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# The role of emotions and positionality in the trajectories of ‘new speakers’ of Irish

John Walsh

National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

## Abstract

**Aims and Objectives/Purpose/Research Questions:** The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the emotional experiences and positionality of ‘new speakers’ of Irish, fluent and regular speakers who were not raised with Irish in the historical Irish-speaking heartland known as the Gaeltacht. The role of emotions in facilitating the transition to new speakerhood is considered, as is their influence on the speakers’ continued use of Irish and on their positionality in relation to other speakers.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The paper is based on semi-structured narrative interviews conducted with participants identified as active and competent new speakers of Irish. It is part of a larger European project on the topic of new speakers.

**Data and Analysis:** The sample size is 46 interviews from a database of 100 Irish speakers and was analysed using NVivo qualitative analysis.

**Findings/Conclusions:** Becoming a new speaker of Irish is a deeply emotional process, both before and after the transition, as subjects grapple with additional obstacles to acquisition and use due to the language’s minoritised status. The emotions involved in adopting a minoritised language such as Irish appear to be qualitatively different from other languages because of the additional obstacles involved in mastering a language with a weak sociolinguistic profile.

**Originality:** The paper’s originality stems from the fact that it is the first systematic study of emotions and positionality among new speakers of Irish and is distinct from existing quantitative studies of language attitudes. An additional innovation is its theoretical framework which aims to guide understanding of emotions and positionality among new speakers of minoritised languages in particular rather than majority languages in general.

**Significance/Implications:** The paper is theoretically significant because existing work on language and emotions has not focused on minoritised languages. Significance attaches to the related finding that the emotional process is not the same for minoritised languages and other more dominant languages.

## Keywords

Irish language, language and emotions, multilingualism, new speakers, positionality

## 1. Introduction

Considerable attention has been paid to the study of emotions in the social sciences in recent years and increasingly emotions are at the forefront of contemporary research (Greco & Stenner, 2008). This has not always been the case: although founders of the discipline such as Comte, Durkheim, Weber and Marx made frequent reference to emotions in their work, the concept became restricted to biosciences and chiefly psychology. Emotions became marginalised to the fringes of the discipline and were not studied systematically in sociology until the 1970s. The rise of the study of emotions in sociology has confirmed the importance of the concept for gaining an understanding of social life. The ‘emotional turn’ has been accompanied by the emergence of fields such as feminism, the study of social movements

and analysis of collective and individual identities, and has challenged the dominance of rationalism in the social sciences and the perception that emotion was the enemy of reason. The work of Heaney (2011) draws attention to the links between emotions and power structures and hierarchies. Other authors on 'emotional practices' have drawn on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and have contended that emotional arousal is 'socially situated, adaptive, trained, plastic, and thus historical' (Scheer, 2012: 193). Within linguistic anthropology and critical sociolinguistics, ethnographic methodologies have facilitated the study of emotion and language and emotions and bi- or multilingualism (Pavlenko, 2005; Wilce, 2009).

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted with 'new speakers' in recent years as part of the European network of researchers on the topic, under the auspices of COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). New speakers refer generally to fluent and regular users of a language other than their primary language of socialisation. They often navigate multilingual repertoires and engage in struggles for legitimisation because the type of language they use may be seen as inauthentic compared to 'native' speakers (for an overview of the concept, see O'Rourke, Pujolar, & Ramallo, 2015). The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the emotional experiences and positionality of new speakers of Irish, understood here as fluent and regular users who were not raised with Irish in the historical Irish-speaking heartland known as the Gaeltacht. The role of emotions in facilitating the transition to new speakerhood is considered, as is their influence on the speakers' continued use of Irish and on their positionality in relation to other speakers.

## **2. New speakers and Irish**

The Republic of Ireland Census does not inquire about self-reported competence in Irish but instead asks respondents about general competence and frequency of use. While many of those claiming to know Irish may have only limited competence, it is reasonable to conclude that those reporting daily and weekly use outside the education system, where Irish is a core subject, are habitual speakers of Irish in their everyday lives. According to the 2016 Census 1,761,420 people or 39.8% of the population reported that they were capable of speaking Irish. However only 1.7% (73,803) said that they did so daily outside the education system. The 2016 returns were notable because they showed a decline, for the first time in decades, in almost all of the key statistics about knowledge and use of Irish. The global figure of general knowledge about Irish fell by 0.7% from 1,774,437 (41.4%) in 2011 and the percentage of daily speakers outside education fell by 3,382, or 4.4%. Approximately two-thirds of these daily speakers are situated outside the Gaeltacht, the historical heartland of Irish and where the highest concentration of speakers is to be found. A further 111,473 people reported being weekly speakers of Irish outside education, a minor increase of 0.8%. Levels of knowledge and use of Irish were higher in the Gaeltacht, but that was where the most dramatic decline was recorded. The number of daily speakers outside education in the Gaeltacht fell from 23,175 or almost 24% in 2011, to 20,586 or 21.4% in 2016, a reduction of 11%. 63,664 people in the Gaeltacht or 66.3% said that they could speak Irish, which also represented a reduction from 66,238 or 69% in 2011 (Central Statistics Office, 2017). UK census returns for Northern Ireland from 2011 indicate that about 66,000 people or 4% of the population there claimed to be able to speak, read, write and understand Irish (Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency, 2012).

