish, especially when removed from a classroom situation:

<i>Tá meascán ann maidir le cumas labhartha na bpáistí sa rang seo ach is cinnte go bhfuil deacrachtaí ag roinnt acu tuairimí a nochtadh ar ábhar comhrá ar bith taobh amuigh de shuíomh an tseomra ranga.</i>	There is mix of ability in relation to the spoken Irish of children in this class but there are a number of them who experience difficulties expressing opinions on any topic of conversation outside of the classroom situation.
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Although the teachers accepted that this situation was understandable given the lack of support for Irish outside of school in the pupils' homes and wider community, they were, on the whole, passionately critical about this and felt that it should be possible to improve

the situation. None of the teachers were willing to accept that accuracy was unachievable and they all felt it was necessary to strive to develop resources and strategies to tackle this issue. These views are broadly in keeping with the findings of the Ó Duibhir (2009) study that it should be possible to improve the accuracy of pupils' Irish with the evidence available from the comprehensive analysis of the pupils' corpus.

7.3.2 *Features of pupils' spoken Irish*

7.3.2.1 Most common errors

The teachers identified the following as the most frequent errors:

- the structure of the pupils' sentences in Irish are influenced by English syntax
- the substantive verb used incorrectly instead of the copula
- the imperative form of verbs used instead of the verbal noun.

These were also among the most common errors identified in the analysis of the all-Irish school corpus (Ó Duibhir, 2009) and they were the subject of the stimulated recall sessions during this study. These errors were reported by the teachers to be a feature of Irish-medium pupils' Irish from an early stage, and many of them, in their experience, persist over time and are difficult to eradicate. As Máire said:

Fágann páistí Rang 7 agus iad ábalta cumarsáid a dhéanamh sa dara teanga ach ní bhíonn struchtúr na teanga acu go beacht.

Children leave Year 7 able to communicate in a second language but they have not mastered the exact structure of that language.

Aoife added the following:

Tá líofacht acu gan dabht ach Gaeilge líofa lofa a thugaimid uirthi go minic! Is cinnte go bhfuil easpa cruinnis ann agus bíonn struchtúir an Bhéarla le cluinstitín go láidir ina gcuid Gaeilge.

There is no doubt that the children achieve fluency but we often question the standard of fluency. There is a lack of accuracy and structures from the English language can be heard. The same errors are there and I assume that there must be deep linguistic reasons that the same errors emerge again and again.

When the teachers were asked why they thought that the errors persist over time and are difficult to eradicate, many believed that while the pupils knew the correct form, that

they did not monitor their output in unplanned communication. Sinéad made the following comment:

Tuigeann siad na struchtúir ach tagann patrúin i struchtúr an Bhéarla chucu níos nádúrtha. Má iarrtar orthu an rud a rá mar is ceart áfach, éiríonn leo don chuid is mó.

They understand the structures but patterns in the structure of English come more naturally to them. If they are asked to say the thing correctly however, they succeed in doing so, for the most part.

Séamus said:

Tiontaíonn siad ar an Bhéarla go minic, fiú nuair a bhíonn an Ghaeilge ar eolas acu. Bogann gach rud go gasta do pháistí sa lá atá inniu ann agus bíonn deifir ar pháistí tuairimí s'acu a nochtadh agus is dócha go mbíonn sin níos fusa agus níos gasta sa Bhéarla. Nuair a iarraim orthu a machnamh a dhéanamh ar an rud atá ráite acu éiríonn leo Gaeilge a chur ar na focail a bhí ráite as Béarla acu agus tugann siad cuid mhaith de na meancóga eile faoi deara fosta.

They often turn to English, even when they know the Irish for what they are saying. Everything moves fast for children these days and I feel that the children are in a hurry to express their opinions and I suppose this is easier and quicker for them to do in English. When I ask them to think about what they have said, they are able to translate the English they used to Irish and they also pick up on the majority of the other mistakes they made also.

This phenomenon of ‘not thinking’ as referred to by Séamus in his comment above, was also a feature that was referred to by both teachers and pupils in all-Irish schools (Ó Duibhir, 2009). The strategic goal of pupils seems to be to produce an utterance that does not lead to a breakdown in communication; the question of the structure of the utterance and whether it conforms to target norms appears secondary. The evidence from the collaborative task on the use of the substantive verb instead of the copula is a good example of this attitude. To ascribe this phenomenon to laziness may be unfair to the pupils however. The reason for them not monitoring their output may be related to excessive demands on their processing power during online communication.

7.3.2.2 Influence of English and peers on pupils’ Irish

Another reason offered by the teachers for the persistence of errors was the influence of English on the pupils’ Irish. Sinéad explained that the children had:

... easpa teagmhála leis an Ghaeilge lasmuigh den scoil.

... a lack of contact with Irish outside of school.

Aoife said that, in the case of the Year 7 class she taught:

... labhraíonn na páistí Béarla níos réidhe gan amhras ach ní thugaim freagra orthu muna ndéanann siad iarracht leis an Ghaeilge.

... the children speak English much more readily but I do not respond until they make an effort in Irish.

Aoife also commented on the influence that one pupil speaking English can have on the rest of the children; other teachers also noted this. Both Aoife and Séamus mentioned the limited word bank that the children have in Irish compared to their range of vocabulary in English, especially in certain areas, such as when discussing emotions:

... teanga na mothúchán – bíonn sé doiligh ar na páistí iad féin a chur in iúl go héifeachtach céanna as Gaeilge, baineann seo leis an stór focal atá acu atá i bhfad níos saibhre sa Bhéarla. Déanaimid iarracht tabhairt faoi seo ag am ciorcal.

... the language of feelings – it can be difficult for children to express themselves effectively in Irish, this is due to the fact that their vocabulary in English is much richer. We try to address this during circle time.

Séamus said:

Bíonn struchtúr an Bhéarla fite fuaite tríd an Ghaeilge s'acu, ganntanas san fhocal stór s'acu as Gaeilge is cúis leis go minic déarfainn. Bhuel, sin a freagra a thugann na páistí iad féin go minic cibé '...níl a fhios agam an Ghaeilge air!'

The structure of the English language in endemic throughout their Irish, a lack of vocabulary I would say is often the reason for this. Well that's what the children tell me anyway '...I don't know the Irish for it!'

In contrast, Aoife also made a comment on the effect that Irish was having on English.

