



# **New Speakers of Irish**

Research Report

prepared for Foras na Gaeilge

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## Table of Contents

The Authors .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Research on new speakers of Irish to date .....	8
3. Who are the new speakers of Irish and where are they from? .....	10
4. Research approach and methodology.....	12
5. Sociolinguistic background of the new speakers .....	14
6. What motivates people to become new speakers of Irish? .....	23
7. Competence in Irish .....	30
8. Use of Irish.....	36
10. New speakers' opinions regarding language policy.....	49
11. Conclusions .....	53
12. References.....	57

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## **Executive Summary**

This report presents research findings about the background, practice and ideologies of ‘new speakers’ of Irish. ‘New speakers’ describe people who use a certain language regularly but who are not traditional native speakers of that language. New speakers usually acquire the target language through the bilingual education system or through immersion education or depending on the sociolinguistic background, the acquisition may occur because of language restoration programmes. In the case of Irish, a broad definition of ‘new speaker’ is used because of the great variety of speaker types in the language community.

This report is based on research undertaken in recent years by a European research network entitled ‘New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges’ under the auspices of the COST organisation (European Co-operation in Science and Technology). 50 researchers from 27 European countries participate in this network and the authors of this report are currently researching new speakers of Irish. In this report, 46 interviews conducted with a wide range of new speakers of Irish and other written material collected from them over a period of three years from 2012 are analysed in depth. This analysis is presented under various themes: (a) sociolinguistic background (b) motivation (c) competence (d) use (e) ideologies regarding the Gaeltacht and (f) opinions regarding language policy.

The report reveals that new speakers of Irish are from a variety of sociolinguistic backgrounds, both in terms of family upbringing and experience of the education system. Many attend standard English-medium schools but several report they had inspirational Irish teachers. New speakers report defining changes towards the use of Irish at various points in their lives, for instance because of Gaeltacht visits or while attending university. Depending on their competence and dedication, new speakers use Irish in different ways. Some depend on conversation groups to speak Irish occasionally but others use Irish as the family language with their children. The Gaeltacht is important to the new speakers but their opinions regarding how important or authoritative the traditional dialects spoken there vary. Some new speakers believe that they do not have the same degree of ownership of Irish as Gaeltacht communities. The new speakers also have varying opinions about the government’s language policy for Irish. Some demand language rights emphatically but others prefer to spend their efforts on speaking Irish socially.

The report concludes with some recommendations for language policy in light of the research findings and identifies other research necessary in the future.

## 1. Introduction

This report represents some of the findings from research on the background, practices and ideologies of ‘new speakers’ of Irish. Foras na Gaeilge funded this report which aims to present preliminary information to the public about the ongoing academic research on new speakers. Funding was received previously from various organisations to conduct the research: the Irish Research Council (which funded John Walsh’s research under the New Foundations scheme in 2013 and 2014); the Arts and Humanities Research Council (United Kingdom) which funded Bernadette O’Rourke’s research fellowship ‘New Speakers of Minority Languages and their role in Linguistic Revitalization’ in 2012 and 2013; the Royal Society of Edinburgh which gave a small grant to code some of the material; the Community Knowledge Initiative and the College of Arts, Social Sciences, National University of Ireland Galway, which helped transcribe some of the material. The research project on which this report is part of a COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology) European research network (Action IS1306: ‘New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges’) which includes 50 researchers from 27 European countries.<sup>1</sup> The report’s authors also benefited from cooperation with members of the NEOPHON (*Nuevos hablantes, nuevas identidades*) network, a research project funded by the *Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación* (Spanish government) as part of the *Plan Nacional de I+D+i 2008-2011*.

In this report, and in the project in general, ‘new speakers’ is used to describe people who use a certain language regularly but who are not traditional ‘native’ speakers of that language. The new speaker often acquires the language through bilingual or immersion education, or the acquisition occurs because of language reinforcement programmes or courses for adult learners. In the case of Irish, we use a broad definition of new speaker to include the great variety of backgrounds and competencies within the language community. The following elements apply:

- The majority of new speakers acquire Irish outside of the home, usually in the education system.
- There are some speakers who have active competence in Irish because it was spoken to them at home, or because both English and Irish were spoken to them, but Irish was not the language of the community in their vicinity i.e. people raised with Irish outside the Gaeltacht (traditional Irish speaking districts).
- Other new speakers come from a Gaeltacht background, i.e. they heard Irish spoken traditionally by relatives or neighbours but Irish was not spoken to them at home.
- New speakers often acquire Irish to a high level of competence i.e. level B2 or higher of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- Although many new speakers use Irish regularly during their life, the sociolinguistic context may restrict that usage.
- An integral part of the concept is the efforts new speakers make to increase the range of uses in which they speak Irish outside of educational contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.cost.eu/COST\\_Actions/isch/Actions/IS1306](http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/Actions/IS1306) and <http://www.nspk.org.uk/>

- Some new speakers use traditional variants and local Gaeltacht dialects, and they may show a negative attitude towards code-mixing (mixing English and Irish). Others use more post-traditional varieties which often include a mix of Irish and English.
- Some speakers have a lower level of competence and therefore their use of Irish is more limited in certain social contexts. People who take part in conversation groups for adults could be included in that group.
- Many new speakers have a political- or identity-based motivation which prompts them to use Irish more actively. Significant changes in Irish usage occur at defining points in a person's life.
- There also exist other new speakers who acquire Irish out of social necessity or because of the social context and not because of an ideological motivation, and they may return to using English if that context changes. Many students in a Gaelscoil or Gaelcholáiste (Irish-medium primary or post-primary school) could be included in that group.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the new speaker is based on a critique of the linguistic categories used for many years in Linguistics to describe people who regularly speak a language other than their 'native' language: 'L2 speaker', 'learner', 'bilingual speaker', etc. (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013; O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 2013). Instead of concentrating on the deficiencies depicted in the speaker's speech, it is best to understand the term 'new speaker' as an attempt to move on from some of the old concepts and labels that had such authority in Linguistics historically but which are very problematic (O'Rourke et al 2015; O'Rourke and Walsh 2015; see also the critique by Davies 2003). It is often impossible to easily create a distinction between new speakers and native speakers of Irish and we do not mean to imply that there is always a clear division between them. The reality is more ambiguous and uncertain because of the basic differences between the context in which young speakers are raised with Irish today and the historical sociolinguistic context.

The report is structured as follows: In the next chapter, the relevant research about Irish to date is summarised. In chapter 3, the research approach and methodology used is explained in brief. After that, the following themes are described and analysed:

- The research participants' sociolinguistic background;
- The circumstances which motivated the participants to become new speakers;
- The participants' competence in Irish;
- The use of Irish among new speakers;
- The participants' ideologies regarding the Gaeltacht;
- New speakers' attitudes towards Irish language policy.

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<sup>2</sup> See the following document for a more detailed discussion of these concepts:  
[http://www.nspk.org.uk/images/downloads/CONCEPTUALISATIONS\\_OF\\_NEW\\_SPEAKERNESS\\_final.pdf](http://www.nspk.org.uk/images/downloads/CONCEPTUALISATIONS_OF_NEW_SPEAKERNESS_final.pdf)

In the last chapter, some preliminary policy recommendations are made based on the research findings and other research that still needs to be conducted. This report essentially gives a short overview of the main issues which came to light from the analysis on the research material to date. More robust and comprehensive analysis is planned in future reports such as this, subject to funding being available.



## 2. Research on new speakers of Irish to date

Prior to our current research, no one substantial piece of work on new speakers had existed. This was due to the fact that traditional dialectology largely ignored non-native Irish speakers. There are some works (e.g. Ó Riagáin 1997) in which language policy is examined, including Irish usage nationally, both in the Gaeltacht and in non-Gaeltacht areas. Certain aspects relating to new speaker issues are discussed in the monographs published by Walsh (2012) and O'Rourke (2011a, 2011b) about Irish but are not comprehensively dealt with. There are various works which discuss aspects of the dialectology of new speakers of Irish, although the term 'new speaker' is not used. That research can be divided into two parts: (a) linguistic or sociolinguistic material concerning speakers who have no historical link to the traditional speech and (b) linguistic or sociolinguistic material concerning the changes in the traditional Gaeltacht speech. Technically, Gaeltacht speech is not part of this study and indeed Gaeltacht participants raised with Irish were not interviewed. However, very often it is not easy to clearly differentiate between 'new speakers' and 'traditional' speakers in the Gaeltacht, especially among young speakers (Walsh and Lane 2014). That research corpus tends to use older terminology such as 'L2 speaker' etc., and particularly in the case of Gaeltacht research, the deficits depicted in the contemporary speech compared to the historical traditional dialects are often highlighted.

Among the works on speakers who do not have a historical link with the Gaeltacht is the report by Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin on the influence of early all-Irish schools in Dublin (1979). Further research has built on that foundation and the Irish spoken by Gaelscoil students in Dublin has been analysed (Ó Catháin 2001). In addition, the doctoral theses by Murtagh (2003) about the conservation and attrition of Irish as a second language among students in 'standard' and Gaelscoil schools and Ó Duibhir's (2009) work on the Irish spoken by sixth-class Gaelscoil students add to the corpus. Walsh (2007) conducted a study on the syntax, vocabulary and grammar 'errors' in Irish written by Gaelcholáiste students in Dublin. Some studies have also been published on the Irish-speaking population in Belfast (see for instance Maguire 1992). A study was published in recent years on Irish practice and ideology among Republican ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012). The promotion of Irish among post-traditional speakers was described in brief in Ó Murchú (2006 & 2007), publications which are aimed at a general, rather than academic, audience. In a wider discussion of the Irish-speaking community, Dónall Ó Riagáin (2011) proposed the concept of the 'New Gaeltacht' which would include the networks in which Irish is used outside of the traditional Gaeltacht. Previously, it had been proposed to call those parts of the country which are not part of the official Gaeltacht (the vast majority of Ireland) the 'former Gaeltacht': 'In that Irish was, historically speaking, the first and main language of all the people of Ireland until recently, and in that there are still certain areas in the country in which Irish is more or less the prominent language, the rest of the country outside of those regions is therefore a former Gaeltacht. Such an understanding has significant implications for the language, the region and what the community in such a region wants, especially when some of the community are endeavoring to re-acquire the language' (translation of Coimisiún na hIar-Ghaeltachta, 2000: 199-200). Walsh has previously claimed that the concept of the

Breac-Ghaeltacht (mixed Irish- and English-speaking districts) could be used again to discuss those networks in which Irish is used: ‘separating “Gaeltacht” from “Galltacht” is a false dichotomy, because the entire state is in essence a “Breac-Ghaeltacht”, where Irish is used frequently by a minority through networks and supported passively and symbolically by a majority, most of whom have some knowledge of the language’ (2012: 403).

In the case of the Gaeltacht, the essays by Ó Dónall (2000) and Ó Béarra (2009) on the changes in traditional speech could be cited as examples of discussion of this subject as well as the dialectology studies by Ó Curnán on the youth in the Gaeltacht (2009, 2012) or on the Irish of Iorras Aithneach (2007). A study was recently published on the Irish competence of fifty children aged between seven and twelve years old in the Cois Fharraige Gaeltacht (Pétervary et al 2014). In all of those studies, the traditional historical Gaeltacht speech was presented as the criterion and it was claimed that the historical dialect is dying. In more general terms, in various commissioned studies which were published in the past decade the findings were that the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking area was degenerating (Ó Giollagáin et al 2007; Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015). However loss and decline are not the only way of looking at the Gaeltacht linguistically: other sociolinguistic research by members of the COST research group on the Gaeltacht focuses on the complicated sociolinguistic dynamic which involves both conservation and language change (see for instance Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011).

### **3. Who are the new speakers of Irish and where are they from?**

According to the 2011 Census, c. 41% of the population of the Republic of Ireland (1.7 million people) report that they are able to speak Irish. The highest percentages are in Connaught and Munster. According to 77,185 (1.8%), they speak Irish daily outside of the education system and 110,642 (2.6%) report that they speak the language weekly. Approximately two thirds of the daily speakers (outside of the education system) or 59,230 people live outside the Gaeltacht (Central Statistics Office 2012: 40-41). In Northern Ireland, 3.8% of the population (almost 65,000 people) reported they could speak, read, write and understand Irish (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency 2012: 18) and the vast majority of them are probably new speakers. If the daily and weekly speakers in the south are added to the competent speakers in the north, there could be up to 200,000 active, regular new speakers of Irish (about 5 per cent of the population of Ireland, north and south) as well as a less competent but larger group (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015).