The number of new speakers of Irish can be estimated by adding the daily and weekly speakers outside the Gaeltacht to those in Northern Ireland claiming the four language skills. Such an estimate comes to over 200,000 people or about 5% of the population of Ireland. The

majority of new speakers of Irish acquire Irish outside the home, usually in the education system. Some have active competence from a young age because Irish was spoken to them at home, but Irish is not the language of their community.<sup>1</sup> Some have a Gaeltacht background but Irish was not their home language (Walsh et al., 2015).

### 3. Methodology

The data on Irish are part of a larger corpus of interviews and focus groups comprising 145 in-depth interviews and 12 focus groups conducted between 2012 and 2015 with new speakers of Irish, Catalan and Basque.<sup>2</sup> Interviewees were chosen using snowball sampling and in the case of the 100 speakers of Irish can be divided into five general categories although there is overlap between them: ‘expert’ new speakers (Piller, 2002); new speakers who use Gaeltacht accents; hybrid new speakers; people raised speaking Irish outside the Gaeltacht; and potential new speakers.<sup>3</sup> The analysis in this paper is based on a subset of 46 interviews (25 males and 21 females). The data were analysed using NVivo software and three general themes identified: (a) linguistic biographies (especially regarding language learning); (b) linguistic practices; and (c) identities and ideologies related to language. The participants’ emotional responses to becoming new speakers were not sought at interview stage but following initial qualitative analysis, the interviews yielded a large amount of data which were coded as ‘emotional’. Informants described a spectrum of emotions experienced during the process of becoming new speakers ranging from shame, fear, and frustration to excitement, pride and joy.

### 4. Theoretical framework

#### 4.1 Emotions and social sciences

There has been an explosion of interest in emotions within the social sciences in recent years. Emotions were not studied explicitly in sociology until the 1970s despite their ‘hidden history’ in the discipline. They were derided by Enlightenment thinkers and rationality became dominant in disciplines such as political science. Heaney has argued that the historical marginalisation of the emotional was unjustified: ‘Emotions are not irrational, or opposed to reason [...] Rationality itself is based on emotion; it should not be considered its enemy’ (Heaney, 2011: 272). He contends that social movements and political power are based on emotions and emphasises the emotional dimension of social structures and cultures. A recent compendium on the ‘emotionalization’ of different sectors of social life states in the Introduction that ‘[t]he sociology and anthropology of emotions [...] are now well-established disciplines with their own textbooks, courses and research networks’ (Greco & Stenner, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, it has been argued that ‘sociology must develop models of how humans think *and* feel [...] Moreover, sociology can no longer ignore the neurology of emotions by simply declaring biology to be a “black box” into which sociologists should not tread’ (Stets & Turner, 2005: 1, emphasis in original). Despite the shift, it is noteworthy

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<sup>1</sup> In the Irish context, such speakers are considered ‘new speakers’ because they often consider themselves to lack legitimacy in comparison with speakers from the Gaeltacht, even though Irish may have been their primary language of socialisation. Several such speakers were reluctant to describe themselves as ‘native’ or if they did so, they considered themselves less ‘native’ than Gaeltacht speakers.

<sup>2</sup> 100 interviews in the case of Irish, 9 interviews and 9 focus groups in the case of Basque and 36 interviews and 3 focus groups in the case of Catalan.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of Irish, ‘potential new speakers’ refer to users with a lower level of competence who are nonetheless attempting to use what Irish they can and who also desire to improve their level (O’Rourke, 2015).

that there is no significant discussion of the concept of emotion in the seventh edition of Giddens and Sutton's *Sociology* (2013).

#### 4.2 Emotions and language

Language and emotions have been studied in psychology, (linguistic) anthropology and (cognitive) linguistics and have ranged in theoretical approach from neurophysical to social constructionist. There has been considerable debate about the difference between 'affect' and 'emotion' but one study on the topic of language and emotion has cautioned against creating simplistic binary divisions between them (Probyn, 2004, quoted in Wilce, 2009: 30). However, language still remains marginal in the discussion of emotions in general, as evidenced by its noticeable absence in the flagship compendium *Emotions: A Social Science Reader* (Greco & Stenner, 2008).

#### 4.3 Emotions and multilingualism

A landmark contribution to the field of language and emotions in the last decade is Dewaele's *Emotions in Multiple Languages* (2010). Using the term 'LX' to refer to languages established after the individual's first language, he investigates two dimensions of emotions in LXs: (a) the ability and experience of individuals to communicate positive (for instance love) and negative (for instance anger or anxiety) emotions in their LXs and how these may differ according to language; and (b) the 'affective factors linked to the use of LXs' and how these may influence use (Dewaele, 2010: 6). Another major contribution from the last decade is Pavlenko's *Emotions and Multilingualism* (2005). Stating that she aimed to challenge the 'monolingual bias' in linguistics, Pavlenko declared herself less interested in a neurophysical explanation of the phenomenon and more concerned with the socially and contextually grounded notion of language:

Social emotions, including the emotional underpinnings of linguistic decision making, are relational and as such are intrinsically linked to our identities, or subject positions, and identity narratives (Pavlenko, 2005: 197).

The languages we speak, or refuse to speak, have a lot to do with who we are, what subject positions we claim or contest, and what futures we invest in (Pavlenko, 2005: 223).

Similarly, this paper is not concerned with how emotions are expressed differently in different languages but rather with how new speakers of minoritised languages respond emotionally to processes of language learning and language use. Pavlenko argues that emotional responses to language are widespread and unremarkable:

Linguistic human beings, we get emotional about what languages we should and should not be using, when and how particular languages should be used, what values should be assigned to them, and what constitutes proper usage and linguistic purity. It is not surprising, then, that emotions influence both language policy and individual language choices (Pavlenko, 2005: 193).

