

Lenihan, A. (2014). Investigating language policy in social media: translation practices on Facebook. In P. Seargeant, & C. Tagg (Eds.), *The Language of Social Media: Community and Identity on the Internet* (pp. 208-227). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Investigating language policy in social media: translation practices on Facebook

Aoife Lenihan

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the Facebook *Translations* application (app) through which the social network site has internationalised its website. Despite its international reach, with over 70% of Facebook users being from outside the United States of America, the site was only available in English until February 2008. Following the development of the *Translations* app, the site was first opened to Spanish, and was quickly followed by French, German and another 21 languages in 2008 (Facebook, 2012). Since then the *Translations* app has continued to be ‘released’ to more languages and, at the time of writing (November 2012), is available in 110 languages including minority or regional languages, such as Irish and Welsh; the national varieties of US English and UK English¹; and other languages and varieties such as Leet Speak, Esperanto and Pirate English.

In terms of existing language policy theory, the *Translations* app initially appears to be very ‘bottom-up’ (Canagarajah, 2006; Hornberger, 1996) in nature, since any Facebook user can add the app to their *Profile*, submit a translation, vote on the translations submitted by others and participate in the discussions on the app’s *Discussion Board*. The translations appear to be co-produced by the communities who engage with it in a dialectical process, albeit one that is explicitly defined and regulated by Facebook. However, on closer inspection Facebook is more involved in the community-driven translation effort than at first appears, intervening in a ‘top-down’ manner to adjudicate and authorize the final translations produced. The case of the translation of Facebook would thus appear to challenge the dichotomy of ‘top-down’/‘bottom-up’ in language policy, and in Facebook’s own words could be described as a ‘hybrid model’ (Vera, 2009).

This chapter will reconsider the categorization of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ in language policy theory with reference to Facebook’s role and the role of the Irish language community who use the *Translations* app. Firstly, the theoretical background of the current study will be considered, focussing particularly on existing language policy theory and studies concerned with social media. Next, the context of the Irish language will be introduced, and in particular its relationship with social media, its offline context and recent official language policy efforts for social media. Following this, the method of data collection and the data gathered will be briefly outlined. Then, the translators of the Facebook *Translations* app will be considered in terms of the notion of community, and the elements and design of the app discussed with regard to how Facebook fosters a

sense of community via these. Finally, the discussion will focus on the language decisions and practices of Facebook and the Irish community of the *Translations* app in relation to current language policy theory and ‘top-down’/‘bottom-up’ approaches.

Language policy and social media

The present study, following Blommaert et al. (2009), focuses on the multiplicity of actors and actions involved in *de facto* language policy situations, the choices and practices involved in the use of the app, and particularly those of the translators of the Irish language *Translations* community. It is the potential use of the internet as a mechanism of language policy (Shohamy, 2006) by ‘bottom-up’ interests that first drew my attention to the activities and policies of the language community driven Facebook *Translations* app. This study links social media practice with language policy, starting from the perspective that all language decisions made as part of the *Translations* app by both Facebook and the translators are manifestations of personal, community and organizational language policies, with varying levels of authority (Lo Bianco, 2010; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). This section will give an overview of existing language policy theory, with particular regard to community, business and social media, it foregrounds the role of community in creating language policy, with a view to exploring how communities decide and enact policy on Facebook.

Language policy can come in two forms: it can be an explicit policy, a change in practices via ‘a set of managed and planned interventions supported and enforced by law and implemented by a government agency’ (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5).

Alternatively, language policy can be viewed in a broad sense, as in the current study, as changes in the language practices of speech communities that cannot be attributed to explicit legislation, but rather due to ‘alterations in situation, conditions and pressures of which even the participants are unaware’ (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5). Shohamy (2006), in her seminal book on language policy, argues for the need to understand the notion as more complex than solely institutional legislation, and says it should be examined and interpreted ‘through a variety of mechanisms that are used by all groups, but especially those in authority, to impose, perpetuate and create language policies, far beyond those that are declared in official policies’ (p. xvi). Language policy efforts by those in official authority are described as ‘top-down’ policy, and are carried out by ‘people with power and authority who make language decisions for groups, often with little or no consultation with the ultimate language... users’ (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 196). Other language policy efforts such as ‘language regulation by non-governmental, commercial and private bodies’ (du Plessis, 2011, p. 196), i.e. non-official or governmental entities, are, in contrast, described as ‘bottom-up’.

