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National identity and belonging among gay 'new speakers' of Irish

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'New speakers' refer to people who use a language regularly but are not traditional 'native' speakers of that language. Although this discussion has been going on for some time in other sub-disciplines of linguistics, it is more recent in research about European minoritised languages. A feature of discourse around such languages relates to their perceived suitability for diverse urban settings removed from their historical rural heartlands. Irish is an example of a minoritised language which was long associated with conservative rural communities, a reified Catholic discourse of national identity and language ideologies based on nativism. Such an approach not only marginalised urban new speakers of Irish but also exhibited hostility to LGBTQ citizens who did not befit its particular version of Irishness. In this paper, a framework of Critical Sociolinguistics is used to analyse identity positions and ideologies expressed by urban new speakers of Irish who identify as gay and/or queer.

1. Introduction

This paper draws on frameworks of critical sociolinguistics and language revitalisation to explore the identities and discourses of 'new speakers' of Irish who identify as gay or queer. The research also considers how these sexual identities intersect with ever-changing historical discourses of national identity and language within the Irish sociolinguistic context.

This context is such that Irish is simultaneously an official, national and yet minoritised language.

'New speakers' refer to people who use a language regularly but were not raised with that language as the primary language of socialisation in the early years. The concept of new speaker is based on a critique of longstanding linguistic categories used to describe people who adopt languages other than their 'native' language: 'L2 speaker', 'non-native speaker', 'learner' etc. (O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015). Although this discussion has been going on since the 1970s in other sub-disciplines of linguistics (Davies 2003), it is more recent in research about European minoritised languages.[1] A feature of discourse around such languages relates to their perceived suitability for socially and linguistically diverse urban settings removed from their historical rural heartlands. Irish is an example of a minoritised language which was long associated with conservative rural communities, a reified Catholic discourse of national identity and language ideologies based on nativism (O'Leary 2004). Such a discourse not only marginalised urban new speakers of Irish but also exhibited hostility to gay/queer citizens who did not befit its particular version of Irishness.

In this paper, I draw on concepts from Critical Sociolinguistics and Queer Linguistics in order to analyse the experiences of one such group: 15 urban new speakers of Irish who identify as gay and/or queer. The paper hinges on the interlinked ideologies of authenticity and anonymity (Woolard 2016) as well as the related concept of 'transnationality' in queer culture (Leap & Motschenbacher 2012).

2. Context of Irish language and Irish national identity

2.1 The minoritisation of Irish

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[1] In this paper I use 'minoritised' rather than 'minority' language as the former is less defeatist and more dynamic than the latter and implies that a language's status can be strengthened through activism and/or positive policy measures. See Walsh 2012: 14 (fn 10) for a discussion.

Although the predominant language of Ireland until the 18th Century, Irish declined as British power was consolidated and a process of language shift to English set in. By the second half of the 19th Century, Irish was in a perilous state and as a native language was confined to the impoverished fringes mostly in the west, areas that would come to be known collectively as the 'Gaeltacht' or Irish-speaking district. The revival of Irish as a marker of a distinct Irish identity became a focus of a late 19th Century cultural and literary revival movement some of whose leaders were involved with the movement for independence from Britain (Doyle 2015). By the time the Irish Free State was established in 1922, Irish was a minoritised language in its own nation-state and English was overwhelmingly dominant. Nonetheless, indebted as it was to the leaders of the language movement, the new government embarked on a two-pronged revivalist policy. This comprised (a) maintenance of the Gaeltacht where the remaining native speakers were located and (b) 'Gaelicisation' of the remainder of the country where Irish was to be adopted by the general population. Irish was granted constitutional status as the 'national' and 'first official language' and became an obligatory school subject. The Gaeltacht was recognised as a distinct territory and a raft of policy measures introduced aimed at supporting its linguistic profile. However, Irish in the Gaeltacht has been weakened by waves of out-migration and sweeping socio-economic and sociolinguistic change, particularly since the 1960s (Walsh 2012). The ongoing decline has been extensively documented and the demise of Irish as the community language in the Gaeltacht has been predicted (e.g. Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donncha, Ní Chualáin, Ní Shéaghdha & O'Brien 2007, Ó Giollagáin & Charlton 2015). Conversely, almost a century of language policy has consolidated Irish elsewhere as subsequent generations of Irish people have learned the language in the education system, to varying degrees of success. A small minority of these have adopted Irish as an everyday language and are regular and fluent speakers. Such people are referred to in this paper as 'new speakers' of Irish (see 3.1 below).

Due to its presence as a core school subject, there is widespread passive knowledge of Irish but limited frequent use. Census returns reveal that about 40 per cent of the population claim competence although most of these are not active speakers. Irish is now spoken regularly (at least weekly) outside the education system by only about 5 percent of the population (Central Statistics Office 2017).[2] While the numbers of those claiming competence in Irish grew continuously since the foundation of the state, the most recent census revealed a decline in all key categories of competence and use. The sharpest decline was in the Gaeltacht where Irish is now spoken daily outside education by only one in five people although almost 70 per cent of the population claim competence in it (Central Statistics Office 2017).

2.2 The Irish language, queerness and national identity

The Irish language is deeply intertwined with the broader context of Irish national identity. Since independence in 1922, Irish has been promoted as the 'national' language and has been widely accepted as an identity marker. Although most people cannot use Irish actively, consecutive attitudinal surveys reveal that a substantial majority are favourable towards it and consider it an important part of the country's identity (Darmody & Daly 2015: 77). Most people also believe that Irish depends on the fate of the Gaeltacht as its historical geographical core (Ó Riagáin 1997: 176) or that supporting the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht is an important policy priority (Darmody & Daly 2015: 84). Although the question has not been asked in recent times, earlier surveys indicated that despite generally favourable views to Irish, many people viewed the language as old-fashioned (Ó Riagáin 1997: 176).

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[2] Irish is also spoken in Northern Ireland where about 65,000 people or just under 4 per cent of the population claim they can speak, read, write and understand it (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency 2012: 18). This paper is about Irish in the Republic of Ireland only.

This perception of Irish has its roots in the way in which the language policy was executed. Since the revival period of the late 19ᵗʰ Century the remote rural Gaeltacht has been idealised as the repository of true Irishness from which the language would be extended to 're-Gaelicise' the entire country. The remaining native speech of the Gaeltacht was presented as the authentic and legitimate variety of Irish and such speakers were seen to embody Irish identity. Therefore, learners of Irish were expected to imitate one of the traditional dialects (O'Rourke & Walsh 2015: 66–68). In contrast to the diversity and radicality of the language movement prior to independence, following 1922 Irish was quickly associated with a conservative Catholicism which became the de facto dominant national identity of the new state (Lee 1989: 643–657). A comprehensive study of the indexing of the Irish language as conservative has yet to be conducted but the association emerges not only in attitudinal surveys but also in histories and media discourse. For instance, in a matched-guise test conducted as part of an early sociolinguistic survey, a clear stereotype of an Irish speaker emerged. Most respondents saw the speaker as 'smaller, uglier, weaker, of poorer health, more old fashioned, less educated, poor, less confident, less interesting, more religious, less likeable, lower class, of lower leadership ability, lazier and more submissive compared to an English speaker' (Committee on Irish Languages Attitudes Research 1975: 454). This negative stereotype is also referenced by several historians of modern Ireland, both those who take a benign view of the Irish language and those who are more hostile. Writing from a less sympathetic perspective, Garvin (2004: 55–56) asserts that the Catholic Church and the Irish language lobby were responsible for Ireland's delayed development in the 20ᵗʰ Century. From an opposing supportive position, Lee (1989: 658–659) criticises a newspaper columnist's denigration of Irish as part of 'the three-leaved shamrock of race, language and Catholicism which were an imposition by nineteenth-century nationalists'. Another similarly sympathetic historian, Ó Tuathaigh, argues that official language policy became part of the indexical field

of normative, stultifying, anti-intellectual statist philistinism with little tolerance of cultural diversity (Ó Tuathaigh 2011, see also Lacey 2008: 215; Ó Conchubhair 2002: 167).