Academic definitions of emotions, to the extent that they exist at all, tend to be more psychological or even biological. Pavlenko avoids offering a potted definition but emphasises

the relational component of emotions and how they might best be understood from a standpoint of social constructivism. This paper endorses that theoretical approach.

More recently Busch has proposed the concept of *Spracherleben* (language experience) in order to explore the connections between linguistic repertoire, linguistic ideologies and lived experience of language (Busch, 2012, 2017). She draws on a biographical approach to expand the notion of linguistic repertoire to encompass interactions with others, the role of ideologies and the personal lived experience of the subject. Following Bakhtin (1981), Busch conceives repertoire as a chronotope, reflecting different social spaces simultaneously, pointing backwards and forwards in our lives (see also Woolard, 2016: 284). The work of Claire Kramsch (2009) on the multilingual subject is also relevant as it explores the subjectivities associated with the language learning process and its links to aspects such as memory, emotion and imagination. At a workshop on the links between her work on multilingual language teachers and new speakers, Kramsch emphasised the importance of understanding ‘emotions that lead you to action’ and described how speakers ‘are created anew and acquire a new sensitivity to meaning and meaning-making’ as a result of adopting additional languages (Kramsch, 2017).

The emphasis on subjectivities in the work of Pavlenko, Busch and Kramsch points to the notion of positionality, the position that subjects adopt in relation to others and how it may change according to their linguistic trajectory. This draws attention to the ideological and identitarian implications of becoming a new speaker; new linguistic practices may be accompanied by fundamental changes in how subjects view themselves. While the work of Pavlenko and others is useful in understanding how the speakers’ emotional responses may differ depending on their choice of language, its limitation for the present study is that these authors focus on major languages such as Russian and German and have not considered the emotional implications of speaking minoritised languages.

#### 4.4 Language trajectories

A final key part of the theoretical framework of this paper relates to ‘language trajectories’, the language-based journeys taken by individuals throughout the life cycle. Language trajectories can be very complex and may intersect with other kinds of critical junctures which imply movements and transitions across time and space. A trajectory may involve learning a new variety (for instance a standardised form) or an entirely new language and the process may be imbued with associated values and ideologies. Woolard (2016) has drawn extensively on a life-histories approach to discourses and language choices around Catalan. A related concept from the sociolinguistics of Catalan (and of the Iberian Peninsula in general) is that of linguistic *muda* (plural *mudes*). The Catalan noun *muda* (based on the verb *mudar*) means to transform or change significantly and a linguistic *muda* refers to a critical juncture in a language trajectory when a person makes a significant shift towards the target language. *Mudes* entail a change in linguistic practice but may also be accompanied by a shift in positionality as subjects change their self-awareness and orientation to others (for a discussion of *mudes* in Catalan see Pujolar & González, 2012; Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015; for a discussion on Basque see Ortega, Urla, Amorrortu, Goirigolzarri, & Urangu, 2015). The concept of *muda* has also been used to study the linguistic and spatio-temporal trajectories of new speakers of Spanish, for instance university students of migrant origin in Madrid. Linguistic identities are reconfigured after the *muda*, the interviewees gain agency and capitalise their new linguistic resources and draw on linguistic ideologies to justify the changes (Martín-Rojo & Rodríguez, 2016). The particular value for the present study of the

*muda* concept is that it emerged from the context of minoritised languages such as Catalan and Basque. Most of the emotional narratives recounted below are linked in one way or another to linguistic *mudes* as a key part of the language trajectory.

Having sketched the theoretical background informing this study, in the following section I present data coded as emotional from the research corpus on new speakers of Irish and interpret it in the light of this framework.

## 5. Emotions and new speakers of Irish

As stated above, a substantial amount of the data gathered for Irish and other minoritised languages was coded as emotional. In the remainder of the article, the Irish data from a range of emotional fields, some positive and others negative, are presented. Such a simplistic binary division does not always reflect the complex emotional reality and negative emotions may lead to positive outcomes and vice versa. Some emotional experiences are identified as the trigger for a linguistic *muda* while others are linked to the subject's new positionality developed as a result of becoming a new speaker.

The selection below is a representative sample of the range of emotional experiences reported by new speakers. None of the material has been altered linguistically and is reproduced verbatim. The extracts that follow use the anonymous numbering convention adopted during the coding process, a combination of letter and numbers. The letter refers to the place where the interview was conducted and the number to the speaker, followed by the number of the conversational turn. For instance, G16 38 refers to place G, speaker 16 and conversational turn 38. In each extract, material directly relevant to the emotion being discussed is underlined for clarity.

