

Article

L1 and L2 Language Attitudes: Polish and Italian Migrants in France and Ireland

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Abstract: Until recently, research on language attitudes focused mainly on attitudes relating to speakers' L1. However, with the increase in interest in multilingualism in a globalised world, there has been a renewed interest in language attitudes relating to L2 speakers. This article focuses on these issues in the context of migration: how language attitudes associated with migrants' L1 and L2 may affect the L2 acquisition process. The attitudes of two L2 groups (Polish and Italian) are compared to see if, in the case of speakers learning different L2's (French and Irish English), there was a difference based on the different contexts. Qualitative data and analysis were used to attend to the voices of the participants in the study. Analysis revealed differences in language attitudes amongst Polish migrants in France, Polish migrants in Ireland, and Italian migrants in Ireland that paralleled differences in L2 strategies. This supports recent research which indicates that attitudes associated with L2s play a more important role than was previously realised and should be considered alongside L1 language attitudes.

Keywords: language attitudes; L2 acquisition; migration; Polish speakers; Italian speakers; French L2; Irish English L2



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1. Introduction

The interest in language attitudes and the related area of language ideology has waxed and waned, going from a flurry of studies and research projects in the 1970's, many initially in Canada, (for instance, Lambert 1972; Edwards and Jacobsen 1987; Gardner and Lambert 1972) to a relatively quiet period, and, more recently, a revival of interest (for example, Coupland et al. 1994; Garrett et al. 1999; Garrett 2001; Preston 1996, 1999, 2013; Edwards 1999; Milroy 2001; Kristiansen 2001; Schieffelin et al. 1998). Although research in the two areas, attitudes and ideology, has sometimes differed in relation to their histories of development, methodologies and focus (see Kroskrity 2016; Bouchard 2022; Forsberg Lundell et al. 2022), the two terms and research areas are nevertheless closely related and frequently interact one with the other. Individual language attitudes are frequently imbued with broader societal language ideologies and the reverse can also be true.

Language attitudes are described as the “attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc.” (Richards et al. 1992, p. 314). In contrast, language ideologies have been described as “beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds” embedded within a broader historical, political, economic, and social context (Kroskrity 2005, p. 498). Silverstein (1979, p. 193) sees language ideology as “a community's beliefs about language”. It is worth noting also that there can be a difference between what speakers believe about language and their actual practices.

For the purposes of this article, then, attitudes are taken to be at the level of the individual learner, and ideologies are at a broader societal level (taking into account that there

is overlap preventing a neat division). A further issue is that the emphases in definitions of the terms can vary according to whether the terms are being used by sociolinguists or second language acquisition researchers (see, for example, the different emphasis in [Swann et al. 2004](#)), which is written from a sociolinguistic perspective. The distinction between attitudes as pertaining to the level of individual speakers, and ideologies as pertaining to a broader societal level, is useful for this article, which situates itself at the contact point between sociolinguistics and second language acquisition.

As [Forsberg Lundell et al. \(2022, p. 3\)](#) point out, while the relation between language attitudes and language acquisition has been investigated, “fewer studies have examined how the broader ideologies that circulate with society may impact language learning” (see also [Regan 2022](#)). Work on language attitudes has tended to focus on speakers’ L1s, but with the increase in multilingualism in a globalised world, there is an interest in language attitudes which includes attitudes relating to L2¹ and multilingual speakers (see, for instance, [Bouchard 2022](#)). L2 acquisition research is certainly now emerging on attitudes towards the L1 of the speakers, as they relate to the acquisition of their L2. However, on the whole, the role played by language attitudes connected with the target language and their effect on the learner/speaker has been less examined so far. How perceptions and socialisation, relating to both L1 and L2, influence language acquisition, practices and use is an important question both for sociolinguists and for researchers in second language acquisition. This article explores these issues specifically in the context of migration. It investigates how language attitudes associated with migrants’ L1, as well as their L2, might affect their L2 acquisition.

In fact, language attitudes can be a major force in migrants’ lives from many points of view. Peoples’ attitudes towards language often play a crucial role in their life decisions, their interactions with other people, their reactions to language policy and overall language ideology in their host country and consequently, to the formation of future plans. For mobile individuals such as migrants, “the study of language beliefs and practices is an especially useful tool for tracking how people create links between their present lives and broader, more enduring processes” ([Dick and Arnold 2017, p. 402](#)).

This article suggested itself from data which emerged from a larger project focusing on language acquisition and use in the Polish and Italian communities in Ireland as well as Polish speakers in France (see [Singleton et al. 2013](#); [Regan et al. 2016](#); [Diskin and Regan forthcoming](#)). This was a quantitative, variationist analysis of language use by migrant speakers and their acquisition of sociolinguistic competence as demonstrated by the acquisition and use of certain L2 variables as well as the interaction of these with identity issues. Wider aims of the project involved issues of language, migration, identity, L2 acquisition and intergenerational transmission (for example, [Regan et al. 2016](#); [Regan 2013](#); [Singleton et al. 2013](#)). This article, on the other hand, focuses not on the quantitative analysis of the variables studied in the earlier research (*ne* deletion in French and use of discourse ‘like’ in English) but on the voices of the participants and the themes and topics that emerged from what these voices tell us. In the course of obtaining naturalistic speech for quantitative analysis, it happened that the participants focused significantly on language, their own and others’ attitudes to language, as well as language ideology issues in the countries in which they now lived, as well as their countries of origin. The researchers/interviewers did not raise the topic nor indicate any particular interest in it; yet it was a frequent focus on the part of speakers. This article therefore aims to pay attention to these quite insistent voices, as they gave their views on language in their own words.

