



Irish speaking children: social class and related behaviour

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About me

- **Irish speaker: bilingual household, Gaelscoil**
- **Degree in Irish and English**
- **Primary teaching**
- **Research assistant at Dep. Public Health and Primary Care, Trinity College where I looked at the Growing Up in Ireland data to research breakfast habits among children along with the present study**



Aim

- **Aim of the study is to analyse differences in social class and background of Irish speaking children and non-Irish speaking children.**
- **Using the data of the Growing Up in Ireland study and linking the question relating to home language with behaviour and also with education, deprivation and other background related factors, this issue can be addressed.**



Overview

- **Language Policy**
- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**
- **Deprivation scale**
- **Results**
- **Conclusions**
- **Relevance to overall study**
- **Implications for policy**



Setting

- Growing interest in Irish for children
- Gaelscoileanna, books, etc
- Personal interest at home, school, Gaeltacht

Only when a language is being passed on in the home is there some chance of long-term survival. Otherwise, efforts to prop up the language elsewhere, e.g. in schools or church, may end up being largely symbolic or ceremonial.

Suzanne Romaine, 1995



Originality

- **Lack of studies on bilingualism in Ireland (as opposed to decline of language)**
- **Research sparse compared to studies done in Canada, Wales**
- **Relatively little known about Irish spoken at home**



Language Policy

20 year Strategy for the Irish language (2010-2030), Dep of Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs

A primary aim of the Strategy is to increase the number of families speaking Irish on a daily basis:

Cuspóir 3: Tabharfar spreagadh agus tacaíocht do phobal na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh de, an Ghaeilge a thabhairt don chéad ghlúin eile mar theanga theaghlaigh. Chuige sin, cuirfear réimse leathan seirbhísí ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge

Goal 3: Encouragement and support will be given to the Irish-speaking community within and without the Gaeltacht to pass Irish on to the next generation as a spoken home language. To that purpose, a wide range of Irish-medium services will be provided.



Data set

- **Child cohort of 9 year-olds (8,568 children)**
- **Infant cohort of 11,100 was used for comparative purposes and to check for consistency**



Core Question

Language

There is only one question regarding language in the child cohort questionnaire. This is asked of the parent, not of the child:

L38. “What language or languages do you and your partner speak with the study child most often at home?”



Strengths and Difficulties

The SDQ addresses...

- **Conduct**
- **Emotional**
- **Hyperactivity**
- **Peer problems**



Focus

**Irish speaking compared to English speaking alone,
other languages excluded from study:**

Is linked in this study to

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**
- Deprivation scale**



Statistics

Language which caregivers most often speak to 9-year olds by percentage

Language	English	Irish	Other	Total
9-year olds	82%	11%	7%	100%
C.I.		10.3 - 11.6		



Family characteristics

The following family and Socioeconomic characteristics were examined:

- **Occupational household background**
- **Household type**
- **Highest maternal education**
- **Urbanicity**
- **Cold home**
- **Making ends meet**
- **Access to services**



Family characteristics

1 Family background

<i>Occupational household background</i>	Irish	English	
Professional/managerial:	46.5%	40.5%	$p < 0.001$
other non-manual/skilled manual:	35.8%	35.7%	
semi-/unskilled manual:	9.4%	11.3%	
No social class:	8.0%	12.5%	
<i>Household type</i>			
Single parent 1 or 2 children:	11.2%	11.6%	$p < 0.035$
Single parent >2 children:	4.5%	6.8%	
Couple 1 or 2 children:	34.5%	34.9%	
Couple >3 children	49.8%	46.7%	
<i>Highest maternal education</i>			
none/primary:	3.4%	7.0%	$p < 0.001$
lower secondary.:	18.8	25.5%	
leaving cert.:	37.5%	37.1%	
diploma/certificate:	17.7%	15.5%	
university degree:	14.0	9.7%	
postgraduate:	8.6%	5.2%	



Family characteristics

2 Other socio-economic indicators

Urbanicity	Irish	English	
Urban:	40%	44.1%	$p=0.019$

Access to services

Regular public transport:	62.7%	66.3%	$p=0.030$
GP or health clinic:	88.8%	88.7%	$p=0.903$
Schools (primary and secondary):	97.1%	97.2%	$p=0.940$
Library:	77.2%	76.8%	$p=0.781$
Recreational facilities appropriate to 9-year-old:	61.1	55.6%	$p>0.001$