### 5.1 Happiness/contentment

Several participants reported a sense of happiness, contentment or fulfilment from having become a new speaker of Irish. Some felt that Irish had changed their identity narrative and made them aware of a positive and healthy connection with their country of origin or even offered them relief from an oppressive environment. Others found contentment and self-valorisation in acquiring linguistic features of traditional dialects that they viewed as authentic and pertinent to their evolving positionality which was rooted in a local identity. The account of N4, a 34-year old community worker from a rural area of Northern Ireland, can be read in terms of an evolving linguistic trajectory. He describes the emotions associated with a trigger to adopt Irish in his youth: the contentment he experienced during a teenage visit to the Gaeltacht in the Republic and the sense of relief it offered him from the Troubles which were ongoing at the time. Similar to many other new speakers (Walsh et al., 2015), N4's trajectory took a significant turn after spending a period in the Gaeltacht. This was the trigger for a linguistic *muda* when he began to associate Irish with freedom in contrast to his repressed surroundings at home and when he realised that it was a community language rather than merely a school subject. This extract also reveals how the *muda* also led to a shift in N4's positionality as he forged a new identity for himself through becoming an Irish speaker. That process was steeped in emotion as he contrasted his new and old identity narratives: the comfort and freedom he now associated with speaking Irish versus the depression and repression linked to his life lived through English at home. This simultaneous backward and forward view is in keeping with the concept of repertoire as (biographical) chronotope (Busch, 2017; Woolard, 2016: 285):

N4 21

Sin an áit a dtáinig an teanga chun beatha domsa / ábhar scoile a bhí ann roimhe sin a raibh dúil agam ann ach go tobann d'aithin mé go raibh an oiread dúil a bhí agam in san rud acadúil seo go dtáinig sé chun beatha os mo chomhair / os comhair mo shúile / bhí daoine ann / bhí pobal ann a bhí ag caint Gaeilge agus rud iontach a bhí ann dom / spreag sé go mór mé agus i bhfírinne bhí an-bhrón orm mar bhí ar dhaoine dul abhaile tar éis trí seachtaine ach níor bhain sé leis an siamsaíocht nó leis an chraic ar fad a bhí againn / bhain sé le bheith ag fágáil áit a bhí / áit a raibh saoirse ann agus deirim é sin sa chiall is leithne de sin / bhí sé gruama a bheith ag tarraingt ar ais ar an tuaisceart ag an am sin nuair a tháinig tú a fhad leis an teorainn agus nuair a chonaic tú na túir móra ag airm na Breataine agus daoine dorcha istigh ann ag amharc amach ort / daoine le gunnaí díreach mhothaigh tú / tháinig an ghruaim ort arís / bhí muid saor ó sin ar feadh trí seachtaine so thaitin an saol a bhí sa Ghaeltacht liom agus thaitin go mórmhór an teangaidh agus gach rud a bhain leis sin / mhothaigh mé go raibh an fhéiniúlacht a raibh mise ag iarraidh mise ag iarraidh a aithint dom féin go raibh sin sa nádúr ag gach duine sa Ghaeltacht agus mhothaigh mé iontach compordach ina measc mar sin [...] agus is dóigh gur mhothaigh mé níos sona ionam féin ansin ná mar a bhí riamh roimhe.

That was where the language came to life for me / it was a school subject before then that I liked but suddenly I recognised that I had so much desire and fondness for this academic thing that it came to life in front of me / in front of my eyes / there was a community there speaking Irish and it was great in my eyes / it really inspired me and I was really sad because people had to go home after three weeks but it wasn't linked to all the fun and craic [=conviviality, fun] we had / it had to do with leaving the place / a place where there was freedom and I say that in the broadest meaning of the word / it was depressing returning to the North at that time / when you came as far as the border and saw the British army's big towers and dark [shadowy] people inside them looking out at you / people with guns / you just felt // the depression came over you again / we were free from that for three weeks // so I liked the Gaeltacht life and especially the language and everything linked to that // the identity I was trying to identify for myself I felt that everyone in the Gaeltacht had it naturally and therefore I felt really comfortable in their midst [...] and I suppose I felt happier in myself than I had ever before.

N2, a 33-year old teacher also from Northern Ireland, argues in terms that suggest change in his identity narrative due to Irish. He says that becoming a new speaker helped him understand both himself and his national identity as an Irishman. He also positions himself as an Irish speaker in a broader context of a positive and healthy multilingualism in contrast to the English monolingualism dominant in Ireland:

N2 36

Ní bheinn ar an chineál Éireannaigh céanna gan an Ghaeilic déarfainn / déarfainn go dtugann an Ghaeilic tuigbheáil ar leith ar cé mé fhéin sa tír seo / fosta is maith liom a bheith ag amharc ar an teangaidh mar theangaidh iomlán chomhaimseartha / nua-aoiseach / go mbeadh dearcadh níos oscailte againn [...] go mbeadh muid ceangailte leis an Eoraip / daoine atá cosúil linn san Eoraip a bhfuil ilteangacht de chineál éigin acu sílim gur rud iontach dearfach agus sláintiúil é ag daoine / in Éirinn tá muid gafa le teangaidh amháin / is dóigh go bhfuil sé níos sláintiúla nuair a bhíonn níos mó ná teangaidh amháin agat.

I wouldn't be the same kind of Irish person without Irish I'd say / I'd say that Irish gives me a special understanding of who I am in this country / also I like to look at the language as a completely contemporary / modern language / that we would have a more open attitude [...] that we would be linked to Europe / people like us in Europe who are multilingual in some way I think that's a very positive and healthy thing / in Ireland we are stuck with one language I suppose it's more healthy when you have more than one language.