After an examination of the views of the migrant speakers and a comparison of their attitudes to their L1 and their attitudes towards other languages, certain questions suggested themselves, which form the research question addressed in this article. Did the participant speakers’ perceptions of the prevailing language ideologies of their receiving countries affect their language learning process and strategies? For instance, did the language insecurity often associated with French ([Oakes and Warren 2007](#); [Adami and André 2014](#); [Langbach 2014](#)) have an impact on L2 learners?² Perhaps language attitudes

should not be considered only in relation to speakers first languages. It may be that L2 attitudes play a more important role than we have accounted for and should be considered alongside L1 attitudes. The paper compares the language attitudes of two groups (Polish and Italian migrants) who are users of two different L1 language families (a Romance language and a Slavic language). The participants comprise (1) Italian and (2) Polish speakers living in Ireland with Irish English (IrE) as a second language³, and (3) Polish speakers with French as a second language. Did the different L2's (Irish English and French), and the different language ideologies surrounding those languages, affect the language attitudes of the migrant speakers who would have shared similar L1 attitudes (e.g., Polish speakers' attitudes towards Polish). Is there a difference in the effect of the L2 attitudes according to whether the speakers were acquiring English or French?

As noted earlier, the issue of language attitudes was not specifically present in the research design at the outset of the larger project (although language in general was one of the topics raised in the interviews with the speakers). The focus on language attitudes emerged as a result of the importance accorded to it by the participants in the interviews. While the emergence of this issue as a by-product of a different research project limits the conclusions to be drawn from the data, the very fact that the speakers would, unprompted, begin talking about language, their use of it and their attitudes towards it, and continue talking at length about these issues, sometimes even where the researchers were prepared to move to other topics, indicates that it is an issue of potential significance. In this sense, we have been guided by them in what they talk about, how they talk about it, and the considerable amount of time they devote to talking about it.

Regarding the participants in the research, Polish participants in Ireland were recruited in two locations: Dublin, the largest urban area in Ireland, and a rural region on the western seaboard. Italian participants were all in Dublin, since Italian migrants mainly settled in large urban settings (while Polish migrants settled in both urban locations and rural/small provincial towns). Polish participants in France were in Paris and a large town in the north east, and were relatively recent arrivals.

2. Migration Patterns

The participants in the study are economic migrants in the main, whether Polish migrants to France or to Ireland, or Italian migrants to Ireland. They have all left their own country to seek a better life but they all maintain close links with their country of origin. Some return for extended periods every year to their country, and others make frequent trips between the two countries and also maintain contact by phone or social media.

2.1. Polish Migration to Ireland

Emigration has been a staple feature of the Polish societal landscape for at least two hundred years. Migration to Ireland from Poland largely dates from after World War Two, but was concentrated in the Celtic Tiger years (post 1997). Grabowska (2005, p. 32) summarises these waves as follows:

1. Post World War II migration. The Irish government offered approximately 1000 third-level scholarships to Polish people who had been forced to leave Poland.
2. 'Solidarity migration' in the 1980s. With martial law in Poland (1981–1983), one-way cross-border movement only was permitted.
3. 'Migration of hearts' in the mid-1980s. This was mostly of young Polish women who emigrated to Ireland to marry Irish men. These women often became Irish citizens through marriage.
4. Post-1997: Migration during the Celtic Tiger boom years through outsourcing by multinational or Irish companies, or through chain migration. The post-1997 migration was primarily economically motivated and helped by the fact that Ireland (with the UK and Sweden) did not require Polish citizens to hold a work permit after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. Most of the 'Irish' Polish participants came from this last category.

At the time of the 2011 census (the study was carried out in 2010), there were 122,585 Polish nationals living in Ireland, the largest non-Irish group in Ireland. The total number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland has risen to almost 545,000, accounting for circa 12% of the total population of the country. This is a substantial increase, amounting to more than a doubling of the estimated 5% of migrants who lived in Ireland before the mid 1990's (OECD 2009, p. 15). Within this figure of 545,000 the great majority came from European Union countries (almost 387,000), with 122,585 from Poland, meaning that Poles represent, on paper at least, 22.5% of the total non-Irish population.⁴

2.2. Italian Migration to Ireland

Whereas Polish incomers have been a relatively new wave of migrants to Ireland, there has long been an Italian community in Ireland. The first Italian migrants came as early as the 1880's; Hegarty (2009) records Italian migrants selling chips to local residents. Almost all of these 'Italian chipper families' came from a district of six villages in the province of Frosinone (Lazio), and by the 1950s, a small but notable population from the village of Cistello⁵ had established chip shops throughout Dublin. A second wave of migrants were recent arrivals from Italy, in the 2000's. While the first wave travelled in the one direction from their country of origin to the new country and settled in tightly knit static groups, the second group was more transient, well-educated and travelled frequently to Italy and other European countries (see also de Tona 2018).

2.3. Polish Migration to France

The Polish participants in our study emigrated to France during three different migration waves: post World War Two, Solidarity (1980–1990), and more recent migration. They acquired French in a naturalistic setting with little formal classroom learning. Polish people have emigrated to France in great numbers for centuries and the French Polonia is estimated to be close to a million. Only the United States has received greater numbers of Polish immigrants than France. In the first, post-World War Two migration, Polish migrants came in significant numbers to the mining regions in Alsace and northern France. The motivation was economic and employment was in mining and agriculture. The participants in this study are part of the second, post-1980 migration, which itself consists of two phases: before 1989 and afterwards. Many people left Poland during and after martial law (1981–1983). Migrants who came to France before 1989 usually intended to settle there permanently. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989, migrants to France intended to stay for a short period, save enough money to invest in Poland, and then return to Poland. The participants in the study emigrated to France between 1960 and 1995.

3. Methodology

All the speakers were interviewed according to variationist sociolinguistic protocol (for example, Labov 1972; Tagliamonte 2006, 2012). Sociolinguistic interviews were carried out in the participant's own homes, places of work or in public spaces, and recorded using a discreet digital voice recorder. The interviews were semi-structured conversations. The researchers were interested in migration and the participants' experience of it, and so participants frequently recounted their personal stories of migration, present or past. Several told of their lives in Poland and Italy; some of the older people told stories of the Second World War. Many talked about leaving home and their families and friends. It should be noted that all spoke at length about their wider family and friends as well as themselves. So these interviews were a rich resource of data about their broader communities of practice and their networks thus revealing attitudes as well as behaviours and situations which the researchers would not have had easy access to (Edwards and Holland 2013, p. 31).