Current theory predominantly conceptualises ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ language policy as a dichotomy, acting in contrast with each other and as two distinct entities (Hornberger, 1996; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). This study will argue that within the traditionally defined ‘bottom-up’ level – that of social media

as non-official language policy entities – Facebook and the individuals of the community act in both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ manners depending on the context of the situation, leading to the need to reconsider the dichotomy of ‘top-down’/‘bottom-up’ in language policy theory.

Recent research has begun to focus on language policy and communities. As Spolsky (2009, p. 2), drawing on Saussure, notes, language policy is a social phenomenon dependant on the ‘beliefs and consensual behaviours of the members of a speech community’. Indeed, Trim (2003, p. 73) believes the ‘dynamic forces at work in the everyday activity of language communities are far more powerful than conscious, ideologically motivated policies’. Spolsky (2012, p. 5) later goes further, describing the actual language practices of the speech community and its members as the “‘real” language policy of the community ... the ecology or the ethnography of speech’. Furthermore, he notes that if any members of the community do not adhere to this ‘real’ language policy they may be marked as ‘alien or rebellious’, or, as in the current study, as will be discussed below, excluded from the language policy of the community. Social media such as Facebook and its *Translations* app are a space for the development of language communities, within which, no matter what their size, language policies operate (Spolsky, 2004).

In line with the broad/expanded view of language policy taken here, it must also be noted that businesses, such as those which develop and run forms of social media, are involved in language policy formation, whether this is their intention or

not (Kaplan & Bauldauf, 1997; Spolsky, 2004). Leppänen and Peuronen (2012, p. 397) acknowledge that ‘many Internet sites, although they seldom spell out an explicit language policy of their own, often in fact develop some kind of regulatory mechanisms that can also affect language choice and use’. These mechanisms, as Leppänen and Peuronen note, although oftentimes implicit, can be ‘a key factor’ in user’s language choice and use online.

Language policy research concerned with new media, including social media, is still in its infancy. Androutsopoulos (2009) acknowledges that the internet and its user-generated content offer ‘unlimited’ potential to challenge official policies and for practicing new policies. Hogan-Brun, surveying recent studies in the field, notes that research is showing that new media can be used to sustain linguistic diversity and ‘point to the potential of bottom-up practices in the use of conventional and new media for dynamic language planning in minority contexts’ (Hogan-Brun, 2011, p. 328). She also believes that globalisation, new media and communication technologies challenge and force us to re-evaluate traditional approaches to language planning in plurilingual or minority language contexts. Blommaert et al. (2009, p. 206) similarly find that the internet is a dynamic space and ‘dichotomies such as top-down versus bottom-up in language policy may not capture fully the dynamics of the processes of normativity and normalisation that operate there’. The current study continues this examination of the notions of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ and their conceptualisation as a dichotomy in social media contexts.

The Irish language: language policy and community

This section briefly introduces the current context of the Irish language, both online and offline. The offline context described here is the shared context of the majority of Irish speakers involved in the *Translations* app and influences their translations and interactions on the app. The constitution of the Republic of Ireland, *Bunracht na hÉireann*, declares the Irish language as the first official language and English as the second official language of the state, and provision is made for the use of either language for official purposes. The Irish language is also an official language of the European Union (EU), although it is not treated the same as other EU official languages, as not all legislative documents are required to be translated into it (European Union, 2005). Despite all these status provisions, the Irish language is classified as ‘definitely endangered’ on the UNESCO vitality scale (2009). 1.77 million of the 4.5 million resident Republic of Ireland population claim to be able to speak Irish, but 1.16 million of these either report they never speak the language, or speak it less frequently than weekly (Central Statistics Office, 2012). There are effectively no monolingual Irish speakers today, although there are many individuals who use it as their primary language of communication. Irish has more second language than native speakers, which is unusual in the context of minority languages worldwide (McCloskey, 2001). The *Comprehensive Linguistic Survey of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Ó’Giollagáin et al., 2007) finds that if the current rate of language shift amongst young adults continues, the Irish language will no longer be a

community language in the *Gaeltacht* regions within the next 20-25 years – the *Gaeltacht* are the Irish speaking geographical areas in the Republic of Ireland as designated by the state.

The presence of Irish online is described anecdotally as ‘*Gaeltacht 2.0*’, ‘virtual hyper-*Gaeltacht*’ (Ó Conchubhair, 2008) and ‘cyber-*Gaeltacht*’ (Delap, 2008).

The creation and use of these terms illustrates that, within new media, there is seen to be an Irish speaking space and an Irish language community. Although no official or academic statistics are available, insight can be gained into Irish language use on social media from *Indigenoustweets.com* which tracks Twitter for tweets in indigenous or smaller languages (Scannell, 2011). This site reports that on the 25 October 2012 there were 4574 Twitter users who had sent 237,537 Irish language tweets (Scannell, 2012).