## 5.2 Pride

Pride is a common positive emotion among new speakers of Irish and manifests itself in different ways. It is often linked to a sense of post-*muda* achievement at having overcome obstacles to the acquisition of the language. Woolard identifies a similar stance among new speakers of Catalan, high-school students in a city on the edge of the Barcelona metropolitan region, who take pride in their transformation precisely because of their 'primary identities as Castilian speakers' (Woolard, 2016: 294). G1 is a 28-year old male student from a rural area who has studied Irish to a high level. He recalls his pride at achieving good competence in Irish in time for the Leaving Certificate, the final school examination. He realises now that what he thought was good competence in his youth was in fact relative, but a source of pride nonetheless as it represented surmounting an obstacle to becoming a speaker. This can also be viewed as a linguistic *muda* as it marked a critical juncture in the subject's adoption of Irish. Subsequent *mudes* cemented that transformation although as we shall see later, G1 remains highly self-critical of his competence:

G1 62

*Yeah don Ardteist bliain na hArdteiste bhí eh caithfidh mé a rá go ndearna sé [an múinteoir] an-jab linn / now shíl mise ag deireadh na bliana sin go raibh Gaeilge anamhaith agam ach ní raibh ach fós féin bhí mé cineál mórtasach go raibh mé in ann go raibh mé in ann ag an teanga seo mar is dócha arís bhí ana-chraic againn sa rang tháinig muid chomh fada le leis le hIndreabhán sílim nó le Cois Fharráige áit éigin i gCois Fharráige chuaigh muid ann ar feadh deireadh seachtaine.*

Yeah for the Leaving Cert the year of the Leaving Cert I was eh I have to say that he [teacher] did a great job with us / now at the end of that year I thought I had very good Irish but I didn't but even so I was kind of proud that I was able for this language because again we had great craic [=conviviality, fun] in the class we went as far as Indreabhán I think or Cois Fharráige somewhere in Cois Fharráige [Gaeltacht] we went there for a weekend.

Some new speakers take great pride in mastering a traditional dialect after they have learned the standard language through schooling. Their motivation for doing so can sometimes be a family connection to a Gaeltacht area, as in the case of a 24-year old who acquired the historical dialect of his district, which is no longer Irish-speaking, by visiting a nearby Gaeltacht where the same variety is still spoken. Irish was spoken by previous generations of his family but as a result of language shift, English was his primary language of socialisation. G11 speaks of his pride in forging a new linguistic identity that would associate him with that area and allow him to pass as a native speaker (Piller, 2002). Using the frame of chronotope again, this can be interpreted as a desire to attain a local variety seen as authentic as a trigger for a linguistic *muda*, not in favour of Irish – which he already spoke – but in favour of a traditional dialect. This involved him expanding his repertoire to include the dialect in

contrast with his previous repertoire which comprised English and standard Irish. Similar to G1, the pride in acquiring the dialect to such a high level may be accounted for by the stark contrast between G11's linguistic origins as an English speaker and his present ability as an 'expert speaker' (Piller, 2002) of his family's historical variety:

G11a 4

Chomh luath agus a thosnaíos ag obair [sa Ghaeltacht] bhí daoine ag rá rudaí nár thuig mé i gceart. Bhí an-fhonn orm fáilt amach déin bhrí a bhí leo agus bheinn i gcónaí ag cur ceiste ar dhaoine mar gheall air, an úsáidtear é seo nó siúd. Bhain mé ana-thaitneamh as na focail chanúnacha san a úsáid toisc gur Gaolainn [an cheantair sin] í. Táim bródúil as an gceantar agus is [as an gceantar sin] mé. Bhí sprioc agam go mbeadh an Ghaolainn chomh cruinn agam agus a gheobhainn, ní hamháin an chanúin ach nuair a thosnaigh mé a foghlaim na n-amhráintí, bhí sprioc agam go dtuigfeadh daoine gur [as an gceantar sin] mé. Bhí mé ag cóisir tí ag duine [sa Ghaeltacht] agus dúirt [bean áitiúil] nár chreid sí go raibh an Ghaolainn chomh pras agam agus nár chreid sí nárbh as an [áit sin] dom. Bhí ionadh an domhain ormsa agus uirthise agus mar is eol duit dhein sí ana-chuid taighde mar gheall ar an gcanúin. Bhí mé ana-shásta go mbíodh daoine san ollscoil agus cainteoirí dúchais eile do mo mholadh. An tslat tomhais a bhí agam ná moladh daoine eile.

As soon as I started working [in the Gaeltacht] people were saying things that I didn't understand correctly. I really wanted to find out what they meant and I was always asking people about them, is this or that used. I really enjoyed using the dialectal words because it was the Irish [of that area]. I'm proud of that area and I am [from that area]. I had an aim that I would know Irish as accurately as I could, not only the dialect but when I started learning the songs, I wanted people to know that I was from [that area]. I was at someone's house party in [specific Gaeltacht area] and [a local woman] said that she could not believe how well I knew Irish and that she did not believe I was not [from that area]. I was amazed and so was she and as you know she did a lot of research about the dialect. I was really delighted that people in the university and other native speakers would praise me. My yardstick was other people's praise.

### 5.3 Duty/loyalty

A sense of duty or loyalty was often expressed by those who had become competent and active new speakers in response to threats to the future of Irish, particularly in the Gaeltacht. Similar to pride above, it is associated with the post-*muda* stage: a sense of duty or loyalty may not create speakers of Irish, but it may maintain speakers if they position themselves as having a responsibility to continue speaking the language. This is a significant decision because there are ample threats to the fragile social networks where Irish is spoken and a *muda* may be reversed in the future. The following extract is from an interview with G17, a Gaeltacht new speaker who was raised mostly in English but now takes a proactive stance in favour of Irish. The reference to 'people like me' reflects a sense of belonging to a committed group or core 'active minority' of new speakers who see themselves as having a duty to support Irish (Moscovici, 1976; O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015). Although G17 is not a parent, there are also similarities with one of Woolard's informants, Josefina, who adopted a Catalan linguistic identity to the extent that she spoke it to her children, despite her background as a Castilian speaker (Woolard, 2016: 278). Similarly, a process of conscientisation about the

threatened status of Basque proves a potent trigger for linguistic *mudes* in that context (Puigdevall, Walsh, Amorrortu, & Ortega, 2018, in press):

