Language learning in Ireland at third level: requirements in a global world

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National Employer Survey –

- Employers' Views on Irish Further and Higher Education Outcomes – May 2015

- Employer's views on language skills required:
  - "Specific languages with a high level of proficiency in sufficient quantities"

Lack of language skills

- Employers were dissatisfied with both the number of languages and the level of proficiency held by graduates they employ

- This is most true in relation to large organisations and foreign organisations

- they require a higher level of proficiency for specific European languages

Which languages?

- The core European languages of French and German were the most popular languages selected

What level of proficiency?

- a higher level of language proficiency is required by foreign employer organizations

- 60% of all employer organisations require at least full professional proficiency in their graduate recruits.

- for indigenous employer organisations, Chinese language skills were required but a high degree of proficiency was not necessarily required

Multilingualism as economic opportunity

- Accepted that multilingualism would have economic benefits for Ireland:
  - Multilinguals who live and work in Ireland
  - Multilinguals who travel outside Ireland to conduct international business

- Why bother – English is widely spoken?
  - Why do people travel to conduct business?

Benefits of multilingualism:

- Communication

- Culture

- Cognition

- Curriculum

- Cash

- Career

(Baker 2002)

Ireland becoming multilingual:

- more than one in 10 people in Ireland speak a language other than Irish or English at home
  - 119,526 people speak Polish as their first language and of these 10,573 were born in Ireland.
  - Next: French, Lithuanian, German, Russian, Spanish, Romanian, Chinese, Latvian, Portuguese and Arabic.

    (Irish Times web site, 12 June)

The multilingual classroom

- See the students' home language(s) as a resource not a problem

- Students use their repertoire of languages for different purposes

Future of languages in Ireland

- Existing language speakers are a resource, but what of the future?

- Many will encourage their children to maintain their home or 'heritage' languages,

- In addition, L1 Irish English speakers need to learn more languages and better to achieve benefits for the economy. How to achieve this?

What does it mean to acquire another language?

- Usually thought of in terms of vocabulary and grammar

- But also:
  - sociolinguistic competence
  - what you say but also how you say it

Bachman's model of communicative language ability

Organizational competence		Pragmatic competence	
Grammatical competence	Discourse competence	Illocutionary competence	Sociolinguistic competence

(adapted from Adamson 2009)

Recent research on interactional competence

- Adds to sociolinguistic competence.

- Broader framework: dynamic and dialogic aspects of communication

- Face to face interaction, shared between speakers in interaction

Interactional knowledge :

- locally situated

- Jointly constructed in discourse by the speakers

- Participants resources not set in adanvce but dependent on the dynamic social context: Here's the place for Year Abroad/Ersamus

Year Abroad

- We learn by participating in context specific discourse practices

- Learning as participation:

- Erasmus provides multiple contexts for acquisition of fine grained language knowledge

Trust and community

- Minimal language competence to achieve a task
  - "when bus arrive?"

- Additional competence to stop language being a barrier
  - "when do you think the bus will arrive?"

- Sufficient sophistication to build trust and common experience
  - "isn't it a shame that Dublin Bus is axing this bus route?"

In the education system, where do we learn languages?

- In the classroom

- Immersion education: Canadian immersion/Irish Gaelscoileanna

- Study Abroad

  How do we determine the effectiveness of learning in these different settings?

Variationist research:

1. variation exists in language ("two ways of saying the same thing")

2. this variation is not random but highly systematic

3. measure variation as a way of comparing speakers in a quantitative rather than impressionistic manner

4. This is done by looking at specific sounds or words, controlling for other factors.

Variables

- Ne deletion

- On/nous alternation

- /l/ deletion in personal pronouns

Year Abroad: rates of *Ne* deletion

Varbrul probability figures for deletion rates for the three years:

Year 1   .36

Year 2   .59

Year 3   .54

speakers improved when they spent a year abroad, and they retained that pattern a year after returning.