The researchers had a list of question modules which in fact was only used as a guide and was not visible to the participants. The questions covered themes such as participants' family background, their own cultural traditions work and working life; dating and marriage; and language use, maintenance and transmission. Questions about

language in sociolinguistic interviews normally come last in the interview, in order to address the observer's paradox described by Labov (1972, p. 209)⁶. In fact, participants frequently introduced the issue of language use and both their own, and other peoples', attitudes to language.

Each interaction lasted approximately two hours, and involved two interviewers, usually one Irish and one Polish or Italian. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed using either Varbrul (Young and Bayley 1996) or, Rbrul (Johnson 2009), both programmes involving logistic regression. For the current article, qualitative analysis was carried out on the interview data. A thematic content approach was adopted in order to explore the wealth of material which had emerged from the data (see Silverman 2010). Once the emphasis on attitudes became noticeable, the transcripts were examined in detail for recurring references to language and particularly language attitudes—these were normally discussed within the context of migration and identity. The process was partly bottom-up, in the sense that the themes emerged and evolved throughout the data collection and transcription phases.

4. Participants

Participants in this specific study were eight Polish migrants in Ireland, seven Italian migrants in Ireland and ten Polish migrants in France. These participants were found through different approaches, especially, however, the 'friend-of-a-friend' or 'snowball' approach (Milroy 1980). As far as possible, an equal number of males and females in each grouping were interviewed. Polish migrants in both rural Ireland and Dublin who arrived in Ireland since 2004 were also interviewed, as were Polish speakers in both the West and Dublin who arrived prior to the Celtic Tiger boom. The Italian participants were all in Dublin, and were from the two different 'generations' or 'waves' (1950s and 2000s). Some Polish speakers in France (living in Paris and a town in the northeast) were long established in France since the mid twentieth century, while others were recent arrivals.

4.1. Polish Participants in Ireland

Of the eight Polish speakers, five lived in Dublin; three in the West of Ireland. Two participants belong to earlier waves of migration, while the remaining six participants migrated to Ireland since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 and were between 20 and 40 years of age. The two earlier wave participants both completed third level education, and are now retired. There are two couples in the data set—Barbara and Gall, and Karolina and Wieszek. Barbara and Gall were married when they arrived in Ireland and had one child at the time of interviewing. Barbara is a teacher and Gall is self-employed as an architect. Both have completed third level education. Karolina and Wieszek married after they had migrated to Ireland; they had no children at the time of interviewing. Karolina works in finance and Wieszek is self-employed as a construction contractor. After finishing secondary school, Karolina completed one year of a Political Science course. Of the final two Polish participants, Ewelina was currently unemployed but studying for a postgraduate degree and regularly went back to her university in Poland because of this. Grażyna has a third level qualification as a dental assistant. She was also currently unemployed but did some part-time work when the opportunity arose.

4.2. Italian Participants in Ireland

Three Italian participants in Ireland arrived in a first wave of migration in the 1950s and four in a second wave in the 2000s. First wave motivation for migration to Ireland, as reported by Teodora and Maria, was economic necessity. Initially a small number of families moved to Ireland, with the majority opting to settle in Dublin. According to Teodora and Maria, some people also went to Scotland, Belfast, England and France and later, other families followed. Many of the Italian families in Dublin were related to one another, particularly in the early years, with one family owning the majority of the Italian chip shops in Dublin. Teodora, who lived with both her parents and grandparents, reported

that it was common for many generations to live together under one roof, usually above the chip shop, or to find homes in the same neighbourhood. Like many 'older' migrant communities throughout the world, this community was very close-knit. According to Teodora, many met their spouses through family events and did not 'date' or 'marry out'; for the most part they married another person from Cistello or the Irish Italian community in Ireland. They returned to Cistello for months at a time and English was to be heard on the streets of Cistello throughout the summer. In terms of language, the first generation spoke a local dialect and did not speak standard Italian. The parents and grandparents were keen for the children to learn standard Italian and wished them to speak it. They made considerable efforts to set up Italian language classes despite the fact that it proved difficult, by their own accounts, as little institutional support was available. For the first wave the Catholic religion was an important marker of identity and also, in fact, language maintenance. For Teodora, religious links were maintained in Ireland and in Italy and she attributes her learning and maintenance of 'proper Italian' to 'the nuns' in Cistello and she attended school whenever she went to Italy. She also sent her own children to school to 'the nuns' in Cistello as well as to a convent school in Dublin. For these first wave migrants the Catholic religion played an important role in the maintenance of Italian in the community.

The younger generations tended to shift to English, spoke English with a local Irish accent and went to school and university in Dublin. However, they also continued to speak Italian and, significantly some, such as Alessandro, took Italian at university in order to maintain links with his heritage. In general, people speak Italian rather than dialect. Teodora, Alessandro and Maria now keep in touch with family in Italy via social media which also tends to maintain standard Italian. Easy and affordable travel now permits more frequent visits and so family ties are maintained. Teodora sent her son to live with her parents for three years in Italy, and she and the rest of her family spent the summer months in Cistello.

The small community of 'Italian chippers' centred around a shared trade which contrasts in many ways with the more recent migrants to Ireland from Italy. The 'Second Wave' migrants had a different profile both in self and other perception. They are generally well educated, with professional experience gained in Italy, Ireland and elsewhere. These twenty first century migrants are internationally mobile, establishing and maintaining connections in more than one country (Pajnik and Bajt 2010). They are very able in finding innovative and creative ways of expanding and translating their skills to the Irish market, as well as the global market (for a more complete description, see Diskin and Regan forthcoming). As Martina says, the fact of having studied abroad in itself was strategically more important than the subject area she studied at university. In terms of discourse, central in the second wave interviews was the professional workplace. Words frequently used by the participants were: 'opportunity'; 'leadership'; 'initiative'; 'innovation'. These 'transnational' migrants viewed themselves as part of the 'global elite' (Kusek 2014), professionals characterised by prestige, opportunity, education and ambition. Ireland is just one of two English speaking countries in Europe, and so provides a useful connecting point with Europe but also with other countries round the world. The Second Wave migrants, given the availability to them of cheap travel, frequently made trips back and forth between Ireland and Italy. In addition to the face-to-face visits with family and friends in Italy and elsewhere, people also frequently used social media and smartphone technology to stay in touch virtually. Martina phoned her family every day and, for Angelo, this practice was twice a day, due to cheap flexible mobile phone plans.