Such associations were embraced by those unconvinced of the contemporary relevance of Irish but often rejected by Irish speakers themselves who did not recognise themselves in them. For instance, the leaders of the Language Freedom Movement (LFM) – a pressure group established in 1965 to oppose the compulsory status of Irish in school and civil service examinations – asserted repeatedly that the language was inextricable from the Catholic Church and the conservative political party Fianna Fáil and argued that the language policy was regressive and illiberal (Rowland 2015). A leading political supporter of the LFM, Dr. Garret FitzGerald (1977),[3] argued that the ideological basis of the state after independence was 'the narrow one of Gaelic Catholic nationalism', by which he meant an ideology which fused support for the Irish language with an adherence to Catholicism. Distancing himself from that association, an Irish language poet responded: 'it struck me that it [a Catholic Gaelic Ireland] would probably be equally unacceptable to a new generation of Irish speakers […] a generation for which Dr. FitzGerald most certainly does not speak' (Ó Muirthile 1977). Such associations undoubtedly erased the diversity of views among Irish speakers and ignored the radical and progressive strands of Irish language activism which were becoming increasingly opposed to the state's lethargic implementation of its own language policy (Ó Tuathaigh 2011).

Queer people were among those erased from the dominant version of Irishness. Homosexuality was not decriminalised until 1993 (in contrast to 1967 in the United Kingdom). In a compendium of essays on sexuality and identity published shortly after decriminalisation, Walshe (1997: 5) maintains that

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[3] FitzGerald went on to become *Taoiseach* ["Prime Minister"] in 1981. In 1973, his party, Fine Gael, acceded to the LFM's demands.

> [t]he post-colonial struggle to escape the influence of the colonising power
>
> became a struggle to escape the gendered relation of male coloniser to female
>
> colonised. Therefore the post-colonial culture could not permit any public,
>
> ideological acknowledgement of the actuality of the sexually "other".

The compendium contains an essay on the gay Gaeltacht poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh (Ó Laoire, 1997) whose homoerotic poetry has gained international acclaim through translation. For Walshe, the inclusion of Ó Searcaigh is a noteworthy aspect of the empowerment of queer culture in Ireland precisely because he writes in the Irish language, which Walshe describes as 'often the whipping boy of reproachful cultural nationalism' (1997: 13; see also Lacey 2008: 227–244).[4]

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Critical Sociolinguistics

This study draws on the work of authors associated with the field of 'Critical Sociolinguistics', the umbrella term given to the schools of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. This approach rejects the contention that language reflects society but rather holds that language and society are inextricably linked. The main concerns of the critical approach are power and conflict and the ways in which language creates inequalities and hierarchies in society (Mesthrie 2009). Issues of language ownership and the legitimacy

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[4] There has been considerable discussion, in both Irish and English, of queer literature in Irish from the perspective of literary criticism, focused primarily on Ó Searcaigh (e.g. Doan 2002, Ó Laoire 1997, Richards 2016) and the writer and publisher Micheál Ó Conghaile (Ó Siadhail 2010). However there has been no anthropological or sociolinguistic investigation of gay (new) speakers of Irish to date apart from one article in Irish on an Irish language social group for gay men in Dublin in the 1990s (Woods 1998).

of speakers are also prominent themes in the field (e.g. Bourdieu 1991, Heller 2001; Heller & Martin-Jones 2001, Sung-Yul Park & Wee 2012). Data analysis in this paper draws heavily on the scholarship of Woolard (1989, 1992, 2016), which examines the case of Catalan through the lens of interlinked ideologies of language, authenticity and anonymity. Arguing that such ideologies are at the foundation of understandings of language in the western world, Woolard traces anonymity to the universalism of the Enlightenment and authenticity to the particularism of Romanticism. The linguistic ideology of anonymity attaches to dominant languages that derive their authority from anonymity, from supposedly belonging to no-one in particular and being neutral. Such hegemonic languages are 'excessively invisible' and thrive on being 'from nowhere' (Woolard 2016: 25). The ideology of authenticity, on the other hand, rests on a language's close association with a particular place, a common dynamic in the case of minoritised European languages such as Catalan or Irish. For such languages to gain authenticity, they must be rooted in territory and be recognisably local. Authenticity is more concerned with who one is rather than what one says, with social indexicality rather than referential function (Woolard 2016: 22). Woolard identifies 'sociolinguistic naturalism' as the basis of both ideologies (2016: 7), stating that they hinge on the position that a linguistic form is authoritative because it is the natural expression of social life, rather than the result of human effort and intervention. However, she challenges the frequent conflation of the authentic and the natural and draws on examples from linguistic cultures where artifice and human intervention are valued as authentic in contrast to 'natural' speech. Such 'post-naturalistic approaches to cultivating and projecting an authentic identity in a fragmented world' (Woolard 2016: 36) are salient for the gay new speakers of Irish who are trying to make sense of their multiple identities.

The concept of 'new speaker' has also been informed by the Critical Sociolinguistic paradigm and in particular the critique of the dominance of the 'native speaker ideology' in

linguistics and its associated strands. 'Native' speakers were presented as the pinnacle of authenticity and legitimacy on whom 'learners', 'non-native speakers' or 'second-language learners' would model their speech. While an uncritical notion of the native speaker has long been critiqued in the case of major world languages such as English (Davies 2003), it is arguably even more problematic in the case of minoritised languages where speakers often straddle the fuzzy border between 'native' and 'non-native' and many younger 'native' speakers use post-traditional linguistic features associated with non-nativeness and vice versa. Following O'Rourke et al. (2015), a 'new speaker' is a fluent and regular speaker of a given language who was not raised with that language as initial language of primary socialisation in an area where it is spoken traditionally. The participants in this paper can all be considered 'new' in that none of them were raised speaking Irish in the Gaeltacht. The 'new speaker' concept is relevant to this research because of its de-essentialising potential: in a post-colonial context of advanced language shift such as Ireland, it helps us to understand how language and territoriality can be decoupled for various identity projects such as queer new speakers who are not from the Gaeltacht.

3.2 Queer Linguistics

Queer Linguistics (QL) as a paradigm offers some guidance to understanding the phenomenon of gay/queer new speakers of Irish. There is a clear parallel between Motschenbacher's (2011: 163) 'two "coherent" combinations of (biological) sex, (socially constructed) gender and desire: male sex – masculine gender practice – desiring women; female sex – feminine gender practice – desiring men' and the two dominant linguistic paradigms of 'native' and 'non-native' speakers. Just as queer sexualities and practices do not align with either 'combination' identified by Motschenbacher, new speakers do not fit neatly into nativist linguistic categories either. Gay new speakers find themselves between both sets

of essentialist poles. A shortcoming of QL in terms of understanding minoritised language contexts relates to the overwhelming dominance of Anglophone settings within the paradigm, unsurprising given the North American roots of both QL and Queer Theory generally (Motschenbacher, 2011: 163). A related question is that of transnationality as a particularly queer cultural dynamic. A distancing from national identities and the adoption of English may be perceived as more accommodating of non-normative sexualities (Leap & Motschenbacher 2012: 8). However, this raises questions about the performance of queer identities in languages other than English and in particular in minoritised languages; this paper will contribute to an understanding of how such performance can work in the case of one such language.

