

Research Article

Helen Kelly-Holmes*, David Atkinson

Perspectives on Language Sustainability in a Performance Era: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in a Digital and Social Media Campaign to Revitalise Irish

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Abstract: The poststructuralist turn has been widely acknowledged in contemporary applied and sociolinguistics (Rampton 2006, Blommaert 2010). While for many this paradigmatic shift has been a welcome challenge to segregationalist approaches (Mühlhäusler 1996, Makoni and Pennycook 2007) and deficit discourses in relation to multilingualism (Jacquemet 2005, Jaffe 2007), it is not an unproblematic concept for minority language media and language sustainability. For those committed to activism and engagement with policy makers, the current paradigmatic shift, which has been described in terms of a performance era for minority language media (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011), presents particular challenges which have the potential to undermine gains made in previous eras in relation to media rights for minority language speakers. Using the example of a recent multi-media campaign to revitalise Irish, the *Bród Club*, this paper explores the opportunities and problems presented by the contemporary performance era for minority language media.

Keywords: Minority languages; media policy; Irish language; revitalization; social media

1 Introduction

The poststructuralist turn in contemporary understandings of language in society has been widely acknowledged in the literature of recent years (see, for example, Rampton 2006, Kramersch and Vork Steffenson 2008, Blommaert 2010, Pennycook 2010, Li Wei 2011, McNamara 2012, Kramersch 2012, Busch 2012, Phipps 2012, Garcia and Li Wei 2014). This paradigmatic turn has resulted in and from what has for many been seen as a welcome challenge to segregationalist (Mühlhäusler 1996, Pennycook 2004, Makoni and Pennycook 2007), “genetic” (Mufwene 2004) and deficit discourses (Jaffe 2007, Jacquemet 2005) and paradigms in relation to multilingualism, both in terms of academic analyses of language and generalized ideologies in society about language. However, it is not an unproblematic concept, particularly for those areas of socio- and applied linguistics, which involve discourse and interaction with policy makers, educational and other institutions (see, for example, Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011, McNamara 2012,

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***Corresponding author: Helen Kelly-Holmes**, University of Limerick, School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland helen.kelly.holmes@ul.ie

David Atkinson, University of Limerick, School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Limerick

Busch 2012, Kramsch and Vork Steffenson 2008). For those committed to activism and engagement around minority languages, the current paradigmatic turn presents particular challenges which, it can be argued, have the potential to undermine gains made in previous eras in relation to, for example, hard-won media and education rights for minority language speakers.

Using the example of a recent multi-media campaign aimed at revitalising the Irish language, the *Bród Club*, this paper explores the opportunities and problems presented by the current poststructuralist turn for minority language media. The article begins by outlining the features of what has been described as the performance era in minority language media and which is premised on this poststructuralist shift. While we could simply talk about the impact of poststructuralist understandings of language on minority languages and by extension minority language media, the concept of a performance era allows us to take into account a wider range of issues (technology, policy, actors, and agency), which are useful in understanding the entirety of the contemporary context of minority language media (see Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). Following this, the particular case study of an Irish language multi-media initiative, the *Bród Club*, is examined. The “assemblage of materials” (Phipps 2012) used comes from a virtual ethnography (Hine 2000, 2008) and computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2004) of the campaign’s main website and Facebook page as well online discussions and feedback about the *Bród Club*. In the final section, there is a discussion about what can be learned about the opportunities and threats involved in the current era for minority language media.

2 The performance era in minority language media

Borrowing from Ricento’s (2000) three-stage taxonomy for understanding the evolution of language policy in relation to English in the post-colonial context, three paradigms have been identified as being useful for characterising the evolution of minority language media (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). The first of these is the “gifting” era or paradigm. Here, scarce media resources are gifted by a national or regional authority to peripheral, minoritised language communities. The speech community in this era is perceived as geographically demarcated, monolingual, and linguistically homogenous internally. Indeed, the community often needs to be represented in this way in order to gain media space and valuable resources from the relevant central authority, and so internal linguistic diversity may need to be downplayed. In line with this view of the speech community, language itself is conceived as an objective, isolated system with material properties which can be fixed, kept pure and maintained. Media communication is primarily monologic, with media being prepared by professionals and broadcast to a homogeneous community in a particular geographic area premised on an essentialised language-territory link (Gal and Woolard 2001). In this gifting era, the state is the key agent and actor with power. From the point of view of minority language activists and enthusiasts, simply being present in the media is seen to be sufficient in order to prove the language fit for modern purposes (Cotter 2001; Dorian 1981). Media presence guarantees credibility and existence, and should bring revitalisation and revival. As a high prestige domain, media are viewed as a necessary attainment for minority languages (Fishman 2000), and a key instrument of normalisation of language relations (Moriarty 2009).