Is minic a thugaim faoi deara droch-thionchar na Gaeilge ar an Bhéarla s'acu fosta! Ach is cinnte go mbíonn seo níos fusa le láimhseáil de thairbhe go bhfuil lámh acu ar an chuid is mó de na struchtúir i mBéarla cheana féin agus ní bhíonn de dhíth de ghnáth ach cur i gcuimhne beag gur chóir níos mó cúraim a ghlacadh.

I often notice the bad influence that the children's Irish has on their English also! This is much easier to deal with however as they have already mastered most of the structures in English anyway and I feel they just need a reminder at times to take more care.

Aoife went on to explain that this was often a concern that parents expressed when considering whether or not immersion education was the best choice for their child. Most

parents were concerned about their own lack of Irish and were also worried that their child's English would suffer as a result of learning through the medium of Irish. Baker (2000, p. 147) acknowledges this concern of parents and gives two main points as reassurance:

‘...what a child learns in one language can be easily transferred into a second language and does not have to be relearnt in the majority language...’ and ‘... a child's majority language fluency and competence is often well represented through other experiences in the environment.’

7.3.2.3 Strategies adopted by teachers to improve proficiency and to correct errors

Teachers were asked about the strategies they adopted when they were confronted with grammatical errors. It was evident from the responses that all teachers used a variety of different strategies depending on the situation. The strategies ranged over positive reinforcement, humour, continuous correction by teacher, asking pupils to reflect and self-correct, peer-correction, a deliberate focus on particular aspects of language during lessons of all curricular areas and actual grammar lessons. No teacher expressed the opinion that any particular strategy was better than another but that they had a battery of strategies which they drew upon depending on a range of factors such as the context in which the error occurred, the student that made the error and the focus of the lesson. This section describes many of the different strategies adopted by teachers as they try to improve the proficiency of their students.

A number of teachers had a way to signal to the pupils by means of a prompt that there was something not quite right about what they had just said. In Ciara's case she would say:

“Cad é sin a dúirt tú?” Agus ansin bheadh a fhios acu go bhfuil botún sa chaint déanta acu, agus ceartaíonn siad iad féin gan stró don mhórchuid.’

“What's that you said?” And then they would know that they have made a mistake in their speech and they generally correct themselves without difficulty.

Aoife would often say to her pupils when they have said something inaccurately:

‘Abair sin ar dhóigh eile.’

‘Say that in another way.’

And this would be adequate to indicate to the pupil that they has said something inaccurately although it was not unduly negative or threatening to the pupil.

It is evident from many of the teachers that they strive to maintain a balance between correction and ensuring that there is a positive atmosphere in the class and school that encourages the pupils to speak Irish. All of the teachers felt passionately about promoting a linguistically accurate output from the pupils but they also believed that this should be done in such a manner as to not deter the pupils from communicating freely and confidently.

In some schools there is a whole-school focus on particular phrases that cause difficulties for the pupils as explained by Sinéad:

... bíonn ‘struchtúr na seachtaine’ i bhfeidhm sa scoil againn. Chuir muid liosta le chéile de na meancóga agus deacrachtaí is coitianta i gcaint na bpáistí agus dírtear aird iomlán scoile ar struchtúr amháin gach seachtain. Sa tseachtain sin, bíonn aitheantas tugtha don struchtúr sin ag tionóil, ar na ballaí, trí amhráin, sna seomraí ranga srl. Is minic a thugtar athchuid ar struchtúr míonna ina dhiaidh sin arís.

... we have a ‘structure of the week’ system in operation in our school. We compiled a list of the most frequent inaccuracies and difficulties in the pupils’ speech and, as part of a whole school initiative, attention is paid to one structure each week. During that week, recognition is given to this structure at assemblies, on the walls, through songs, in the classrooms etc. We often revisit the same structure months down the line.

One strategy that all teachers reported using was to teach grammar formally. The errors that the pupils made were noted and ‘focus on forms’ type lessons were taught in an attempt to correct them. The Year 7 teachers reported that was more common in Key Stage 2 than in both Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and a few of them believed that more emphasis could be placed on grammar during the earlier Key Stages.

A challenge for all teachers was trying to find the time to deliver all learning areas of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2006) through the medium of Irish and at the same time focusing on developing pupils’ Irish. Sinéad believed that the issue of time was a particularly pressing issue and that it would be unreasonable and possibly counteractive to expect teachers to correct every single inaccuracy all of the time:

‘... easpa ama ag múinteoirí gach rud a cheartú agus freagraí sínte a mhealladh an t-am ar fad.’

‘... teachers do not have enough time to correct everything and to encourage extended responses all of the time.’

This comment brings into focus the dual nature of the immersion teacher's role in being both a language and a content teacher. The challenge for teachers is to strike a balance between the two roles. The teachers' comments reveal that they strive to achieve that balance in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of the pupils as well. Teachers certainly do not ignore student language errors and whether they are dealt with immediately on the spot or later in a form-focussed lesson, all teachers had strategies for dealing with them.

7.3.2.4 Teaching materials and resources

An issue that most teachers commented on was that of teaching materials. Although they spoke very positively about the ongoing improvements and developments in this area, all of them making specific reference to the work of An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge (Irish-medium Resource Unit) based in St Mary's University College, Belfast, they all expressed strong opinions on the shortage of learning and teaching resources available through the medium of Irish. Mairéad said:

Tá bearna ollmhór go fóill ann maidir le háiseanna lán-Ghaeilge. Tá gach rud ar fáil i mBéarla agus bainim úsáid as cuid mhaith de na háiseanna sin. Bím féin go fóill ag scríobh agus ag cumadh áiseanna teagaisc s'agam féin de thairbhe nach bhfuil siad ar fáil as Gaeilge.

There is still a great shortage of Irish-medium resources. Everything is available in English and I use quite a few of these resources. I still have to write and create my own teaching resources because they simply aren't available in Irish.

This makes it difficult for teachers and schools to plan a structured programme for implementation in senior classes. It also presents difficulties in developing the pupils' standard of Irish if there is a lack of suitable material, especially reading material.

7.3.2.5 Exposure to Irish outside of the school context

Many of the teachers, including Sinéad, raised the issue of the limited exposure to Irish for the majority of their Irish-medium pupils:

Bíonn easpa teagmhála ag na páistí leis an Ghaeilge lasmuigh den scoil. Déanaimid iarracht imeachtaí sóisialta a eagrú agus a chur ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge ach bíonn sé doiligh foireann a fháil le tacú leis seo go minic.