The analytical framework of this article will examine the intersection of identity discourses – sexual, linguistic and national – among gay new speakers of Irish in order better to understand how they make sense of their world. To do so, it will draw on Woolard's framework of linguistic authenticity, anonymity and naturalism and on the related concept of queer transnationality. In the case of Irish, ideologies of authenticity have been complicated by the conflation of the language and social conservatism and, as will become apparent in section 5, this has coloured the gay speakers' complex relationship with the language. New speakers represent two layers of de-coupling: of language and territory (they acquire the language despite not being from the area where it is spoken) and of language and the organic notion of language transmission, assumed to be heterosexual (they acquire the language despite it not being spoken to them by their parents). By unsettling the authority of territory and transmission in sociolinguistics, new speakerness – regardless of the sexuality of the speaker – 'queers the pitch' and challenges fundamental assumptions in linguistics and related strands. By studying specifically queer new speakers we can throw further light on the tensions involved in navigating the choppy waters of language and national identity, when

such an identity is founded on conservatism. As we shall see, some of the participants openly challenge this association while others appear to internalise it but by their very existence, gay new speakers of Irish can be seen as queering, or challenging, assumptions about language and national identity. As stated at the outset, this has implications for understanding queer new speakers of other minoritised languages historically associated with rurality and conservatism.

4. Methodology and analysis

The methodology was based on semi-structured interviews and subsequent purposeful conversations with participants. Those identifying as Irish-speaking gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and queer etc. were sought through LGBTQ press and networks in 2014 and 2015. 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with men aged between 21 and 50 all of whom identified as gay and Irish-speaking but were not from Gaeltacht backgrounds. Two of the men also identified as queer (which they took to mean a more critical and radical political engagement with heteronormativity) and one described himself as gay, queer and gender-fluid. Despite attempts to broaden the sample, no women or transgender people came forward to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and in Irish although a small number of participants had lower levels of competence. Rather than impose prescriptive views of who was or was not a 'speaker', I relied on participants' self-categorisation. As they identified as 'Irish-speaking' in responding to my request, I interviewed them in Irish although I said that they could be as informal as they wished and use English if they felt the need. I use the concept of 'expert speaker' (Piller 2002) for those with high competence (with the added label of 'G' in the case of those who have acquired a traditional Gaeltacht dialect) and 'hybrid' for those with more restricted competence. Their language background refers to

their home language during childhood. The table below outlines the participants and their

profiles. For reasons of space, only material from a sub-section of participants is used but the

table is intended to give the reader a sense of the full sample.

Table 1. Profiles of research participants

Number	Pseudonym	Age	Self-identification	Occupation	Language competence	Language background
1	Seán	50	Gay	Media	Expert (G)	Bilingual
2	Rory	32	Gay	Education	Expert	English
3	Nathan	26	Gay/queer	Education	Expert	English
4	Terry	28	Gay	Media	Hybrid	English
5	Pádraig	22	Gay	Student	Expert	English
6	Noel	24	Gay/queer	Student	Hybrid	English
7	Nicholas	47	Gay	Graphic design	Hybrid	Bilingual
8	Adam	21	Gay/queer/ gender-fluid	Fashion	Hybrid	English
9	Stiofán	46	Gay	Education	Expert	Bilingual
10	Ethan	25	Gay	Retail	Hybrid	English
11	Liam	30	Gay	Education	Expert (G)	English
12	Cian	42	Gay	Media	Expert (G)	Irish
13	Naoise	23	Gay	Student	Hybrid	English
14	Kevin	23	Gay	Student	Expert	English
15	Donncha	24	Gay	Student	Expert (G)	English

The data was transcribed and analysed using NVivo software and salient themes

identified. Ungrammatical features in the original Irish were left unamended and code-

switching was marked in the transcription. Irish neologisms for contemporary categories of

sexual identity have been created by the government's Terminology Committee

(www.tearma.ie) and are used to varying extents by the participants. However, it is important

to emphasise that there is no recognisable in-group gay variety of Irish that is discernibly

different linguistically to the contemporary speech of new speakers in general. Such linguistic

differences, if they exist, are not the focus of this paper but some notable self-reported gaps in

participants' lexicon about sex are discussed in section 5.2 below.

In the following section both the original and the English translation are provided. Code-switching to English in Irish conversations is italicised as an aid to the reader who does not know Irish. Speakers are identified by the pseudonyms in the table above. For reasons of space, only material from a sub-section of participants is used and issues of identity are the core theme.

5. Sexual, linguistic and national identity among gay new speakers of Irish

Two salient themes have been chosen from the data as representations of how gay Irish speakers make sense of their world through the ideologies they adopt or contest and the identities with which they align themselves. These relate to (a) tensions around the historical ideologies of Irish national identity discussed in 2.2 above and (b) hierarchies of gay and Irish-speaking identities. The following section analyses a selection of extracts from the interviews by drawing on the theoretical framework discussed in section 3.

5.1 Tensions around historical ideologies of national identity

Historical ideologies of Irish national identity linking the Irish language with conservatism are referred to frequently in the data but are interpreted in different ways by participants. Some openly contest them while others seem to have internalised them. References to the historical stereotype are more prevalent among the four participants who were aged 40 or over and who had experienced or feared homophobia in Irish-speaking contexts. Seán, who is 50 and works in media, was raised with both Irish and English in a city but in recent years has spent long periods in the Gaeltacht:

Ní dóigh liom ar bhealach go raibh sé sin [coimeádachas] mar chroílár saol na

Gaeltachta. Tá mé ag ceapadh go raibh sé sin ar bhealach mar chuid des na

heagraíochtaí Gaeilge ar bhealach go raibh daoine ag iarraidh a léiriú you know 'Ó

is duine fíor-Éireannach sort of is fíor-Ghael mé is fíor-Chaitliceach mé is fíor-'do

you know what I mean? Agus go raibh an pacáiste iomlán seo a raibh an dearg-

ghráin agam air ar an bpacáiste ar fad / mar níor léirigh sé an rud a bhí ann go raibh

sé an t-am ar fad ag iarraidh breathnú ar cúl go dtí saol ná raibh riamh ann agus

gurb é seo an // dá mbeifeá Gaelach go mbeadh ort bheith i do Chaitliceach nó

díreach.

"I don't think in a way that [conservatism] was at the heart of Gaeltacht life. I think

that in a way that was part of the Irish language organisations in a way that people

were trying to show you know 'Oh I'm a true Irish person sort of I'm a true Irish

speaker I'm a true Catholic I'm a true-'do you know what I mean? And that there was

this whole package that I really hated every bit of the package / because it didn't show

what existed that it was always trying to look back at a life that never existed and that

was // if you were an Irish speaker that you'd have to be a Catholic or straight."