The gifting era or paradigm tends to evolve into what can be termed a “service” era (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). This results from the realisation that simply being present in the media is not enough. There follows a drive for “functional completeness” (Moring 2007). Minority language media need to provide a complete service for all speakers. Writing about the Irish context, Ó Laoire (2008) identifies this as the era of the “mega-policy” and of its, possibly inevitable, crisis, with increasing fragmentation. One radio station or one television channel in the relevant minority language cannot satisfy all speakers. And there is the realisation that “standardized, homogenous and ‘one-size-fits-all’ policies” (Shohamy 2009: 185) do not work. Media communication is still primarily monologic in this era, although there is growing dialogic communication between audience and media speakers. Community-based organisations and channels have a certain amount of agency in this era (Cotter 1999) and so along with relevant state actors are the key agents with power.

Whilst actors and agency change somewhat between the gifting and service eras, the performance era or paradigm represents a very significant change in actors and agency. In the performance era, we can see the individual as the primary actor and agent. Friedman (2006) argues that “globalization 3.0” as he terms it, which is based on digital technology, is shaped by individuals. As a result, projects of the self, including linguistic projects of the self (Coupland 2010), are a key aspect of contemporary media communication. The performance era both results from, and in, a general decline in the role of the linguistic and media professional in favour of a model whereby non-professionals provide digital content free of charge for multilingual and minority language media. A good example here is Facebook, which has used a crowd-sourcing model to localise its site for all languages other than English. In the Facebook model, language communities are not pre-ordained or geographically determined, but formed from the bottom-up by a call for volunteers who act as and put themselves forward as part of a translation community, with no verification of their competence, qualifications or location (see Lenihan 2013 for an extensive discussion of this).

Thus, linked to the changes in agency and actors has been a change in the concept of the speech and media community. Unlike the gifting and service eras, which were premised on granting rights to and servicing territorially-defined speech and media communities, the performance era is characterised by the emergence of communities based on interest in a language or activity in it, rather than necessarily by location. Both transient and more long-lasting communities of practice can develop around minority language media projects and channels, as in the case of Facebook translation community outlined above.

Together with technological changes, the evolution of the post-structuralist paradigm in sociolinguistics (e.g. Pennycook 2010, Rampton 2006) also provides the context for the performance era. Block (2012) sees it as involving “a recognition of the limits of structuralism and an emphasis on the emergent in localized, diverse and variable social activity” (p. 48). This paradigmatic shift argues for a view of languages as linguistic resources which make up an individual’s repertoire, and thus can be used by speakers acting in an agentive way in performing identity work (Li Wei 2011). There is also, at the core of poststructuralism, a critique of modernist conceptualizations of language and society (McNamara 2012: 475), and this is particularly relevant when talking about minority language sociolinguistics. Revitalization and revival discourses and politics are about achieving normalization, which is generally measured in modernist terms, for example, in terms of a concern with counting and increasing numbers of speakers and domains, as well as achieving “functional completeness” (Moring 2007) for the relevant minority language in high status domains. As McNamara (2012) points out, “incorporating poststructuralist perspectives challenges many of the underlying assumptions of work in applied linguistics, including work with a socially critical focus” (p. 479), and most work in minority language sociolinguistics certainly belongs to the latter.

The poststructuralist turn has of course not taken place in a vacuum or simply for its own sake; it also represents an attempt by theorists of language to catch up with contemporary practices on the ground, which traditional approaches, based on taken-for-granted structures and modernist understandings of society, are ill-equipped to analyse and explain. An example of this which we can observe in relation to minority languages such as Irish is a move away from the valorising of only complete competence and towards the valuing of hybridity. This involves the recognition and exploitation of mixed, “truncated” (Jacquemet 2005) repertoires, which were previously hidden and/or not deemed suitable for mediatization or commodification (see, for example, Moriarty and Pietikäinen 2011). A little bit of language can be enough, and even limited competence is celebrated alongside an acceptance of “imperfect” bilingualism and language mixing. So, for example, a minority language can become a resource in the linguistic repertoire of a comedian or a rapper, and their use of the particular language may or may not signal commitment to the language and/or fluency (Moriarty 2011; Pietikäinen 2008).

Linked to the shift away from territorially-based speech communities in the performance era has been an increasing commodification in relation to minority languages in the media. Here we can see a move from a rights based model to a lifestyle or consumption based model, whereby speaking the relevant minority language becomes a matter of personal choice (Ó Laoire 2008). For example, “new speakers” in minority language contexts (see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013), may have a linguistic “muda” or life-changing moment, when they shift to the minority language, not for reasons of necessity but as a conscious personal choice

(see Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). Minority language speakers can now also be attractive consumers, and new technology makes it possible to serve their needs, since the traditional economies of scale that favour publishing media in big languages have been broken down by digital technology (see Moal 2000 in relation to the establishment of Breton television).