Cold home

Yes:	8.8%	6.4%	$p=0.005$
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Making ends meet

With great difficulty/with difficulty:	25.3%	23.8%	$p<0.563$
With some difficulty/fairly easily:	58.7%	59.6%	
Easily/very easily:	16.0%	16.6%	



Health & Behaviour

The following characteristics are significantly different ($p < 0.001$) between the Irish speaking and non-Irish speaking cohort:

Characteristic	Irish	English
Ever Breastfed	48.9% [45.7-52.1]	40.6% [39.4-41.8]
No Daily Television	2.30%	1.90%
No Breakfast	1.2% [0.7-2.1]	3.1% [2.7-3.5]
Use of public library	69.8% [66.7-72.6]	64.2% [63.1-65.3]
Cultural Activities:	55.8% [52.6-59.0]	46.6% [45.4-47.8]

Commentary: Irish speaking children were more likely to have ever been breastfed, to eat breakfast, to not watch television, to use the public library and to engage in cultural activities. These are all positive indicators of the child's wellbeing.



Health & Behaviour

Speech:

Questions asked about speech and language disorder include

	Irish	English	
Speech difficulties	1.7%	2.3%	$p=0.272$
Reluctant to speak:	0.4%	0.5%	$p=0.657$
Speech unclear to family:	2.0%	1.4%	$p=0.116$
Speech unclear to others:	2.9%	2.9%	$p=0.929$
Difficulty finding words:	1.7%	2.2%	$p=0.295$
Difficulty putting words together:	1.4%	2.1%	$p=0.152$
Voice sounds unusual:	1.1%	1.1%	$p=0.944$

These findings indicated no significant differences between the two groups



Deprivation scale

- **Twelve point scale measuring factors such as: Cold homes; Maternal education; Hot meals; Books at home**
- **Deprivation scale ranges from zero to 11 points**
- **0 indicates no factors of deprivation measured**
- **11 indicates a very high prevalence of deprivation**
- **Point 2 of the scale is the cut-off**
- **Three bands were examined: 0-1 points; 2 points; 3-11 points**



Prevalence of abnormal behaviour 1

Indicators of abnormal behaviour: Emotional symptoms

Basic deprivation scale	0 – 1 points	2 points	3 – 11 points
English	12.4% [11.5-13.3]	20.9% [18.5-23.6]	23.2% [20.0-26.7]
Irish	10.5% [8.4-13.0]	10.1% [6.2-16.3]	20.0% [13.2-29.2]
Other language	10.7% [8.0-14.1]	10.6% [5.7-10.0]	15.1% [8.7-25.0]

- Results indicate a difference in emotional symptoms for children on 2 points of deprivation
- No indication of a significant difference in emotional symptoms for children on less than 2 or on greater than 2 points
- **Emotional symptoms were significantly more prevalent for more deprived English-speaking children**



Prevalence of abnormal behaviour 2

Indicators of abnormal behaviour: Conduct problems

Basic deprivation scale	0 – 1 points	2 points	3 – 11 points
English	8.6% [7.9-9.4]	12.2% [10.3-14.4]	21.3% [18.2-24.7]
Irish	7.0% [5.3-9.1]	6.5% [3.5-11.9]	18.9% [12.4-28.0]
Other language	5.7% [3.3-8.4]	4.7% [1.9-11.5]	4.1% [1.5-10.4]

- Results indicate as before a greater difference in conduct problems for children on 2 points of deprivation than on other points.
- However this was not statistically significant



Prevalence of abnormal behaviour 3

Indicators of abnormal behaviour: 3 Hyperactivity

Basic deprivation scale	0 – 1 points	2 points	3 – 11 points
English	11.2% [10.4-12.1]	17.6% [15.4-20.1]	17.7% [14.9-21.0]
Irish	6.4% [4.8-8.4]	6.5% [3.5-12.0]	6.3% [3.0-13.1]
Other language	6.2% [4.3-9.0]	3.6% [1.3-10.0]	21.6% [13.8-32.3]