Study Abroad: Rates of ne deletion individual speakers

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Judy	.79	.93	.85
Cathy	.08	.31	.44
Sally	.46	.30	.38
Donna	.00	.22	.14
Miles	.15	.39	.56

/l/ deletion in two contexts

Classroom and Year Abroad

Howard, Lemée and Regan (2004)

Irish learners before year abroad:
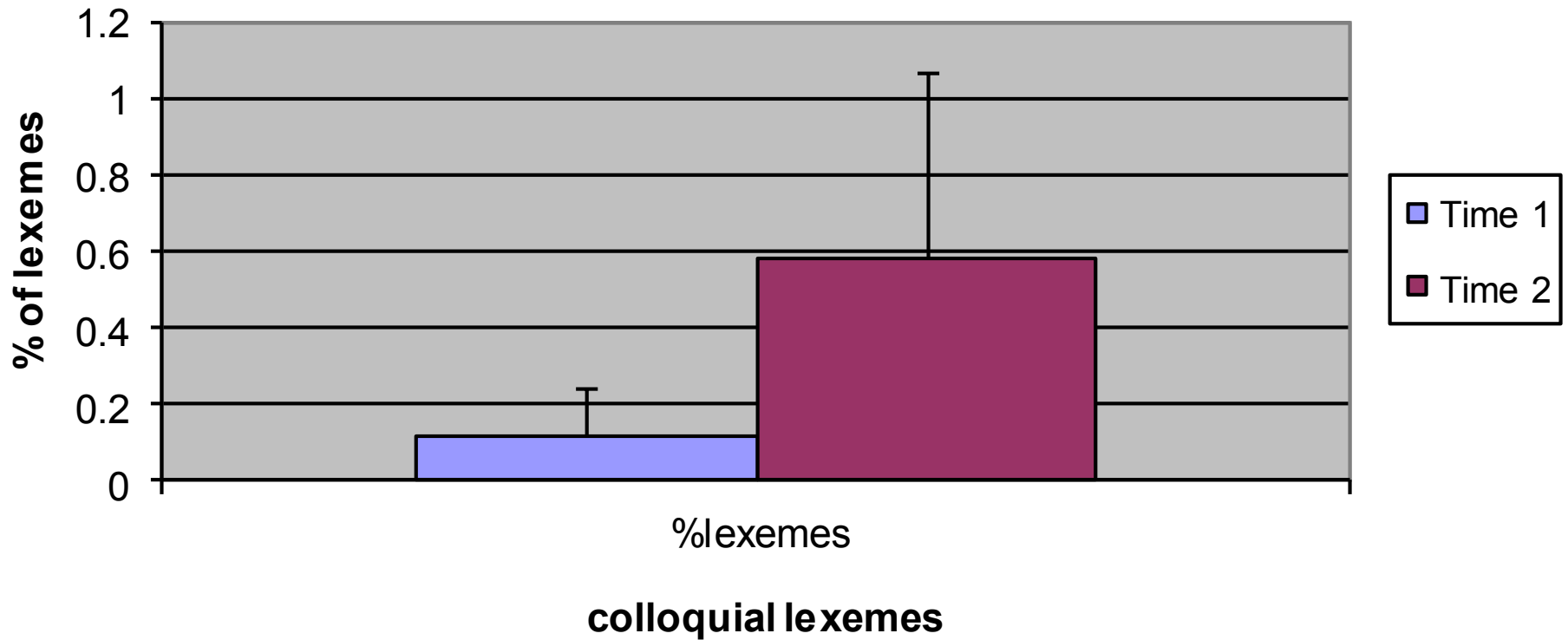4% deletion

after year abroad:
33% deletion

On/nous alternation

Irish Year Abroad

the longer the stay abroad, the greater the rates of ON usage

The effect of a year abroad on % of colloquial lexemes

Dewaele and Regan 2001

Linguistic outcomes of Year Abroad

- context plays an important role in the acquisition of fine-grained, subtle variation patterns

- the more contact with native speakers, the greater the linguistic gains in sociolinguistic competence

- effects are long term

The Quantitative triangulated with the Qualitative:

- Shows that successful outcomes don't just depend on 'being abroad'

- It depends also on:

- Affordances, investment, agency, motivation and attitude

Can the classroom achieve sociolinguistic competence?

- Yes. Lyster, 2004, shows that instruction is indeed beneficial but it must be over some time- not just a once off lesson.

- E.g. that integrating instruction on the pronouns *tu* and *vous* throughout an academic term helped learners develop a better understanding of these pronouns.

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Conclusions

- sociolinguistic competence is most effectively acquired in the native speech community

- The more attuned the classroom is to the naturalistic context the greater the gains in sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence

- This is part of the multilingualism so important for individuals and society

Conclusion

- Multilingualism has benefits for Irish citizens, for society and for the economy

- These benefits are worth the effort of acquiring and using multiple languages, and not confining ourselves to English.

- -fosters links between individuals, countries and cultures, changes perspectives on diversity, enables individuals to operate in different cultural and economic climates

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