In relation to language, these Second Wave participants reported a highly multilingual repertoire; they often maintained their use of Italian alongside the learning of new languages, including Polish, Spanish, and Irish (Gaelic), mirroring the evolving multilingual status of contemporary Dublin, and the transnational identities associated with this. As a group, the Second Wave were very conscious of language and had high levels of metalinguistic awareness about English, Italian and other languages, unsurprisingly, considering their transnational networks and ties and their high mobility. Most of the Second Wave

migrants spoke at least two languages at home. Other kinds of leisure activities involving language, such as television watching, also tended to consist of two or more languages. Multilingual media consumption and engagement with social media was common, and was often used to stay connected with current affairs and family and friends in Italy.

4.3. Polish Participants in France

As noted earlier, the ten Polish participants came from two research sites: Paris and a town situated in the northern mining regions where many Polish people had settled in the 19th century. Migrants settling in the North benefited from the ‘chain migration’ phenomenon in that many had relatives already settled in the areas around Lens or Dunkerque. Paris has been a consistent location for Polish migration for many years; Polish migrants found that Paris presented many opportunities in terms of work and accommodation as well as Polish organisations and support centres which facilitate the initial contact with France. As noted earlier, the informants in this study emigrated to France between 1960 and 1995. The length of residence for the speakers varies from 15 to 40 years at the time of interview. Their ages ranged from 40 to 70 years and they worked in a range of occupations. Of particular interest will be the comments of two couples, one from Paris (Gaby and Henri, both in their 50’s), the other couple from the northern city (Elena and Daniel) were also in their 50’s, and had arrived during the same time period. Both had one daughter, had good incomes, and planned to remain in France.

5. Polish and Italian Speakers in Ireland and Language Attitudes

Many of the Polish and Italian speakers in Ireland spoke at length about their L1 (Italian or Polish), about English (the second language they were using) and sometimes other languages they knew and used. In relation to their L1, they were all very aware of issues of standards and norms, had firm notions regarding their L1, and about how it was perceived in their home countries. Italian was characterised by the Italian participants as cultured and literary, and Polish by the Polish participants as difficult and rich. They also felt they needed to have a high standard of language knowledge and use in their L1.

There also emerged a picture of their perception of IrE. In general, the participants were aware of IrE as a variety of English and found aspects of it striking to their ears. This was true for both the L1 Italian speakers and the L1 Polish speakers. A second striking finding was that, while they were very conscious of norms and standards in relation to their L1, they seemed to feel that issues of linguistic norms were less crucial in relation to IrE. They found aspects of IrE different either from what they had learnt before coming to Ireland, or expected to hear (based on their previous learning experiences of more standard varieties).

5.1. (Irish) Polish Attitudes to Polish L1

The Polish speakers in Ireland had firm notions about standards in relation to Polish. Barbara and Gall are happy living in Ireland; they are interested in talking about language and initiated the topic of language during the interview. Barbara talks about ‘proper’ Polish and clearly perceives it as important. She talks about her husband’s family speaking Polish well, and contrasts this with the less than perfect Silesian variety that she says Gall speaks. They talk about the threats to Polish language throughout history, and clearly value their language as important to them and their view of themselves as Polish:

- B yeah. G’s parents speak proper Polish
 G yeah
 B because they come from the east. And Gall’s sisters. I don’t know why you speak the Silesian way (laughing). Because [the sister] one sister is older than him (laughing)
 G no way
 B And she speaks proper Polish yeah but it’s nice because I can turn to proper Polish
 Interviewer –mm

B em of course yeah maybe there is accent like. People from Warsaw would know that I 'm from Silesia because of the accent

G I never feel like Silesian I never [em]

They suggest reasons why proper Polish is so important to them, describing the turbulent history of Poland:

Interviewer 1: why do you say that proper Polish is the one spoken in the east

B that's what they say in Poland (laughs)

Interviewer: I mean there are em historical reasons or em

B it's like – you – know the . . .

G without any influence (.) it's clear

B it's clear like – you – know no

G [you – know – no –] [no the – the – the – the boundaries] in Poland moved a few times

Interviewer: [ah it's clear]

B [yeah without any influence like]

Interviewer: ok (laughing)

G like like the – the – [these areas in Beloruss –] (false start)

B [like when we get independence] in nineteen-eighteen like—prior to that Poland didn't exist on maps for a hundred-and-twenty-three years. And it was like Russia Germany Austria invaded Poland and it was just split into three parts. [So Silesia was German]

G [and then it's the same like in the same] policy to kill [Polish language]

B [that's why] Warsaw [was Russian]

G [it was even forbidden to speak] Polish

B and then (.) German

Interviewer: mm

B yeah

G and they all had the same policy. Just kill Polish language traditions so they learn German [# # some Russian]

The Polish speakers usually associated these language standards with school and education in Poland. Almost to a person, they had negative memories and views of education and school in Poland and these negative attitudes seemed to affect how they viewed Polish. In any case, the data consistently showed that they felt strongly about standards to be maintained in relation to the Polish language.

In the following excerpt, Wieszek talks about the difference in the education systems in Poland and in Ireland and the contrast between the two. His daughters are at school in Ireland and they like school. His partner, Karolina, is present at the interview and interjects comments. The first interviewer's L1 is (Irish) English but she speaks Polish. There was also a second interviewer, who did not speak Polish:

Interviewer 2: So they prefer the school in Ireland. Do you know why? Is it nicer?

W: Może nie ma takiego stresu tu napewno jak w Polsce [It's definitely much less stressful than in Poland]. It's less stressful here

C: Inne podejście [They have a different attitude]

W Inaczej podchodzą jak do znajomych A w Polsce trzeba Pani proszę Panią ładnie [Different attitude. They treat you as a friend. In Poland you have to be very formal all the time]. Ok. They say the communication with the teachers is much easier. Because in Poland it's very formal so you get stressed

Interviewer 2: Really?

C: Bardziej im się tutaj podoba niż w Polsce [They like it here more than in Poland]

Interviewer 1: And did you go to school in your village when you were in Poland when you were young?

W: I? Yes oh Jesus everyday stress

Interviewer 1: Why?