Another element to the commodification of (some not all) minority languages and identities, is that they can add distinction (Bourdieu 1991), especially in an English-speaking majority language context. The emergence of the “sexy Irish” phenomenon (Kelly-Holmes 2011), which has many parallels in similar contexts such as Welsh (Coupland 2012), can be seen to be part of this. Globalised genres have become acceptable for minority language media, representing a move away from cultural nationalist models of media; likewise, minority languages such as Irish are now seen as “fit” for such genres. For example, the Irish language television station TG4 is primarily focussed on broadcasting programmes that will attract viewers and just happen to be in Irish (Moriarty 2009), rather than in previous eras where the starting point was that the programme was in Irish and the content was secondary (Watson 2003, 2007).

Together with all of these factors and how they relate to minority language media, are the new conditions which present challenges and opportunities for all media in the current era. For example, there is the declining dominance of the monologic model of media involving one-to-many communication. While one-to-many media do still exist, there is the exponential growth of peer-to-peer communication practices and phenomena. In the current era, a minority language media product does not just have one mediation; programmes and events can be remediated (Bolter and Grusin 2000) through sharing, uploading, and linking, and can then become the subject of metalinguistic comment and discussion, as well as the inter-text for future media products. In addition, the decentering of production that has resulted from the evolving technology has in turn resulted in a decentering of media production. As a result of this decentering, fragmentation, and remediation, there are now more sites for using minority languages and discussing minority languages.

Having looked at the features of this “performance era”, we will now look at a case study of minority language media in the performance era by focussing on the case of the *Bród Club* initiative.

3 A case study in performance era minority language media: the *Bród Club* campaign

The *Bród Club* was a multi-platform campaign, initiated in 2012, with the objective of motivating people to “use the Irish they have”. The complexity of the sociolinguistic context of Irish has been well documented (see for example, Hindley 1990; Ó Laoire 1995, 2008; Ó Riagáin 1997, 2001; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Giollagáin et al 2007; Nic Pháidín & Ó Cearnaigh 2008; Walsh and McLeod 2008; Edwards 2010; O’Rourke 2011; Walsh 2011). Irish can be seen as a privileged language in the sense that it is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland and a compulsory subject for primary and secondary education. It also enjoys a limited official status in the European Union and in Northern Ireland, the latter as a result of the Belfast Agreement (see Mac Giolla Chríost 2005 in particular in relation to Northern Ireland). However, it is considered “definitely endangered” (UNESCO 2009) in global terms and is minoritized in relation to English in everyday life and domains such as business, entertainment and the mainstream media. As Lo Bianco (2012) puts it, “Ireland represents a case of failure and success, conquering all areas of formal legal recognition but marked by relative neglect of domain normalization” (p. 518). The revitalization of Irish can thus be seen as both a success and a failure: Irish is surviving, but its revitalization has not resulted in it becoming the normal language of everyday life for most people in Ireland. And while there are families and communities who use Irish as their main language, the key institution of intergenerational transmission is now the school. As has been widely acknowledged, despite a lack of everyday usage outside of the education system and certain communities, the language does enjoy a high degree of symbolic value. Using a few words of Irish, the *cúpla focal*, is required on appropriate occasions in Irish society and the value of this tokenistic usage should not be underestimated. It is also inaccurate to think that the language has no instrumental value. For example, knowledge of Irish is normally needed for educational achievement and

advancement, and it is a required matriculation subject for a number of higher level institutions in the country, independent of the desired programme of study, although this is currently being reviewed.

While the latest census figures are encouraging in terms of the number reporting that they can speak Irish, figures on reported usage on an everyday basis remain low. So, while 1.76 million (about 39.8% of the population) answered positively to the question “Can you speak Irish?”, only ca. 73,803 reported speaking Irish on a daily basis outside of the school system and one in four reported never using Irish (Central Statistics Office 2016). Judged on modernist criteria and in terms of a “technicist orientation” (McNamara 2012), Irish language revitalization is far from a success story. However, a poststructuralist perspective allows for a more complex reading of the sociolinguistic situation of Irish, by permitting “a critical awareness of the role of desire and the presence of the irrational within social structures” (McNamara 2012: 478). Such a perspective acknowledges and makes space for contradictory and simultaneous possibilities, for example, that the language is both privileged and minoritized, a success and a failure in terms of revitalization, meaningful to people in symbolic terms and yet for many not used on a daily basis. Recent revitalization campaigns, like the *Bród Club*, have concentrated more on encouraging people to use the Irish they have rather than necessarily improving their competence. On the one hand, from a modernist perspective, this can be seen as a kind of “final straw”, a response to the futility of trying to get people to improve their Irish and increase reported competence and usage. On the other, it can be seen as an acceptance of the contradictions and complexities inherent in the context, the impossibility of “fixing” language problems and an attempt to work with rather than against these in addressing the gap between reported competence and reported usage.