The children have a lack of contact with Irish outside of the school. We try to organise social events through the medium of Irish but it can be difficult to find staff to help with these events.

Mairéad referred to the difference between the academic language of the classroom and the social language in other settings:

Labhraíonn siad í (an Ghaeilge) sa suíomh ranga. Bíonn teanga acadúil an tseomra ranga acu gan amhras. Mothaímid anseo áfach go mbíonn easpa Gaeilge le cluinstitín sa chlós; ba mhaith linn an Ghaeilge a bheith mar theanga shóisialta agus mar theanga acadúil acu.

They speak it (Irish) in the classroom. There is no doubt that they possess the academic language of the classroom. We feel here however, that there is a lack of Irish to be heard in the school yard; we would like them to use Irish both academically and socially.

Aoife added that:

Tá plean againn tús a chur le himeachtaí iarscoile ach tá impleachtaí ann maidir le heaspa foirne agus easpa fairsinge. Tá pobal thart orainn anseo atá an-bháúil leis an Ghaeilge agus is cinnte go dtugann ár dtuismitheoirí tacaíocht dúinn. Níl páiste ar bith sa rang a bhfuil mórán Gaeilge sa bhaile acu ach cuirimid ranganna Gaeilge ar fáil do thuismitheoirí. Chomh maith leis sin bíonn guthán scoile ann gach oíche le tacaíocht a thabhairt leis an obair bhaile.

We intend to start an after-schools programme of activities but there are implications regarding staff and space. We have a very supportive community and our parents give us a great deal of support. There are no children in the class who have much Irish at home but we do provide Irish classes for parents. As well as that, the school phone line remains in operation in the evenings so parents can call should a child require support with homework.

Clearly then, although it may be desirable that pupils would be exposed to Irish outside of school, the reality is that in most instances they are not to any great extent and it may be unrealistic to expect it. Some teachers expressed the desire for more support from parents in this regard and wished that the Irish language skills of parents could be improved. Notwithstanding this, many of the schools organise trips to the Gaeltacht and participate in events and activities for Irish-medium schools. In other areas, pupils have access to Irish youth clubs. The teacher from the school that was situated in Belfast felt that there were more opportunities locally for the children to become involved in activities through the medium of Irish, outside of school hours, he did not believe however that many parents and children availed of these opportunities on a regular basis. While these activities and visits appear to have a positive effect on the pupils' attitudes to speaking Irish, and in many cases demonstrate to the pupils that Irish is a language that is alive outside of the school context, it is difficult to judge if it results in an improvement in pupils' accuracy in

Irish. The pupils cited their lack of exposure to Irish outside the school as influencing their code-mixing behaviour and general accuracy in Irish in the recall sessions.

7.3.3 *Pupil willingness to speak Irish*

7.3.3.1 General encouragement of pupils and inculcating a positive attitude

It was evident from the responses of teachers that they expend a large amount of energy in maintaining Irish at all times in the school. The effort required to do this should not be underestimated and it may partly explain why grammatical accuracy and the influence of English are relegated to second place. All the teachers were questioned about their pupils' willingness to speak Irish and it elicited a variety of responses, some positive and some negative depending on the school. Aoife felt that although the children enjoyed Irish they wanted to be 'cool' in front of their Year 7 peers and didn't want to be viewed as the teacher's pet:

Creidim go bhfuil dearcadh an-dearfach acu i leith na Gaeilge agus is cinnte go mbaineann siad sult as an Ghaeilge. Faoin am a mbaineann siad Rang 7 amach áfach bíonn siad ag iarraidh a bheith 'fionnuar' agus níor mhaith leo a bheith mar pheata an mhúinteora.

I believe that they have a very positive attitude to Irish and there is no doubt that they enjoy Irish. By the time they reach Year 7 however, they want to be 'cool' and don't want to look like the teacher's pet.

Sinéad also noted in her school that an attitude can emerge among the pupils by Year 7:

Bíonn na páistí óga ag iarraidh an múinteoir a shásamh trí Ghaeilge a labhairt. Bíonn sé doiligh iad a spreagadh Gaeilge a labhairt an t-am ar fad faoi Rang 7.

The younger children want to please the teacher by speaking Irish. It is difficult to motivate them to speak Irish all of the time by Year 7.

7.3.3.2 Incentives and sanctions

All teachers reported that their schools use incentives to encourage their pupils to speak Irish, although these incentives appear to be more effective with classes in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 in particular. Many schools operate a system where each class teacher chooses a '*Gaeilgeoir na seachtaine*' [Irish speaker of the week] or a '*Gaeilgeoir na míosa*' [Irish speaker of the month]. Recognition is given to this

achievement in a variety of ways including, presenting the child with a certificate at a school assembly, giving the child a badge to wear, putting a photo of the child in the school newsletter, on the school website and on display in the school, and allowing the child to go around all of the classes to share news of their award with everyone else.

Séamus described this system in his school:

Cuirimid an-bhéim ar 'Ghaeilgeoir na míosa' sa scoil s'againn agus tuigeann na páistí uilig gur rud iomlán scoile é agus má bhaineann siad é go mbeidh aitheantas acu fud fad na scoile as an éacht iontach seo. Déanaimid cinnte mar fhoireann go mbíonn a fhios gach duine cé a bhain an duais seo i ngach rang gach mí – trí thionóil, trí ghrianghraif ar na ballaí agus ar shuíomh idirlín na scoile. Is duais speisialta gan dabht é agus baineann gach páiste sult as duais na Gaeilge a bhaint.

We put a great emphasis on 'Irish speaker of the month' in our school and all of the children understand that it is a whole school system and that they will receive recognition throughout the whole school for this great achievement. We ensure, as a team, that everyone knows who has won this prize in each class every month – by means of assemblies and by placing photographs on the walls and on the school website. It is a special award without a doubt and every child enjoys winning the award for speaking Irish.

Mairéad described a few of the strategies she uses with her Year 7 class to encourage them to speak more Irish:

Bainim úsáid as straitéisí éagsúla le Gaeilge labhartha a spreagadh. Bainim úsáid as moladh leanúnach dearfach go rialta agus bronnaim duaiseanna beaga gach seachtain fosta. Cuirim an-bhéim ar thábhacht na Gaeilge labhartha agus bíonn comórtais bheaga sa rang againn trí dhrámaí a dhéanamh agus trí chomhrá beirte a dhéanamh. Sin áit ina bhfuil easpa áiseanna – drámaí do pháistí trí mheán na Gaeilge!