Although there are networks of new speakers throughout Ireland, little systematic research has been undertaken on this theme. It may be that some new speakers have links with Gaelscoil or Gaelcholáiste schools in various areas, but more research is needed to investigate this. Based on Ó Murchú (2006 and 2007) and on our own experience of the research field, we compiled a list of those areas in which there are ongoing efforts to reinforce Irish usage or in which there was a coordinated effort for the past twenty years:

1. Bord na Gaeilge community schemes, 1976-1983 (Dublin suburbs)
2. Cill Dara Beo, 1998-9 (Kildare)
3. Port Láirge le Gaolainn, 1998-2008 (Waterford)
4. BAILE, Cúige Laighin, 2007-2009 (Leinster)
5. Iarthar Bhéal Feirste (West Belfast)
6. Gaillimh le Gaeilge (Galway)
7. Tiobraid Árann ag Labhairt (Tipperary)
8. Newcastle West, south Tipperary
9. An Clár as Gaeilge (West Clare)
10. Gaeilge Mhaigh Eo (Mayo)
11. Gael-Taca (Cork)
12. Carlow
13. Glór na nGael (nationally and locally)
14. Gaeilge Locha Riach (Loughrea, East Galway)
15. Muintir Chrónáin (Clondalkin, West Dublin)
16. South Dublin
17. An Droichead (South Belfast)
18. Strabane, Co. Tyrone
19. Carntogher, Maghera, Co. Derry
20. Derry City

Some of these campaigns have ended but others are still in existence and they represent locations in which there are networks of new speakers. Language policy and legislation have begun to recognise those networks in recent years. For example, the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* states as an objective: ‘...develop new language communities/networks outside the Gaeltacht. These will be predominantly in urban communities that have achieved the essential critical mass of community and State support for the Irish language’ (Government of Ireland 2010: 23). Article 11(1) of the Gaeltacht Act 2012 states: ‘The Minister may by order designate a specified community, other than a community in a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area or a Gaeltacht area, to be an Irish Language Network’. Although the Act has many shortcomings, it is significant for this research that Irish language networks outside of traditional Gaeltacht areas were recognised in legislation for the first time (O’Rourke and Walsh 2015: 67-8).

#### **4. Research approach and methodology**

This report is based on some of the research corpus gathered since 2012. Included in that corpus are semi-structured biographical interviews, field notes based on observation of participants and follow-up correspondence with participants. A comprehensive analysis of all the interviews (100 in total) in that corpus could not be undertaken due to a lack of resources. Therefore 46 sample interviews were chosen as well as some field notes which had already been transcribed and openly coded. Each interview was transcribed into conversational turns which were then numbered. Following that, the interviews and field notes were further coded using the NVivo software which facilitates qualitative analysis. Common patterns and themes were identified in three major areas: (1) the participants' sociolinguistic and linguistic backgrounds (2) the participants' language practice and (3) the participants' language ideologies and identities. The following report is based on those three major areas. However, we needed to exclude many subcategories for reasons of space due to the enormous amount of data available.

This research was undertaken according to standard ethical practice for human subjects. Accordingly, no research participant is named or identified and any detail which might suggest the participant's identity is withheld or changed. Each participant has a codename comprised of a letter and number. The letter refers to where the interview took place and the number to the order of the speakers. For example, J13 means that the interview took place in a place named 'J' and that s/he was the thirteenth person interviewed. The number of the conversational turn is added after the extract used in the report. For example, (J13, 80) means the eightieth turn in the interview with J13. An extra I (for example J13-I) stands for an interjection from the interviewer. An extra A (for example G15A) stands for written correspondence with the participant after the interview.

The majority of participants were chosen using snowball sampling. Using that methodology, participants who the researchers already know are contacted and asked to propose other appropriate participants. This is regarded as an effective way to locate research participants with a particular characteristic (Berg, 2008). It was a challenge to ensure enough participants were identified to represent the wide variety of profiles among new speakers of Irish. However, based on our long experience in this field of research, we made a significant effort to include representatives from each subgroup. We identified the following subgroups:

- new speakers who are 'expert' speakers (see Piller 2003);
- new speakers who speak with Gaeltacht accents;
- hybrid new speakers (a mix of English and Irish);
- people raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht;
- potential new speakers who have a more limited competence.

A clear succinct distinction is not always evident between those subgroups and indeed some of the new speakers could be included in more than one.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Irish, which demonstrates that the majority of the participants had a good or very good level of linguistic competence. Some of the participants interviewed used both English and Irish in their answers due to their more limited competence. The participants chose suitable locations in which they would be comfortable for the interviews: their own homes, offices available to them or to the researchers, public places such as cafés, etc. Each participant took part in a semi-structured biographical interview, which lasted up to 45 minutes on average. The interview was based on a questions protocol developed by the research network NEOPHON which was based in the *Universitat Oberta de Catalunya* in Barcelona and in which John Walsh and Bernadette O'Rourke participated.

In terms of gender, the sample discussed in this report includes 25 men and 21 women. In terms of language competence, 19 of the interviewees are experts, 11 are hybrid new speakers, another 11 speak with a Gaeltacht accent, one was raised speaking English in the Gaeltacht and four were raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht. 21 speakers are 18-30 years of age, eight are 30-40, seven are 40-60, and ten are 60-75. Additional research is planned on the 30-60 cohort, many of whom are parents.

The material was transcribed from the audio interviews according to the NEOPHON transcription protocol. Standard sentence punctuation (commas, periods, etc.) is not used as the transcription was of natural speech. Here is a simplified version of the protocol to assist the reader.

<b>Transcription custom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Placenames and other people are substituted as follows: [name of place], [other Gaelscoil] etc.	Places/people the interviewee mentions
I:	Questions/interjections from interviewer
<i>right</i> (italic)	Code-mixing i.e. when English words or phrases used in original Irish version of transcript
[...]	Content omitted
/	Short pause (0-2 seconds)
//	Long pause (2-5 seconds)
(( ))	Unintelligible speech
LF	Laughter
?	Questions (also used for tag questions such as “alright?”, “eh?”, “you know?”)
!	Exclamation

Grammatical and syntactical errors were transcribed in Irish as they occurred and the code-mixing was left in the original Irish version. In the interest of clarity, some vocabulary errors in the material were corrected and the texts were slightly edited.

## **5. Sociolinguistic background of the new speakers**

Sociolinguistic background refers to the language(s) in which the speaker was raised speaking as a child and the early experience s/he had of languages in the education system.

### **5.1 Linguistic background of the family**

New speakers of Irish report a variety of sociolinguistic backgrounds. Some describe a family background which was sympathetic to Irish, or that a family member had (some) Irish. Sometimes, one of the speaker's parents has a Gaeltacht background, although s/he may have been raised speaking English. Others explain they were raised speaking English although they are aware of their traditional Irish heritage. Others discuss occasional use of Irish in their family when they were young. The majority are monolingual English families going back generations.

#### **5.1.1 Interest in Irish in family history**

Some of the new speakers report their parents or grandparents were interested in Irish, which motivated them to use the language. N1, a Protestant in her 70s from Northern Ireland, says she became interested in Irish because of her father's interest, although it was difficult for Protestants to access the language:

I love languages / as you know / but I didn't have a chance to learn Irish / my father was hugely interested in all things Irish [...] he had no experience of the language itself but he had a lot of knowledge about everything to do with the country / history / folklore / archaeology / every thing / he had a huge interest and he always motivated me throughout my life / he had an interest in the history of the language but he didn't have any of the language itself / he didn't have a chance in this country because we were Protestants to learn the language / he never had a chance to learn the language / the language wasn't to be heard (N1, 5).

J2, 48, was raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht. Her grandparents were active in Conradh na Gaeilge and because of that her own parents were active Irish speakers. They decided, in turn, to raise their children speaking Irish:

My parents met each other in college in the Irish Language Society and they were / although / my father was doing a degree in English and Irish and my mother was in the same year as him [...] she was very active in the Irish Society and she was auditor of the Irish Society at one point so they knew each other in college and they started going out a couple of years after leaving college and when they married they decided to raise us with Irish / my mother was mostly raised with Irish herself as a child in Dublin with parents from [other places] who moved to Dublin when they were burned out of the place in the twenties (J2, 24).

Four generations of J4's extended family, 37 years of age, attended the same Gaelscoil: her grandmother, mother, herself and her niece. Although she says they were all fluent, Irish was never the language of the home:

Em my granny spoke Irish because she attended an all-Irish school em [school] and I / well actually the fourth generation of us will attend [school name] next September not my own children but my / my niece but em she attended [school name] and then [other school name] and my / my mother the same so there was Irish in the home but I suppose when my / my granny was growing up she was very taken with / the / the nationalism to a point like she used to go to Irish dances and she used to be very involved with her social life so you know she had Irish but there was no / like / there / my family are Dubliners going back / going back years em so but just there was Irish in the family I don't know why I never questioned it to a point (J4, 46).

### 5.1.2 Gaeltacht Background

G21, 40 years of age, was raised speaking English mainly in a city but his mother came from the Gaeltacht. When the family went on holiday to the Gaeltacht, in the area his mother came from, they spoke Irish mainly but English was used more in the city:

I wouldn't say it was very strong now but I wouldn't say it was very weak either it's very hard to qualify these things properly but I don't want to imply we always spoke Irish because we didn't / my father didn't have Irish and that creates difficulties in the family I suppose but em yeah when we used to go on holiday in [Gaeltacht] I feel like we spoke Irish a lot more because my father used to work in Dublin and all the children would go together to [Gaeltacht] and my father would stay working so there was a different context there you know but all in all I'd say maybe twenty per cent Irish fifteen percent Irish at home (G21, 36).

G20, 29 years of age, was raised speaking English and Irish outside of the Gaeltacht. His father comes from the Gaeltacht and his mother speaks some Irish. The two parents spoke Irish to their children in early years but after a while the children became more fluent than their mother:

Only Irish until I'd say we were about / until we went to secondary school I'd say and then we started to get a bit better than Mam in Irish because Mam wasn't brought up with Irish but they made a decision to bring us up with Irish so she felt a little uncomfortable then and she started switching to English so then I'd mostly speak English with my Mam and I'd speak only Irish with my Dad (G20, 36).

G2, 29 years of age, was raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht. Her father comes from the Gaeltacht and her mother speaks Irish fluently. She learned a Gaeltacht dialect as a child by spending time in a nearby Gaeltacht area. Although her parents wanted to raise their children speaking Irish, they changed to English with one of the brothers after he changed to an English-medium school. Although her brother's experience of Irish was not as positive, G2 has happy memories of Irish when she was growing up:

I: Was it / hard with that experience em [...] was that experience negative in any way growing up with Irish in the midst of [...] English. (G2-I, 57)



I don't think so I mean I remember going to other houses where children spoke Irish eh so there was an informal network in [name of place] and em yeah I don't remember anything negative about the experience or anything but maybe if you asked my brother that question because I think because he was the eldest perhaps he didn't like being different from the rest (G2, 58).

G17, 28 years of age, was raised speaking English and Irish in the Gaeltacht, but English was the main language in the home:

We were a bilingual family em / although [place] is a Gaeltacht area eh it's very weak as a Gaeltacht eh you couldn't say that eh it's in category C and is one of the weakest Gaeltachts in the country em / having said that there would be a strong tradition of folklore eh singing music and storytelling in the area eh / my father he spoke Irish to all of us in the family eh especially when he was giving orders em especially when we were farming or doing housework but [...] I suppose they spoke English to us if we were discussing something at the dinner table for example or if the two of them were talking about the day about what they did all day that conversation used to be in English but any time the father was speaking to us alone he used to speak in Irish (G17, 26).

### **5.1.3 People raised speaking English but who were aware of their Gaeltacht or traditional Irish heritage**

G16, 30 years of age, was raised speaking only English but both parents speak fluent Irish since they were in Irish-medium education as children. Although they spoke English among themselves, they emphasised the importance of Irish and G16 spent long periods in various Gaeltacht areas as a child, which left her with a Gaeltacht accent:

No they would speak English together but em my mother would have has Irish / very good Irish and em my father was able to recite *Cúirt an Mheáin Oíche* [long traditional poem] LF but em just I suppose because of their education it was all through Irish so they wanted to / my Mam especially wanted to promote Irish between us and we always went to summer colleges and the like in [town name] where there is [town name] so em we spoke Irish from the start although it wasn't the family language let's say when I was young (G16, 59).

G5, 32 years of age, was raised speaking only English but his grandmother and father spoke Irish well. He says he went to a standard English-medium school but spent time in the Gaeltacht and speaks with a Gaeltacht accent. Although he tried changing to Irish with his father, he did not succeed:

My granny heard Irish spoken naturally when she went to [Gaeltacht] every summer the old people would only speak Irish em amongst themselves / in their own group you could say so she my grandmother understood Irish very well because of it and she

decided eh to send her children that's my father included to em [Gaelscoil] [...] and then he went on to / my father / he went on to [other Gaelscoil] so he would have had very good Irish but we didn't speak Irish amongst ourselves at home eh he tried to switch to Irish LF a few years ago when I was doing the degree [...] but I suppose the bottom line is that I was too shy really it was extremely unnatural he had brought us up speaking English and I wasn't comfortable speaking Irish with him and that's the way it is still to this day (G5, 42).

G11, 24 years of age, was raised speaking English mainly, but his father was from the Gaeltacht, although he didn't speak Irish regularly. However he says they used to speak a little Irish at home and the emphasis placed on Irish in the local primary school helped the children understand Irish well:

English was spoken most but I suppose we always understood Irish we knew it existed because we had relations out in [nearby Gaeltacht] and we had friends out in [Gaeltacht] too and eh I was in primary school and there used to be a bigger emphasis on Irish although it wasn't a Gaelscoil than there was in [place] there used to be a bigger emphasis on it and I remember learning hard poems when I was very young poems by Pearse that wouldn't be on the Leaving Cert course now I suppose and we used to have teachers from [Gaeltacht] too so Irish was / Irish used to be spoken sometimes at home that's for sure and as I said I understood it always I understood / we understood it existed but English was the language spoken most because my mother has no Irish (G11, 42).