The *Bród* campaign itself consisted of a website with a Facebook page and Twitter account, forums, information, celebrity interviews, news about events, and other features. In terms of “old” media, the campaign also included a series of television programmes which involved the *Bród Club* coming to different locations around the country for live broadcasts (for example, in schools and community language clubs). The campaign had three main sponsors: the national broadcaster, *RTÉ*; the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland; and *Foras na Gaeilge*, the all-Ireland promotion agency for the Irish language. All of these actors represent the established, top-down, authoritative agents in relation to Irish language media of the gifting and service eras. So, at first glance, the *Bród Club* seemed to be nothing new; it appeared to be simply the latest top-down attempt to get people in Ireland to speak and use “their language”, this coalition of interests representing a staple of “old” media for many years and “new” media in recent years.

However, in a number of ways, the new campaign illustrates an attempt to break with the norms of the gifting and service eras of Irish language media, and represents an attempt to create media for and in Irish that respond to and are premised on the performance paradigm. Firstly, the campaign sought to create a new, non-territorially-bound or pre-defined media community of interest and practice around using Irish, harnessing the exponentializing power of social media for creating, maintaining and expanding this community. Secondly, the *Bród* campaign was premised on a repertoire (Blommaert 2015) concept of language, urging people to just use whatever Irish they have – however good or bad – within an English language matrix. Thirdly, *Bród* was attempting to challenge established norms in terms of practice and ownership, to achieve a shift from a normative to a creative concept of using Irish, and, seeking to broaden the definition of an Irish speaker. We will now examine the campaign in terms of each of these objectives.

3.1 Building a new community

The objective of revitalising Irish as a living language of the community has been at the heart of many policy initiatives in relation to the language. While Irish still exists as a community language in the *Gaeltacht* – the designated Irish-speaking areas – even this situation in the language’s heartland is seen as threatened. For example, a study of the linguistic vitality of *Gaeltacht* areas found, along with many positive indicators, “low levels of use of Irish as a community language in some areas” and “clear threats to the sustainability of Irish as a community language” (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007). Communities of speakers do also exist elsewhere, but an understanding of their importance and potential requires a rethink of the concept of community – in

line with the performance era. For example, as outlined above, Ó Laoire (2008) emphasises the importance of choice in describing the new networks that have emerged in mainly urban areas. Irish-medium schools (*Gaelscoileanna* and *Gaelcholáistí*) and also English-medium schools, in which Irish is routinely in use as a housekeeping language, can also be seen to constitute important Irish language communities. In our own university, the University of Limerick, a community of Irish speakers meets once a week in a *Gaeltacht* corner (*Cúinne na Gaeltachta*), literally a designated corner of the staff canteen for a coffee break in Irish (see Armstrong 2012 for a study of three new communities of Irish speakers). New media are also a space in which such communities are found, with both transient communities (e.g. Kelly-Holmes 2010 in relation to YouTube) and more permanent communities (e.g. on Facebook, see Lenihan 2011, 2013) using Irish to varying degrees. Walsh (2011) asserts that there is a “proliferation of Irish language blogs and websites”, and this new phenomenon has been termed “*Gaeltacht 2.0*”, the “Virtual hyper-*Gaeltacht*” (Ó Conchubhair 2008) and “cyber-*Gaeltacht*” (Delap 2008).

The policy aim of providing the infrastructure for supporting and growing a virtual community of Irish speakers using the exponentialising power of social media is explicitly stated in the *Bród* campaign’s slogan. Here individuals are encouraged to sign up two new members in order to achieve the goal of attracting 100,000 members and advocates for Irish. All extracts in relation to the *Bród Club* website are taken from www.rte.ie/brodclub:

U + 2 = 100,000

This objective is explained elsewhere on the homepage, as follows:

Be an ambassador for the campaign. If you have signed up to the Bród Club, please get at least 2 more like-minded people to sign up. If every 1 of you gets another 2 people, and every 1 of them gets another 2, we’ll be closer to our target. Together, le chéile, we can do this.