At first glance, Seán appears to articulate a strident rejection of an ideology of authenticity

which linked the Irish language to a conservative Catholic outlook and to heterosexuality as

part of a hegemonic frame of national identity ('Catholic and straight'). Such authenticity is

referenced by his repeated pejorative use of the prefix 'fíor-' which means true or

uncontaminated ('true Irish speaker', 'true Catholic').[5] However he qualifies his position by

distinguishing between Irish language organisations, which jhe saw as epitomising

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[5] Following the foundation of the state, the Gaeltacht was divided into two categories according to the amount of Irish spoken: 'Fíor-Ghaeltacht' (literally 'true' Gaeltacht) and 'Breac-Ghaeltacht' (literally 'speckled' or partial Gaeltacht, 'breac' also carrying connotations of disease) (Walsh 2012: 42–43).

conservatism in the past, and the average Gaeltacht person who did not share such a view. Seán describes how such associations caused him to question his own relationship with Irish:

Bhí an dearg-ghráin agam ar ar an phacáiste ach mar chuid den phacáiste sin is dóigh you know bhí an Ghaeilic leis agus ag an am just dúirt mé "Sin deireadh leis go huile agus go hiomlán tá mé chun an dream ar fad is cuma liom faoi just ní féidir liom glacadh leis seo" ach ansin agus mé imithe ón áit [láthair oibre] d'imigh an fearg agus ansin tháinig an ghrá just an ghnáth-ghrá don Ghaeilic mar just rud nádúrtha tá sé tagann an Ghaeilge go nádúrtha dom agus mé sa nGaeltacht dar ndóigh thosaigh saol nua ar fad agus ansin níor fhéach mé siar ó shin i leith.jjjjjj (J18, 50)

"I just hated the package but part of that package I suppose you know was Irish also and at the time I said 'that's the end of it completely the whole lot of them I don't care about them I can't accept this' but then when I had left the place [workplace] the anger subsided and love returned, just normal love for Irish as just a normal thing it is Irish comes to me naturally when I'm in the Gaeltacht of course a completely new life began and then I never looked back again." (J18, 50)

The 'package' of Irish and conservatism is more than an abstract notion for Seán, as he describes how an Irish-speaking superior in his workplace expressed homophobic views to him. This brought him to the verge of rejecting the Irish language community ('the whole lot of them') but despite his hatred for the 'package' Irish was also part of it. Once he left that particular workplace he could embrace the Irish language again and speak it 'naturally' and as a 'normal thing' in the Gaeltacht. Therefore, despite rejecting the imposed framework of identity conflating authenticity and conservatism, Seán draws on a key aspect of linguistic

authenticity – the 'naturalness' of speaking Irish with native speakers in the Gaeltacht – in order to justify his continued use of the language as a gay man. At the same time, he distances Gaeltacht speakers from conservatism and in the process strives to rescue Irish from such an association. Furthermore, although he uses some Gaeltacht features in his speech his production is mixed and contains many post-traditional elements. Here we see a refashioning of authenticity without unconditionally adopting anonymity along the lines of the 'post-naturalistic approaches' mentioned by Woolard (2016: 36). Seán feels that Irish comes 'naturally' to him in the Gaeltacht and distances that experience from homophobic conservatism but fashions his linguistic practice from a variety of sources including the Gaeltacht.

A similar rejection of the national identity discourse was articulated by Nicholas, a 47-year-old who was raised bilingually and whose grandfather was a native speaker from the Gaeltacht. However, he experienced homophobia in his youth from Irish-speaking relatives and strongly associates the language and the Gaeltacht with conservatism. This led him to leave Ireland and spend a period in Germany instead, where he learned German to a high level:

> *N: Deutsch ist die Sprache der Freiheit [Is í an Ghearmáinis teanga na Saoirse] [I: Saoirse?] An saoirse.*
>
> *I: Ach ní cheanglaíonn tú an tsaoirse le Gaolainn?*
>
> *N: An mhalairt ar fad↑. [I: A mhalairt. Conas?] Bhuel do you know bhíos amuigh ann ins na hochtóidí bhíos i m'aerach agus ba dheacair an saol domsa anso in Éirinn agus chuas go dtí an nGearmáin agus an saoirse a mhothaigh mé thall ansan ní féidir liom é fiú a léiriú you know. Ba é sin an chéad uair i mo shaol agus go rabhas in ann bheith aerach agus ghlac gach uile duine liom gan ceist a chur orm […]*

I: An gceanglaíonn tú an Ghaolainn leis an gCaitliceachas agus leis an gcúng-

aigeantacht san a luaigh tú níos luaithe?

N: Ceapaim go gceanglaíonn faraor. Is dócha gur n'fheadar an rud an é sin an

cás anois ach déarfainn sna hochtóidí bhí sé sin ann sa saol a bhí againn agus bhí sé

ceangailte go trom leis an eaglais Chaitliceach agus is dócha freisin sin fáth báis na

Gaolainne freisin bhuel fáth amháin tá mórán fáthanna ann.

"N: German is the language of freedom. [I: Freedom?] Freedom.

I: But you don't associate Irish with freedom?

N: The exact opposite↑. [I: The opposite? How?] Well do you know I was out

then in the eighties I was a gay man and life was difficult for me here in Ireland and I

went to Germany and the freedom I felt there I can't even describe it you know? That

was the first time in my life that I was able to be gay and everyone accepted me

without any questions […]

I: Do you link Irish with Catholicism and with that narrow-mindedness that you

mentioned earlier?

N: I think I do unfortunately. I suppose I don't know if that is the case now but I

would say in the eighties that was the way things were in the life we had and it was

associated strongly with the Catholic church and I suppose also that's a reason for the

death of Irish well one reason there are many reasons."

Unlike Seán, at the time of the interview Nicholas was on the cusp of rejecting Irish and

clearly felt a greater affinity with German which he associated with freedom ('die Sprache

der Freiheit') and with ultimate valorisation as a gay man ('everyone accepted me'). In stark

contrast, Irish represented the 'exact opposite' of freedom and instead indexed a restricted

and unhappy youth from which he had to escape. Nicholas has a very pessimistic view about

the future of Irish, identifying conservatism as a contributory factor to its 'death'. This position can again be interpreted through the lens of authenticity and anonymity: the dominant, anonymous majority language (German) which was acquired as part of a painful process of escaping from homophobia and which indexes freedom not only linguistically but also socially, versus the minoritised language (Irish) strongly associated with his grandfather and more authentically local but also indexing homophobia. In rejecting language along with other elements of Irish national identity in favour of German and English, Nicholas also appears to reflect the queer dynamic of transnationality: the further away he went, physically and psychologically, from the dominant Irish national identity, the more comfortable he felt in his queerness. Therefore, although rejecting the historical stereotype like Seán, the outcome of the process for Nicholas is very different in that he is unable to salvage Irish from it.

Cian, a 42-year-old who was raised in an urban Irish-speaking family outside the Gaeltacht, similarly reported discomfort in Irish-speaking circles as a younger man but describes how he returned to Irish at a later stage:

Tá saghas lámh in uachtar ag saghas steiréitíopa áirithe agus é sin go gceapann tú go bhfuil ana-bhaint acu leis an eaglais nó go bhfuil reiligiún mar chuid de shaol na Gaolainne agus ar shlí an rud a fuaireas deacair mar Ghaeilgeoir i [cathair] ná go bhfuaireas saol na Gaolainne an-chúng domsa agus is é sin nár thaitin ceol traidisiúnta liom go mór ach níor theastaigh uaim éisteacht leis an t-am ar fad. Bhí i bhfad níos mó suim agam dul go dioscó agus éisteacht le ceol domhanda [...] níor thaitin an cúngaigeantacht liom i dtaobh gach rud i saol na Gaolainne agus saghas chas mé droim leis go rabhas aibí go leor agus sean go leor saghas seasamh ar mo

dhá chois féin [...] I mean *déanann tú tú féin a chruthú laistigh de pé saol ina bhfuil tú.*

"A certain stereotype kind of has the upper hand and that is that you think they are linked to the church or that religion is part of the Irish language world and in a way the thing I found difficult as an Irish speaker in [city] that I found the Irish language world very narrow and that is that I didn't like traditional music very much but I didn't want to listen to it all the time. I was much more interested in going to a disco and listening to world music […] I didn't like the narrow-mindedness about everything in the Irish language world and I kind of turned my back on it until I was mature enough and old enough to stand on my own two feet […] I mean you create yourself within whatever world you live."