B8, 45 years of age, was raised speaking English only but he strongly emphasised in the interview how important it was for him to understand that his family were Irish speakers going back a few generations:

I have Irish language heritage Irish was spoken I suppose I looked at some map and I think about half the population in the place [...] had Irish I think in the 1901 or 1911 census that was published and there were questions there about being able to speak in Irish and I think in nineteen eleven it was eh written that [...] my grandfather had Irish he was about twenty that year and he was one of / there were younger children in the family and then his mother and father were living in the house and eh in the [census] it was written that my great-grandfather and his wife had Irish so they [...] had English and Irish [...] my father always had a great respect for Irish and for education and he used to always say to me that he wanted to be a teacher and that he decided to be a teacher when he was in primary school (B8, 4).

B16, 55 years of age, comes from a county in which there was a Breac-Ghaeltacht (mixed Irish- and English-speaking district). She speaks about that Gaeltacht link and about the importance of Irish-medium education as well. Those two elements motivated her to return to learning Irish later in life:

When I was in school everything was in Irish like a Gaelscoil would be today / it was like that / and I have an interest / I suppose I developed an interest / from that time in Irish and History / Geography everything / and then I was interested in Irish from that point on and also when I was young at home my grandmother was from a place where Irish was always spoken [name of place] and so when my father was young then my grandmother would speak Irish I suppose not all the time but now and again my father had a lot of vocabulary and a lot of Irish and would speak English and Irish mixed together and em also my mother had a lot of Irish but she had no interest I suppose in speaking it but she was good / she went to secondary school in [name of place] and every subject at that time was through Irish right up to the Leaving Cert so she had a lot of Irish too (B16, 4)

#### **5.1.4 Occasional use of Irish**

Some of the new speakers comment on occasional use of Irish when they were young. The following examples pertain to people who were raised in a county in which there was a Breac-Ghaeltacht in the past and therefore some memory of spoken Irish among the community.

According to B21, 60 years of age, his mother spoke more Irish than she realised:

Well my mother would always say she had no Irish but she used Irish words while speaking English / quite a lot! Em my father never indicated to me that he had any interest in Irish but he wasn't negative about it but he didn't have any Irish in my opinion! (B21, 19).

B20, 55 years of age, comments on his mother who prayed in Irish. He says she would start praying like that when he asked if she spoke Irish. That likely indicates that she had heard Irish native speakers when she was young:

My mother / she had / my mother knew her prayers (B20, 12)

In Irish? (B20-I, 13)

In Irish / the old prayers / you never hear them anymore / and it was difficult to understand them when I was young / I didn't speak that dialect (B20, 14).

What dialect was it? (B20-I , 15).

Well she had a [County name] dialect / but the old dialect / she spoke the old Irish in the prayers (B20, 16).

#### **5.2 Educational background of the speakers**

Many new speakers mention that their interest in Irish began in school. The dedication of teachers in standard English-medium schools is mentioned, teachers who inspired people to make Irish their own by strongly emphasising various aspects of the language and traditional

Irish culture. Gaeltacht teachers in standard English-medium schools are also mentioned. Some new speakers describe the linguistic advantages of immersion education. The participants who were raised speaking Irish report they were very confident in school because of that extra linguistic advantage from home.

### 5.2.1 Inspiring interest in Irish in standard English-medium schools

Many of the new speakers attended standard English-medium schools but they had very competent Irish teachers who inspired their interest in the language and who supported them in various ways. N3, 32 years of age from Northern Ireland, describes such a teacher who greatly influenced him and his friends:

I think I was lucky to have a great teacher in those first three years there // [name of the woman] / she's a school principal here now [...] / it's obvious she herself was very passionate and excited about the language and I suppose she made us pupils feel the same // but I / I suppose / maybe I was always drawn towards Irish I think but a teacher like that helped / if I'd had a bad teacher it might have been difficult to get drawn to the language / but definitely that woman influenced me / from that year group I was in seven of us speak Irish fluently / we're good friends / we meet up / some of us work with Irish media and in the Irish language education sector / that kind of thing / that doesn't happen very often in the North that there are that many people (N2, 8).

G1, 28 years of age, describes the good education he got in Irish in the local primary school, which was a standard English-medium school. He did not realise how good his Irish was until he started secondary school:

Yeah but it's not that we knew it but he tried to cover it with us now eh for people eh who were in other primary schools in the area they barely had two words of Irish when they started in the secondary school because the teachers weren't interested at all / I suppose the teachers were younger because they had no interest / I'm not saying that the Irish was brilliant and I used to think the principal had great Irish when I was young but now I think he only had the standard Irish you'd expect from any primary school teacher but eh even so he pushed us to speak the language whenever he was there / I don't know if he nourished a good attitude towards Irish eh among the students but definitely we all had a better standard of Irish when we were in secondary school / we stood out even those who weren't academic or academic as it was understood traditionally I suppose so he was effective at teaching Irish (G1, 53).

G16, 30 years of age, refers to great teachers in both primary and secondary schools:

So it was an English-speaking school em [...] but em there were Irish speakers / there was one particular teacher who was brilliant and she taught fourth and sixth class and she taught great Irish so em and I suppose and then I had other teachers when I was in

first year of secondary school and it was mostly teachers who motivated me (G16, 97).

G5, 32 years of age, describes the emphasis placed on the traditional Irish culture as well as the language in primary school:

It was an ordinary English school eh as I said a great emphasis on the traditional Irish culture / on the games even on singing and drama through Irish eh we took part in Slógadh [competition-based youth arts festival] for example one year and then the language itself the language itself was taught eh and I remember we knew a fair amount of examples in the Genitive Case by heart for example by sixth class eh without the rules of course but we had a good idea about what the Genitive was for even at that point and that always stood to us I think (G5, 54).

### 5.2.2 Immersion Education

A minority of research participants attended a Gaelscoil or in the case of the older speakers, the old system of ‘A-schools’ which were founded in the 1930s. A small number of people who were raised speaking English in the Gaeltacht but who attended a local Irish-medium school were interviewed.

B15, 18 years of age, describes his parents’ decision to transfer him to a Gaelscoil along with his sister to ensure they would achieve a high competence in Irish. He was asked how good his Irish was in primary school:

No I had no / I had no Irish at all but my mother was planning to do something about it / when we were / when we were / especially my sister and I when we went to primary school there was no emphasis at all on Irish / the principal at the time / she was very interested in Mathematics and Science and things like that and we were so weak in Irish / so my mother decided to send me and my sister em / to take us or send us to a school outside of the city in County [other county name] [...] and that had seven years / a transition year between primary school and secondary school my sister and I did that year and we did everything in Irish we did all the subjects in Irish and we had to speak Irish all the time (B15, 16).

B14, 20 years of age, comments on the period she spent in an Irish-medium boarding school and the strong impact that had on her language competence and her attitude towards it:

Oh I loved it / it was a mix of girls and boys and that’s where / I have to say that inspired / I’d say / my interest in the language / so I learned the structure of the language I didn’t have that / basic stuff like ‘may I get something?’ or ‘may I do that?’ and when you kind of have the structure you can / step by step I suppose develop what you know / so when I will go / when I went on to secondary school then / I was able to maybe pick out the vocab and sentence / sentences which were more complicated I suppose than we’d had before more than other students in my class could but yeah / it was a great experience / I have to say (B14, 14).

K1, 32 years of age, was raised speaking English in a Gaeltacht area and he depended on the primary school to achieve competence in Irish. Again, he comments on the highly competent teachers he had:

You're depending I suppose on / on your own memories but I learned my Irish there I think and eh I'd have to say those teachers were eh very fluent and very / very Irish as well em I had one woman from [Gaeltacht area] as / as a teacher for my first four years in school / from the infants to second class and then there was another man who although he wasn't from the Gaeltacht he learned his English down [in Gaeltacht area] (B1, 40).

G21, 40 years of age, remembers attending a Gaelscoil in which the teachers were very dedicated but he admits he might idealise the amount of Irish the pupils spoke among themselves:

I went to [name of school] and I suppose it is a Gaelscoil and there was and there is / I think but I'm not sure I'm not in touch with anyone who goes to the school but Irish was very strong the staff were very strong and em sure I don't remember people talk about the language in the yard and so on I think we used to speak in English but I'm not sure to be honest but it's hard you're remembering and idealising it and saying to yourself sure we spoke Irish all the time but we certainly didn't (G21, 38).

### **5.2.3 The experience of immersion education amongst people raised speaking Irish**

Some interviewees mention that their parents made a conscious decision to send their children to Irish-medium schools, for instance J2, 48 years of age, who was raised speaking Irish outside of the Gaeltacht:

When they married they decided to buy a house near [name of place] which a lot of parents did / there were a lot of traditional or semi-traditional Irish families culturally in the same estate [...] that was the only all-Irish primary school apart from [school name] which was in the city center close to [other place] at the time so they bought the house there so that they could send any children they might have which they later did to that school (J2, 30).

The people who were raised with Irish mention they were self-confident in the immersion system because they had a better competence than their fellow students, as this extract from the interview with G2, 29 years of age, demonstrates:

It was very easy for me because I had no problems communicating with teachers in Irish or anything and I suppose I had a vocabulary that was quite / well that was vast compared to the other students and I remember even in junior infants we were learning the letters of the alphabet and we got to 'I' and nobody could think of an Irish word that started with an 'I' / and I knew 'iora rua' [squirrel] so it was so easy there I was I had Irish at home and there were at least two others who I can think of at this point eh who also spoke Irish at home (G2, 68).

G20, 29 years of age who was raised speaking Irish, says she looked forward to Irish-medium secondary education where there would be more people from the same background as she had. She comments on a group of friends in the Gaelcholáiste who always spoke Irish among themselves:

I was way / way ahead of other people in primary school and I was / there was never any doubt about it I wanted to speak Irish all the time in the yard and so on and maybe people thought I was a bit of a nerd because of that in primary school and I remember I was so happy leaving primary school and going to [name of Gaelcholáiste] because I understood they had a strong language policy and that pupils at that school had the same background as I did (G20, 88) [...] And we spoke Irish all the time in the yard if a group of us went into town after school we used to speak Irish (G20, 90).

Conversely, J2 says her own fellow students had mixed language behaviours while in secondary school:

A mix of English and Irish / Irish mostly at school even when the teachers weren't around but a lot of us would slip into English conversations outside of school but that happened more with certain people than others so some of us went on talking in Irish because that was our mother tongue and what we spoke in primary school but then there were a lot of people who switched to English as soon as they walked out of the school gates every day (J2, 40).

## 6. What motivates people to become new speakers of Irish?

In this project, we borrow the *muda* concept from the critical sociolinguistics of Catalonia (and the Iberian peninsula in general), where it is used to refer to critical points in a person's life when s/he changes the linguistic practice substantially toward a target language (Catalan, Basque or Galician) (see Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015; Ortega et al 2015; O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 2013, 2015). The Catalan verb *mudar* means to change or to transform and *muda* (plural *mudes*) is its noun. *Mudes* are transformational moments in linguistic practice and very often there is a strong sense of identity involved due to the fact that the speaker's self-awareness changes too (see Walsh and O'Rourke 2014). As the interviews conducted are language biographies, we have information about the typical moments in which the *mudes* occur. Based on the analysis of part of the corpus collected to date, we recognised seven chronological *mudes* already for Irish: (a) primary/secondary school (b) Gaelscoil (c) Gaeltacht (d) university (e) family and (f) retirement age (Walsh and O'Rourke 2014: 68). Instead of looking at chronological moments such as those, in the next section we discuss the various motivations the speakers discussed. They included inspired interest due to a visit to the Gaeltacht, change in competence or practice due to visits to the Gaeltacht, defining years at university, the new speaker's political awareness, music and culture, a revelation about the speaker's Gaeltacht heritage and the feeling that Irish is a part of the speaker's fundamental being.

### 6.1 Interest inspired due to a visit to the Gaeltacht

Many new speakers report a defining *muda* in their life because of a visit to the Gaeltacht. N4, a 34 year old man from Northern Ireland, said he did not understand until he visited Rann na Feirste as a teenager that Irish was a community language in the Gaeltacht:

I went to the Gaeltacht / to Rann na Feirste for the first time in 1996 I think and I remember that I spent four years in a row going back to Rann na Feirste every summer and I went to Dún Lúiche a couple of times as well / yeah and that's where the language came to life for me / it was a school subject before that which I liked but suddenly I realised that I had such an interest in this academic thing until it came to life in front of me / in front of my two eyes / there were people there / there was a community who spoke Irish and that was a great thing for me // it was a huge inspiration for me (N4, 21) [...] To this day I say I'm a Gael // I don't think I recognised at that age what it was you know but // that's what was there you know // I was among the Irish and I felt very comfortable and I suppose I felt happier in myself there than I had ever before (N4, 23).

G11, 24 years of age, was raised speaking mainly English near the Gaeltacht but after visiting that area regularly he decided to learn the traditional dialect spoken there. The traditional culture also motivated him to bring about a defining *muda*:

That was a new period for me because it was then that I started getting interested in the traditional Irish things it was then that I started singing traditional Irish songs and listening to those songs and other aspects of the traditional Irish culture and I was



speaking to people who had lovely Irish and I was speaking to them because I was interested in listening to their Irish rather than just talking to them I wanted / I remember every time I heard something to do with the dialect when I heard something new I'd ask them what did it mean I remember every time [I was there] I'd write down [...] 'ag fuireach' and 'dén t-am' and all that (G11, 116).

J3, 26 years of age, attended a summer college and a Gaeltacht school after that. When he saw that Irish was the community language in that Gaeltacht area, he decided he would use the language more in school:

Well I recognised that this treasure was right under my nose and why wouldn't I use it / I went to an Irish college or a summer college I should say since I was twelve years old and I saw another side to Irish there I suppose I saw it could be a community language and a language between friends and such so I recognised that and I wanted to copy that in school because I felt it was a waste of time really to have the native speakers there and not speak Irish to them (J3, 44).