Although the stated aim was to achieve 100,000 new supporters, when the campaign ended, only 24,056 people, just under ¼ of this target, had in fact signed up. Campaign statistics given on the website state that the Facebook site achieved a modest 9,360 likes, but, using this figure the reach on Facebook is estimated by the *Bród Club* as around 1.4 million (about 39% of the population), again based on the exponentializing potential of liking, commenting and sharing. Unique visits to the website are given as 169,265, which means that about 17% of those who visited the site signed up to the campaign. The site contains a variety of forums designed to support members, offer people the opportunity to share past memories, good and bad, of learning Irish, encourage the creation and discussion of new terms, and share Irish language events. However, the average number of posts per discussion is three, and, given that the *Bród Club* itself was the main contributor to and initiator of the discussion threads, this does not indicate an active and vibrant community of interaction (Herring 2004). The Facebook site attracted more activity. Over a period of 133 days, 99 posts were made by the administrator, which attracted likes, comments, and shares. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the range, median number and simple average of likes, comments and shares per post over the 133 days. Liking was the most popular activity – in line with Facebook usage generally.

Table 1: Total number, range, median and simple average of likes, comments and shares per post on the *Bród Club* Facebook site 5th March – 15th July 2012.

PER POST	LIKES	COMMENTS	SHARES
RANGE (MIN-MAX)	3-220	0-102	0-44
MEDIAN	41	10	0
SIMPLE AVERAGE	55	18	5
TOTAL	5418	1796	534

In the following extract from a typical post, the *Bród Club* attempts to start a conversation by posting a question about fitness and activity levels (we have added translations in square brackets beneath the relevant text):

Maidin mhaith a chairde! Frása an Lae
 [Good morning friends! Phrase of the day]
 ‘Táim ag dul ag rith tar éis obair=I’m going running after work’
 Any fitness fans in our Bródclub? An mbíonn sibh ag traenáil? Are you training?

Apart from the opening two sentences, the rest of the post is given bilingually, with a direct translation into English following the Irish phrases. The post attracted 29 likes and 10 comments. All contributors post only once with one exception, which seems to be an error. One contributor is a regular poster and comments once on almost all of the posts by the *Bród Club*, while two others comment, again usually only once, on a much less regular basis. All of the contributors make a simple statement or comment in reply to the question posed by the *Bród Club*. All comments are liked by the *Bród Club*, and only two posts are liked by two other members of the Club. In terms of the comments, the rate of repeat contributions to one thread is low, with the majority of contributors only posting once. Also, the rate of inter-thread posting, i.e. contributors who posted in more than one thread, is also very low, with only a very small number of individuals posting on more than one thread. Therefore, we could consider this to be a moderately active forum, but made up of a transient community with limited and sporadic levels of interactivity online – particularly with each other. Thus, despite the peer-to-peer interactional possibilities of the Web, the communication is mainly between the *Bród* administrator and the members rather than between members. In other words, although it takes place on the Web, it is still one-to-many rather than peer-to-peer.

3.2 Promoting bilingualism as added value

As mentioned above, the aim of the campaign was to get people to use the Irish that they have, as illustrated in the following slogan:

Show Pride – Bród – in your language: Use what you have.

The *Bród* campaign was explicitly designed to address the problem of non-use of Irish, highlighted in the Census figures above which show a major gap between reported competence and reported usage. The extract below illustrates the campaign’s attempt to break with the discourse of the past:

Although we spend 14 years of our lives learning Irish very few of us actually speak it. This campaign is a passionate, loud and brash attempt to turn this situation on its head by asking people to commit to using whatever Irish they have.

We would normally expect a language-promotional text like the one in the extract above to read something like the following: “Although we spend 14 years of our lives learning Irish, very few of us *can* actually speak it”. However, the text from the *Bród* campaign, rather than focussing on the failure of acquisition policy in schools (i.e. not being able to speak Irish at all or speak Irish properly), which is a more established discourse, focusses instead on the waste of not using the language, even people’s “bad” Irish, after school has finished. Thus, the campaign focussed, as the following extract illustrates, on encouraging people to use the Irish they have, “however little that is”:

The grand ambition of this campaign is to get 100,000 people who use little or no Irish now to use their Irish again, however much or however little that is. This is not a learning series. It’s an appeal to show your pride, your “bród” in your language by using what you have – and we all have some.

The use of pride here has a double-meaning. On the one hand, it is an appeal to people's pride in Irish as the language of the nation (linking to a modernist construct). On the other, it is an appeal to pride in language at an individual or micro-level, regardless of competence, fluency, or confidence (drawing on a poststructuralist understanding). Not only did the campaign distinguish itself from language learning media campaigns ("This is not a learning series"), it also very deliberately and explicitly distanced itself from the school domain, which is one of the most common associations people have with Irish and often a negative one for many. One of the ways it did so was by parodying Irish teachers in the character of the "Mean *Múinteoir*" (mean teacher). Users of the site were invited to use the "Mean *Múinteoir*" facility, to play a trick on their friends who are presumably still traumatised from the experience of learning Irish as school. Members of the site could send a joke message to a friend's email, ostensibly from the mean teacher, evoking memories of their school learning of Irish:

Do you know someone who is ready to give Irish another try?
 Maybe they've finally forgotten the teacher who put them off it in the first place.
 Unfortunately, he hasn't forgotten them.
 Send your friend a personalised video from the mean *múinteoir*

The campaign also self-consciously challenged established norms in relation to mediated Irish by permitting and even encouraging mixing and linguistic "mistakes". As is apparent from the extracts above, English is the matrix, and often the only language used with a small number of Irish words and phrases in much of the text, as in the following example, in which the Irish words are underlined:

This campaign is a national call to action. Be proud of your language – use what you have – or as Fiona Looney would say, get back on the capall!