Cian refers to the 'stereotype' that the Irish language is linked to 'religion' and 'narrow-mindedness' and explains how it caused him to distance himself from Irish and its associated culture of traditional music in favour of more universal cultural elements such as 'world music'. This sense of alienation seems to have been amplified by his being a relatively isolated Irish speaker in an overwhelmingly English-speaking city which offered a range of cultural choices. However, having 'turned his back' on Irish in his youth, he returned to it when he grew older and gained the confidence to be himself, illustrated by his reference to 'creat[ing] yourself' in the world. Cian's discourse could also be interpreted as a retreat from the frame of authenticity but his linguistic production is based strongly on a traditional dialect which he acquired both at home and through repeated visits to the Gaeltacht since childhood. Therefore his desire to appear more anonymous culturally by shunning traditional music and the Irish language scene where he lives is counterbalanced by his maintenance of a traditional dialect of Irish and regular contact with the Gaeltacht. This points to a distinction between

ideologies of linguistic and cultural authenticity or anonymity. As an adult Cian has found a way to live his life both as a gay man and an urban Irish speaker; while adhering to a key aspect of the ideology of linguistic authenticity, traditional Gaeltacht speech, he has jettisoned other cultural aspects of traditional identity.

A younger participant, 25-year-old Nathan, identifies as queer and was brought up with English as his home language, having acquired Irish through education. Although he attended Gaeltacht schools he experienced sometimes violent homophobia and describes himself as having 'post-traumatic stress disorder' in relation to native speakers as a result. Despite his strained relationship with the Gaeltacht he identifies strongly as an Irish speaker and wants to maintain both aspects of his identity. He expresses a desire that an Irish language gay culture be developed following a once-off event with an Irish language theme[6] in a gay bar:

> *Tá [gá le cultúr aerach Gaelach] […] sin scéal eile nach bhfuil an Gaelachas ar fáil i bpobal an LGBT agus go bhfuil sé this new liberalism go bhfuil sé i bhfad níos fearr cineál Meiriceánach nó Sasanach nó aon rud seachas Éireannach [I: Idirnáisiúnta saghas.] Sin díreach é agus caithfidh tú a bheith cineál you know Soho agus […] nach cóir dúinn a bheith bródúil asainn féin mar Éireannaigh chomh maith agus as Éireannaigh aeracha agus go bhfuilimid in ann cultúr na hÉireann a thabhairt linn agus a bheith aerach chomh maith?*

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[6] Since this research was conducted, an Irish language drag show was held in west Belfast. *An Cabaret Queeráilte* ["the queer cabaret"] took place in November 2017 and featured a series of mostly local drag queens and artistes, all performing in Irish. The evening was exceptional for being the first drag show to be held entirely in Irish and the intention was to make it a regular event. The Irish language community in Belfast has a tradition of innovation due to the socio-political context in which it has developed. Speaking Irish was an act of resistance against a traditionally hostile British state, so it is perhaps unsurprising that an initiative aimed at Irish speakers who are gay/queer would come from there.

"Yes [a gay Irish language culture is needed] […] that's another thing that the Irish language culture is not available in the LGBT community and it's this new liberalism that it is much better kind of American or English or anything other than Irish [I: kind of international?] Yes that's it exactly and you have to be kind of you know Soho and […] shouldn't we be proud of ourselves as Irish people as well and as gay Irish people and that we can bring Irish culture with us and be gay also?"

Nathan's discourse can be seen as a distancing from anonymity and transnationality: he criticises 'the new liberalism' in gay life epitomised for him by 'Soho' or Anglo-American 'international' culture and is uncomfortable with the marginalisation of Irish cultural identity and the Irish language within it. He questions why 'gay Irish people' cannot be proud of their own identity. However, his discomfort with the Gaeltacht and his post-traditional practice of Irish prevents him from identifying closely with authenticity either. Nathan's desire to forge an urban Irish-speaking gay culture not based on a traditional discourse of authenticity aligns him more closely with the 'post-naturalistic approaches' identified by Woolard.

Another younger participant, 26-year-old Terry, was brought up with English only and acquired Irish at school and university. He articulates a clearer distancing from the ideology of linguistic authenticity and conservatism which he sees as embodied by the very term for Irish speaker, *Gaeilgeoir*:

Cé go bhfuil Gaeilic agam ní chuirim 'Gaeilgeoir' orm [féin] mar ní / is téarma an-trom é sin dar liomsa mar de ghnáth bíonn sé nasctha leis an bpoblachtánachas leis an gCaitliceachas [...] agus you know ní Críostaí mé ar chor ar bith / ní poblachtánach mé ar chor ar bith agus tá na sórt téarmaí sin deacair dom agus mé

ag rá yeah tá Gaeilic agam agus tá teanga[cha] eile agam ar nós na Fraincise ar nós na Danmhairgise freisin.

"Even though I speak Irish I don't call myself a 'Gaeilgeoir' because that's not / I think that's a very heavy term because usually it's linked to republicanism to Catholicism [...] and you know I'm not a Christian at all / I'm not a republican at all and those kinds of terms are difficult for me when I say yeah I speak Irish and I speak other languages such as French and such as Danish as well."

Gaeilgeoir contains myriad meanings and is often used pejoratively in the English-language media to denigrate Irish language activists as extremists (Walsh 2012: 290). Terry's description of it as a 'heavy' term implies that he sees it as restrictive and essentialist. In a clear illustration of adherence to linguistic anonymity, Terry sees Irish as linked to republicanism[7] and Catholicism, both of which he rejects out of hand as 'difficult' for him. He seeks to frame Irish as just another language, like French and Danish which he also speaks but which for him do not have these associations and are somehow more neutral. He goes on to espouse a 'European' approach to language:

Ag an bpointe seo de mo shaol ó thaobh na teanga de bíonn dearcadh Eorpach agam dó [...] tá mé in ann Gaeilge a labhairt le héinne a bhfuil Gaeilge acu agus ní fheicim aon fhadhb nó ní chuirim iad ar pedestal *má tá Gaeilge acu agus daoine eile nach bhfuil Gaeilge acu tá mé in ann Béarla a labhairt go héasca agus sin an sórt* attitude *céanna a bhíonn ag na Danair nó na Sualannaigh de má tá a fhios acu go*

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[7] Irish republicanism refers to the political ideology that the entire island of Ireland should become a republic. This position is most strongly associated with the Sinn Féin political party and was linked with the military campaign of the IRA in the past. Sinn Féin has also been an active promoter of the Irish language (Walsh 2012: 337–372). Presumably this association between language promotion and violence has prompted Terry's rejection of the ideology.

bhfuil Danmhairgis agat nó Sualainnis agat nó pé teanga [...] grand *tá siad in ann sin a labhairt but murach sin an cás tá siad in ann Béarla a labhairt agus is dátheangachas éasca é sin is dátheangachas compordach é sin agus sin an sórt* attitude *a bheadh agam leis an nGaeilge [...] Tá daoine ann a bhíonn ag iarraidh* you know *Gaeilge a chur thar an Béarla nó Gaeilge a chur ar leibhéal níos airde agus tá a fhios agam* obviously *go bhfuil luach cultúrtha maith ann* but *ceapaim go ndéanann sé níos mó dochar ná aon rud eile [...] ba chóir dúinn dearcadh Eorpach a bheith againn seachas bheith ag díriú isteach ar an gcás áirithe dúinn féin* you know?

"At this point of my life with regard to language I have a European attitude […] I'm able to speak Irish to anyone who has Irish and I don't see any problem or I don't put them on a pedestal if they speak Irish and other people who don't know Irish I am able to speak English easily and that's the kind of attitude that the Danes and the Swedes have if they know you have Danish or Swedish or whatever language […] grand they are able to speak it but if that isn't the case they are able to speak English and that's easy bilingualism that's comfortable bilingualism and that's the sort of attitude I would have with Irish […] There are some people who try to you know put Irish above English or put Irish on a higher level and I know obviously that it has good cultural value but I think it does more harm than anything else […] we should have a European attitude instead of focusing in on our own case you know?"