Delap (2008) sees new media as complementing traditional media efforts, describing the Irish language internet magazine *Beo* as operating effectively as a ‘cyber-*Gaeltacht*’. He also points to social media and SNSs in particular as an important space for the Irish language, although noting that ‘there is no social networking site operating exclusively through Irish’ (p. 63). In his study of globalisation and diaspora, Ó’Conchubhair (2008) finds that Irish language speakers in any nation-state are no longer in isolation which he credits as an outcome of globalisation. He believes ‘the global communication revolution allows Irish-speakers to participate in the virtual hyper-*Gaeltacht* any where, any time...’ (p. 238). The Irish language communication network, he writes, is now a

global phenomenon. Furthermore, Ó'Conchubhair believes new media development(s) open the Irish speaking community up to those not based in Ireland or Irish-born.

There are moves towards developing a strategy and provisions for the Irish language and new media, including social media, by official language policy entities. The *Straitéis 20 Bliain Don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 (Dréacht)/20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Draft)* published by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2009) includes media and technology as one of its nine areas for action. It acknowledges the 'new directions' in which the Irish language is going, noting the 'immense potential' of new media and how they 'open up new channels for individuals and communities to increase their knowledge and regular use of Irish' (2009, p. 84). Also, in 2009 *Foras na Gaeilge*, the statutory body responsible for the promotion of Irish, published its *Straitéis Idirlín don Óige (Dréacht)/Internet strategy for young people (Draft)* report. With regard to SNSs, the report finds there are many profiles available in Irish on Bebo and simply notes that Facebook has been 'localised' (2009, p. 3). The Irish language has been available for translation on Facebook via the *Translations* app since June 2008.

Method and data

The data considered here form part of a wider project on the translation of Facebook (cf. Lenihan, 2011) and were gathered using virtual ethnographic methods. Virtual ethnography, developed by Hine (2000), ‘transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the internet’ (Hine, 2008, p. 257). Ducheneaut (2010, p. 202) describes virtual ethnography as ‘an ethnography that treats cyberspace as the ethnographic reality’ and its distinguishing feature is the goal of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1983) from the participants’ perspective (Wouters, 2005). Here virtual ethnography is used to observe and investigate the *de facto* language policies on Facebook.

Virtual ethnographic studies can, as Madge (2010) notes, range from passive observation studies to participative studies where the researcher is an engaged member of the community. For the majority of this study the researcher assumed the role of a ‘lurker’, ‘someone who reads messages posed to a public forum such as a newsgroup but does not respond to the group’ (Hine, 2000, p. 160). In other words, the development of the Facebook *Translations* app and the Irish *Translations* community were observed in a non-participatory ethnographic manner. At one point the researcher did participate on a small scale, translating and voting on two words. This was undertaken simply to determine how the *Translations* app worked and to ascertain how much about these workings the translators were privy to.

The primary data sources are Facebook and the Irish language *Translations* app, which were longitudinally investigated from January 2009 to October 2011. Particular attention was given to the development of the app, its workings and design and the interactions of the Irish language community via the *Discussion Board* on the app. Other areas of the site considered include the overall *Translations* app homepage, the *Translations* apps of a number of other languages and the *Terms Applicable to Translations*. *Facebook* publications and sources examined include: Facebook press releases, the Facebook Blog, Facebook careers publications and other regulatory Facebook documents.

The Facebook Translations app and community

New communication technologies and the social media they bring cause us to rethink the notion of ‘community’ (Watkins, 2009). After briefly introducing the *Translations* app, this section will consider whether the Facebook translators can be seen as a community – or what type of community it is that they constitute – and discuss how Facebook as a company fosters and encourages community formation via the design and infrastructure of the app.

Facebook users can add apps to their *Profiles* which ‘allow [them] to personalize their profiles and perform other tasks, such as compare movie preferences and chart travel histories’ (boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 7). These apps can be created by outside developers or by Facebook, as the *Translations* app is. When a user adds

the *Translations* app they become, as Facebook title them, a ‘translator’ and they join the community of the language they select. In 2011 300,000 users were ‘involved’ in all of the *Translations* apps, the latest figures available (Facebook, 2011).² The app works by allowing translators to submit translations for words/phrases, which are then open for approval via a voting system by the other translators. Each language must pass through three steps via the app to be deemed fully translated and launched for non-app users to use. Step one is: ‘translate the *Glossary*’, the glossary being the list of core Facebook terminology. Step two is ‘translate Facebook’, the translation of all the words and phrases Facebook as a website consists of. Finally, step three is ‘voting and verification’, which involves further translation of words/phrases and the reviewing of and further voting on the translations submitted in previous steps.