I use a variety of strategies to encourage the children to speak Irish. I give ongoing and regular praise and positive reinforcement and I present the children with little prizes each week also. I place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of spoken Irish and we have little competitions in the class through dramas and role plays. That's an area where I believe there to be a shortage of resources – dramas for children in Irish!

Sinéad also commented on the subject of incentives and their effectiveness for different age groups:

Bainimid úsáid as réimse de straitéisí dearfacha sa scoil – duaiseanna, spreagadh dearfach, gradaim srl. Bíonn an straitéis féin agus an cur chuige go mór ag brath ar an rang. Ó

We employ a range of positive strategies within the school – prizes, positive reinforcement and encouragement, awards etc. The actual strategy itself and the approach depend

Rang 1 – Rang 3 oibríonn na greamaitheoirí agus na suaitheantais bheaga go breá; ó Rang 4 ar aghaidh bíonn dearcadh difriúil ag na páistí agus bíonn ar na múinteoirí a bheith níos cruthaithigh.

a great deal on the class in question. From Year 1-Year 3, the stickers and badges work fine; from Year 4 onwards the children have a different attitude and the teachers have to be a bit more creative.

It was evident from the responses of all of the teachers that there was a far greater emphasis on incentives than on sanctions. Máire stressed the importance of keeping a positive focus on Irish:

Ní mór an cur chuige a choinneáil dearfach, aitheantas a thabhairt do na Gaeilgeoirí, iad a mholadh agus a spreagadh in áit a bheith anuas ar na Béarlóirí agus aird dhiúltach a tharraingt orthu.

It is imperative to keep a positive approach, to give recognition to the Irish speakers, to praise and motivate them rather than bringing negative attention to those who are speaking English.

In general, the teachers appeared satisfied with the willingness of the pupils to speak Irish but reported that it was an area that they had to continually promote and attend to. This applied in particular to the pupils' compliance with speaking Irish at break-time in the playground. It was also evident that the teachers expend a good deal of time and energy in devising incentive schemes and in implementing policy in this area.

The teachers recognize that the vast majority of the pupils live their lives outside of school through English, and that as a result, it is easier for them to speak English. There appeared to be a delicate balance to be struck between the imposition of rules to speak Irish on the one hand and inculcating a positive attitude in the pupils towards speaking Irish on the other. Many teachers were reluctant to overcorrect the pupils in case they undermine the pupils' confidence in their ability to speak Irish or turned them against the language.

7.3.4 School planning and staff meetings in relation to pupils' proficiency in Irish

7.3.4.1 Whole-school approach

All teachers reported that the pupils' proficiency in Irish was regularly discussed at staff meetings. It was also clear from their responses that this issue was central to school planning as is clear from Séamus' comment:

Pléitear cumas Gaeilge na bpáistí go rialta ag cruinnithe foirne – aontaímid mar shampla ar na drilleanna teanga a

The pupils' competence in Irish is discussed regularly at staff meetings – we agree for example on the language

gcuirfear béim orthu le linn seachtaine áirithe – ar thóg tú, thóg, níor thóg; an bhfaca tú, chonaic, ní fhaca srl. Pléitear an córas marcála fosta, maidir le hobair scríofa na bpáistí mar shampla, cinnimid mar fhoireann go bhfuilimid ag díriú ar rud ar leith, ar fhócas áirithe ag aon am amháin, in áit béim a bheith ar bharraíocht meancóg a cheartú.

drills that attention will be paid to during a particular week – did you lift, I lifted, I did not lift; did you see, I saw, I did not see etc. The marking system is also discussed, in relation to the childrens' written work for example, we ensure as a team that we are focusing on one thing, on a particular focus at a given time, rather than trying to correct too many mistakes at one time.

Séamus' response that there is a whole-school approach to monitoring the pupils' progress in Irish in his school was also the position reported by a number of other teachers in the study. While all schools regularly discussed progress and issues of concern during staff meetings, the whole-school approach to remediation wasn't as formal in all schools.

Mairéad referred to her school's approach to this:

Pléitear Gaeilge sna cruinnithe go cinnte. Ach níl aon rud foirmiúil i bhfeidhm sa scoil againn – bíonn gach múinteoir ag plé leis seo ar dhóigh s'acu féin.

We certainly discuss Irish at meetings. But we there isn't a formal approach as such in the school – each teacher deals with this in their own way.

Sinéad added:

Maidir le cruinnithe foirne, pléitear úsáid na Gaeilge ach ní phléitear cruinneas go mion.

Regarding staff meetings, the use of Irish is discussed but accuracy in Irish is not discussed in much detail.

Many of the teachers stated that the work they do with their pupils in primary school is part of a process, and that as long as the pupils continue with education through Irish, which the vast majority of them do, then they will become more accurate over time. This is the experience of many of them regarding past pupils that return to visit their school or that they meet socially.

7.3.5 Teachers' professional development needs

7.3.5.1 Courses to improve teachers' proficiency in Irish

A number of the teachers expressed similar views in relation to their professional development needs and improving their pupils' proficiency in Irish. They were concerned

about certain elements in their own accuracy in Irish and expressed a desire and a willingness to receive professional development in this area. Máire said:

Ní cainteoir dúchais mé agus tá áiteanna ann a bhfuil treoir de dhíth orm le mo chuid Gaeilge go fóill. Bheinn an-toilteanach ar fad freastal ar chúrsa Gaeilge – ach an t-am a bheith agam!

I am not a native speaker and there are areas that I still require support in with my own Irish. I would be very happy to attend an Irish course – if I could find the time!

Sinéad discussed this in relation to her own school:

Is cinnte go bhfuil treoir agus tacaíocht sa Ghaeilge de dhíth ar na múinteoirí fosta. Aithnímid sin sa scoil agus táimid an-dearfach agus an-ghairmiúil faoi seo – bíonn seisiúin ar an Ghaeilge againn mar chuid den chlár don fhorbairt ghairmiúil go rialta.

Certainly the teachers require support and direction with their own Irish also. We recognise this in the school and we approach this both positively and professionally – we have sessions on Irish regularly as part of our professional development programme within the school.

Aoife added:

Creidim go bhfuil tuilleadh oiliúna de dhíth ar mhúinteoirí Gaelscoile ar mhodhanna leis an teanga a fhorbairt i ngach gné agus suíomh sa scoil lán-Ghaeilge.

I believe that Irish-medium teachers require more training on methods to develop the language (Irish) in all aspects life in the Irish-medium school.