The ideologies of anonymity and transnationality are dominant in this extract where they are presented as 'European' attitudes. Terry will speak Irish or English depending on his interlocutor's ability and sees no 'problem' with that. He does not want people who speak Irish to be put 'on a pedestal', by which he infers that Irish speakers should not be praised excessively. He criticises those who put Irish 'on a higher level' than English, a clear

reflection of the ideology that a minority language should not become 'excessively obvious' (Woolard 2016: 66). This is contrasted with a 'European' outlook where all languages are theoretically equal although the apparently unproblematic 'easy/comfortable bilingualism' which Terry favours in fact erases the dominance of English throughout Europe. The supposed equality between languages should prevail over prioritisation of the locally authentic ('our own case'). Terry's comments are a strong illustration of the symbolic indexicality of languages such as Irish versus the referential function of dominant languages such as Swedish. They also reflect a sense of the paramount importance of queer transnationality over national identities linked to specific languages, in this case Irish.

Another young participant, 21-year-old Adam, also distances himself from traditional discourses of authenticity, both linguistic and cultural. Adam describes himself as gay, queer and gender-fluid, is the most hybrid of the participants linguistically and lapses into English regularly during the interview.[8] He was asked whether he identified primarily with the Irish language and Irish national identity or with queerness:

Tá mé bródúil a bheith as Éirinn ach níl mé an-náisiúnachas agus sin rudaí staire agus polaitiúil agus an-topaiciúil agus controversial *agus* yeah *tá mé [bródúil]. Chonaic mé an* Eurovision *agus bhí go leor brat LGBT sa* arena *sa staidiam agus bhí sé sin go maith ag féachaint agus ceapann mé cad é is tábhachtach? An brat Éireann nó an brat LGBT agus em* I suppose *b'fhéidir meascán* you know?

"I'm proud of being Irish but I'm not very nationalist and that's historical and political and very topical things and controversial and yeah I am [proud]. I saw the Eurovision and there were lots of LGBT flags in the arena in the stadium and that

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[8] Despite more limited competence, Adam insisted on conducting the interview in Irish.

> looked good and I thought what is the most important? The Irish flag or the LGBT
>
> and I suppose maybe a mixture you know?"

This response sits further along the spectrum towards queer transnationality in that Adam distances his queerness from national identity but does not reject it entirely. He is proud of his Irishness but does not position himself as 'nationalist' with its political and historical associations (including, potentially, the erasure of queerness in the dominant discourse). He welcomes the fact that LGBT rather than national flags were predominant at the Eurovision Song Contest but suggests that a 'mixture' of both would be preferable. The absence of a reference to the Irish language in his discussion of national identity could be interpreted as further evidence of a distancing from traditional articulations of linguistic authenticity. Asked if he sees a link between his self-identification and the Irish language, he laughs and replies: '*Bhuel tá mé ag bogadh trí inscne agus ag bogadh idir Béarla agus Gaeilge*' ['Well I am moving through gender and between English and Irish'], an acknowledgement of his hybrid linguistic performance as well as his gender-fluidity.

5.2 Hierarchies of Irish-speaking and gay identities

13 of the 15 participants speak about the relationship between their Irish-speaking and gay/queer identities and 12 give the impression that it was not easy for them to reconcile both or had not been in the past. The reasons for this are the historical whiff of conservatism around Irish and lack of understanding between Irish speakers and gay/queer people. Such dynamics can also be interpreted within the authenticity-anonymity/transnationality spectrum. Of the participants, seven (Pádraig, Stiofán, Liam, Cian, Naoise, Donncha and Kevin) feel that being Irish-speaking is more important to them than being gay. Two participants (Seán and Nathan) feel that both are equally important and the remaining six

(Rory, Terry, Noel, Nicholas, Adam and Ethan) identify gayness or queerness as their primary identity. Two participants (Cian and Stiofán) comment that their Irish-speaking identity is more fundamental because it was established first, long before they came out. Some of those discourses are analysed in this section.

Pádraig, a 22-year-old student, has mastered Irish to a high level and is also fluent in other languages. He feels that there is a link between gay and Irish-speaking identities as both are marginal positions carrying with them their own challenges but being an Irish speaker is something about which he feels more sensitive:

N'fheadar ach sílim gurb ea [féiniúlacht na Gaeilge níos tábhachtaí] toisc nach féidir liom an aerachas a athrú ach gurb fhéidir liom an Ghaeilge a fhágáil agus a bheith níos normálta agus leanúint orm agus Béarla a labhairt // tá mé sa mhionlach toisc gur fhear aerach mé ach tá mé tar éis // sin mar atá ach tá mé tar éis cinneadh a dhéanamh dul isteach sa mhionlach Gaeilge chomh maith mar sin sílim gurb é sin an difríocht.

"I don't know but I think that it is [Irish speaking identity more important] because I can't change the gayness but I could leave Irish and be more normal and carry on speaking English // I'm in a minority because I'm a gay man but I have // that's the way things are but I have made a decision to enter the Irish-speaking minority also so I think that's the difference."

Seen through the analytical lens, Pádraig's discourses about his multiple identities show distancing from authenticity without fully embracing anonymity. He is proud, almost defensive, of his acquired identity as an Irish speaker ('I have made a decision to enter the Irish-speaking minority') and it is his dominant identity position. As he always felt gay, there

is no sense of achievement that he had to adopt his sexuality as an additional identity ('that's the way things are', 'I can't change the gayness'). Irish is potentially more vulnerable as he could walk away at any time ('I could leave Irish and be more normal'). Such an engaged but vulnerable position can often be seen in the emotional responses of those who become new speakers of Irish (Walsh 2017). Pádraig was also asked about which identity position he feels was more important:

> *Níl dúchas an-tábhachtach dom nó ní maith liom fiú nuair a chuireann daoine ceist orm 'Carb as duit?' mar ní bhraithim go bhfuil aon bhaint ag an áit sin arb as dom […] ach braithim anois go bhfuil mé mar chuid den phobal Gaelach i [cathair] / ní dóigh liom go bhfuil mé mar chuid de phobal aerach mar ní dóigh liom go bhfuil a leithéid ann […] is dócha nuair a fheicim daoine eile aeracha uaireanta atá cineál gáifeach nó a leithéid nach dtaitníonn sé liom agus nach bhfuil mé ag iarraidh a bheith // níl aon rud eadrainn seachas rud bitheolaíoch agus mar sin ní ionannaím leo ach i gcás na Gaeilge tá teanga eadrainn.*
>
> "Heritage/native place isn't very important for me or I don't even like it when people ask me 'where are you from?' because I don't feel I have any connection with where I'm from […] but now I feel that I am part of the Irish speaking community in [city] / I don't think I am part of the gay community because I don't think such a community exists […] I suppose when I see other gay men who are kind of camp and the likes that I don't like that and that I don't want to be // there's nothing between us apart from something biological and therefore I don't identify with them but in the case of Irish we have a language in common."

Although Pádraig is a highly competent speaker of Irish and his practice includes some Gaeltacht features, he does not model his dialect on any given area as his reticence about 'heritage/native place' reveals (the Irish word *dúchas* means both and is strongly associated with place). Pádraig also feels a stronger sense of community among Irish speakers and identifies more strongly with them through 'language' than with gay people with whom he feels only a 'biological' link. He also distances himself from queerness and a camp aesthetic. The acquired link of language is seen as more meaningful than the existing link of biology. This is consistent with research on the emotional responses of new speakers to their acquired minoritised languages: precisely because they have overcome significant social obstacles to language acquisition they may develop a particularly potent attachment to the language (Walsh 2017). It also echoes Woolard's (2016: 36) argument that in some non-Western cultures, artifice is highly valued and a linguistic variety that has to be created may be more valorised that a 'natural' and 'native' variety. Overall, Pádraig's discourse has a strong flavour of Woolard's 'post-naturalistic approaches' (2016: 36) in that he seems to be seeking a new composite identity which is not based closely on either ideological pole and which also values artifice.