## **6.2 Change in competence due to a visit to the Gaeltacht**

As well as a positive attitude which motivated a linguistic *muda*, the participants speak about their competence Irish improving after spending time in the Gaeltacht. G15, 26 years of age, was raised speaking English. His Irish improved so much after attending a Gaeltacht course that his teacher believed he spoke Irish at home:

I was always ahead of a lot of the class in Irish, but that was because of the Gaeltacht courses I did while I was in primary school. I don't know if this is relevant, but I was sent on a Gaeltacht course for the first time when I was in fifth class and I made a big effort to speak the language while I was there (unlike everyone else – the naivety of youth). When I came back to the primary school after that I felt my spoken Irish had improved. The teacher was surprised at that improvement and she asked my mother if we spoke Irish at home – which shows, maybe, how much I learned that summer (G15A, 2).

N2, 33 years of age from Northern Ireland, says he became fluent after spending a summer as a youth leader in a summer college. At the end of that period, he was very comfortable speaking Irish:

Maybe the year I left school / I suppose I was 18 by then / I spent the whole summer in the Gaeltacht as a youth leader that summer before I started university / I got to a level where I was confident / totally fluent and confident of my Irish and from that point on I spoke more Irish than English since I was 18 // I would have been good at Irish at school and every thing but I wouldn't have been able to go into an Irish-speaking group and take part a hundred per cent or totally in that conversation but by the end of that summer in 2000 / at the beginning of that summer I did a Gaeltacht course [...] and I felt really that my confidence was improving all the time and at the

end of that summer I was a youth leader again in another college in Donegal / and I felt completely natural and comfortable going in (N2, 10).

N4, 34 years of age and also from Northern Ireland, comments on the support he had from the Gaeltacht family with whom he used to stay. Because of that support, he says, he succeeded in acquiring Irish:

I was lucky with the family I stayed with that there were a couple of young children in the house that and she was very talkative // that they wanted to talk to us / they wanted to be in the rooms and talking to the visitors all the time and spending time with us and I used that a lot to listen to them / to pick up on the ways they put sentences together and to learn their pronunciation and things like that // and they were very happy to have a bit of company and to be able to talk to people // yeah I spent a lot of time with the family / with the mam playing cards at night trying to learn from her / that was the kind of approach I had / focusing on that you know and picking up things that way / and I felt it changed by the end of those three weeks there that it was changing somehow / that I felt I had acquired the language to a certain point / I wasn't fluent but I was able to use the language correctly (N4, 27).

### 6.3 Defining years in university

The university is often mentioned as another defining *muda* in the life of the new speaker. In the case of those who decided to study Irish or a subject through the medium of Irish at the third level, they often describe how important the university community they experienced was regarding their competence in Irish and their attitude towards it. G15, 26 years of age, says he and a group of friends decided to speak Irish while they were studying:

About the same time myself and a bunch of friends decided to switch to Irish outside of the classroom. I don't remember it exactly, but it must have been a conscious decision, that we discussed the issue and decided to make a bigger effort to speak the language. We were trying to make the Irish course easier. It was an academic decision more than anything else. But until then we had always spoken English to each other. There were a couple of disagreements because of that decision. We'd get rather passionate sometimes when other students would change to English as soon as they left the room, urging them not to do so (G15A, 8).

J3, 26 years of age, mentions the importance of the social context for bringing about a *muda* towards Irish. In the following extract, he describes the impact of social events through the medium of Irish at university on his competence in the language:

Oh well that was great because for the first time we had a community and we had / we had / a community and we were the same age and there was a sort of understanding between us and without the [Irish language social group] I don't know what I would have done because it gave a social context to / to the whole thing and do you know maybe I learned more in Club an Chonarthá [Irish language bar] than I learned that

day in the lecture hall and maybe it was because of that that I was out the night before too and do you know with the social context I think it really helped a lot (J3, 61).

G17 was raised speaking English mainly in the Gaeltacht but he had little interest in Irish until he met a group of other young people in the university who were fluent speakers:

I was never interested in Irish until I went to college and met people who were / so I suppose well who were interested in Irish and then I started / I was involved with clubs [society names] which had to do with Irish and that's where I became interested in Irish and in the language and I started to really enjoy the Irish language community and the / eh I suppose the Irish environment and events we had em courses the first time we went for instance to the Oireachtas [largest Irish language festival in Ireland] em that inspired a lot / like I didn't know / I hadn't even heard of the Oireachtas before that [...] when I came to college / to university [...] I noticed for the first time [...] that I wasn't very fluent at all when I met other people from the Gaeltachts and there were people who spoke Irish like that was the first time I think that I spoke Irish to people who were the same age as me (G17, 40).

G1, 28 years of age, explains that a university lecturer helped advance his Irish. That shocked him because he believed he already spoke good Irish:

One thing she asked me was to choose a book that wasn't on the first year course and write a review on it and you could choose one on the course and everyone else did that but I made an effort and I wrote a review about another book and eh she invited me in to discuss the essay and she showed me the mistakes I made and I thought I'd done a great job on that essay and em she advised me I suppose you know that I had a lot of work to do but eh she gave me kind of (G1, 82) [...] confidence as well eh that she liked the essay a lot but that there were big weaknesses in my Irish so em things like that I suppose between support and I suppose that I was surprised / well I was shocked as well that I didn't do so well and eh a challenge I suppose that's the thing that drew me most to Irish definitely that I wasn't thinking about being a teacher like the rest of them so it didn't have anything to do with progressing em in life or anything like that it was a personal thing (G1, 85).

According to G22, 25 years of age, there is a link between fluency and the accuracy expected in the formal learning context of university. He says he greatly improved because lecturers and tutors corrected him:

I think I understood it at a very young age but when we're talking about fluency I suppose I became fluent when I started university I have to say because there were lecturers there there were tutors there and that was the first time ever I think that people were correcting me instead of praising me do you know? / it's different when you're in university thank you for choosing Irish as a university subject but at the same time you have to achieve a certain level every year and the praise stops and the correcting begins you know I'll accept that that's grand / I suppose I started to become fluent in university (G22, 73).

#### 6.4 Awakening new speakers' awareness of politics or identity

Some new speakers mention political or identity circumstances which motivated them to bring about a *muda*. According to G23, 22 years of age, promoting minority languages means challenging globalisation. This is a political understanding, rooted in socialism and republicanism, that influenced him and motivated him to use Irish outside of the education system.

Aye I was sort of fluent I suppose since I was a child em but I had no interest in the language until I was maybe fourteen years of age or thereabouts when I started wanting to speak Irish outside of school and that came with a political understanding I think (G23, 58) [...] I became more republican and socialist and the like and kind of against globalisation and every thing and I understood that the language was important because of that and that it was connected to identity (G23, 60).

A university teacher influenced G21, 40 years of age, when he drew his attention to Irish, Dublin and European identity. G21, as an urban Irish speaker, enjoyed being able to understand the language issue within the concept of cultural nationalism:

Your man influenced me and he fostered maybe love for the language and a certain understanding of issues of identity and how important the language was as part of my identity as a Dub and as an Irishman and yeah it's very important and yeah as a European even with that that's where those particular understandings came from / before that I think you don't consider those matters objectively you just accept you have to do Irish for the Leaving (G21, 54).

Older new speakers often comment on the cultural nationalism as an inspiration that brought about a linguistic *muda* or at least made them decide to start relearning Irish. That can be seen in the following two extracts from interviews with B10, a 54 year old woman and B7, a 50 year old woman. Those two women are involved in a conversation group in a rural area and they spoke both English and Irish in the interviews. B10 claims Irish is part of the Irish people's DNA and she describes its importance in terms of nationalism. This *muda* is not as explicit as the others but it seems the affinity with nationalism motivated this woman's decision to take part in the conversation group:

I went back studying and teaching and was teaching in the [County name] VEC for thirteen years and I resigned from my job last year and it's only now I'm thinking about Irish and about / and that there are a lot of people from Poland in Ireland and they're speaking in their language and I was thinking it's very important that the people of Ireland speak in their own language too so you know it's only lately that I'm even thinking of it but it is I would hate to lose it I don't know I would just hate to lose it like you'd hate to lose em people I think it's part of our DNA you know so (B10, 64).

B7 also speaks about Irish in terms of cultural nationalism although she only spoke English in that part of the interview:

I think back to the am / that I discovered that Irish was our language / that English wasn't our language / and the shock I got / 10 or 11 years of age / I just couldn't believe / I don't know what it is / I remember being shocked and kind of ashamed that we weren't speaking our own language / that we were speaking another language of another country (B7, 112).

Irish is a sign of identity for N4, 34 years of age from Northern Ireland. He says that there was a strong link between Irish and his identity and that he understands that the language would distinguish him from people with other identities. This extract suggests that that identity motivated the linguistic *muda* because he believed Irish would strengthen that identity even more:

I think I was a little revolutionary too and I was brought up in a revolutionary town in the north / the town I come from is a Republican town no doubt and I think that there was / that kind of feeling was obvious you know // and that identity was extremely important to us as I said it was extremely important to my mother / and I think that everyone in our community felt that identity was incredibly important to us and then in the eighties there was a lot of trouble on the streets and we were there and the other side were there and we had to wear signs to show who we were and I suppose I thought Irish was part of that / you know that it was a serious way to develop my own identity and to recognise who I was in this world (N4, 19).

### **6.5 Gaeltacht heritage of the new speaker**

Some participants mention their own Gaeltacht heritage as a factor which motivated a linguistic *muda*. B13, 60 years of age, was raised in an area that used to be a Breac-Ghaeltacht. She says she started relearning Irish because of a conversation with a famous Irish language broadcaster when she was unable to hold a conversation in Irish with him. B13 has limited Irish and she spoke English in this part of the interview:

I think so we'll keep plodding away one of the things / you know one of the things that em / prompted me to do more with the Irish I got a phone call on one day right outside the coffee shop and who was it Seán Bán Breatnach and eh we had a conversation and I spluttered and made loads of mistakes and we had a conversation anyway and then it was over and he rang again and I spluttered through what had to be said and explained what we were trying to do now / this is going back three years ago and I was saying here am I Seán Bán Breatnach is ringing me and I should have better Irish I'm from an area which was a Gaeltacht once and that was one of the things that prompted me most so that I could have a better command of the language because I wanted to / anyway (B13, 243).

K1, 32 years of age, who was raised speaking English in the Gaeltacht has a very different linguistic background. He speaks about a very definite defining moment when he understood he would have to improve his Irish. In the following extract, he explains he attended an additional Irish course for the Leaving Certificate where the teacher asked him why he was

there as he came from the Gaeltacht. He was embarrassed his Irish was not fluent enough and he decided to bring about a *muda*:

The day the change happened I suppose like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus that's what that's what my / my old secondary school teacher said to me because I had a watershed moment I was attending a Leaving Certificate [...] course it was on down in [name of place] and [name of woman] [...] was the person running the workshop eh for people on the same day and [...] nobody was there from the Gaeltacht you could say but myself and I remember she spoke to us and she / well she was very nice as a teacher and very kind to us and everything but when she / when she asked me why I was there since I'm from the Gaeltacht and it wasn't in a harsh way or in any way mean eh or anything but she just wanted I suppose to get me to talk as well but I became sort of eh [...] / I wasn't discouraged but eh I was shocked because I was there and I suppose that that / that em a door was opened in my mind and eh I was [...] sort of embarrassed in a way (K1, 56) [...] I remember that day we were doing the / the oral exam the next morning so I went home that night and I stood in front of some mirror eh and I was speaking Irish to myself and trying to scrub the rust I suppose and the dust / off the Irish I had and from then on I became very interested in Irish (K1, 57).

G6, 22 years of age, has a similar background. He was raised speaking English in the Gaeltacht but he decided to speak Irish to his mother, a native speaker, when he was a teenager. His decision was reinforced while in university when he met other Gaeltacht speakers:

I speak Irish to my mother now that's maybe four or five years ago / em until then we'd usually speak in English eh I decided when I was younger maybe fifteen / sixteen / seventeen years of age that I should eh to make more of an effort / to prompt her to speak Irish to me because / because she has great / great / wonderful Irish and I wanted to learn that accent and that richness and I eh / especially now that I'm in college I see people around me who have Irish which is really natural / really fluent really idiomatic too and I want I'm trying to find a dialect my own dialect and I think the best way to do that is to speak Irish (G6, 36).

## 7. Competence in Irish

Many new speakers indicate they have negative opinions of their own competence to communicate with people who are more fluent than they are or who are native speakers. Some evaluate their own Irish harshly and say they are worried that their Irish will deteriorate because of a lack of contact with other speakers. Conversely, some new speakers also have positive opinions about themselves. According to some, they are competent speakers or they are competent enough for their communication needs.

### 7.1 Negative opinions regarding new speakers' competence

Some new speakers feel uncomfortable with their competence and say that they are not fluent yet or that their ability to express themselves is limited. Hybrid speakers sometimes encounter comprehension difficulties with native speakers and a lack of practice affects other people. Even in the case of new speakers who have achieved a high level of fluency, or who have a good understanding of a traditional dialect, they often say that their learning is not at an end yet.