W: Jak chłopaki coś zrobią w szkole no to trza iść do dyrektora [When you misbehave at school you have to go to the principal]

K: He was misbehaving (laughing)

Interviewer: So what did you do?

W: Bo ja jestem bardzo ruchliwy człowiek Bił mnie po rękach linijką Tłukł Za ucho mnie ciagną Tu mam naderwane [I'm a very lively person] (laughing) He used to beat me on my hand with a ruler. Or pull my ear He actually pulled my ear too much I have a scar] (laughing) Do you understand? You ask questions? (laughing)

Interviewer 2 What did you do?

W: (laughter)

K: He was misbehaving and the teachers would punish him

W: Ucho mi naderwał dyrektor skurwiel miał dwa metry wysokości bo wisiałem na nim [He pulled my ear son of a bitch. He was two meters tall and he lifted me on my ear].

Karolina agreed with Wieszek that the children much prefer to be at school in Ireland than Poland: “the kids like school in Ireland—not in Poland. Just learning by heart and forgetting after Matura—yeah here kids they like to go to school”. Wieszek was also positive about many other aspects of living in Ireland, including Irish people, work and jobs.

5.2. Attitudes of Italian Speakers in Ireland to Italian L1

The Italian participants, like all of the participants, were sensitive to, and seemed aware of, linguistic norms in general. They talked about ‘good Italian,’ ‘broken English’. Even the children of these migrants who were themselves born in Ireland seem to share their parents attitudes to language. Alessandro whose parents are Italian was born in Ireland contributed to one of the interviews as he came into mothers kitchen at one point in the interview. Interestingly having grown up in the tight knit Italian community in Dublin, he is also aware of standards in relation to language and he is conscious of learning good Italian:

“I love Italian – I love the language. I learn the language and speak to people about culture, literature. I read – I look up Italian grammar—I practice.”

He perfects his English too:

‘I speak well and my grammar is very good’.

Claudio is a second wave migrant. Claudio’s views on language are filtered through his views of his girlfriend’s son, Alex (to whom he acts informally as dad), and the child’s use of language. While Claudio is self-deprecating in relation to his own language skills, he clearly feels that language standards matter in general. He is aware, for instance, of the difficulties of English spelling, but equally he stipulates ‘Spelling—it’s very important you know’. Claudio is admiring of Alex’s language skills. He says when Alex was only five years old (some years previously) he was aware of language differences, even dialect differences:

“But he has really a talent I think with languages. I think it’s amazing—for five years – he was so good in English but so good at Italian as well. When I met him my English not-

-very bad but . . . ”

The child helped Claudio out with his language at the initial stage of the relationship when Claudio’s English was not yet good: “he understood already when I couldn’t understand – he translate before I ask him”. The boy code switches efficiently according to his needs: “He speaks Italian at home—sometimes English”. He switches to English when “he can’t be clear in Italian.” For school topics, he switches to English. He is aware of accents and dialects: “when speak Italian with me, he had Italian accent, when speak with children his friends, with strangers—Irish accent”. He talks differently in Italian to his grandmother

from Northern Italy: “he speak with their accent”. Alex varies what Claudio calls ‘accent’, depending on who he is speaking to; for example, IrE speakers. When initially, Claudio’s own proficiency in English was less, Alex talked in an Italian accent. Now, as Alex is a teenager, according to Claudio, he talks in IrE with American influences and elements.

In relation to Italian specifically, Claudio is very aware of norms and prestige variants. He corrects himself in order to produce standard Italian. He himself wants his Italian to be good. He admires Alex’s skills in Italian when they go to Italy. Alex speaks to Claudio’s parents with no problem: “he uses *conjunctivo* more and [. . .] “His mother is very strict. It’s too much but he likes it—he corrects me himself”. “But in Italy he manages very well “sometimes he just forget name rather than case, apart from cases it’s impossible to believe he’s not Italian.” These attentive attitudes towards Italian do not seem to hold when Claudio talks about IrE, however. He seems to see English in Ireland as less impacted by linguistic norms and standards, and only comments on the inconsistencies of English spelling.

The first wave Italian speakers, who have a different migrant profile from the recent more mobile ones, also have clear views on language. They too have firm notions of ‘good’ language and language standards. Teodora tells about her childhood spent between Dublin in Ireland and Cistello, the village in Italy where the family spent long summers along with other Italian immigrant families. She and her sister were sent to school in Cistello. She spoke with an Italian dialect she had learnt within her family from her grandparents and parents. The grandparents who lived with them spoke only dialect. Teodora comments on the difference between their dialect and Neapolitan. Additionally, she didn’t recognise the standard Italian spoken by the nuns at school in Italy: “my mum would send us there to pick up a little bit of Italian, proper Italian, it was run by the nuns in Cistello”. The nuns spoke ‘proper Italian’. She tells of her first experience in school in Cistello, after which she told her mother: “Mammy, they don’t understand English and they don’t speak Italian properly” because, she explained, she and her sister were used to the dialect and the nuns spoke Italian. She and her sister were used to perceiving nuns as purveyors of ‘proper’ language, and they also went to a school run by nuns in Dublin. Like the other speaker participants, she is aware of norms and standards in relation to language in general. She addresses her son during the interview: “I pay all that money for a private school so you speak proper English and you come back to Cistello . . . ” She also comments on issues of formality which are particular to Italian. She tells her son: “it’s difficult to see the difference between *tu* and *lei* – you haven’t grown up with that”, implying that one had to grow up within an Italian speaking context to get these subtle aspects of ‘proper Italian’.

Susanna, equally a new Italian Second Wave speaker, is also very language aware. Her parents spoke dialect but she speaks Italian. However, she says her parents’ Italian is not of a high standard. “It wouldn’t be very elaborated—more simpler”. She also is aware of dialect differences and borrowings. “if I speak Italian with people I know the regions.” Additionally, she is aware that she borrows from dialect “I know it’s not Italian but I use those words. With people from other parts of Italy I try to cover my accent: . . . if I talk to old people it’s straightforward—it’s dialect. I’m more confident”. However, she is conscious of language standards with people she works with. Regarding her Irish boyfriend who is learning Italian, she says he learns a ‘lot of words’ but is lazy when it comes to grammar: “you have to have grammar – when it comes to grammar – it’s not like English”. She encourages him to learn more Italian when they go to Italy. She sends him to negotiate with native Italian speakers: “now you go and buy the tickets” Additionally, she makes him watch Italian films: “People in films are well educated. It’s a good way to learn Italian history . . . ” Clearly she makes a distinction between the standards one has to maintain in relation to Italian and the less careful approach one can take to IrE.