Many of the teachers valued the partnerships they already had with other Irish-medium schools but felt that further development of these partnerships and a greater emphasis on sharing resources, expertise and good practice would be of great benefit in the professional development of all teachers.

7.4 Discussion

The purpose of interviewing teachers was to ascertain their judgements in relation to the spoken Irish of their pupils and to explore with them the factors that influence this level of proficiency. The sample consisted of three Year 7 teachers and three principals located in Irish-medium schools across Northern Ireland. As the sample is relatively small the results may not represent the views of the entire body of Year 7 class teachers and principals in Irish-medium schools.

The teachers in the study appear to be reasonably satisfied with their students' proficiency in Irish but would like it to improve. Some of them thought that it was probably

as good as could be expected under the circumstances in which Irish-medium schools operate where the pupils have little exposure to Irish outside of school. Others thought that this standard could be improved. Many of them mentioned that the pupils live in an English-speaking world outside of school and that this impacts on their language behaviour in school. While the pupils acquire a good level of fluency in Irish it was acknowledged that this needs to be built on in their post-primary schooling.

The most common pupil errors that emerged from the corpus analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 were the same as those identified by the teachers. Many teachers experience a certain level of frustration that some errors seem to recur despite the strategies that they adopt to correct them. All teachers adopted strategies for correcting their pupils when confronted with errors. In the main these took the form of prompts that encouraged the pupil to pause and rephrase what had been uttered. The extent to which this happened however, was hampered by the burden of implementing curricular content in all areas. Despite the teachers' best efforts, they felt that once their students could communicate with them and with one another that they appeared to lack the motivation to do so in a way that was always grammatically accurate. Day and Shapson (1987) found a similar pattern in their study of French immersion students in Canada.

Teachers were dissatisfied with the range of teaching materials that they had at their disposal for teaching Irish. This problem was particularly acute in senior classes. Some of the teachers find it a continual challenge to encourage their pupils to speak Irish while others did not appear to experience the same level of difficulty. All teachers reported that they insist that their pupils speak Irish at all times in the school with the exception of English classes. The teachers acknowledged that it would be easier for the pupils to speak English and they had a range of incentives and sanctions to help them counteract this and to encourage them to speak Irish. The teachers appeared to spend a lot of time and energy in ensuring that pupils complied with the school norm of speaking Irish and were quite innovative in this regard. Some teachers felt that while incentives were necessary for younger pupils, a different approach may be required for senior pupils.

The issue of pupils' proficiency was central to school planning in a number of the schools and time was spent at staff meetings formally discussing and developing plans in this area. There were plans in place for improving pupils' proficiency in Irish. It appeared that the proactive strategies adopted for specifically addressing the errors identified by the

teachers and by the corpus analysis in the present study consisted of formal grammar lessons.

The teachers in the study expressed professional development needs in relation to wishing to improve their own standard of Irish and many of them felt that greater partnerships and collaboration with other Irish-medium schools would also be of great benefit to everyone. The themes that emerged from the teacher interviews in this study were very similar to those of 12 all-Irish school teachers in the Republic of Ireland (Ó Duibhir, 2009) and 14 French immersion teachers interviewed in Toronto and Ottawa (Ó Duibhir, 2008). Their pupils acquire good fluency in the target language, but despite the efforts of teachers in three different immersion contexts, the pupils lack grammatical accuracy.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The aim of the present study was to investigate the variety of Irish spoken by Year 7 pupils in four Irish-medium primary schools in Northern Ireland. It was a corpus-based study that gathered speech samples of pupils' Irish in naturalistic communication in the course of collaborating on a task with other pupils. It sought to document and describe those features and to ascertain the opinions and insights of the pupils about the quality of their Irish and the errors it contained, and to investigate their level of awareness about its relationship to the Irish of native speakers, through a stimulated recall activity. In order to account for some of the factors that influence this acquisition process, further data were gathered from other sources, including interviews with the pupils' class teachers and the principals of their schools to explore their opinions about pupils' proficiency in Irish and the strategies they adopt at whole school and individual classroom level to improve their proficiency. As this is a replication of a previous study conducted in the Republic of Ireland (Ó Duibhir, 2009) it also sought to compare the features of pupils in both jurisdictions and with their native-speaker peers from the Gaeltacht. A mixed-method's approach was adopted in the study that was guided by second language learning theories and by research in immersion settings in particular. The broad-based approach provided rich data for analysis that has given a deeper understanding of the features of Irish-medium pupils' Irish at the end of primary school and the context in which these features are acquired.

While the present study was comprehensive in terms of its multi-method approach it does have some limitations. Only 24 pupils in 4 Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland participated in the study and these pupils were chosen from a purposive sample of 4 schools out of a total of 33 such schools. While every effort was made to ensure that the schools chosen would fairly represent the different variables present in these schools, the results obtained may not be generalisable to the full spectrum of Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland. Another limitation is that the presence of the researcher in the classroom while the children were being recorded may have influenced the pupils' output. Similarly, during the stimulated recall session the presence of the researcher may have had a bearing on the opinions expressed by the pupils. The samples of pupil speech gathered through the task

may also have been limited by the nature of the task itself. Future studies will determine how representative the corpus in the present study is of Irish-medium, all-Irish and Gaeltacht pupil speech.

The remainder of this chapter briefly reviews the theoretical background to the study, its methodology and execution and summarises its main findings. It concludes with a series of recommendations based on these findings in relation to research and practice in Irish-medium schools on the island of Ireland and in immersion in general, with a view to improving overall proficiency of pupils in the target language and stimulating them to progress further towards native-speaker speech norms.

8.2 Conclusions

8.2.1 Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland

It was shown in Chapter 1 that Irish-medium education has experienced continual growth in Northern Ireland since the first such school was established by parents on the Shaw's Road in West Belfast in 1971. There are currently more than 80 centres in Northern Ireland providing excellent standards of education through the medium of Irish from pre-school right through to post-primary level. These schools could be classified as adopting an 'early immersion' approach where language and content are integrated. Despite the strong parental support for Irish-medium schools, many of the pupils have limited exposure to Irish outside the school context, placing a greater onus on Irish-medium schools to provide extended opportunities for the pupils to have contact with the language. Many of the schools provide after-school's programmes in order to ensure that pupils are as proficient as possible in Irish.