The discourse of Noel is both similar and distinctive. The 24-year-old student strongly self-identifies as queer and although he began the interview in Irish, he switched to English about one third of the way through because he was struggling with queer vocabulary in Irish. He is one of two participants (along with Nicholas) who appears to be on the cusp of abandoning Irish and describes an identity shift away from Irish to one rooted in his queerness:

Nuair bhí mé níos óige I'd say *fiche haon fiche dó bhí mé i gcónaí ag smaoineamh bhí sin an t-am a bhí mé ag déanamh Gaeilge san ollscoil agus [...] chuir sé isteach orm*

nach raibh an Ghaeilge you know *nach raibh an Ghaeilge le fáil* / in everyday life. *Ní feictear an Ghaeilge ní chloistear an Ghaeilge [...] Anois tuigim b'fhéidir is cineáilín* apostate Irishman *mé ach tuigim go bhfuil rudaí ann níos mó ná an teanga* I mean *agus is breá liomsa a bheith in ann í a labhairt ach ní bhreá liom an teanga a thuilleadh / ní páirt ollmhór tábhachtach ionam é a thuilleadh.*

"When I was younger I'd say twenty-one twenty-two I would always be thinking that was the time I was studying Irish at university and [...] it bothered me that Irish was not you know not available / in everyday life. Irish is not seen and not heard […] Now I understand maybe I'm a kind of apostate Irishman but I understand that there are bigger things than the language I mean and I love being able to speak it but I don't love the language anymore / it isn't an enormously important part of me anymore."

Noel provides only scant information about his earlier more engaged position but it can be interpreted as a desire for authenticity in that Irish would be available 'in everyday life' from which he feels it is absent. His reference to becoming an 'apostate Irishman' appears to reflect guilt at having turned away from an earlier ideological commitment to Irish.[9] The 'bigger things than the language' are not specified but given his identity shift can be taken to mean issues related to queerness. At a later stage, Noel echoes the view of Pádraig that becoming a new speaker is an acquired identity whereas being queer is not and he also casts doubts on the inclusivity of speaking Irish:

I think there's a difference between gay identity and Irish-speaking identity in that one is a choice. You don't choose to be queer. You do choose to be an Irish-speaker

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[9] Use of this term is further evidence of the strong coupling of the Irish language with Irish national identity. By criticising himself for being an 'apostate', Noel is describing the quasi-religious belief that to be truly Irish, an Irish person has to speak Irish.

[...] But also I feel that if you were to create an identity among a group of friends it would be inherently insular because there will always be friends who don't speak it [...] I also feel that speaking Irish when one could be speaking English among a group of young friends is a little bit maybe not old-fashioned but it's not as modern […] as it is to be speaking English […] If I was speaking Irish with them it would be a conscious effort and there is I suppose some psychological baggage to do with the speaking of Irish because of as you said that associated backwardness that associated parochial identity which I don't think any longer flies but yet [I: But you do feel that at some level?] Yes I do feel that at some level and [...] almost like some of the naysayers and the condescending people have burrowed into my brain and they're telling me 'Oh why are you doing that? Why are you bothering?'

Noel clearly distances himself from authenticity and from activist approaches which have tended to borrow from such discourses (see Woolard 2016: 39–94 for a discussion on Catalan). In shifting from an Irish-speaking to a queer identity he appears to have internalised historical stereotypes about Irish and now frames speaking English as more 'modern' and 'inclusive'. He expresses concern that speaking Irish is an 'insular' act that could potentially exclude others but acknowledges that this may be linked to discourses around 'parochial identity' and 'backwardness' which have 'burrowed into [his] brain'. Noel's comments are in keeping with ideologies of anonymity about dominant languages and claims that they are neutral, belonging to everyone and no-one in particular. He also shows the influence of queer transnationality by seeing English as the default language in which to express queerness.

The interview with Terry also contains evidence of hierarchisation of his gay and Irish-speaking identities. He described how Irish was salient as he was coming out as gay but that the language's importance diminished as he became engaged with LGBTQ rights:

Nuair a bhí mé ag iarraidh teacht amach bhí mé ag úsáid na teanga mar lipéad eile dom eh you know *bhí mé aerach agus bhí Gaeilge agam [...] ach anois ní chuirim an luach céanna ar an teanga anois [...]* definitely *tá tá an Ghaeilic tar éis titim ó d'imigh mé ón gcoláiste agus is dóigh an rud a bhí ann ná domhan beag nó* bubble *beag a bhí ann agus mé ag déanamh na Gaeilge sa choláiste [...] agus ansin beagán ar bheagán thug mé faoi ndeara go bhfuil domhan eile is dóigh taobh amuigh den Ghaeilic agus sin an domhan ina bhfuil an chuid is mó de dhaoine anseo ina gcónaí ann.*

"When I was trying to come out I was using the language as another label for myself eh you know I was gay and I spoke Irish [...] but now I don't put the same value on the language [...] definitely Irish has fallen since I left college and I suppose what was there was a small world or a little bubble when I was doing Irish in college [...] and then bit by bit I realised that there was another world I suppose outside of Irish and that is the world in which most people live."

This extract is consistent with Terri's earlier discourse which places him much closer to the anonymity pole. His reference to using Irish as 'another label' for himself hints that it was more a coping tool than a fundamental identity marker so it was perhaps to be expected that his identity would shift. His current identity is predominantly gay and, as he said earlier, 'European', and involves a retreat from the authenticity associated with the 'staticity and placeness' (Pujolar & Puigdevall 2015: 168) of Irish in its 'small world' or 'little bubble' into 'another world' where most people live but where Irish is not spoken.

Rory, a 32-year-old student whose home language was English, had knowledge of the cultural and literary history of Irish. He was also a competent Irish speaker, expressed a

preference for traditional dialects and regularly engaged in cultural activities related to the language. However, for him being gay was more important:

> *B'fhéidir an chuid aerach díom féin is dócha go gcuirfidh sé sin isteach ar an gcineál saoil a chaithfidh mé amach anseo agus [...] mar shampla dá mbeinnse chun liosta a dhéanamh des na rudaí a dhéanann sainmhíniú ormsa is dóigh liom go mbeadh an t-aerachas i bhfad chun cinn ná an Ghaeilge.*
>
> "Maybe the gay part of me I suppose that will affect the kind of life I will live in the future and [...] for instance if I had to make a list of the things that define me I suppose that gayness would be much higher up than Irish."

Rory's reference to the future hints that he views homophobia as more of a potential problem than intolerance towards Irish speakers. He is unusual in that he was the only highly competent speaker of Irish to prioritise being gay as his primary identity. He seemed not to see any tension between both identities but aligned himself closely with linguistic authenticity. However, he drew on his knowledge of literature to argue that queerness was present in the Irish language long before puritanical Victorian attitudes to sex and therefore sought to naturalise a theme that has long rejected or erased by conservatives as 'unnatural' in an Irish language context.