Some new speakers speak about how difficult it becomes to protect their competence in Irish if they do not have enough opportunities to practice the language. Many speakers outside of the Gaeltacht have that problem but it is an even larger problem in a unionist area in Northern Ireland as N3, 33 years of age, explains:

When I came back first / I did a postgrad in education in [college] and I had opportunities there to speak and practice Irish / I did the teaching degree through Irish and I had opportunities in the city as well / and I took advantage of all those opportunities / but since I moved back to [town name] I don't have the same opportunities to speak Irish and I feel my Irish is getting worse all the time / but I was lucky that I was working with [Irish language organisation] and I was travelling to Gaelscoils and so I had opportunities to use my Irish but now that I'm working in the English sector I don't have those opportunities / I try to listen to RnaG [Gaeltacht radio station] when I'm driving to work and home again and whenever I speak to my friends from college / we mostly speak Irish to each other / to be honest / I suppose the amount of Irish we speak has fallen to about 60% or even 50% of the time because we're falling out of the habit (N3, 15).

B15, 18 years of age, says he does not get enough opportunities to speak Irish and he believes he only has a moderate competence:

Compared to other people well I'd have to admit / I have to be honest too compared to people who live in Connemara or Dingle too I wouldn't have the same level of fluency because I sort of have a lack of practice during the year / I speak English most of the time / I won't have the same practice but compared to other people I have a lot more as I said before because of my friends some would have none / there are only two or three and they have Irish so because of that / I think / I think I'm in the middle

compared to people who have no Irish at all and people who have a very high standard of Irish (B15, 68).

B4, a 60 year old woman, who is relearning Irish in a conversation group, says that the lack of practice and self-confidence affects her too:

Well yeah at that point when I was about twenty one it was maybe three years since I had left school so my Irish was sort of hard drive at the point so that's why I was looking for words oh my God where you know you have the words but they're kind of locked away you know it's difficult it's / you're not able to / it's difficult to think and as well as that there's a lack of self-confidence / oh my God I'm not able to speak like this because I have no experience but so that's the reason I was slow [...] I believe everyone has it you know it's just a lack of practice (B4, 30).

Even in the case of new speakers who are expert speakers and who have made a particular effort to acquire a traditional dialect, that same lack of self-confidence is often apparent. When he was interviewed G1, 28 years of age, was about to graduate with a postgraduate degree in Irish but even so he was disappointed not to know all the rules of the language:

I was frustrated I suppose about learning the language / you're always frustrated learning Irish / it's hard I suppose em there are other languages that are much harder than Irish but even so it's hard enough and em especially writing Irish eh when I see an essay I wrote and red marks on it I'm frustrated I have to say eh I'm about to graduate from [postgraduate degree course] and I'm still making mistakes / there are things I don't understand I don't like that that frustrates me I have to say em I suppose my Irish is limited and that upsets me because I'm not able to express myself effectively at times that's something that would frustrate anyone when they're using the second language I suppose but it's difficult there's a particular difficulty with Irish because you know you can always switch to English (G1, 117).

Although he usually uses a traditional dialect for his own speech, G15, 26 years of age, says he might have difficulties understanding native speakers who use very traditional variants of Irish:

Em I'm proud enough of my English I have to say both the dialect and LF terminology and it'd be hard to compete with that / I'm alright in Irish there are some fairly big gaps em / still say if I was talking to an old man from the Gaeltacht who was talking quickly there's a good chance a lot of those words would be ambiguous to me and em I'd like to be able to fix that so I wouldn't / I wouldn't say I'm very fluent but I'm alright (G15, 56).

Some new speakers are uncomfortable with the label 'fluent' and they understand it is difficult to define it. Although he works in the Irish language sector, G5, 32 years of age, does not believe he is fluent yet:

Em fluency is a dangerous word LF I'd say I was about twenty or so and even then even to this day I wouldn't say I'm a fluent speaker / I don't like / I'm reluctant to use



that word it depends on who's talking to me / am I comfortable with that person / how friendly am I with him / what dialect does he speak (G5, 66).

G6, 22 years of age, was raised in a monolingual English family in the Gaeltacht but he has made a significant effort in recent years to improve his competence. He says there are practical difficulties for people who wish to do so because of the great variety of language competence among the people who interact with the new speaker. Being in the Gaeltacht or among 'other enthusiasts' is needed to achieve a higher level:

That's something which I'm ashamed about I suppose that my Irish is still at a lower level than my English eh especially the vocabulary and stuff like that em I suppose that's because of the influence on / on the way I use English in a much wider context that I do Irish em if you wanted to come out of the university completely fluent in Irish I'd say you'd have to live in the Gaeltacht or live with people who are happy to speak Irish eh in the house and that's something which you don't find usually em because people are so / people are so different coming to the university and you'd be lucky to meet other Irish language enthusiasts among / among your friends (G6, 76).

N4, 34 years of age, was raised in the North and he did not learn Irish until he was a teenager. Although he is a fluent speaker, he admits he needs to use English occasionally but he speaks about his experience as a journey of learning and he hopes to be more competent in the future:

I don't recognise you know / that I can say that I'm happy at any time with my standard of Irish but I hope I'm always improving // my own competence / we all depend on the odd English word here and there to help / especially people like me who learned Irish and who didn't learn much until we were teenagers but again I've said they have the same difficulties in the Gaeltacht again / to keep the English out of the speech but I'm competent in English / I'd be much more competent in English / that's my first language // but I hope / and as I say I'm always trying to add to it / that I can be as good some day in Irish but I still have some work to do (N4, 35).

B9, a 24 year old man, has some experience of linguistics as it was included in his university education. In the following extract, he uses the technical term 'near native' and says that that label does not apply to himself. He believes nobody who has not been raised speaking Irish can have a 'natural' accent:

I understand that my kind of / Irish / kind of / em / my spoken Irish / maybe it isn't near native / I understand that (B9, 80).

Why? (B9-I, 81).

I don't have the accent like / you don't have the accent / people don't have the accent except in those places where the children are raised / like you know? (B9, 82)

In the Gaeltacht? (B9-I, 83)

In the Gaeltacht / well not even in the Gaeltacht / but when you're raising a child with Irish / so / that's the accent / that's a natural accent (B9, 84).

Although they admit they still have some work to do, some new speakers are happy with their competence in light of the learning resources available to them to date. For instance, G3, 26 years of age from the United States, emphasises how little contact she had with Irish before coming to Ireland:

I'm not great LF I'm not as good as I'd like to be em / I'd like to be totally fluent and em but with the / the resources I had eh em I think I did a good job em I had / I had those teachers for a few years but / a couple of years ago [teacher] moved to another state [...] so I had to do my own study by myself and a little with [husband] but em I studied by myself and while I was in school at university and while I was / teaching in em an extremely challenging position I didn't have a good chance to focus on Irish and I had this chance this year and a little em last year so because of that I think I'm doing well but I'd like to focus on it more (G3, 48).

B14, 24 years of age, works as a teacher in a Gaelcholáiste. She says Irish speakers learn from each other and although she admits her Irish is not perfect, she believes that her competence is enough for her job:

I know I can be here as a teacher and that my Irish is good enough / well I hope it is in any case / to be a teacher in a Gaelcholáiste and I'm happy with that / when I want to compare my Irish to other people we're all learning from each other and that's a wonderful thing / my Irish wouldn't be as good as other teachers or other speakers / that's fine I accept that / but I'm happy the standard I have / with the standard I have now / although I have to go back to the grammar rules and things like that and it would be kind of nice / to learn more / but at the same time I'm a primary school teacher and I deal with second class and I'm not going to lecturers / to / not lecturers to lectures anymore so maybe some day (B14, 88).

## **7.2 Positive opinions regarding new speakers' competence**

Although some new speakers show a lack of self-confidence in their competence in Irish, others are happy or reasonably happy with it. Some of those people are hybrid speakers and others would be closer to the expert profile. According to some experts, they are very comfortable speaking Irish but no-one is perfect and they always want to improve their Irish. Some new speakers report they have a natural affinity with languages in general. Others believe there is no need to be as 'perfect' as the native speaker to be a good speaker.

B11, a 23 year old woman, believes she is competent enough in Irish and she was always interested in languages:

I suppose I have fairly good Irish em I'm not sure really I always liked Irish and em it came quite easily for me I suppose maybe in comparison to other things (B11, 52).

G8, a 22 year old man from the United States who previously studied linguistics, speaks a few languages. He believes Irish is his third language in terms of competence:

Well now perhaps I'm / stronger yeah I'd say I'm stronger in / in Irish that I was in French usually I'd say / I'd say oh well I speak English definitely and after English I speak French I speak Irish but now I'm not practicing French [...] Irish would be in the second or third place between French between French and Irish (G8, 66).

B19 is 65 years of age and he uses the media as a measure of his competence. He says he understands radio and television programmes and that he can communicate with anybody in Irish:

It's hard to say but the thing I say is if there's an Irish language programme on the radio or television I'm able to understand it / and em I have a lot of time / I'm able to express my opinions to anyone in Irish (B19, 61).

According to B5, 66 years of age, he is not as good as a native speaker but he believes he is a good speaker all the same:

Yeah well if you asked me that / em I have to admit I'm very fluent you know? I might not be as perfect as / as the native speaker but if I have the chance to think about it / that I have good fluency and a good standard of language and I'm happy with that you know? (B5, 66)

Some of the experts speak about how comfortable they are speaking Irish now, or they explain that they achieved a reasonably high level of competence as children. In the case of G11, 24 years of age, who was raised speaking English near the Gaeltacht, he remembers being able to speak Irish while in primary school:

That's a very subjective question I suppose em when I was in primary school I was very comfortable and I remember I used to speak Irish to people not often because it's hard maybe when other people aren't interested but I used to be able to speak Irish comfortably and when I wanted something I could express that to the other person although it wasn't / although I was making lots of mistakes and I didn't use the proper case or whatever but I was able to express something and I suppose that that's what's important (G11, 102).

G16, 30 years of age, comments on regular Gaeltacht visits which helped her achieve a high level of competence:

I'd say I'm a good speaker em I hope anyway I always did my best to keep in touch with Gaeltacht people and go to the Gaeltacht regularly when I was em learning and when I was doing the degree especially there were great schemes and you could go for two or three weeks to the Gaeltacht free of charge and I did that every year while I was in college and I stayed with great speakers while I was learning (G16, 113).

G20, 29 years of age, was raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht. She is reasonably happy with her written competence but she is unhappy when she makes mistakes while speaking. She believes her competence has deteriorated because she is a teacher:

At this point I suppose I have a high level of Irish em I don't know I wouldn't I don't think that / that well maybe there'd be the odd mistake or two in / in my writing but there wouldn't be that many and if I make a mistake when I'm talking that annoys me a lot LF you know but em but I see like since I started teaching that my Irish has / that it's deteriorated slightly (G20, 118).

G22 is 25 years of age and works in the Irish language sector. He believes he is a competent speaker and that he achieved that competence by making a conscious decision to improve his language skills:

I can say that it's a lot better that it was ten years ago and the reason for that is that I'm working in the Irish sector / I speak Irish daily and I speak to Irish speakers my job is in Irish / since I left college I've always been involved in the Irish sector so that motivated me to correct my Irish more than to learn Irish because you can learn a language but when you've got to a certain level you have to say to yourself look it / what am I going to do am I happy with this level or do I want to be a competent speaker and there is a difference between a competent speaker and a native speaker because I don't think I'm a native speaker but I do think I'm a competent speaker (G22, 69).

G23, 22 years of age, evaluates his Irish positively but he emphasises the importance of reading to achieve an even better competence:

I'm fairly fluent em and confident enough but still I think I can still learn a lot more about the language / I have new words to learn I read [...] and I see that there is so much richness to the language there are always new things to learn (G23, 76).

B8, 45 years of age, believes being a competent speaker means being able to have a natural conversation without thinking about it:

Well I suppose comfortable yeah comfortable and able to have any conversation / do any business anything through the medium of Irish that is eh yeah able to have a natural conversation because em I wasn't able to do that and I wanted to get that back I never had it when I was brought up I had broken school-Irish right (B8, 52) [...] now I think I can speak Irish without thinking (B8, 54).

## 8. Use of Irish

The use of Irish among new speakers is very varied, based on the speaker's profile. Hybrid speakers or speakers with limited competence tend to use the language less, as would be expected, but those subgroups report using the language regularly or quite regularly nonetheless. Various speakers mention the opportunities that cultural events such as music and theatre provide to use the language, as well as events relating to Irish language culture itself. In the case of fluent speakers (new speakers or Gaeltacht speakers) who do not speak Irish to their children, some participants are reluctant to criticise them although they find that decision regrettable. Certain new speakers believe they are Irish language conservationists and that they have a duty to pass the language on.

### 8.1 Conversation groups

A certain percentage of the new speakers attend conversation groups regularly. The interviews reveal that they do not share the same level of enthusiasm and commitment. Some are happy with this limited contact with Irish and they do not wish to achieve a high level of competence. Others wish for the conversation group to be a starting point so that they can continue studying Irish or later start a diploma or university course.

B21, 60 years of age, speaks about the local conversation group as a hobby and he emphasises the supportive relaxed atmosphere that prevails there:

And for the past two years we have a conversation group and that's why I'm going just to meet people and speak! (B21, 82) Well I take it nice and easy / I listen / well at my age I can listen / I have a lot / like even some of the lads at the conversation group they're slow enough putting sentences together so I listen / and I pick up whatever they're saying / and we accept things (B21, 178).