8.2.2 Second language learning theories and immersion research

Many studies have shown that immersion pupils' acquire high levels of ability in the second language at no cost to their L1 skills (Johnstone, Harlen, MacNeil, Stradling, & Thorpe, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). Their receptive skills of listening and reading reach native-speaker levels in the target language but their productive skills of speaking and writing do not. The purpose of this study was to investigate the oral productive skills of Irish immersion pupils in naturalistic peer-peer communication as they collaborated on a

task. It set out to describe the non target-like features of their Irish. Chapter 2 examined second language learning theories that would help to inform the study. Second language learning theories relevant to the immersion context generally and to the sociolinguistic context of Irish-medium schools in particular were considered from a number of perspectives. A specific focus of that examination was to explore theories and studies that might explain why immersion pupils in general acquire non-target like forms that appear to persist over time despite extended exposure to the target language and the efforts of their teachers to correct them.

The general picture that emerges from the overview of the literature, when the insights it provides are applied to the immersion context, is that it may be difficult for immersion pupils to achieve native-like proficiency in their productive skills. Certain structures that do not have a single map from their L1, such as the copula in Irish, may not be sufficiently salient for them to notice. If deviant forms are automatised, they can be difficult to modify particularly if they serve a communicative function and do not lead to a breakdown in communication. These forms can become the norm for peer-to-peer interaction and, when habitually practiced, can lead to permanency. The experiential orientation of immersion classrooms is unlikely to lead to the kind of restructuring of learners' interlanguages that would be required to eliminate these forms.

Research on the acquisition of Irish as a second language has identified the features of Irish that appear to be difficult for second language learners in general to acquire. It is these features that are also likely to cause greatest difficulty for Irish immersion pupils. The acquisition of the copula, verbal noun and dependent forms of verbs have been shown to be particularly problematic. Although there is anecdotal evidence, and limited findings from some small-scale studies, there is a lack of comprehensive knowledge about the features of Irish-medium school pupils' Irish and their grammatical accuracy. This study aims to contribute to this area by providing a comprehensive analysis of the features Irish-medium pupils' Irish (Northern Ireland) in comparison to all-Irish pupils' Irish in a wide range of immersion schools in the Republic of Ireland, and in Gaeltacht schools for comparison purposes.

8.2.3 *Mixed-method's approach*

Chapter 3 described the research methods used in the present study. Due to the limited studies on Irish immersion education to date, a broad-based approach was adopted, using mixed methods. The rationale for this was that, while a comprehensive description of the features of Irish-medium pupils' Irish in a range of schools would be useful and add considerably to the knowledge base in this field, its value would be greatly enhanced by exploiting the opportunity to collect information on the acquisitional context, the perspectives of the pupils on the nature and quality of their Irish, and teachers' views on their pupils general proficiency in Irish. A purposive sample of four Irish-medium schools was selected to represent the different contexts in which they operate under the following criteria: school size, geographical location, number of year's established and socio-economic status.

In order to better understand the possible causes of the fossilisation and embedding of non target-like features, data were gathered from a number of sources. A collaborative design task where the pupils were audio- or video-recorded while engaged in the task was developed that would facilitate the recording of pupils' peer-peer interaction in a relatively naturalistic setting.

The first twenty minutes of each of these video-recordings were transcribed and compiled into a corpus of pupils' speech for analysis. This amounted to 2 hours and 40 minutes of the pupils' speech in total. While a further 80 minutes of pupils' speech was available for transcription, it was found from the initial study carried out in the Republic of Ireland (Ó Duibhir, 2009) that the selection of twenty minutes of speech from a representative sample in each school yielded the most common features and further sampling did not add to the range of errors detected.

The 24 Irish-medium pupils that had been video-recorded were given an opportunity to engage in a reflective stimulated recall activity. The recall sessions consisted of three phases where the pupils were enabled to i) comment on the quality of their Irish having viewed selected excerpts on DVD, ii) correct any mistakes that they noticed in their output, iii) discuss why their Irish contained non target-like features.

Year 7 class teachers and principals in the Irish-medium schools were also interviewed to ascertain their views about their pupils' proficiency in Irish. The data

gathered in these ways has provided rich data for analysis that is summarised briefly in the sections that follow.

8.2.4 *Features of Irish-medium pupils' Irish*

Chapters 4 and 5 described and analysed the corpus of pupils' speech gathered through the collaborative design task. It is the first of its kind for primary school pupils' Irish and is based on oral data gathered in a relatively naturalistic setting in four Irish-medium, nine all-Irish and two Gaeltacht schools. While no claim is made that the Irish-medium sample is strictly representative of the entire Year 7 population of these schools nor that the all-Irish school sample from the previous study (Ó Duibhir, 2009) is strictly representative of the entire sixth class population of all-Irish schools in the Republic of Ireland, every effort was made to choose a representative sample of schools which take account of the variables listed in 8.2.3 such as socioeconomic status of school population, school size, and number of years established. All speech samples were gathered from one type of task only.

The corpus was analysed using the concordance and wordlist tools of WordSmith software. A word frequency analysis of the 50 most common words used by the Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils showed a high level of consistency when compared to their Gaeltacht peers. The main differences were found to be syntactic in nature.

The most common errors of the immersion pupils' were; (1) the use of the substantive verb *Bí* instead of the copula *Is* for classificatory purposes, (2) difficulties with the use of dependent form of all verbs and the irregular verbs in particular, (3) the use of incorrect syntax with the verbal noun, (4) difficulties with numbers and interrogative pronouns (*Cad/Céard/Cad é* 'What') incorrectly used, (5) a tendency to map English syntax onto Irish. The mapping of English syntax onto Irish while inappropriate, was not counted as an error if the utterance, in at least some context, conformed to an acceptable form in Irish.

The compilation of the pupil corpus has broadened and clarified issues raised in other Irish studies (Henry, et al., 2002; Ó Baoill, 1981; Ó Domhnalláin & Ó Baoill, 1978, 1979; Walsh, 2005). It has identified the specific errors of immersion pupils' spoken Irish. In common with other immersion programmes, while there are errors that are specific to each individual language, the influence of the pupils' L1 together with non-salient features

where there is not a single map from the L1 to the L2 appear to lead to the majority of the non target-like forms (Harley, 1991; Lyster, 2007).

The comparison made between the speech of Irish-medium and all-Irish pupils with their native-speaking peers in Gaeltacht schools confirms the finding in international immersion research that they have a high level of communicative ability but have not reached native-speaker levels (Harley, et al., 1990; Lyster & Mori, 2008).