G17 103, 107

Bímse cosantach faoin teanga nó ní maith liom daoine ag caitheamh anuas uirthi nó bímse leochaileach go maith [...] braithimse go bhfuil saghas tábhacht ar leith ag baint liomsa mar eh Gaeilgeoir mar duine a bhfuil Gaeilge aige duine a bhfuil Gaeilge réasúnta maith aige mar gheall go bhfuil saghas dualgas orm an sochaí a thabhairt ar aghaidh go dtí an chead glúin eile agus í a labhairt [...] mar mura labhraítear é níl sí beo mar sin caithfidh muid í a thabhairt slán *like* í a labhairt amach os ard mar em muna labhraímidne é cé eile a labhródh í? [...] Is eh daoine ar chosúil liomsa a bheidh ag labhairt na teanga agus a bheidh ag is dócha beidh siad ag eascairt as ceantracha neamh-Ghaeltachta ceantracha Galltachta nach raibh an Ghaeilge riamh iontu mar sin is dócha táimse sásta glacadh leis an dualgas.

I tend to be defensive about the language because I don't like people criticising it and I am quite sensitive [...] I think that I am kind of particularly important as an Irish speaker as someone who has Irish who has fairly good Irish because I have a kind of duty to pass on this life to the next generation and to speak it [...] because if it isn't spoken it isn't alive and we have to save it like speak it loudly because em if we don't speak it who else will speak it? [...] It is people like me who will be speaking the language and they will be from non-Gaeltacht areas areas outside the Gaeltacht where Irish never existed so I suppose I am happy to accept the duty.

A similar sense of duty and of solidarity with similarly motivated people, is also expressed by a 29 G20, a 29-year old woman who was raised bilingually outside the Gaeltacht. She argues that only people like her can be relied upon to stand up for Irish and to carry on speaking it, a clear example of how this emotion may spur a subject to remain an Irish speaker:

G20 106, 108

Braithim go bhfuil dualgas orm leanúint orm ag labhairt Gaeilge agus a bheith ag cosaint na teanga [...] toisc gur mionteanga í is dóigh *yeah* go bhfuil sí faoi bhagairt agus mura ndéanaimse é cé a dhéanfas é? [Ní] féidir linn a bheith ag braith ar dhaoine eile le chuile rud a dhéanamh.

I feel that I have a duty to carry on speaking Irish and to defend it [...] because it is a minority language I suppose yeah it is under threat and if I don't do it who will? We can't rely on other people to do everything.

The group identity is particularly strong in the case of G22, a 25-year old man from a city whose home language was English and is now living outside Ireland. He argues that precisely because 'we' (i.e. new speakers) have had to learn Irish and have created their own community, they should speak it also. He articulates an inclusive vision of what constitutes an Irish speaker based on competence not nativeness and positions himself as a member of a group that has a stake in the language's future:

G22 121

Tá oibleagáid orainn an Ghaeilge ní a labhairt ach a choimeád beo *I mean* más rud é gur fhoghlaim muid

an Ghaeilge ba cheart dúinn é a úsáid chomh maith leis sin agus tá pobal bunaithe againn ach níl muid in aon áit amháin arís tá muid thar lear tá muid i gcathracha éagsúla agus níl muid sa Ghaeltacht *but* tá muid ana-thábhachtach scríobhann muid dho na meáin cumarsáide tá muid inár láithreoirí anois tá muid inár iriseoirí anois tá muid inár / tá daoine ag obair le TG4.

We have an obligation to speak Irish to keep it alive I mean if we learned Irish we should use it as well and we have established a community but we are not in just one place we are abroad we are in different cities and we are not in the Gaeltacht but we are very important we write for the media we are presenters now we are journalists we are / we are people working for TG4 [television station].

#### 5.4 Frustration

Frustration was the most common negative emotion towards Irish. Unsurprisingly it was particularly prevalent among speakers with lower levels of competence (not featured in this paper) but was also noteworthy for its strong presence even in the discourses of highly competent speakers. Self-criticism was highly prevalent across all of the profiles, with speakers often comparing themselves unfavourably with Gaeltacht speakers and describing their frustration at improving or mastering their Irish. However, frustration did not deter such speakers from continuing to speak Irish; their productive and successful *mudes* ensured that they were actively using the language in their lives, at least for now. The first speaker is G1, a 28-year old postgraduate student of Irish who expressed vividly how he was still struggling with the language despite attaining a high level:

G1 117

Em bhí frustrachas orm is dócha ó thaobh foghlaim na teanga bíonn frustrachas ort i gcónaí is tú ag foghlaim na Gaeilge tá sí deacair is dócha [...] agus em scríobh na Gaeilge ach go háirithe eh nuair a fheicim aiste a scríobh mé agus marcanna dearga air bíonn frustrachas orm caithfidh mé a rá eh tá mé ar tí dochtúireacht a bhaint amach anois agus fós tá lochtannaí ann tá rudaí nach dtuigim inti ní maith liom sin cuireann sin frustrachas orm caithfidh mé a rá em is dócha tá teorainn le mo chuid Gaeilge agus cuireann sé sin isteach orm mar ní bhímse in ann mé féin a chur in iúl go héifeachtúil uaireanta [...] tá tú a rá leat féin cén fáth nach bhfuil mé in ann mé féin a chur in iúl sa teanga seo agus mé ag plé leis le na blianta anois.