[horse]

Will you support a weekly Irish at work day? Organise your group to use the Cúpla Focal?

[few words]

In many ways, this usage mirrors everyday practices in Ireland in which the use of a few Irish words and phrases is a non-remarkable practice. Sometimes, this may be domain-dependent (for example in relation to school) or may be used for comedic effect, or in-group maintenance or any other number of possible reasons in this complex sociolinguistic context.

As well as assuming and promoting a non-normative, non-didactic style, the campaign also encouraged users to come up with new words and phrases in Irish, running a competition for the "phrase of the day", which could be anything at all, so long as it was in Irish. In addition, one of the discussion forums was designed to allow club members to discuss "new 'hybrid' Gaeilge words and invent new terms". This group of speakers would be seen as far removed from the established domains and brokers (Blommaert 1999) of top-down Irish language corpus planning (Ní Ghearáin 2011). Again, this reflects the possibilities of the performance era, which, in contrast to previous minority language media eras, does not present the media speaker as expert pedagogue. Here the media / language user has equal status with the media / language professional, and can be creative with the language without being hampered by concerns about competence:

Sign up to the campaign and be inspired. There are many different ways you can begin to use the Irish you have. The limit is your imagination. And have some fun using it.

Although there were not sufficient comments or interactions on the website itself to show significant evidence of people taking up this call, the Facebook site is a space in which people appeared to use their Irish, however limited, in mixed, new, individualistic ways, supporting the "added value" ideology, as the following extracts from the thread on fitness outlined above, show:

Táim ag dul ag rith roimh obair
 [I'm going running before work]
 Ta me seacta bleen aosta.
 [I am seventy years old]
 Táim ag dul ag rith ... now ☺
 [I'm going running]

In the first extract, the contributor is using a literal translation from English, in the second, there are non-standard spellings used, and in the third extract, the poster mixes Irish and English and an emoji in their contribution.

3.3 Expanding definitions of speakerhood

The concept of who is and is not a speaker of Irish has undergone a significant shift in Ireland over the last decade or so. As mentioned above, the number of those able to speak Irish being reported in the census has increased substantially and consistently in recent censuses, although the latest 2016 census shows a very slight drop. This is not just due to the change in the question being asked, but also in terms of the answers that respondents feel able to give. Identifying oneself as being able to speak Irish no longer indexes competence, native or first language speakerhood, or even regular usage. The concept of the “new speaker” (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015) acknowledges these new definitions and possibilities of speakerhood. “New” speakers inevitably emerge in contexts of revitalisation and this can lead to tension with “native” or “traditional” speakers (see for example O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013). However, whilst the concept highlights the tensions involved between categorisations of speakers in minority language situations, “new speakerhood” involves a more active and committed stance than that required by participation in the *Bród Club*. O'Rourke and Walsh (2015) draw attention to this distinction as follows: “By the broadest definition, most people in the Republic of Ireland who have gone through the Irish education system have been exposed to the language and could be defined as new speakers. However ... we define the term more specifically to include those individuals who acquired the language outside of the home and who report that they use Irish with fluency, regularity and commitment.”

The *Bród* campaign rather than focusing on fluency, for example, featured profiles of celebrities identifying themselves as speakers of Irish who wanted to offer their support for the campaign and reflect on their relationship with the Irish language. Significantly, none of these speakers is someone who would be identified as an Irish speaker in the media, which generally indexes a good level of competence (see Kelly-Holmes and Atkinson 2007). In this way, the *Bród* campaign promoted a changing consciousness and a challenge to received ideologies in terms of speakers in relation to geography, competence, ethnicity, class, and culture.