8.2.5 *Stimulated recall activity*

Chapter 6 described the stimulated recall sessions that facilitated the pupils in reflecting and commenting on the quality of their Irish. They did this by viewing video-excerpts of themselves that were recorded while they were engaged in the collaborative design task. These excerpts were shown in the four Irish-medium schools seven to ten days after the original recording. The excerpts lasted no more than three minutes in total and contained examples of the most common deviant features as described above (e.g. copula and verbal noun). A collaborative atmosphere was created for these recall sessions where the pupils were assigned the role of assisting the researcher in his investigations rather than placing a focus on the errors in their Irish. Initially, pupils commented spontaneously on the mistakes that they noticed and as each session developed their attention was drawn to other common errors, that were not initially noticed, and they were prompted to see if they could correct them.

The pupils' initial reaction to viewing these excerpts was one of disappointment, expressing surprise that the quality of their Irish in the recording was not as good as they had thought it was. They were particularly disappointed with the number of English words that they had used, and stated that they were not aware that they used them so frequently. They cited the lack of exposure to Irish outside the school as being the main reason that they used so much English and added that it had become a 'habit'.

Apart from code-mixing, the recall sessions also focused on three other features of the pupils' Irish namely the copula, the verbal noun and dependent forms of verbs. When the pupils were given an opportunity to correct mistakes involving these three features in the transcripts, they rarely noticed any problem until their attention was specifically drawn to possible alternative forms. In the case of the copula they could correct the error if prompted in a particular way using a structure similar to the one in the transcript. Because

of the centrality of the copula in the syntax of Irish (O'Leary & O'Rahilly, 1922), this is a key finding of the present study and has implications for pedagogy. The input that Irish-medium pupils receive may not be salient enough for them to notice that although the copula is omitted in utterances of this type, it is implied. They may not realise that *Sin an geata* 'That is the gate' is perfectly acceptable. Based on the evidence of the pupils' corpus and the stimulated recall it appears that Year 7 pupils in Irish-medium schools have partially mastered the use of the copula with the demonstrative pronoun *sin*. They had to be prompted in a particular way for them to produce the correct form. The pupils appear to be unaware of the aspects of discourse that trigger the use of the copula and it was only when they were alerted to these by the researcher's prompts that they were able to correct their errors.

The verbal noun clause (e.g. *Thig liom peann a fháil.* = I can/am able to get a pen) was the other most frequent deviant feature identified in the corpus analysis. Verbal noun clauses were explored with the pupils in the stimulated recall. In general, the pupils did not notice these errors on viewing the video-recording or the written transcript. When their attention was drawn to them however, they were able to correct their deviant use of the verbal noun clause approximately 75% of the time.

Following the correction of a number of utterances, the pupils were asked why they thought they used these incorrect forms when they knew the correct forms. The most frequent responses given were that they were 'not thinking' and that it was a 'habit'. When questioned as to how the teacher would react if they used these deviant forms with him/her they replied that they were more careful when speaking to the teacher in that they thought about the content of their utterances before speaking to the teacher.

8.2.6 *Principal and class teacher interviews*

Chapter 7 described the semi-structured, 25-35 minute interviews that the Irish-medium Year 7 school teachers and principals were invited to participate in, to discuss their pupils' proficiency in Irish. A total of three principal teachers and three Year 7 teachers agreed to be interviewed giving a total of six interviews.

The teachers in the study appear to be reasonably satisfied with their students' proficiency in Irish but felt that there was room for improvement. Bearing in mind the limitations of learning a language in a school setting, some of them thought that the

standard of pupils' Irish was probably as good as could be expected, particularly where the pupils have little exposure to Irish outside of school. The fact that the pupils live in an English-speaking world outside of school was seen to impact on their language behaviour in school. The teachers sought to maximise the pupils' opportunities to be exposed to Irish by organising trips to the Gaeltacht and participation in inter-school activities through Irish. While the pupils acquire a good level of fluency in Irish it was recognised that there was a need for further improvement that should continue at post-primary level.

The teachers identified the most common pupil errors and this was consistent with those identified in the corpus analysis. Difficulties with Irish syntax were seen as the fundamental problem. Many felt that the pupils directly translated from English and that this caused the underlying problem. They also thought that the pupils 'did not think' about the form of their utterances and that they 'pick up' errors from their peers. It was clear that the influence of English on their speech arose from its being embedded more fundamentally in the variety of Irish they heard from their peers every day. They simply picked up this English-influenced variety of Irish through routine exposure. All teachers had strategies for dealing with these errors when they arose, i.e. they use prompts and elicitation requests rather than recasts. Despite this, there was evidence of a degree of frustration among teachers that the errors persisted. They cited the lack of suitable teaching materials for teaching Irish as a particular problem that made their job more difficult. They also mentioned the lack of suitable reading material in Irish for pupils.

The burden of teaching content in all other Learning Areas of the NI Curriculum (www.nicurriculum.org.uk) meant that teachers felt unable to correct all errors. They were also conscious of the need to remain positive, to affirm pupils' spontaneous communication in Irish and not to undermine confidence through over-correction. This was also part of a more general concern to promote positive attitudes to Irish among the pupils. Most schools had incentives to encourage the pupils to speak Irish particularly for the younger pupils. But some teachers felt that a different approach might be needed for Year 7 pupils, where a greater degree of self-motivation in relation to speaking Irish was required. Some teachers felt that fluency and willingness to speak Irish were more important than accuracy. Many teachers also expressed the view that once the pupils could communicate their meaning in Irish, that it was difficult to motivate them to make the further commitment to be grammatically accurate. This view is supported by the comments of the pupils in the

stimulated recall and by research in other immersion studies (Day & Shapson, 1996; Genesee, 1987, 2008).

The pupils' proficiency in Irish was a central element of school-planning and was regularly discussed at staff-meetings in almost all schools. Most schools have a whole-school approach to addressing pupils' proficiency in Irish. It was evident from the teachers' statements that deviant features were not ignored. Many of the strategies identified by the teachers were reactive in nature, however, and it was not clear what proactive plans are in place to address the non-target like features that they identified.

In relation to professional development, many teachers did not feel that they had any needs at all in this area. Where needs were identified, two were notable. First, some expressed the view that they needed to improve their own competency in Irish and would welcome courses to enable them to do this. Second, many of them felt that greater partnerships and collaboration with other Irish-medium schools would also be of great benefit to everyone.