Sofia, another Second Wave migrant is also, like Claudio and Teodora, very aware of levels of formality in Italian:

“So do you know that Italian language has different how do you say layers? So you can for example if you are in a situation that is very informal and you use a language that would have been used in the 1500’s to write a manual of church, people laugh because you mix up the things you know and that was you know pretty much what I used to do. The way I used to be.”

The Italian speakers viewed Italian as beautiful and associated with literature and art and they also felt the pressure of standards to be maintained in relation to their language and seemed subject to a certain degree of linguistic insecurity in relation to prestigious Italian.

5.3. Italian and Polish Speakers and IrE

In contrast, both the Italian and the Polish speakers seemed to feel that less exacting standards were required when it came to English, especially IrE which they were acquiring and using as their L2. As noted earlier, Susanna says that accuracy matters in Italian but not in English (“you have to have grammar – when it comes to grammar – it’s not like English”). All speakers seem to be aware of IrE as a variety and the differences between it and the variety of English they expected from their previous experience either in the classroom or living in another Anglophone country. Sofia spoke ‘good’ English when she came to Ireland. She was aware of the differences between IrE and standard English: “what is that word ‘lashing’, an American asked me; what’s ‘lashing’? I don’t know whether officially it’s a feature of [IrE].” She also comments on the ‘accent’ including ‘the vowel’ [u] as different from other parts of the English-speaking world (“It’s very striking”) as well as the IrE pronunciation of the interdental. However, she does not seem to have any negative attitudes towards these differences. She does not hide her Irish accent when she visits other English speaking countries: “no I’d speak it as I speak it. I’ve been noticing for a while now”. She is comfortable with it and, when abroad, she does not feel that anyone notices, or is critical of, her English.

Susanna, along with other Italian participants, also notes features of IrE such as strut vowel usage ([pub] not [ʌ]): (in IrE the standard [ʌ] is rounded to [ɔ]). Alessandro also talks about his experiences with IrE:

“Yea it was my first time I put my foot on the Irish soil. I started trying to talk to the taxi driver just to make some practice. I literally didn’t understand any single word. So I start learning how to smile accordingly and just say “yes yes yes” now and then and that’s I think that is the beginning of everyone eh when the accent seemed to me very strong. Nowadays I probably don’t even realise this was different from the English’. . . . Nowadays it seems strange when an English speaks”

He likes Irish people and has lots of friends. He does not feel they are critical of his language. He compares Ireland with London where he had previously lived:

“People are more human simpler eh The attitude eh they have in the pub to speak and to chat is nice. I mean you can easily get in touch with them. There’s no problem. They they don’t care if at the beginning you make mistakes with the language or they help you. They are very helpful. So this – these are positive aspects that probably in a city like London I wouldn’t have found”

Martina, also a Second Wave Italian speaker, loves living in Ireland, her Irish colleagues and neighbours: “colleagues were very nice—all young and temporary—They were joking – they were teaching me the pronunciation and the Irish accent (‘mam’ instead of ‘mum’)—they’re still my friends”. She didn’t get “trapped” meeting only foreigners: “I seem to work with Irish people – go to the pub with Irish people to make really really friends”. In fact, when she hears someone with a British accent she talks about the “strong British accent”. IrE seems to be the unmarked variety for her. She feels Ireland is home.

Alessandro talks about his cousin who, by dint of coming to Dublin, has ‘perfect English’. He has a Dublin accent as well and knows Dublin slang, as Alessandro “taught him”. Alessandro is proud of teaching him Dublin English, and has no prescriptive or negative attitudes when it comes to IrE and doesn’t expect his cousin to be negatively perceived for speaking with a Dublin accent.

It seems from these participants’ accounts that a feature common to both Italian and Polish nationals is the difference between their attitudes to their native language and IrE, their second language. They have rather prescriptive attitudes towards their L1; they are aware of, and concerned with, “proper” speech and accent. Yet, neither group has the same attitude regarding IrE speech and accent. They tend to be aware, but also tolerant of the fact that they speak with a regional version of standard English, and are very forgiving about mistakes that they or others make in grammar or vocabulary in IrE.

One possible explanation for the difference between attitudes to these participants’ L1 and L2 might be that these speakers had a closer bond with their L1 and little investment in the L2 they were learning. Given the close ties between language, culture and identity, these migrants might be seen as more bonded with Polish and Italian culture/identity/language than IrE. However, a number of participants are very positive about Irish society and culture (especially the education system), and they indicate possible long-term residence in Ireland. Since they seem to feel that that, to fit into either Polish or Italian society, they should speak ‘good’ Polish or Italian, why, even when they want to fit into Irish society, are they not focused on speaking equally ‘properly’ in English? Is it possible that there is something about the language attitudes of Irish L1 speakers to IrE, which both the Italian and Polish participants have intuited, which may account for this? To this end, it is interesting to look at the third group of L2 speakers: Polish nationals who now live in France and are learning French as their L2.

6. Polish Migrants in France

6.1. Polish Attitudes to Polish L1

The Polish migrants in France have similar attitudes towards their L1 to those of the Polish and Italian participants in Ireland: they viewed prescriptive norms as important in relation to Polish. They talked about “good” Polish and less prestigious versions of Polish. One couple, conscious of linguistic forms perceived as prestigious in their Polish L1, talk about the other Polish emigrants in France who remain within Polish culture (particularly regional), continue to speak Polish rather than French, and, they point out, especially, do not speak a ‘correct’ Polish but a ‘heavily accented’ one, as they come from the countryside in Poland and not the city. As Elena says:

‘ils continuent à écouter la musique polonaise ils ont—ils ont leur accent qui est très fort parce que c’est souvent les gens des villages qui venaient donc [‘They continue to listen to Polish music—they have—they have a very strong accent because it’s often the people from the villages who came (to France) so’].