- Results indicate a difference in hyperactivity for children on all levels of deprivation
- **These results were statistically significant in all bands and suggest that those children with Irish spoken to them had less tendency toward hyperactivity than those with English.**



Prevalence of abnormal behaviour 4

- **Indicators of abnormal behaviour: 4 Peer problems**

Basic deprivation scale	0 – 1 points	2 points	3 – 11 points
English	7.7% [7.0-8.4]	9.0% [7.4-11.0]	15.8% [13.1-19.0]
Irish	5.3% [3.8-7.2]	10.1% [6.1-16.2]	22.6% [15.3-32.1]
Other language	6.9% [4.9-9.9]	14.3% [8.4-23.3]	8.2% [3.9-16.8]

- Results indicate a higher rate of peer problems among the Irish speaking children than might be expected from the previous results
- Is this an indication of a higher likelihood of bullying?



Discussion

One *limitation* of this study is the little knowledge we have regarding those who said that they spoke Irish to their children and the reliability of that figure. The question on language is also an isolated one with no follow-up. However considering both cohorts allows for a comparison of demographics and also allows for a confirmation of validity regarding the figures from the child cohort.



Conclusions

3 types of question addressed:

- **those relating to family characteristics**
- **the health and behaviour of children**
- **and the behaviour of children as reported by the primary caregiver.**



Conclusions

Association between Irish spoken in the home and socio-economic status

- **Significant association between Irish spoken in the home and the family's socio-economic status.**
 - maternal education, professional background and household type
- **Irish-speaking families in both urban and rural areas had significantly colder homes.**
- **They also had slightly more difficulty in making ends meet.**
- **When children were asked how they felt their family compared to other families in Ireland, there was a significant difference between the perceptions of both groups of children.**
- **While parents of Irish-speaking families said they had significantly higher access to recreational facilities appropriate to 9-year-olds 61.1% [57.9%-64.2] compared with 55.6% [54.4-56.7].**



Conclusions

Association between Irish spoken in the home and children's health:

- **Significantly more Irish-speaking mothers breastfed their children.**
- **Having Irish spoken in the home had no negative effects on the child's speech and language development.**
- **Significant differences in the activities of children in both groups with Irish-speaking children less likely to watch more television and more likely to read.**
- **They were more likely to spend time in structured after-school activities, sporting, and youth clubs and in particular, cultural activities. This corresponds with *Growing Up in Ireland* report on *Influences on the 9-year-old: Home, school and community*, which found that a higher proportion of children from Gaelscoileanna were involved in cultural afterschool activities.**
- **Children from English-speaking homes were twice as likely to not eat breakfast as their Irish-speaking counterparts.**



Conclusions

Association between Irish spoken in the home and children's behaviour:

- **There were marked differences in the behaviour of children in both groups, in particular with regard to hyperactivity and abnormal emotional behaviour.**
- **The difference in hyperactivity was more pronounced in the caregiver report and the difference in abnormal emotional behaviour was more pronounced in the teacher report.**
- **In contrast to other findings, Irish-speaking children, especially those above the 2-point threshold of deprivation show a tendency towards having peer problems. This might be an indicator of bullying problems.**



Policy

- **A number of issues are emphasised in the government strategy that are relevant to the present study:**
 - **Awareness should be raised among parents and prospective parents of the advantages of bilingualism**
 - **Health and social service providers who are already working with young families and prospective parents should be informed of the benefits of bilingualism**
- **The findings on hyperactivity and peer problems are particularly significant for those working with young people, especially in Gaelscoileanna.**



Relevance to overall study and children

- **First recent study done of its kind on Irish-speaking children across Ireland (not solely focused on the Gaeltacht areas)**
- **Significant findings regarding hyperactivity. More could be done here looking specifically at the effects of bilingualism on hyperactivity (same cohorts?)**
- **Looking at Irish-speakers as a significant minority in Ireland, this study gives us an insight into their varying characteristics**
- **Further work could explore the effects of other languages being spoken to children**



Acknowledgments

- **Growing Up in Ireland**
- **Department of Children**
- **Department of Public Health and Primary Care**



Buíochas

- **Go raibh maith agaibh!**