The campaign was fronted by Bernard Dunne, a well-known boxer from a working class Dublin background. Dunne has a marked urban Dublin accent in English and displays what would be considered very basic and limited competence in Irish. He describes his own Irish as “horrible”. Traditionally, campaigns of this nature have been fronted by native speakers or educated, middle-class presenters with first or fluent second language competence in the language. A boxer is also an interesting choice to front this campaign, as Irish tends to be associated, for cultural-nationalist reasons, with traditional Gaelic sports, while boxing, particularly in urban areas and in the media on a national scale, has generally been an English-language domain. We can see an evolving understanding of what constitutes an acceptable speaker through the different eras outlined above. The gifting and service eras valorised first language and fluent second language speakers. The performance era, in which *Bród* is located is promoting the notion that anyone can be a media speaker, and, as pointed out by the following comment on a discussion board about the initiative, the non-professional, non-expert and even non-competent speaker can be seen as a positive and motivating factor:

Well I'll say one thing, even though I'm not in the slightest bit interested in their campaign, at least it's being spearheaded by someone outside of the usual media gombeens [fools] who use the Irish language as some sort of phrase bazooka to make us all in awe of their linguistic skills (comment posted in response to Dunne 2012)

As mentioned above, *Bród* frontman Bernard Dunne admits that he has little or no competence in the language, and this is evident in his practices, but he still identifies himself as a speaker of Irish. This violates a recognised trope in the Irish media, whereby to identify oneself as a speaker of Irish is only permissible above a generally accepted level of competence (Kelly-Holmes and Atkinson 2007). As one blogger comments in another forum, however, this enhances rather than takes away from his credibility in the current era, which values non-professional media speakers and presenters:

Having come from a profession that has nothing to do with the language whatsoever gives him some credibility (Fusty 2012)

3.4 Assessing the potential impact of *Bród Club*

As highlighted above, the *Bród Club* set out to challenge ideologies in relation to the Irish language, by exploiting a change from a monologic model of Irish media, to one that would utilise the exponentialising power of social media. The campaign statistics and levels of participation in the boards and forums (see above) can, however, be considered to be modest, given the grand ambition of the campaign. The Facebook site shows some success, at least in terms of people using Irish who might not normally do so. In addition, it is of course impossible to quantify the effects of the language ideological work done by the campaign and the potential benefit from the participation of schools and language clubs in the campaign. There is some evidence that the campaign did have an effect on people's practices and attitudes, resulting in some minor "mudas" (Pujolar and Puigedevall 2015) as the following extracts from two discussions (Dunne 2012, thejournal.ie 2012) around media coverage of the campaign show:

I've been watching Bernard dunne's *Bród Club* and leave TG4 on at times and noticed myself saying go raibh maith agat [thank you] instead of thanks in shops past week. Even said it getting off the bus last weekend (online comment responding to Dunne 2012)

This campaign really inspired me to use what Irish I have, I'm far from fluent and am having great fun using my cúpla focal [few words] with my fiancé. I also say slán [goodbye], go raibh maith agat [thank you] etc. it doesn't cost a cent to use what you have, and I am proud to say I now use what I have. It's been a really fun experience for me and would highly recommend anyone that wishes to give it a go (online comment responding to Dunne 2012)

Here we can see people reporting a change in their practices, using Irish in situations they normally would not, and using the Irish that they have, whether it is grammatically correct or not in an online context. In their comments, no-one expresses a desire to improve their Irish, in line with the campaign objectives which were simply for people to use the Irish they have, however imperfect. Dunne himself, who fronted the campaign, considered it a success, as did a number of media commentators, like the following:

Times have changed. And the methods of passing on Irish are also evolving. The transmission of Irish is now spreading more effectively and exponentially, like a sexually transmitted disease, as a result of casual encounters, a cúpla focal [few words] here, a 'conas ta tu?' [how are you] there. This is a global epidemic (Ó Liatháin 2012)

Ó Liatháin (2012) attributes "this revolution in public opinion towards the Irish language in the past 10 years" to changing media in particular, and contrasts them with the deadweight of top-down language policy legislation in the same period:

At a time when the Irish language needed more resources targeted at encouraging young people to use more Irish, through websites, podcasts and the like, the then government decided what was needed was Irish versions of official reports which weren't read in English and would be as equally unread in Irish. Now we seem to be copping on [getting sense] (n.p.)

As noted above, display, play, and truncated practice, which are an unremarkable feature of everyday life in Ireland, have come to be valorised in the performance era and are now the object of language policy in the *Bród* campaign. However, a key point is that such practices are only possible because of the long-term outcomes – positive and negative – of “mega-policies” (Ó Laoire 2008), such as the acquisition policy in education, and the media policies of the gifting and service eras. As the mixed results of the *Bród Club*, which exhorted people to use their few words in order to show pride in their language (implying both their own imperfect repertoire and Irish as a national language) show, this type of performance does not lend itself well to top-down policing. And, while people may find it hard to identify with the ideal media speakers of previous eras, it does not mean that they will want to identify with the truncated practices of the speakers presented in the performance paradigm, which may, however unintentionally, hint of condescension (Bourdieu 1991). As one media commentator puts it:

The target of getting people signed up is contrived and we think Dunne is probably pushing against an open door with much more Irish popping up in everyday conversation these days. Promotion of the Irish language is exactly what RTE [national broadcaster] should be doing, but perhaps this effort is a little unfocused, for now at least' (@sean.nolan 2012)