Also,

c’était pas le Polonais le plus correct, c’est l’accent disons parfois villageois—ça dépend, on entend un fort fort accent selon les régions [‘It wasn’t the most correct Polish, it’s the accent let’s say from the village—it depends—you hear a strong accent according to the region’].

Another speaker (an older male) talks about Polish as a language being ‘difficult’ and his pride in being able to speak such a complicated language. Additionally, he compares the difficulty and the richness of Polish favourably with other languages, and with French, specifically:

«mais vous savez quand je lis la poésie française/et la poésie polonaise je trouve le vocabulaire de la poésie française bien plus modeste que la poésie polonaise notre langue est difficile mais a une richesse de vocabulaire telle (. . .) mais grâce à ça justement elle peut transmettre de la finesse que j’ai trouvé dans aucune autre

langue moi je suis fier d'être Polonais c'est-à-dire d'abord de parler une langue compliquée pour apprendre ensuite les langues qui sont toutes plus simples que la mienne ».

[‘But you know when I read French poetry /and Polish poetry I find the vocabulary of French poetry much more modest than Polish poetry—our language is difficult but it has such a rich vocabulary, – but precisely thanks to that it can transmit a finesse which I have found in no other language—me, I’m proud of being Polish, firstly for speaking a difficult language and after to learn languages which are a lot simpler than mine’]

He wants his Polish compatriots to interest themselves in ‘proper’, ‘good’ Polish. He talks of those who speak an ‘inferior’ Polish: “ce . . . n’est qu’ un argot de rase campagne ». And he advises a Polish compatriot who is preparing to go to a conference in Poland to avoid presenting her paper in Polish as her standard is not sufficiently high: « madame si avec un tel polonais vous allez donc là-bas au Congrès où il y a que des professeurs de votre niveau je vous conseille quand même de le présenter en français».

[Madame, if with such Polish you go over there to the conference where there are professors at your level I advise you to present in French . . .] Here, we see him alluding to a high standard of Polish which the average, or even the educated, French Pole does not reach. Better to speak French at the conference than present in substandard Polish.

6.2. ‘French’ Polish Speakers’ Attitudes to French L2

However, unlike the ‘Irish’ Poles and their attitudes towards IrE L2, these exacting language attitudes towards Polish seemed to extend also into their attitudes to their French L2, and was in marked contrast to the attitudes previously observed for both Poles and Italians in Ireland. They talk at length about the French education system, the importance of the role of language within this system and specifically the importance of standards and norms in relation to French. One woman, mother of a child in school in France, was keen that she herself, her husband and daughter should have as much contact with native French speakers as possible so that her daughter could integrate fully into the French educational system. She actively set about learning French and, with her husband, attended French classes at the *Institut Catholique Polonais*.

Another couple talked about the excellence of their daughter’s French regarding both proficiency and ‘correctness’: “pas de fautes d’orthographe” [‘no spelling mistakes’], “sans accent” [‘no accent’], “elle parle parfaitement” [‘she speaks perfectly’]. Her mother talks about her own learning process: “apprendre le français en écoutant la télé, en répétant les mots et en faisant les exercices de prononciation” [‘learning French by watching TV by repeating words and doing pronunciation exercises’]. Her father wanted to speak ‘correctly’: “j’ai fait maximum d’efforts pour parler correctement” [‘I made the maximum possible efforts to speak correctly’], but says that, though he tried to learn also how to write as well as speak French, he does not write well.

It seems as if these ‘French’ Polish speakers seem to align their Polish language attitudes and language ideology with their French ones. The concept of ‘good Polish’ and ‘good French’ does not seem surprising to them. They seem very sensitive to the issue of linguistic norms and they espouse the importance of working hard to reach certain linguistic standards. They connect these standards with the education system and ultimately with the successful progress through it on the part of their children.

7. Conclusions: L2 Acquisition and L1 Attitudes and Ideologies

This article has focused on three groups of speakers. All three groups have similar prescriptive and normative attitudes towards their L1, Polish or Italian. However, the Polish speakers in Ireland and France, despite sharing the same L1, having similar migration profiles (they are economic migrants), similar ages, and even similar life cycle stages (children in secondary school), nonetheless differ in their attitudes towards their L2. Those living in France are distinctly more prescriptive in their approach to learning the language of

their host country than either the Poles or Italians who are living in Ireland. The qualitative evidence from the data suggests that their attitudes to the host country's language, and even the language ideology in the host country, (and/or the speakers' view of this) regarding its' own language, may indeed play a role in the acquisition process and strategies of the migrant speakers. For both language groups (Polish and Italian), ideologies relating to the language of the host country seem to affect their stance in relation to this language. While it has been accepted that L2 speakers often try to accommodate to the language practices of the host society, it may be that this extends to language ideology and attitudes; in this case, prescriptive expectations of speakers in one language as compared with less normative expectations of speakers in another. It is possible to suppose that the influence of the language ideology pertaining to French, as opposed to IrE, is a factor in this difference. It appears that indeed there can be a difference between what speakers believe and what they do as we suggested at the outset. The 'Irish' Polish speakers, while believing in linguistic prescriptivism, nevertheless choose to behave differently by using less prescriptive language in their Irish English L2. They are adopting a less prescriptive stance due to what they evaluate to be more appropriate in the context of Ireland and Irish English.

7.1. Prescriptivism, French and Irish English

There seems to be a general acceptance that there is a difference between perceptions of the strength of language norms relating to French (as opposed to English). This is by no means to suggest that there are not strong ideologies surrounding standard English but it would seem that attitudes to French might be even more intense as they are affected by the traditional strong codification of the French language. In France, there been a perception (at least since the founding of the Académie in 1635) that the French language should be as codified as other aspects of French state authority. 'Le bon usage' is frequently invoked as the 'correct' standard and is consulted in relation to the prestige of standard French in France and to any perceived threat to its position, either by any possible increase in use of English, or by regional languages or dialects. Any moves to counter these prescriptions and strictures regarding use of French are only recent. Changing attitudes are represented by the recent 'loi Molec' which reflects a growing interest in regional varieties. These varieties in the Hexagone are now receiving official government attention, which complements already existing community interest in Breton or Occitan, for instance. However, so strong is the attachment to notions of French as prestigious and a crucial force in the unity of the Republic, that there is a struggle between this new avowed support for linguistic diversity and the traditional careful protection of French. Article 75.1 'Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France', appeared as late as 2008 (Conseil Constitutionnel, article 40, [Government of France 2008](#)), but specific proposals to support these varieties are lacking. As [Hawkey and Kasstan \(2015\)](#) point out, this stance "reflects the general sentiment towards regional languages in France. They are of secondary importance to Standard French."

