

# New Speakers, New Perspectives?



North American Students & Irish Language Revitalization

# The New Speaker

- Non-native speakers of minority languages who self-identify as fluent
- ‘Neo-speaker’, ‘Second language learner’, ‘L2’, ‘Second language speaker’, ‘adult learner’, ‘Neofalantes’
- Generally an urban, middle class profile
- Language Varieties

# An Nuachainteoir

- More than competency alone
- '(N)ative speakers have tended to be seen in opposition to second language speakers as the repository and guardians of the 'true' or 'authentic' language, the model setter or, in Chomskyan terms, the 'ideal' speaker.' (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2011)
- Questions regarding authenticity, ownership and legitimacy

# Significance

- A difficult role but a necessary one
- ‘While it is unlikely that a language can survive without native speakers, in minority language contexts the generation of non-native speakers who can become ‘new speakers’ of the languages can play an important role in the process of language revitalization. Such new speakers can re-initiate the process of intergenerational transmission in the home and community and thus have the potential to create new generations of native speakers.’ (O’Rourke & Ramallo, 154)

# Methodology

- Focus Groups
- Current students of Irish at a beginners' level (Not New Speakers..yet)
- 18-24
- First Year of Irish instruction in the University
- *'Language Ownership in an Irish Language Classroom'* - Dr. Bernadette O'Rourke

# Prior Impressions

- S1, R6: I heard it was a really confusing language, didn't really make a whole lot of sense.
- S2, R4: ...everybody said it was going to be really, really hard and that it was going to have no use.
- S2, R1: It's not as difficult as everybody said it was. I mean, it's not easy, but it's not as outrageously hard as some people said it was.

# Prior Impressions

- S1, R7: Like, honestly, when I saw it on the list of choices, I still thought it was a dead language.
- S1, R4: ...I thought it was a dead language too.
- S2, R2: People (in America) think it's a dead language.
- S1, R3: I also thought it was like, like Latin, like something that people didn't actually speak, um, like as a native tongue. So I was surprised to learn that.

# Ideology

- S2, R2: It is the ultimate fun-fact conversation starter. But, I don't know, its kind of cool. I mean, the reason I took it was because, what I want to do, I have to learn a lot of different languages and I only know Spanish before this. So, I figure if I can learn Gaelic, I can learn anything and, that way, I feel a lot more comfortable, walking into a situation where I can say I can learn this now. If I learned Gaelic, I can learn this.



# Native Speaker

- I: And, as you mention it, would you need a native speaker or just a fluent speaker (as an instructor)?

S1, R2: I think you need a native speaker. It's like, umm, my son in high school was taking French but his French teacher was from Brazil and his French accent was, you couldn't take that to France, you'd be killed for speaking French to a French person that way. They don't want to hear it that way.

- S1, R6: I think, I think technically you could (learn it) in America like I said, but I think it would be much better to actually, to actually go to Ireland and be immersed in it.

I: With a native speaker?

S1, R6: Oh yes, yes.

# Potential as 'New Speakers'

- S2, R2: As far as the Gaelic language overall, the Irish language, it's kind of cool. I mean, it's something that I'm not going to use in my life. I've accepted that but I mean it's still, it's something that's kind of fun but different.

- I: So you think you will continue to study the language?

S2, R6: I will, yeah. I have to get back on track with my computer science stuff but this was a great distraction.

# Potential as 'New Speakers'

- S1, R5: I'm invested in it now. There's no way of getting out, yeah. I just, no, I really, I enjoy languages as just like a general. I've always enjoyed learning them and I've never been quite able to master one as I've never really any kind of dedicated study. And to have this language, that appeals to me on so many different aspects, on so many different levels, to not continue with it would seem like a great disappointment towards myself because I'd like to think I've put a lot of work into learning this language and, you know, discussing it. I just, I want to be a part of it, not just, you know, in name.

# Resources

- S1, R7: I think you need to hear it and like the only way really is like the internet, I guess.

- S1, R4: I, like, downloaded two dictionary apps on my phone.

S1, R6: They suck.

S1, R4: Yeah, they don't have very much.

- S2, R1 I was thinking about it today and Rosetta Stone was the only option that came to mind, umm, so I'd really like to still have it a few years from now but I don't know how I'd go about it.

# Opportunities

- S2, R2: That's the one hard thing about this language, you cannot practice this language without, like, talking to yourself in the mirror. It's the only way.
- S2, R4: I'd definitely like to go back to Ireland and properly be able to, if I get lost, talk to people in Irish or something like that. But, as everyone else was saying, I don't know if there are too many opportunities in America to continue learning.

# Potential as 'New Speakers'

- S1, R5: In order to, kind of, make the transition from Irish being a purely academic pursuit, like, to being able to read it, translate it, to make it into a language, which is all about communication, you need someone to communicate with, you need something to communicate. It's getting easier in today's world because you have the TG4 documentaries that you can find online but an actual sort of conversation, face-to-face, is something that would really be required ..... because otherwise it's just the academic pursuit; it's not really, like, a full-bodied experience.

# Conclusions

- Awareness of the Irish language among students is limited.
- Opinions among students regarding the study of Irish in American Universities would appear to be very favourable, despite widespread assumptions that the language is dead and very difficult to learn.
- While opinions towards the language are generally favourable, students are divided about the ability to become fluent speakers of Irish in America.
- Students generally believe that the native speaker is the ideal speaker and appear to disregard the significant role of new speakers in Irish language instruction.
- Students do not feel that adequate resources are available to them for independent learning of the language and demonstrate a strong desire to interact with other learners outside of the classroom.
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