N1, 75 years of age, was awarded a degree in Irish when she was younger. She is a Northern Protestant and therefore the opportunities she has to experience Irish are limited. She takes part regularly in a conversation group as often as possible:

Well it's hard now since I don't study any more / you loose it / I have a chance to take part in an Irish conversation group once a week in [name of town] / I go as often as I can / and there's a small group in [other town] too who drink coffee together and who speak Irish to each other too once a week / I'm doing my best but I know I've lost so much Irish since I was awarded the degree a long time ago now / I have friends / friends I met through Irish and through the classes and the dances and so on (N1, 11).

B6 is 45 years of age and is doing a Diploma in Irish at the moment. She sent her daughter to a Gaelscoil. She wishes to use Irish professionally in the future. She started to relearn Irish in a conversation group:

I came maybe for two and a half years and I was very shy about speaking my Irish / I came a few times you know and I didn't open my mouth I was listening to them and bit by bit my Irish came you know from the depths of my memory to my lips again

and em I was able to talk to them / everyone has a different eh standard in the conversation group and they don't you know they sometimes use English and Irish and there's never any pressure you know with Irish the pressure you put on yourself to speak Irish in the conversation group and I think that's a good thing because it's open to everyone to come everyone has Irish em everyone who went to any primary or secondary school in this country has a few words but sometimes people are afraid like you know to speak (B6, 137).

## 8.2 Traditional Irish music and culture

Many participants mention cultural and music events as spaces for them in which to practice Irish. B5, a 66 year old man, refers to his experience with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann<sup>3</sup>:

I have a lot more opportunities to use my Irish with Comhaltas / because / it's the Comhaltas policy to have music and language together and therefore / like one thing we're doing at the moment is to use more bilingualism in our communications like say now eh everything Comhaltas does / say any book or leaflet or anything that they make it's in Irish and English and that's our policy now at the moment / and like I have a lot more opportunities like to use my Irish at the events or at everything we do in Comhaltas and so on / and like in recent years I notice that a lot more people are trying Irish you know at the events / say at the music festivals and the like (B5, 34).

G3, 26 years of age, is from the United States. She first became interested in Irish because of traditional music and spent some time in Ireland learning Irish. During that time, she spent a lot of time with other traditional musicians who spoke Irish:

When I started learning language / the language / there wasn't anything / there wasn't any big thing involved except that I became interested in culture of Ireland / in the culture of Ireland em through music and maybe the friends I had at that point and maybe that / that they em that they were related to people of Ireland and / from Ireland and things like that (G3, 58).

Some new speakers mention theatre groups or festivals as a social context in which the language can be used in an enjoyable informal manner (see also 6.3). According to B18, a 27 year old woman, that type of context fosters confidence in the use of the language:

As I said I'm very interested in drama and I started a group / now we're asleep and that's how I'll say it / for the last couple of years / but just because I'm back in college and I'll come back to that but I'm back in college at the moment / I wasn't able to keep the group going at the same time because I was directing and kind of producing and doing everything at the same time so but we had a group [group name] and there were up to twelve people actually and they put on a few plays and we did the rounds at the theatre festivals / they really enjoyed it I have to say (B18, 6).

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<sup>3</sup> Organisation which promotes Irish traditional music.

Other new speakers believe Irish is culturally important and that that should be conveyed to the public. In that way, they see themselves as sort of ambassadors for the language. In the case of G1, 28 years of age, that cultural and historical aspect is more important than political aspects such as public services or language rights:

I suppose one thing that damages the language is lack of knowledge it's important that there are people out there are able to eh explain the importance of Irish the richness of Irish to English speakers to people who can't speak the language who don't have a chance to read the language or understand it's important / in terms of being active in organisations I'm not as interested in that side of things but I'd be more than happy myself to spend time writing to give talks anything that would add to the knowledge the people of Ireland have about the language / I'd be happy to do that but I wouldn't be out looking for marches or anything like that em maybe I'd go out marching about other things but not about Irish I don't think (G1, 126).

### **8.3 Use of Irish in the family**

New speakers who are parents had varying experiences of using Irish at home. Some report they decided to use Irish as the family language, or English and Irish together. The children did not always learn to speak Irish fluently however. Other people did not speak Irish to their children, although some of the children became new speakers because of the education system regardless of the family context. B4, 60 years of age, married a man who spoke Irish and who motivated her to speak Irish when they had children:

Gradually then we were taking part in organisations for example Glór na nGael and you know in Irish in the community and promoting Irish and em when the children came you know we were interested you know every celebration you know christening you know when they started school names we chose [Irish names] just there was / and the Irish was sort of / we made room for Irish it was kind of a bilingual house you know and took part in / when a Gaelscoil was founded in the town in [name of place] (B4, 10)

And did you speak Irish to them when they were young? (B4-I, 70).

Yeah yeah you know they're not great as happens sometimes when the young people / when the parents are sort of enthusiastic about something but gradually as they get older they're wiser I suppose and they understand that / what the language and culture means yeah (B4, 71).

B20, 55 years of age, works professionally with Irish and is engaged in promoting Irish in his own area. He tries to speak Irish to his own children but admits he is not succeeding very well at the moment because they are not as enthusiastic about the language as he is:

I try to speak Irish to them but they're all in university now all three of them and because of that / I understand completely they're hard at it studying different subjects such as Human Resources / Computing / History and English and they have an exam / they have exams every week / they have schoolwork every week and it's very difficult

to speak Irish to them when they're concentrating on their own study but I'm not saying I don't speak Irish to them / yeah I speak Irish to them when I can but I speak very little Irish to them because I understand the situation they're in and I know there'll be plenty of pressure on them after finishing in college / there'll be plenty of Irish then from that point on (B20, 150).

B21, a 60 year old man, says he did not speak Irish to his children when they were young. His daughter speaks Irish fluently now however because she has friends on a Gaeltacht island:

Oh I never pushed Irish on her at all / at all at all / there are four girls and one lad but I left it up to them / I'm a father more than a teacher so I didn't push anything but if they needed help maybe they'd ask me (B21, 108).

J4, 37 years of age, attended a Gaelscoil and she worked in the Irish language sector but she spoke mainly English to her children because her husband speaks no Irish. The following excerpt is illustrative of the complexity of that issue. On one hand, J4 says using Irish with the children would have affected the 'intimacy' of the family but on the other hand she remembers that the Irish word 'te' [hot] is the first word her son spoke:

There's a certain intimacy in a family that would have been lost to us you know that way / having said that like sort of in the family history / the first word the eldest lad spoke was an Irish word you know he said the word 'te' when he was in the bath one night you know while he put his hand on the tap and he said 'te' as I used to when I'd give him a bath and speak Irish to him you know (J4, 128).

#### **8.4 Opinion of speakers who do not speak Irish to their children**

All the new speakers avoided judging when they were asked what their opinion is of other speakers, either new speakers or Gaeltacht speakers, who do not raise their children speaking Irish. The new speakers claim that parents who speak Irish fluently have every right to speak any language they wish with their children but many say it is a pity when English is chosen. Their answers illustrate that they understand how sensitive and complicated this issue often is. It is clear that many new speakers, especially those who are 'experts', see themselves as Irish language conservationists who would have a duty to pass the language on. However some new speakers claim the child could be deprived of his/her English heritage if s/he is raised speaking Irish.

In the first extract, B11, a 23 year old woman, reveals that she would be uncomfortable if Irish was forced on her as the family language but it appears to her nonetheless that the Gaeltacht community has a particular responsibility to speak it to their children:

Well I suppose if they don't have Irish em you know it's very hard to persuade them to learn it and then have it as the main language in the house that's a huge thing to ask of anyone but em but at the same time I suppose people who live in the Gaeltacht have a certain responsibility at some level to be conscious of Irish and to make a particular effort I suppose (B11, 78).



According to G15, 26 years of age, it is regrettable that a parent who speaks Irish would choose English since Irish has a certain distinctiveness:

They're a crying shame but of course they'd be able to defend that decision and I know certain people who did it / it's a wicked shame / it's a pity I mean LF I'm not saying shame or wicked to belittle them but em (G15, 114).

Why is it a pity? (G15-I, 115)

Well maybe this is a romantic perception but I like the language and I believe that language adds / to the distinctiveness of the country and it has its own distinctiveness and when a parent decides not to pass Irish on to the next generation we're all becoming a little more eh standardised (G15, 116).

G16, 30 years of age, illustrates that she understands that making Irish the family language will not come naturally and that the parents need to make a conscious decision about the issue:

You have to sit down and make a decision beforehand are you going to raise the family with English or Irish and there are certain cases and the speaker who wasn't raised with Irish goes makes that decision right I'm married to a native speaker and I'm going to make the decision right I'm going to learn Irish to be as good as my spouse so that we can raise the children with Irish but that rarely happens in my opinion (G16, 174).

G17, 28 years of age, was raised speaking English and Irish. In this extract, he reveals that he regrets anyone whose parents speak Irish being raised speaking English because Irish added so much to his own life:

It's hard to criticise them in a way because that's the decision they've made and I'm not going to criticise them but eh the thing I'd say is it shouldn't / I suppose the language is valuable and I believe it's one of the biggest values I got from my own parents that it opened this whole life up for me em that would be closed and that I wouldn't be part of if they hadn't spoken it to me em / so the thing I'll say is that the children will always benefit if Irish is spoken to them (G17, 111).

According to J2, a 48 year old woman, the child would be deprived of some of his/her traditional Irish heritage if Irish was not spoken to him/her:

It's very sad [...] and a friend of mine said it to me too / she was adopted as a child and when she went to look for her natural mother / find her mother she found out that her mother had Irish that she came from the Donegal Gaeltacht and that made her very angry well she was angry in any case that her mother was pressured to / to give her up but she was also angry that she was deprived of her traditional Irish heritage because of what happened to her mother and to her when she was / when she was born so I think it's very sad because you're depriving them of a heritage / it doesn't cost you any money to raise your children with Irish / it costs time maybe it's hard but

isn't it the most natural thing to raise your children in your own language? [...] so it makes me angry and it makes me sad that any parent wouldn't pass on his or her own native language to the children (J2, 93).

G2 claims that people in the Gaeltacht are often discouraged or have a lack of confidence about their Irish because of how complicated the sociolinguistic context is there and that criticism should therefore be avoided:

It's not up to me to judge anyone and there are personal circumstances / and for myself one thing I noticed about the contact I have with people in the Gaeltacht is that each and every one of them they feel insufficient they feel somewhat insufficient in their Irish perhaps the father in the family doesn't have Irish or maybe someone else was brought up or born abroad (G2, 148).

This extract from an interview with J1, a 33 year old woman, reveals that she believes that new speakers of Irish have a responsibility to speak Irish to their family as language transmission in the Gaeltacht cannot be relied on. This woman has a child but she raised him speaking English as her Irish was not very good at the time and she had not considered the issue much. She regrets that now:

If we're not going to do it who will? And it's the same thing that / people say why is the government / the state spending so much money on conserving Irish if the Irish don't do it the people in Spain or Russia won't nobody else is going to do it and the first place we start is with the children [...] if you don't have that transfer between generations you have nothing it doesn't matter about the telly and about / you're building / a house of cards without that foundation at all (J1, 121).

Conversely, G1 is unsure if would raise his family speaking Irish if he had children because so much of his cultural and heritage background relates to Hiberno-English. Even so, it is important to him that the children have some knowledge of Irish:

In terms of if I had a child would I bring them up with Irish I don't know because I wouldn't know about the personal circumstances in that case / it's very hard to bring up children with Irish / I have to think again about my own background em eh it'd be a little unnatural I think if I was speaking a language if I had children with the children that the grandparents didn't speak eh that would be strange and difficult I think it'd create difficulties and the question you asked about ownership / eh I don't like sort of that children wouldn't understand if I had children the kind of English I speak eh if they kind of know me / I think they'd have to get to know me that way in English maybe [...] / I'd like that they'd know about Ireland's culture and Hiberno-English as part of that culture as well as Irish / but it's very important that they'd know about Irish too (G1, 126).

## 9. New speakers' ideologies regarding the Gaeltacht

The data generated an enormous amount of material related to ideologies and identities of new speakers but for reasons of space we have decided to focus on one sub-theme i.e. ideologies of new speakers towards Gaeltacht speech and speakers. Although the majority of participants mentioned the Gaeltacht in some form or another, there were both positive and negative perceptions of the legitimacy of Gaeltacht speech as a target variety for new speakers.

### 9.1 Legitimacy of the Gaeltacht speaker and questions of ownership

The role of the Gaeltacht and Gaeltacht speakers as linguistic models was a reoccurring theme in the data. The topic came up in various ways, but naturally in the course of conversation when we asked participants about how they rated their level of Irish or through more direct probing on the part of the researchers. For most of the interviewees, the Gaeltacht was part of their consciousness and they placed a strong emphasis on the need to keep the Gaeltacht alive. For many it was used as a learning resource and as a destination for them to improve their own Irish and model their Irish on. There are several examples of this.

B10, a 54 year old woman from a rural non-Gaeltacht part of the country, pointed out that without the Gaeltacht it would be difficult to keep the language alive as there would be no destination for her or other learners like her:

Oh yeah that's right if there was no Gaeltacht it'd be very difficult [...] if there was no Gaeltacht regions we'd have no kind of destination and yeah yes they should be kept (B10, 76).