G1 117

Em I was frustrated I suppose learning the language you are always frustrated learning Irish it's hard I suppose [...] especially the writing of Irish and whenever I see an essay with red marks I feel frustrated I have to say eh I am about to get a doctorate now and still there are faults there are things that I don't understand about it I don't like that it frustrates me I have to say em I suppose my Irish is limited and that bothers me because sometimes I can't express myself effectively [...] you say to yourself why can't I express myself in this language and I have been dealing with it for years.

Another reason for frustration is the challenge of navigating the sociolinguistic landscape of the Gaeltacht, where some speakers may prefer to speak English to outsiders whose Irish differs from their traditional variety. This can cause frustration and disappointment among new speakers, some of whom have limited experience of the Gaeltacht, little understanding of

the complex sociolinguistic dynamics at play or indeed poor awareness of how their own speech may differ from Gaeltacht dialects. Such frustration may be greater for speakers who are highly fluent but do not have a Gaeltacht accent, as in the case of G20, who was raised with both Irish and English outside the Gaeltacht. This is because they may reasonably expect to be spoken to in Irish given their background and competence. In a frustrated tone, G20 recounts an incident where she was told by a Gaeltacht resident, in English, how she had ‘book Irish’, a reference to her more standardised and less traditional variety:

G20 72

Eh is cuimhin liom lá amháin [i mbaile Gaeltachta] em bhí mé ag labhairt le bean stop bean ar an mbóthar ag iarraidh orm em *Oh are you the woman from the Corporation so dúirt mé Oh no tá mise ag múineadh ar an scoil lean mise orm ag labhairt Gaeilge / lean sise uirthi ag labhairt Béarla agus dúirt mé ó bhuel tá Gaeilge agam so is dúirt sí Oh but you have the book Irish and I'd like to accommodate you so LF you know agus ansin eh thosaigh sí ag labhairt Gaeilge liom ansin agus nuair a stop an comhrá eh dúirt mé bhuel slán anois deas a bheith ag labhairt leat agus dúirt sí *well you're a great ambassador for the Irish* LF i mBéarla so you know sin an rud agus bhí nuair a théinn isteach sa siopa ansin [sa Ghaeltacht] ní bhídís sásta Gaeilge a labhairt leat.*

Eh I remember one day in [Gaeltacht town] em I was talking to a woman a woman stopped me on the road asking me Oh are you the woman from the Council? Oh no I said I am teaching in the school I continued talking Irish / she continued talking in English and I said oh well I speak Irish so she said Oh but you have the book Irish and I'd like to accommodate you so LF you know and then eh she started speaking Irish to me and when the conversation ended eh I said goodbye now nice to talk to you and she said well you're a great ambassador for the Irish LF in English so you know that kind of thing and when I went into the shop in [Gaeltacht] they wouldn't speak Irish to you.

Frustration is also expressed at Irish speakers who do not speak the language to each other, as in the following interview with J2, a 48-year old woman from Dublin who was raised speaking Irish and attended an Irish-medium school. She voiced frustration at a school friend who now speaks to her in English even though the friend is herself an Irish teacher. In expressing this view, J2 positions herself as an active speaker with a loyalty to Irish in contrast to her less-committed school friend:

J2 81

B'fhéidir gurb é ceann de na fáthanna nár fhan mé i dteagmháil le cúpla cara ón scoil thar na blianta [...] bhí cara nó dhó agus mar go mbídís siúd ag tiontú ar an mBéarla an t-am ar fad agus ag diúltú Gaeilge a labhairt liom agus duine acu is múinteoir le Gaeilge í anois a rinne céim sa nGaeilge liom agus bíonn sise ag tiontú ar an mBéarla an t-am ar fad agus cuireann sé as dom.

That might be one of the reasons why I didn't stay in touch with a few friends from school over the years [...] there were one or two friends and because they used to switch to English the whole time and refuse to speak Irish to me and one of them she is an Irish teacher now / who did the degree with me and she switches to English always and that bothers me.

Poor provision of public services in Irish is another cause of frustration and is mentioned by J3, a 28-year old teacher from a rural area who has successfully mastered a traditional dialect. In another example of strong language loyalty, he reserves stronger criticism for a colleague who can speak Irish but refuses to use it with him:

J3 95

Ó bíonn [frustrachtas orm] i gcónaí go háirithe nuair a bhím ag iarraidh mo ghnó a dhéanamh leis an Rialtas bíom ag troid leo i gcónaí em ach fosta em aithníom an saol mar atá sé agus ní bhímse riamh feargach le aon duine nach bhfuil Gaeilic acu sa Rialtas ach ba mhaith liom dá dtiocfadh athrú ar sin [...] inniu mar a tharla sé nuair a bhí mé ag obair comhoibrí de mo chuid múinteoir Gaeilic í d'iarr sí orm gan Gaeilic a labhairt léi agus níos mó ná rud ar bith eile ghoill sé mé go pearsanta / níor thuig mé é ní thuigim é an dearcadh sin.

J3 95

Oh I am always [frustrated] especially when I try to do my business with government I am always fighting with them em but also I recognise life as it is and I never get angry with someone in the government who doesn't have Irish but I would like that to change [...] today as it happens I was working with a colleague an Irish teacher she asked me not to speak Irish to her and more than anything else that bothered me personally / I didn't understand it I don't understand that attitude.