A linguistic aspect of distance from Irish emerged in follow-up discussions with some of the participants during and following the interviews. While most if not all could describe the identitarian aspects of their sexuality in Irish, some admitted to not using Irish to talk about sex itself because of a lack of familiarity with the intimate lexicon involved. Nathan was among those who reported this:

Ní go rómhinic a bhuailim le daoine atá aerach agus atá Gaeilge acu so *éiríonn sé uaigneach ó am go chéile toisc nach mbíonn b'fhéidir nach bhfuil an réim teanga agam le bheith ag iarraidh cur síos a dhéanamh ar eachtraí sa George nó ag casadh ar leaid nua nó coinne a shocrú leo nó Grindr trí Ghaeilge* so actually *ar mo chuntas Grindr tá "cén chaoi a bhfuil tú" scríofa agam san* "about me" *nó* whatever.

"I don't often meet gay people who speak Irish so it gets lonely from time to time because there isn't perhaps I don't have the register of language to describe things that happen in the George [gay bar] or meeting a new lad or arranging dates with them or Grindr in Irish so actually on my Grindr account I have written 'cén chaoi a bhfuil tú?' [how are you?] in the 'about me' or whatever."

Nathan describes being a solitary ('lonely') Irish speaker in an overwhelmingly English-speaking group ('I don't often meet gay people who speak Irish'). He admits to lacking the 'language register' of dating and sexual relations but nonetheless signals his status as an Irish speaker by including it in his profile. Donncha, a 24-year-old student, reported reactions ranging from amazement to hostility when he included Irish in his online profiles. Ethan, a 25-year-old working in retail, said that he could never imagine having sex in Irish. No participant was in a long-term relationship with an Irish-speaking partner and two reported that they had switched to English to have sex with another Irish speaker although they had spoken Irish before and afterwards.

Despite the efforts of purist Victorian revivalists and the Catholic state to repress sexual expression, Irish by no means lacks the vocabulary to discuss sexuality, as evidenced by contemporary gay writers referred to above and a plethora of historical texts renowned for their bawdy content, for instance the 18th Century erotic poem *Cúirt an Mheon-Oíche* ["*The Midnight Court*"] (Ó Murchú 1982, Merriman & O'Connor 2014). However, it appears that

gay new speakers do not fashion this rich and ribald resource in their sexual relations. They can describe their sexual identity discursively in Irish but do not perform it intimately with others without recourse to English. There are hints that participants may not feel linguistically competent in the sexual domain but what is less clear is if they wish to choose Irish at all in sexual relations. It may be that Irish is viewed sub-consciously as excessively authentic and therefore inappropriate for contemporary queer sex and sexuality which are so closely associated with the anonymity of English. Clearly there is scope for further research on this question.

6. Discussion

This paper has analysed the identities of gay new speakers of Irish by examining the ideological positions they adopt along a spectrum of linguistic authority ranging from authenticity to anonymity, the latter being closely associated with transnationality in a queer context. Linguistic authenticity hinges on the premise that language has to be 'from somewhere' to be authentic, in other words a traditional native variety. In the Irish context, such an ideology is complicated by conflation of linguistic authenticity with historical discourses associating conservatism with the Irish language. Woolard (2016: 24) has argued how excessive emphasis on authenticity can alienate new speakers who wish to adopt Catalan. In the Irish case, the mixture of authenticity and conservatism can be said to have been a particularly dangerous cocktail. It is a backdrop to many of the discourses of the participants, particularly an older cohort, and while many reject it out of hand and continue to speak Irish (for example Seán and Rory), others (Nicholas and Noel and, to a lesser extent, Terry) seem to have internalised it and it may have contributed to their decision to distance themselves from Irish or abandon it altogether. Only one person – Rory – closely aligns

himself with linguistic authenticity but de-couples it from the mesh of conservatism by using his knowledge of literature in Irish to legitimise queer themes stretching back centuries. Others, such as Pádraig, have a more ambivalent relationship to authenticity, adopting diluted aspects of it such as a limited amount of Gaeltacht features but expressing a discomfort with too much *dúchas*. For many participants, the alignment with either authenticity or anonymity is not clear-cut, but in the case of the most active and competent Irish speakers there is evidence of post-naturalistic authenticity being sought or practiced, approaches that are less dependent on traditional 'natural' models.

Hierarchies of identity positions are split down the middle with roughly equal numbers prioritising Irish or gayness/queerness and a small minority unable to decide. It may be asked why do some speakers prioritise Irish over queerness in their identities and vice versa? A possible interpretation is linked to identity as a practice and even to 'languaging' (Swain 2006): by 'doing' the Irish language in their own individual ways, the speakers become more invested in it as an identity position. With the single exception of Rory, all of the participants who chose queerness over Irish were less competent speakers and included two people who were on the cusp of giving it up altogether.

This research on gay new speakers queers a number of assumptions in the language planning and language revitalisation paradigms: that authentic language is directly tied to national identity, territory, a specific history and that it results from organic (heterosexual) transmission. The notion of transmission is important in the Irish context because the work of one of the founding fathers of sociolinguistics, Joshua Fishman, became influential among Irish language policy-makers in the 1980s and 1990s. Fishman's classical language planning model of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) hinges on strategic interventions appropriate to the level of the target language's 'intergenerational dislocation', in other words the extent to which it is (not) being transmitted in the home (1991, 2001). Fishman (1991: 95) is

unequivocal that no language could dispense with or ignore intergenerational transmission and that every revitalisation movement should aim at restoring it. In the Irish context, the emphasis on intergenerational transmission has been placed centre-stage in the state-backed language planning process that is being rolled out in the Gaeltacht in response to the declining use of Irish there[10] but the consequences of such an approach have not been critically assessed from a queer perspective. Fishman's model assumes heterosexual and intrafamilial transmission as the apex of language planning and risks alienating those with non-heteronormative sexual identities from the revitalisation effort. By drawing attention to who gains and loses from classical language planning perspectives, this critique of RLS represents an important contribution to the field of Critical Sociolinguistics. More generally, the research also adds to the growing body of literature on new speakerness and broadens its scope by deepening our understanding of the role of gay/queer new speakers in adopting languages. This is particularly important in the case of minoritised languages such as Irish where such research has not been conducted to date.

By speaking Irish in their everyday lives, gay new speakers de-couple the links between language, territory and organic transmission. Even if they do not overtly contest the historical discourses of conservatism associated with Irish, by their very existence they queer the assumption (which lingers both in queer circles and in wider society) that non-heteronormative sexuality is not compatible with speaking Irish. On a more discursive scale, heteronormative models of language revitalisation need to be challenged continuously in order to destabilise the obstacles they place in the path of non-heteronormative people who wish to become new speakers and adopt Irish as a central part of their linguistic repertoire.

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[10] Although there are denser concentrations of active Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht than elsewhere in Ireland, census returns and various research reports (e.g. Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, Ó Giollagáin & Charlton 2015) have documented the ongoing decline in the use of Irish in these regions. A Gaeltacht Act was passed in 2012 in order to provide a statutory basis for language planning in the Gaeltacht in an effort to stem the decline.

Many more research possibilities emerge from this paper: more detailed research about and mapping of conservative discourses around Irish; research among gay Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht; the (non-) use of Irish in gay sexual encounters; comparative work on gay speakers of other minoritised Celtic languages such as Scottish Gaelic and Welsh and research on multilingualism among gay people in general (another theme that emerged strongly in the data but that has not been discussed in this paper).

Transcription protocol

[city] etc.	name of place removed
LF	laughter
/	pause
//	short pause
↑	voice raised
(( ))	unclear speech
[…]	material removed
[name of city]	material inserted
you know (in original Irish text)	codeswitching

Acknowledgements

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[11] This is not a direct translation. The original title – 'aithníonn queeróg queeróg eile' – is a reworking of an Irish proverb 'aithníonn ciaróg ciaróg eile', meaning 'one beetle recognises another beetle' or 'it takes one to know one' (see Lacey 2008: 3–4).

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