In contrast, it appears that IrE speakers are not necessarily as focused on a centralised 'standard' variety as are French speakers. While, of course, most people have a conscious or unconscious tendency to evaluate language, it appears that IrE speakers are less focused than some other English speakers, on standard English, sometimes referred to as received pronunciation (RP). According to [Hickey \(2005, p. 98\)](#) "RP is not an accent which is regarded as worthy of imitation in the Republic of Ireland". This attitude to RP may stem from the fact that IrE speakers have always spoken a variety of English which had long been seen, especially in the 19th century, as rustic, non-prestigious, often slightly hilarious by speakers of more standard English.⁷

7.2. Prescriptivism and L2 Learning

These differences seemed to be replicated in the attitudes of the migrants whose stories have been recounted in this article. In general, the Polish speakers in France seem to demonstrate some linguistic insecurity. These Polish speakers' linguistic insecurity seems reminiscent of what are sometimes perceived as the attitudes of French nationals themselves in relation to their own language (Oakes and Warren 2007; Adami and André 2014; Langbach 2014), as well as the Polish speakers' own linguistic insecurity in relation to Polish (based on what they themselves say). These attitudes are in marked contrast to those of Poles in Ireland. The amount of time several of the 'French' Polish speakers devote to the detail of the French education system, and the intricacies of their children's progress through it, contrasts with the more generalised diffuse description by the Polish speakers in Ireland of school in Ireland which is described as being a pleasant experience overall, without the addition of much detail regarding structures, programmes and so on.

Second language acquisition research has shown that the process of learning a language is influenced by many factors but perhaps not enough attention has yet been paid to how the L2 language is perceived in terms of general language ideology. Those Polish speakers in France who want to succeed, and especially want their children to succeed and prosper economically and socially in France, want these children to learn 'proper' French and say they are proud when they do. For them, there are socially agreed and accepted linguistic norms, often handed down from 'above' by institutions such as the Académie Française. For the Polish speakers in Ireland the situation seems more variable; they seem happy to use non-standard varieties.

For the speakers who have children in school in both countries (for example, the two couples in France and several parents in Ireland), what seems to drive their language attitudes is their aspirations for their children. In France, these children are within the French education system and are aware of prescriptive norms in relation to French. Whether the parents wish their children to prosper in France or globally, they still learn the same 'proper' French. In Ireland, where there is less prescriptivism in relation to language, whether they want their children to stay in Ireland or have the opportunity to leave Ireland, both Italian and Polish speakers in Ireland displayed greater tolerance of non-standard elements in spoken English than the Polish migrant speakers in France.

7.3. L2 Learner Response to Perceptions of Language Ideology

It is clear that the suggestions in this article must remain tentative, as they arise from research not originally focused on language attitudes. The data, however, containing the frequent references to attitudes on the part of the speakers and the relatively large amount of time they spent talking (unbidden) about language, language attitudes, and ideology, indicate their attitudes to L2 acquisition and the strategies they use in this process. So, with these caveats in mind, tentative answers to the research question can be proposed.

Did the participant speakers' perceptions of the prevailing language ideologies of their receiving countries affect their language learning process and strategies? Strategies seem to have indeed been affected by prevailing language ideologies of the receiving countries. For example, Polish migrants learning French made significant efforts to learn and speak "well":

- seeking out 'input' by consciously associating more with L1 speakers of the host language (the mother who left her daughter in the school canteen so she was forced to speak French)
- the Polish speakers who consciously avoided other Polish speakers and sought out French speaking colleagues or social acquaintances, and adopted a prescriptive discourse characteristic of institutional French norms

Conversely, the strategies of both Polish and Italian learners of Irish English reflected the language ideologies of Irish English speakers. Speakers in neither groups attempted to change their Irish English accents to imitate RP English accents, and were not concerned

about the various versions of Irish English that their children were learning ('grammar' did not matter so much in English, as it did in Italian, for instance).

It appears that speakers do indeed react to the prevailing language ideologies of the community in which they are now living, and adapt their acquisition strategies accordingly. These findings from qualitative investigation confirm that the research being carried out in this area will add substantially to what we know about the process of second language acquisition, particularly in its social context. This preliminary study strongly suggests further research, to more fully explore the role of L2 attitudes and ideologies in L2 language acquisition.

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Notes

- ¹ In this article, L2 is used to mean any second and other additional languages used by a speaker.
- ² Language insecurity has been defined by Meyerhoff (2006, p. 292) as "[s]peakers' feeling that the variety they use is somehow inferior, ugly or bad" and by Adami and André (2014, p. 71) as speakers perceiving that "they have repertoires that are incomplete or are too unvaried to deal efficiently with the different communications situations they participate in, in particular those that fall outside the usual limits of their interactions".
- ³ One of the two official languages in Ireland and spoken by the majority of the Irish people, the other being Irish (Irish Gaelic) spoken by a minority but learnt formally by all children until they leave school.
- ⁴ As of the 2016 Census, at 122,515 out of a total of 535,475, Polish nationals remained the largest number of non-Irish nationals in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2018).
- ⁵ The home of the village has been anonymised, as have the participants' names.
- ⁶ Labov's concept of the Observer's Paradox addresses the issue of obtaining spontaneous speech which is not monitored by the speaker despite the fact that the speaker must be made aware (for ethical reasons) of the tape recorder recording their speech.
- ⁷ It should be noted that these attitudes to Irish English seem to have changed. A recent survey in 2007 (reported in Amador Moreno 2010, p. 6) found 27% of 4000 respondents rated Irish English as the most attractive variety of English.

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