For many of the people we interviewed, an explicit link was made between speaking 'good' Irish and being from the Gaeltacht. This was paralleled with a downgrading of new speakers' own way of speaking Irish. B11, a 23 year old trainee teacher, pointed to the idea that because people from the Gaeltacht are brought up speaking Irish, they would have the language more 'naturally'. As we see in the excerpt below, she contrasts this with her 'learned' Irish from a Gaelscoil which is lacking a sense of place and without any traces of a local dialect:

And is there much of a difference between your Irish and the Irish those people from the Gaeltacht speak? (B11-I, 41).

Oh there would be yeah they'd have better Irish of course because they were brought up with Irish and em their Irish would be more natural than mine (B11, 42)

When you say better, why do you say that? (B11-I, 43)

Em well I suppose they're more fluent but I'm quite fluent myself and I speak learned Irish a sort of Gaelscoil Irish and the Irish they speak would be more natural (B11, 44)

When you say Gaelscoil Irish what kind of Irish is that? (B11-I, 45)

Eh I'm not sure really just em it's not a particular dialect it's just / it's not one particular dialect I suppose (B11, 46).

B 12, a 25 year old expert speaker shows a largely similar way of thinking saying that people from the Gaeltacht have a 'real *blas*' characterising her own Irish as 'saghas caighdeánach'. Although there is some level of acceptance of her own way of speaking, she feels a strong need like to spend time in the Gaeltacht like many other new speakers:

And what kind of Irish did they have compared to your Irish? (B12-I, 41)

They had more idioms / I think I have a sort of standard Irish you know they have the real accent and idioms and they use I don't know nice sentences they can put nice sentences together and just I thought they were they spoke so quickly too you know it took a couple of minutes for me to kind of understand it but that's what I thought anyway (B12, 42)

And do you think that can be learned do you intend to learn that accent or are you happy with your own accent? (B12-I, 43)

I think I'm happy with my own accent but I'd love to learn more natural idioms like they use at home but I think to learn that you have to spend a long time with them speaking to them and listening to them to pick it up (B12, 44)

In the Gaeltacht? (B12-I, 45)

In the Gaeltacht yeah (B12, 46).

B13, now retired and actively involved in improving her Irish through participation in weekly conversation groups in the local area, talks explicitly about the 'proper pronunciation' of Gaeltacht speakers and seeks out native speakers in her efforts to emulate this, classifying her own Irish as 'learner Irish':

They have wonderful Irish [...] I started speaking to him in Irish and he we had the most amazing conversation yeah beautiful Irish (B13, 100)

And when you say beautiful Irish what do you mean by? (B13-I, 101)

There was a flow there was an accent I would consider my Irish now as em eh learning the whole time trying to put sentences together eh but I suppose it's the new type of way that Irish is spoken (B13, 102).

However, her inability to access what she sees as the best Irish sometimes creates tensions as this involves what she perceives as expensive visits to summer colleges which not everyone can afford.

The admiration for the Gaeltacht *blas* comes up again and again in discussions with new speakers. B14, a young primary school teacher who works in an Irish language summer college talks about the ‘*fuaimanna*’ and ‘*an-bhlas*’ of certain speakers she knows and admires. As she puts it:

They had a great accent and there were differences just / the sound that’s it / that’s what my lecturer said to me [...] I had picked Irish as an arts subject and she said / just you’ll have to work on the way you say things / you’re accurate when you’re writing but you know the words / the sounds / you have to use some kind of accent / so there are differences definitely (B14, 26).

G15, a 26 year-old, gives importance to Gaeltacht Irish seeing it as a link to the past and an authentic way of speaking. He is against the creation of a Dublin or more urban dialect:

The way I look at it there’s only so much status to spread / to distribute among the language community and the more status or prestige or central dialect you associate with the Dublin dialect or whatever term is used for it now eh the more you take from the Gaeltacht’s status and therefore although we’re all in favour of the language in different ways em I feel that we neglect and even undervalue even if we don’t realise it em the Gaeltacht Irish and of course it’s much more important to have the Gaeltacht Irish than the central dialects (G15, 58)

Why is the Gaeltacht Irish more important? (G15-I, 59)

Having that unbroken gap in the general public’s identity it’s quite important to us that we feel a connection with / with the / with the generations that came before us with our ancestors and therefore it is quite philosophical and it’s not that it worries me greatly from day to day but nonetheless em it’s more valuable de facto that link being unbroken rather than broken as it would be on the Isle of Man for example (G15, 60)

[...]

But you, it’s clear you have a great admiration for those people’s speech in general? (G15-I, 63)

I have great admiration for the native speaker who makes an effort to keep the language alive and who is happy to really reflect on the words he or she uses from day to day for the / for the kind of person who makes a conscious effort to avoid English because he or she believes that / that it’s for the sake of the language (G15, 64).

The Gaeltacht speech is idealised but is nonetheless seen as out of reach or unattainable by many new speakers. While many new speakers talked about efforts to emulate Gaeltacht speech they felt that that they could never sound as ‘natural’ as someone brought up in

traditional Irish speaking parts of the country.

## 9.2 Challenges to legitimacy of Gaeltacht speech

Although she admires the Gaeltacht pronunciation, B14 also expresses less positive ideologies towards Gaeltacht speech. She legitimises her way of speaking as different. Because she is not from the Gaeltacht, she feels that she can never really sound like someone from there. For her, speaking what she refers to as ‘a less natural’ sounding Irish is more important than not speaking any Irish at all:

Do people outside of the Gaeltacht have that kind of accent? (B14-I, 27).

I don't think they do / I don't think / that makes sense to me because I wasn't brought up with Irish and people weren't brought up with Irish // so // it's hard to say / it can be learned it can be picked up but I don't think it's as natural for those people as it is for Gaeltacht people and if it is you have to make an effort to show that accent and you have to / not even thinking about but you have to / you emphasise certain words to show that accent / it might not come out as naturally / but that's how it is for us / I was talking to [name of person] and he said ‘We're not from the Gaeltacht / we're in County [name] / why would we have the same accent as people from Dingle?’ So that's it / at least we have Irish / so / that's the most important thing! (B14, 28)

G2, a 29 year old who speaks an idiomatic variety close to Gaeltacht speech, displays a similarly ambiguous position. On the one hand she gives pride of place to the Gaeltacht accompanied by a purist ideology which supports the idea of keeping Irish ‘clean’ from English influences. For instance, she talks about ‘an Ghaelainn a choimead Gaelach’ (‘keeping the Irish language Irish’) (G2, 106). On the other hand, she dislikes the fetish associated with the native speaker of Irish, recognising that while her own new speaker Irish is not perfect, she took pride in her efforts towards greater fluency.

Although many new speakers see the Gaeltacht as important for the future of the language, they also recognise the fact that a new sociolinguistic reality is emerging outside of the traditional Irish-speaking communities, something which new speakers see themselves as playing a part in shaping:

Oh that's a good question [...] is the Gaeltacht needed? Well in terms of I suppose in terms of planning and the like / it's difficult to answer that question / is the Gaeltacht needed? I think the Gaeltacht is needed / we need to return to somewhere which is sort of / natural [...] it hasn't been destroyed by anyone else (B14, 66).

Are there a lot of Irish speakers outside the Gaeltacht? (B14-I, 67).

Yes definitely / sure / I speak / I have Irish and so do the people here / none of us were brought up no-one you were talking to / we weren't brought up speaking Irish at

all / so yeah there is Irish outside of the Gaeltacht areas especially now since there are a lot of Gaelscoils / Gaelcholáiste / there is a lot / there / there is a lot of demand for them / there is a certain status associated with the language now / that's wonderful (B14, 68).

Admiration for the Gaeltacht speech is often accompanied by a sense of sadness and nostalgia at the loss of the traditional way of speaking associated as depicted in the excerpts below from B20, a 55 year old language activist. He has made a concerted effort to ensure that his Irish is anchored in a local way of speaking and has undergone an intensive study of the now moribund dialects of what used to be a Gaeltacht area. He is also of the opinion that the Gaeltacht should be maintained as Irish-speaking and expresses some mild criticism at the fact that Gaeltacht speakers are switching to English:

Inside the Gaeltacht all native speakers should have historical Irish with no changing to English / that's the rule but they are no longer there you know? / when I listen to Raidió na Gaeltachta [Gaeltacht radio service] now I haven't listened to it for the past year but you'd rarely hear a native speaker a real native speaker because they no longer exist they are all dead at this stage you know? But outside of the Gaeltacht yeah I suppose a good speaker [would be] the likes of [Áine] over there or [Mícheál] / were you talking to [Mícheál]? (B20, 226).

...they are going in the direction of English // they don't speak naturally anymore and they are making a mess of the whole thing (B20, 42).

For other new speakers, there was often a recognition that the Gaeltacht, while important, was not the only model of the contemporary Irish-speaking community and that some recognition should also be given to 'learners' who are seen to be in a majority. There were some clear counter arguments to the native speaker ideal such as B1, a younger speaker who perceived no link between native speakers and the Gaeltacht. For her, native speakers of Irish were people who 'always spoke the language' irrespective of where they were from (B1, 110).

A similar ideology was expressed by B6, a 45 year old woman from Dublin who had moved to a semi-rural area and was sending her daughter to a Gaelscoil.

Speak it I don't care LF you know I understand that the sounds are very important but it is more important to make an effort you know // I am not from the Gaeltacht you know I was never living there I have Dublin Irish so that's it you know and I make an effort and you know another person I am another person who speaks Irish (B6, 199).

You know it's a kind of a thing of a them and us situation and they don't they're not interested in the life of the language and the language being kept going they see it as theirs and you've no right to it we're all of the same nationality and it's just you know by the grace of God that they were born where they were born and you know for

anyone else who'd like to learn Irish and wasn't brought up in an Irish speaking home it's unfortunate you know // the attitude has to change but the government has to change it as well and it wouldn't do any harm to take to change the status and to give places like [name of place] and places where they make an effort to keep the language alive (B6, 356)

While agreeing that native speakers are important if the language is to be kept alive B5, a 55 year old from a semi-urban part of the country, broadens the scope beyond the Gaeltacht to include Irish language media e.g. TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta which are seen as important resources for people such as himself living outside the Gaeltacht:

Can the language be kept alive without the native speakers? If there aren't speakers ... (B5-I, 71).

I don't think it can / you need / you need a lot / a lot / to hear the language you have to hear them often and like since we have Raidió na Gaeltachta in this country and TG4 that's happening [...] there are a lot more opportunities since [...] Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 were founded / if you think about the past / in the past there was no Raidió na Gaeltachta and no TG4 people didn't have much of a chance to listen or to hear the language from day to day! You know the only chance they had was to go to the Gaeltacht to hear the language you know? So that's a good thing like there are a lot more opportunities now and thinking of [...] the amount of Gaelscoils catering for the language in every / in every part of the country (B5, 72).

### **9.3 Ownership of Irish**

Linked to questions of legitimacy and the Gaeltacht were questions of ownership of Irish. Participants were asked if they considered Irish to be their language or if they claimed ownership of it. The majority of participants referred to English as their first or native language and to Irish as a language in which they wished to become more competent. The following excerpt is illustrative of this. B10 is a 65 old woman, now retired and an active member of a local Irish language conversation group:

If you're asked em what's your language? (B10-I, 73)

My language yeah that's a difficult question you know because every day I speak English but I'm very interested in English and I read // isn't that funny that question I suppose just English really if I were to be really honest because you know I'll go to the library today I'll take out an English book in English because it's too difficult (B10, 74).

Some participants also felt they hadn't enough Irish to be categorised as Irish speakers or that they didn't use it with sufficient regularity. B16 is a 55 year old woman who like B10 above is committed to improving her Irish through regular participation in her local Irish language



conversation group. As she indicates below, in the census form she would prefer to list Irish as ‘her language’:

If you’re asked what’s your language, what would you say? (B16-I, 138)

Well in the census in that / I’d put in both I think / ach I suppose I have to say English / that unfortunately / that’s it’s English yeah / I hate saying it / it’s the language you’re using but I’d say it with great reservation do you know? [...] / I’d prefer to say Irish but I don’t speak enough [of] it / but I do put in both in the census / say I’m an Irish speaker (B16, 139).

G20, a 29 year-old woman, was brought up speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht. Although she refers to Irish as her first language, as someone who was brought up outside of traditional Irish speaking areas she lacks legitimacy compared to the Gaeltacht speaker who ‘own’ Irish more than her:

Is Irish yours do you think do you think it’s your language do you own it as a language? (G20-I, 143)

It’s my language yeah but again em I feel that / that the people in the Gaeltacht own it in a way that’s bigger / that’s stronger than I do (G20, 144)

Why? (G20-I, 145)

Well because / because they are from a Gaeltacht community or they are part of an Irish-speaking community but I was brought up in an Irish-speaking family inside an English-speaking community so that’s why (G20, 146)

So the Gaeltacht speakers have more ownership or a bigger right to the language? (G20-I, 147)

I don’t think they have a bigger right but but maybe they have more ownership and they have a wider experience too of / of spending their whole life through Irish than I do (G20, 148)

## 10. New speakers' opinions regarding language policy

Some of the new speakers feel they have a duty to be pro-Irish services and to use those services, if they are available. However, not everyone is in agreement about the importance of language rights. Some new speakers are happy to protest to demand their rights and others are not as excited about those issues. New speakers who are experts tend to be more unhappy with language policy than new speakers who have a more limited competence.

### 10.1 Duty of new speakers to support services in Irish

Some of the new speakers believe they must use Irish language services when available. There is however a difference between Northern Ireland and the Republic in regard to that issue. In the case that no language rights exist, other actions the new speaker could utilize to add to the use of Irish are emphasised.