8.3 Recommendations

A number of findings emerge from the present study that increase the understanding of second language acquisition in Irish immersion education and in the wider immersion context more generally. It has been confirmed that Irish-medium pupils speak a variety of Irish that resembles a code in that it contains non target-like forms and is resistant to change. It may not be a code in the strictest sense however, as there is inconsistency in the deviant forms that the pupils produce as evidenced by the analysis in Chapter 5. The variety of Irish is perfectly acceptable for peer-peer communication and the norm of 'no peer correction' is well established, despite the fact that the pupils realise that their output contains grammatical errors. Irish-medium schools are very effective in promoting Irish as the communicative language of the school and this extends to the playground, an outcome not achieved in every immersion setting. The effort and dedication required by teachers to maintain this context for authentic Irish use should not be underestimated and any recommendations in relation to improving pupil accuracy must bear this in mind.

A number of recommendations are made below in relation to practice and research in immersion. If the ultimate goal of an immersion programme from a language perspective

is to enable pupils to participate in the speech-community of that language then a high level of competency in the language would seem to be a desirable outcome. The following recommendations are made in the context of that ultimate goal, bearing in mind that pupils in Year 7 in primary school have many more years of formal education remaining in which to improve their Irish.

8.3.1 Pedagogical practice

8.3.1.1 Analytic approach to language

Convincing arguments have been made in the research literature for a more analytic approach to L2 learning in immersion (Genesee, 2008; Lyster, 2007; Stern, 1990). The findings of the present study suggest that the current, strongly experiential, approach does not lead to grammatical accuracy by the end of primary school. In an analytic approach, there is a shift in attention from meaning to language form. As teachers identify emerging deviant features, they could be the forms to be focussed on. While not advocating extensive explicit teaching of grammar, some explanation of grammatical elements adjusted to the maturity level of the pupils may be warranted (Lyster, 2004b; Lyster & Mori, 2008; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2008).

8.3.1.2 Reconceptualise school norm to include the accurate use of Irish

The stimulated recall activity showed that Irish-medium pupils interpret the school norm of speaking Irish as ‘not using English words’. This interpretation may be sufficient in the early years of immersion until pupils gain basic interpersonal communication skills in Irish. Once this has been achieved the emphasis needs to shift to affirming pupils, not only for speaking Irish, but also for the quality of their Irish. Reconceptualising the school norm as speaking Irish accurately may involve sacrificing a degree of fluency initially, but may be worth it in the context of achieving greater accuracy in the longer term. To continue the current policy is to give pupils practice that is making ‘permanent’ rather than ‘perfect’ (Hammerly, 1991). By not addressing particular features at the appropriate time there is a danger that the deviant forms are being stored in long-term memory and are becoming automatised (Skehan, 1998). These forms are thus less susceptible to change. Perhaps a monitored pilot programme in a number of schools, starting perhaps with those which are

longer established, could help to identify challenges and solutions in implementing such an approach.

Another area worthy of investigation in this context is that of empowering pupils explicitly to take greater responsibility for improving the quality of their Irish. Motivational factors combined with peer norms may operate counter to the efforts of the teacher and school in promoting accurate use of the target language. While the extrinsic motivation of rewards and sanctions may be effective in junior classes, enabling pupils in senior classes to become more autonomous learners might be more fruitful (Little, 2007). It is suggested that motivational factors need to be considered in any pedagogical intervention to improve pupil accuracy in the target language.

8.3.1.3 Record pupils engaged in language use

A significant finding of this study was that the Irish-medium pupils were unaware of the extent of their code-mixing behaviour. This highlighted the benefits of collaborating with pupils in exploring their use of Irish, using video recordings of the pupils engaged in real tasks as an object upon which to reflect. Pupils could be recorded and provided with short extracts of their speech and asked to transcribe perhaps 30 seconds of it. The transcription element seems to enhance critical reflection. In the stimulated recall study reported here, it was when pupils saw the written transcript that they detected deviant forms most readily. Transcription of collaborative dialogues in other research studies have also shown that it facilitates pupils in engaging in ‘languaging’ (Swain, 2006; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002).

8.3.1.4 Provide opportunities for ‘pushed output’

The pupils revealed in the stimulated recall that they monitor their output more critically when they speak to the teacher than when they speak to their friends. This type of ‘pushed output’ has been shown to be effective in shifting learners from semantic to syntactic processing (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain, 2005). Teachers should seek to maximise the opportunities for the production of ‘pushed output’ by setting tasks for pupils which involve the preparation of oral presentations and materials for real audiences. These tasks require pupils to reflect on what they want to say and teachers can assist them in

choosing the most appropriate language forms. Tasks such as these also enable the teacher to integrate language and content objectives more effectively.

8.3.1.5 Whole-school approach to deviant features of pupils' Irish

In order to deal more effectively with the deviant features of Irish-medium pupils' Irish, it is recommended that teachers would monitor, on a whole-school basis, the emergence of these non-target forms, in order to identify the optimum time to intervene. The input that pupils receive should also be monitored to ensure that the critical forms are salient. Where the latter is not the case there will be a need for enhanced input.

8.3.2 *Further research*

8.3.2.1 Corpus-based research

The features of Irish-medium pupils' Irish that deviate from native speaker norms are being acquired through a largely experiential approach with a certain amount of 'focus on form'. The type of 'focus-on-form' work appears, from the comments of the pupils and teachers, to emphasise the manipulation of forms rather than relating them to meaningful communication. Further corpus-based research with both younger and older Irish-medium pupils would help to identify the developmental patterns associated with the acquisition of these features. It might indicate when the need for these forms emerges in the general instructional context or in discourse between pupils and so enable the explicit teaching of the correct forms to be embedded in authentic communicative contexts. It could also emerge that some of the deviant features are mastered when the pupils are older although the evidence from the small number of studies reviewed in this area suggest that many of the features remain at the end of post-primary education (Walsh, 2007).

9.3.2.2 Integration with Irish-speaker networks

One of the aims Irish immersion schools is to produce competent bilinguals who could integrate into Irish-speaking networks in later life. The present study has highlighted that the majority of opportunities that Irish-medium pupils have for speaking Irish is with their peers in school. There is very little motivation for them to significantly increase their grammatical accuracy in this situation. Opportunities could be provided in selected schools on a pilot basis for pupils to integrate with Irish-speaker networks through participation in

age-appropriate Irish-medium activities in their immediate community or through contact with Gaeltacht peers by means of email, Skype and video-conferencing. Such initiatives should be evaluated to measure their effectiveness in increasing grammatical accuracy and in reducing the impact of English on their Irish usage.

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