4 Discussion

The case of the *Bród Club* demonstrates the opportunities and threats involved in attempting to harness the power of social media for top-down language policy. The performance era is tricky to navigate, difficult if not impossible to predict and control, and the feedback from an unforgiving, or even just uninterested public is instant and visible. There is a growing body of research on bilinguals' language habits online and attempts to find out how best to “steer” their language behaviour in order that they will use more of the relevant minority language in an online context (Cunliffe, Morris and Prys 2012 and 2013, for example in relation to young people's use of Welsh in social networking, and Fleming and Debski 2007 in relation to young people and Irish usage online). But such efforts may betray a lack of understanding of the performance era (see for example, Jones 2007 in relation to Welsh girls' creative practices online), which does not appear to yield to the heavy-handed, top-down policy and planning of the service and gifting eras, designed “to engineer people's linguistic lives” (Shohamy 2009: 185). There is also a danger, as highlighted in the *Bród* case, in shifting the focus in minority language media from gifting and service paradigms to the performance paradigm. Gifting and service were premised on revitalisation discourses, and while they are not unproblematic (see for example Duchêne and Heller (2007) on endangerment discourses in relation to revitalization and maintenance) and have led to many of the problems that the *Bród Club* and other new initiatives are attempting to tackle, they are still framed within a language that justifies the allocation of resources to learning the minority language and to supporting minority language rights. For example, the following comment from another online discussion of the *Bród Club* highlights, albeit unwittingly, where such a paradigmatic shift in minority language media may lead:

It's great ! A good idea to speak our native language as a hobby and at no cost. Bernard is great. I would like to see more of this and Irish taken out of schools and thought this way. The schools could then teach another more useful language that could be used in other countries while travelling or working. If more people had French or German it would give them a great advantage in seeking work. It souls [should] also boost their confidence. Our standard of English also needs to be improved as the poorer areas are having big problem with literacy levels (online comment responding to Dunne 2012)

Although the comment is praising the initiative and seems broadly positive towards maintaining “our native language”, new technology and the associated paradigmatic shift towards performance (“as a hobby and at no cost”) are premised on an established discourse of Irish learning as a waste of valuable resources which could be directed at promoting languages (French, German and English) with greater instrumental value (see Lenoach, Ó Giollagáin & Ó Curnáin 2012 for a structuralist response to the problems of the performance era in terms of the *Gaeltacht* communities).

Referring to Ricento's (2000) three-stage taxonomy, Pennycook (2004: 214) observes that the new paradigm in language policy (which might loosely equate to what we are here calling the performance era in relation to minority language media) promises "a bright new dawn of language policy, enabling us to better relate languages in complex ways to their contexts, and making it possible to close the gap between micro- and macro-sociologies of language". Pennycook goes on to point out the contradictions that are however inherent in such a view "between segregational and integrational views of language ecology, the former promoting the separation of languages into natural, enumerable entities, the latter questioning the possibility of such objectifications" (2004: 218). Although he is referring to the ecology of language approach highlighted by Ricento (2000) as a feature of the contemporary era of language policy, his comments apply equally to the performance era as understood here. This contradiction – between a segregational and an integrational view – as well as many other contradictions are inherent in the current era.

The trick is, perhaps, to acknowledge and allow for this contradiction, and to recognise that gifting and service paradigms (premised on the segregational view) continue to exist and to argue for their continued and necessary existence (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). This involves acknowledging that the performance paradigm (premised on the integrational view) is now only possible because of the continuation of the institutions and policies which allow for acquisition of the minority language and offer something with which to play and against which to rebel. This is evidenced by many comments and reflections in relation to *Bród*, which reveal people's complex and complicated relationship with the Irish language, and which involve a combination of both segregationist and integrationist perspectives. A large number of the comments, for example, refer back to people's, generally negative, experience of learning Irish in school and how they started to use it again, or improve it, or simply started to re-evaluate their relationship with the language over the course of their lives (in the form of a type of "muda" (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2013), as in the following example:

I didn't like Irish too much in school. I didn't hate it or anything, I just didn't really like the pressure of the subject. I picked it up myself later in life, by setting up a conversational group (online comment responding to thejournal.ie 2012)

And, although there are advocates for abolishing compulsory Irish in the education system, these views are not supported in general opinion polls nor by the majority of posters in the discussion boards reviewed in relation to *Bród*. Perhaps, and we would argue this possibly or probably controversially, in navigating the performance era, one of the functions of top-down minority language media policy might be rather than attempting to steer social media, to still be, if not quite the "mean teacher", then the provider of corpus and acquisition planning, to be prepared to remain the untrendy voice of previous eras.

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