G20, 29 years of age, was raised speaking Irish. She believes she must continue speaking Irish as it is a minority language at risk:

I feel I have a duty to continue speaking Irish and protecting the language you know if I see signage bad signage or something to ring the Language Commissioner maybe / I've done it I don't do it enough but I feel I have / I don't know but it's not / it's not just a duty / I like the language I don't know (G20, 106).

[...] What creates the duty? (G20-I, 107)

Because it's a minority language I suppose yeah that it's at risk and if I don't do it who will? Because we can't depend on other people to do everything so yeah (G20, 108).

N2, a 33 year old man who was very involved in Irish language politics in the North in the past, says that language rights are much more limited in the north. In the absence of those rights, he emphasises the way Irish can be used with friends and family regardless of the authorities:

If I lived in the south I'd say I have certain language rights / I can deal with the state for instance in Irish / I can get all my certs and paperwork in Irish down south / I can access Irish language education / most of time in the south without any problems well there are problems there too it's much easier in the south / in the north I have no right to contact the state in Irish / the access to Gaelscoil schools or Irish classes isn't as wide as it would be in the Republic / so I have certain rights but I suppose I don't spend that much time talking / thinking about my rights in the areas I use Irish / you don't need legal permission to use Irish // that's my social life / my personal life it's easy enough to use Irish when you're with Irish-speaking people / sometimes people are too dependent on the state to do certain things / you can do a lot in your own personal life / you can speak Irish to your children and foster an Irish environment around you so I don't need any particular rights to do that / you can do a lot without state intervention (N2, 45).

## 10.2 Subjective importance of language rights among some new speakers

Although new speakers believe it is important to cater for those who wish to deal with the state in Irish, they would not all demand those rights for themselves. While some new speakers take part in protests to demand their rights, there are others on the other side who are not very excited about these issues at all. The interviews conducted with new speakers in the North reveal that they only show conditional support for a language act. In the case of the following extracts, it should be remembered that all the speakers are experts and therefore that there would be no linguistic barrier to them using Irish services if those services were available.

G10, 28 years of age, was raised speaking English and Irish and although he used to have a radical attitude about Irish, that has diminished in recent years. He would not seek Irish services if not easily available:

For me it's not important eh that I can go to the courthouse and if I was / if I was stopped in the car drinking or something and if I was in front of the court I'd have no problem speaking English em if it was an Irish form that stopped / or that it would delay the case I wouldn't like that eh I don't like asking for Irish unless it's easy to do so eh if it's easy to get the service through the medium of Irish (G10, 208).

According to G15, 26 years of age, speaking the language socially is more important than state services being available in Irish:

I'm not really into politics em / I don't know about rights and stuff like that / yeah it should we should all be able to speak whatever language we want / about catering like you mentioned I really feel that it's up to the individual to promote the language instead of depending on or expecting the Government to help us with it / what I'd say is that as long as nobody interferes with us / as long as we aren't opposed when we're speaking the language it's up to ourselves (G15, 52).

Conversely, J3, 26 years of age, always demands Irish services. He admits he is often frustrated however and he reveals he understands the challenge of providing a public service in a minority language:

Especially when I'm trying to deal with the government I'm always fighting with them em but still em I know what the reality is and I'm never angry with anyone who doesn't speak Irish in the government but I'd like if that changed and I'm always optimistic that those services will be available / there are always conflicts especially when you speak a minority language that people rarely hear spoken sometimes it frustrates other people and therefore [...] it frustrates me I think (J3, 95).

N1, a Northern Protestant, believes that some kind of legal protection should be given to Irish in the North but that every service need not be made available in Irish:

Well I suppose it's important that the languages act is in effect to protect the language / but it's not always necessary to translate everything to Irish / I think in the

Parliament when everyone speaks English but it's important that the language has some protection (N1, 43).

N4 says he was very involved in the first major campaign for a language act in the North in 2007 and 2008 but that his optimism has waned slightly since then. He believes that it might be better to promote Irish using goodwill in light of how sensitive the issue is in the North:

I've lost a bit of hope in those campaigns / there's a campaign on at the moment and I've sent petitions for that and so on // but I'm not sure // it's not that I've lost hope excuse me in the campaigns / I've lost hope in the benefits we'd get from an Irish act in the North / maybe I'm not as radical as I once was but I think that if the Irish act came in in the North it would create more problems / I'm in favour of promoting Irish based on creating goodwill for Irish [...] / I think if an Irish act is brought in and if Irish is forced on certain parts of the community in the North that it would create more hate than there is already / I mean that happened in the south although the public is more sympathetic towards the language / the hate came about because Irish was forced on people (N4, 45).

It is more likely that new speakers who are experts are unhappy with the language policy or that they are frustrated with it. Because they are more competent in Irish, they can use the state's Irish services more often or seek those services and therefore they have experience of the standard or the effect of those services. In the case of speakers who have a more limited competence, it seems that it is important to them that there is a language policy but not necessarily that they are competent enough to actively test aspects of that policy.

G16, 30 years of age, reveals she is frustrated with how hard it is to use or seek Irish services because they are not always available. She indicates that the extra effort is not always recognised and claims that the new speaker's Irish should not be corrected or criticised if that person is using state services in Irish:

People should be able to em speak Irish and that they wouldn't be under pressure and that it wouldn't be kind of you know 'beat them with a stick' if you make a mistake or that anyone would correct you I don't like it when people correct me you know I'm fighting a hard battle every day for the cause so relax you know I'm doing my best LF and when I'm in the library and when I'm trying to speak Irish and get things in Irish / always fighting a battle to get forms in Irish so if people complain to me just I don't like it to be honest but em we have to encourage the young people and get rid of the stick (G16, 140).

Conversely, although B45 is a fluent speaker, he reveals he is happy that the Irish services exist. Although he did not speak Irish to his own family for the sake of employment opportunities, he likes being able to deal with the state in Irish now:

You could say maybe that Irish is among the things among the tools I want to give to my children so they'll have Irish but I don't want anyone giving them a job just because of that that they can speak Irish there are other things which are much more

important in this life but I like it now that I can pick up the phone and ring the tax office and take care of things in Irish and I love that and they don't get many calls like that in the office and I think when you ring an office like that and when you press one to do your business in Irish the person who talks to you well you have a similar outlook they understand you / Irish speakers / they're an Irish speaker too (B8, 86).

## 11. Conclusions

In this report we set out to analyse part of an existing corpus of data about new speakers of Irish. Based on a sample of 46 interviews and some additional correspondence with interviewees, we analysed the data under three overarching themes: the sociolinguistic background of new speakers, their use of Irish and their ideologies towards it.

### 11.1 Findings of the report

The report reveals that new speakers of Irish are from a variety of sociolinguistic backgrounds, both in terms of family upbringing and experience of the education system. Most were raised with English as the only home language and acquired Irish through the education system. However, smaller numbers heard some Irish from family members in their youth or grew up in households where some Irish was used. Others experienced very positive attitudes towards Irish from parents or other peers. The majority attended English-medium school but several reported having inspirational Irish teachers. Some attended Gaelscoileanna or in the case of the older cohort the historical ‘A’ schools which were also Irish-medium. The report illustrates that not all educational experiences of Irish are negative and that positive experiences may encourage people to become new speakers at a later stage.

New speakers also report a variety of *mudes* or critical junctures in their lives when they made a significant shift towards the use of Irish. The most common trigger for these changes was experience of the Gaeltacht, often a summer college as a teenager. However, many more competent speakers reported that the years spent at university were crucial in bringing them into contact with other regular speakers, a sociolinguistic change which often brought about a *muda*. Triggers related to identity and ideological stances such as cultural nationalism or anti-globalisation were also identified.

The report illustrates that new speakers make both negative and positive self-evaluations of their competence in Irish. Even highly competent speakers often express a belief that they are still on a learning journey and although they may describe themselves as fluent, they often lack confidence compared to Gaeltacht speakers. However, others appear less concerned about their level of competence and consider it appropriate to their professional or social needs.

Irish is used in a variety of settings by new speakers. One group of speakers describes how they use Irish in more limited social settings such as ‘ciorcail chomhrá’. Others explain how they came to use Irish through cultural activities such as music and drama. Some new speakers were raised with Irish (or Irish and English) outside the Gaeltacht and continue to use it with their own families. Others do not speak Irish at home and instead rely on immersion education to transmit the language to their children. Some people expressed concern that not all Irish speakers, either ‘new’ or from the Gaeltacht, were bringing up their children in Irish.

Only a small section of the data on ideologies and identities was analysed in this report i.e. that related to the Gaeltacht. Although the Gaeltacht and its speech were referred to by almost all speakers, not everyone valorised them in the same way. Several new speakers legitimised Gaeltacht speech as a target variety and Gaeltacht speakers as their role models. Others expressed a preference for other forms of less traditional Irish. Some new speakers felt that they had less ownership of Irish than Gaeltacht speakers.

Finally, new speakers also expressed a variety of opinions on language policy. Some explained how they adopted a more activist profile, often demanding state services in Irish and campaigning for language rights. Others were less concerned about these discourses and preferred to focus on social and informal uses of Irish among Irish speakers rather than formal interactions in Irish with the authorities.

## **11.2 Policy recommendations**

The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language states that the ‘objective of Government policy in relation to Irish is to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. Specifically, the Government’s aim is to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English. It is an integral component of the Government’s Irish language policy that close attention be given to its place in the Gaeltacht, particularly in light of research which indicates that the language’s viability as a household and community language in the Gaeltacht is under threat.

The aim of Government policy is also to:

- increase the number of families throughout the country who use Irish as the daily language of communication;
- provide linguistic support for the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking community and to recognise the issues which arise in areas where Irish is the household and community language;
- ensure that in public discourse and in public services the use of Irish or English will be, as far as practical, a choice for the citizen to make and that over time more and more people throughout the State will choose to do their business in Irish; and
- ensure that Irish becomes more visible in our society, both as a spoken language by our citizens and also in areas such as signage and literature’ (Government of Ireland 2010: 3).

Many of the policy aims above are directly related to new speakers and therefore it follows that specific and targeted supports for such speakers should form a key part of government policy from now on.

Although they may be at different stages of the spectrum, the new speakers featured in this report are examples of people who have converted support for Irish into actual use of it. A recurring theme in the data relates to the difficulties involved in making that transition. We recommend that policy measures be developed to support people who wish to move beyond being learners of Irish to becoming active new speakers. Furthermore, we recommend that existing new speakers be offered additional supports in order to support their efforts to increase their competence in Irish and their use of it. Such measures could include:

- The creation of more ‘safe spaces’ where Irish can be spoken socially. Such spaces should cater for a variety of levels and backgrounds from those with limited competence to speakers closer to the expert category. This would entail strengthening the existing network of ‘ciorcail chomhrá’ and creating a wide variety of new social spaces for Irish in cities and towns. Such spaces should range from physical Irish language centres to Irish language activities in other places not normally associated with the language. The 20-Year Strategy refers to the need to develop ‘resource centres’ for Irish in the main cities (Government of Ireland 2010: 25) but at the time of writing no obvious progress had been made in that regard.
- Potential new speakers need to be informed about how to integrate themselves into existing Irish speaking networks. Ongoing curricular reform of Irish at second and third level should include pedagogical material for students offering them guidance about how to join such networks. Educational proposals in the 20-Year Strategy such as part-immersion and significant reform of teacher training also have the potential to produce larger numbers of new speakers (Government of Ireland 2010: 23-36) but similar to the resource centres there was no clear progress in their implementation either as this report was being finalised.
- The report illustrates how many new speakers suffer social anxiety about speaking Irish and have low levels of confidence in their ability to communicate effectively with Gaeltacht speakers. Policy initiatives should emphasise the fact that becoming an Irish speaker does not necessarily mean adopting a traditional variety and that other competent speakers could act as role models for potential new speakers.
- More awareness needs to be developed among both new and Gaeltacht speakers alike of different types of speakers including traditional speakers and the various profiles of new speakers outlined in the introduction to this report. This could be addressed in the school curricula and through broader media representations of what it means to be an Irish speaker in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Personal accounts of new speakers of Irish could be used to inspire potential new speakers. This could be done through properly funded awareness, broadcast and social media campaigns as has happened in other minority language contexts such as Catalonia (see for instance Plataforma per la Llengua



2010). The absence of such high profile campaigns is a major weakness in Irish language policy at present.

- New speakers clearly value the role of the Gaeltacht in providing social opportunities to learn, practice or improve their Irish and many of them believe the Gaeltacht is necessary for the future of Irish. The support offered to Gaeltacht communities to engage in language planning under the Gaeltacht Act 2012 is clearly inadequate. The government needs to greatly increase financial support for local language planning initiatives in the Gaeltacht far beyond the current paltry allocation.
- The Gaeltacht Act also pledges to recognise ‘Irish language networks’ outside the Gaeltacht, many of which comprise new speakers similar to those featured in this report. It is crucial to consider the experiences and requirements of such new speakers when developing these Irish language networks.

The number of people who make the transition to becoming new speakers is quite small and such new speakers achieve their aims sometimes in the face of significant obstacles. Further research is required to more fully understand the ideologies and identities of these speakers and their potential role in the future development of Irish. However we know very little about a larger group of potential new speakers who appear to have the will to speak Irish but have not yet undergone a *muda*. Some members of that group may even have relatively high levels of competence but lack the opportunity or the confidence to become new speakers. Much more research would be required to understand why this is the case and what can be done to resolve it.

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