## 5.5 Shame

As mentioned above, the corpus includes data from Gaeltacht new speakers, people who were raised speaking English in a Gaeltacht area. Some of the material coded as emotional related to shame at being from the traditional heartland of Irish but not having Irish as a home language. Although shame can be seen as a negative emotion, in these cases it has had positive consequences as speakers were prompted to undertake a linguistic *muda* in order to increase their competence in Irish precisely because of their Gaeltacht background and the expectation that they should speak it. The first extract is from an interview with G6, a 22-year old student with a Gaeltacht background whose home language was English. In spite of the errors in the following extract, he was making valiant efforts to relearn the traditional dialect of his area and has since succeeded. His mother was from the Gaeltacht but had raised him in English at home. Not being competent in her dialect of Irish was a source of shame and a trigger for a *muda* after which he began speaking it to her. He acquired elements of the dialect from her and from historical studies of local speech and is now an active and committed speaker who exhibits strong loyalty to his local variety:

G6 42

Chuir seo cineál de náire ormsa siocair gurb as ceantar Gaeltachta mé ach nach raibh mórán de chanúint agamsa cuir i gcás dá mbeifeá ag rá abairt déarfainn *dom* in áit *domh* agus leithéidí beaga / na leideanna beaga sin a thig a thaispeánann duit nárbh cainteoir dúchais thú ach cainteoir eh cainteoir a d'fhoghlaim an Ghaeilge agus tú ag dul ar scoil eh nuair a thuig mise sin eh nuair a thuig mise sin ba é sin an t-eachtra is mó a chuir drogall orm [=a spreag mé] dul i dtaithe le cúrsaí canúna agus a chuir an spreagadh ionam eh plé le mo mháthair i nGaeilic ar mhaithe le le canúnachas s'aici a bhlaiseadh agus b'fhéidir a chur ar mo sheilbh.

That kind of shamed me because I am from a Gaeltacht area but I didn't have much of a dialect for instance if you were saying a sentence I would say *dom* [standard] instead of *domh* [dialect] and the likes / those little hints that reveal that you're not a native speaker that you're a speaker who learned Irish at school and when I understood what happened that was the event which most prompted me to get to grips with dialect and inspired me to talk to my mother in order to experience her dialect and maybe acquire it.

Another Gaeltacht new speaker, K1, a 32-year old teacher, recalled his shame when he realised that despite his Gaeltacht background, he still had to take an extra course in Irish before his final school examination (Leaving Certificate) because of his linguistic insecurity. The teacher of the course, herself from the Gaeltacht, asked him why he was there, prompting embarrassment that someone with his background would need to do an Irish course. Similar to G6, K1 was prompted by shame to strive even harder to become a more competent speaker. He has since undertaken his own *muda* from standard to dialect and adopted many local linguistic features:

K1 56

Nuair a d'fhiafraigh sí díom an fáth go rabhas féin ann mar gurb as an Ghaeltacht dom agus ní hé in aon slí borb nó in aon slí saghas gonta eh sa tslí san ach bhí sí *just* ag iarraidh is dócha mé a chur chun cainte chomh maith ach do tháinig saghas eh [...] ní drochmhisneach orm ach eh baineadh geit asam mar go rabhas ann agus is dócha gur / gur n-osclaíodh em doras éigin i m'aighe agus eh bhí saghas / bhí saghas náire orm i slí.

K1 56

When she asked me why I was there because I was from the Gaeltacht and not in a nasty way or in any way abrupt but she was just trying I suppose to make me talk also but I felt kind of eh [...] not despondent but eh / I got a shock because I was there and I suppose that that / em a door was opened in my mind and I was / I was kind of ashamed in a way.

## 6. Conclusions

Emotions, ranging from happiness and pride to frustration and shame, play a key role in the language trajectories of new speakers of Irish. They may act as triggers for linguistic *mudes*, critical junctures of language transformation, as illustrated by the examples of pride in local identity and shame at linguistic insecurity. Equally, they may be experienced following productive *mudes* which complete the transition to new speakerhood as in the examples of a sense of duty to continue speaking Irish, pride at overcoming linguistic obstacles or happiness with their new identity narratives as new speakers. The subject positions adopted by new speakers – for instance, the desire to pass as a native speaker of a traditional dialect or the feeling of responsibility to continue speaking Irish due to its minoritised status – illustrate how a change in language practices is frequently accompanied by new positionalities, new identity narratives, and new self-representations in relation to others.

The new speakers featured here recount emotional trajectories dotted with obstacles in their path but manage to overcome these and complete the transition to a new repertoire which involves an active and committed use of Irish. As Pavlenko (2005) reminds us, becoming a new speaker of any language can be emotional but this research suggests that there are

additional emotional elements linked to the threatened status of many minoritised languages. The sense of pride at becoming a speaker of a marginalised language despite its weak sociolinguistic presence is arguably greater than becoming a speaker of a major language with strong social prestige. Similarly, the sense of frustration may be greater when struggling with Irish precisely because of that marginal status, but the contentment with achieving a level of mastery of it may be greater than in the case of a widely spoken language which is supported at every turn. Loyalty to a minoritised language such as Irish is salient also, as speakers invoke a sense of personal responsibility to nurture and support it from a perspective of membership of a group of committed new speakers. Such conscientisation is a common thread in the data and appears to play an important role in supporting speakers' desire to continue speaking Irish and in positioning themselves as unofficial language activists.

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