Facebook considers these translators a ‘language community’ and designates this status to them, describing them by use of the term ‘community’ throughout all their publications, and thus, in a sense, bringing the group into being by doing so. Using Fishman’s definition of a ‘language community’ as ‘a group of people who regard themselves as using the same language’ (Fishman, 1968, p. 140), the community of translators can be seen as a ‘language community’ in this sense, although they use different dialects of the Irish language and have varying approaches to language and translation. Spolsky (2004, p. 9) defines a speech community as ‘any group of people who share a set of language practices and beliefs’; they are governed by norms and rules of language and have ideologies relating to language practices (p.14). As we shall see below, it is certainly possible

to see this occurring in the Irish *Translations* app. Danet and Herring (2007) note that internet users are invariably members of one or more ‘speech communities’, with each member bringing their own linguistic knowledge, values and expectations to the online context. Given these various definitions, we can argue that the Irish language translators are a type of ‘speech community’, drawn together around shared interests in, values towards and practices relating to the Irish language, and developing ways of interaction in the pursuit of this shared goal.

In a relatively early definition, Rheingold (2000, p. 5) describes virtual communities as: ‘social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’. Vossen and Hagemann (2007, p. 59), define internet communities as ‘groups of people with common interests who interact through the Internet and the Web’. In these definitions Rheingold places human feeling and personal relationships at the centre of online communities, while Vossen and Hagemann see all those interacting online around particular issues as constituting online communities. Herring (2004) goes further and sets out a number of conditions she believes must be satisfied to term a group of internet users a community. These include: regular interaction around a shared interest or purpose; the development of social roles, hierarchies and shared norms; a sense of common history; and an awareness of difference from other groups. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, Rheingold (2000, p. xv) importantly describes them as ‘computer-mediated social groups’. And as Herring (2004) observes, they

are communities primarily based on and through language (or increasingly, other semiotic resources – see Leppänen et al., this volume, as the communities of translators involved in the translation of Facebook are. However, in this case study, Facebook are involved in the creation and promotion of community and a virtual or internet community to further the translation of their website.

A number of aspects of the design of the *Translations* app promote and foster the development of a community of translators using the app and also, a sub-community of senior translators within that language community. The primary function of the homepage of the *Translations* app is to demonstrate the role the community of translators are playing in the translation process. The progress bars and statistics here (about translated and untranslated words/phrases) outline the progress of the language through the translation process, illustrating how the community are progressing, what they have done and what they have left to do. Also, the inclusion of the *Discussion Board* element in the design of the app demonstrates its community-focused, co-operative nature. Here any translator can began a *Topic* on any issue and post replies on other *Topics*. In August 2011 Facebook divided the menu layout of the *Translations* app into three sections titled: *My Contributions*, *Community* and *Translation App*. The *Community* section includes the homepage of the app, the *Leaderboards* and a new sub-heading *Guidance* which includes the *Style Guide Wiki*, *Glossary* and *Help* elements. These changes were primarily aesthetic and structural but the titling and grouping allows Facebook to build a sense of community between the translators involved.

Facebook provides a number of ways for translators to recruit new translators. In August 2009 an *Invite Friends* section was added, which enabled users to invite potential translators from among their *Friends*. Translators could also *Share* the app by posting a link to it on their *Wall* or emailing their *Friends* with this link via the *Share* option on the *Translations* app's overall homepage. In May 2011 this *Share* link was replaced by a *Share this App* link, which posted a thumbnail of the app's logo, information on what the app did and a link to it on a user's *Profile Wall*, a *Friend's Wall* or via private message to their *Friends*. Also, on the overall *Translations* app homepage translators could see which of their *Friends* was using the app by going to the *Friends Who Have Added This Application* (2009) or the *You and Translations* (2011) elements. This feature builds a sense of community as they highlight which of your *Friends*, people you know, are involved in the app already.

Through the design of the app Facebook creates and fosters a sub-community of senior translators within the wider community. Firstly, the *Leaderboards* (*Weekly*, *Monthly* and *All Time*) create a community of de facto senior translators – i.e. those who are continually in the top ten or top twenty of the *All Time Leaderboard*. Secondly, the *Style Guide Wiki* element is only editable by the top 20 translators of the *All Time Leaderboard* for that particular language. By designing the wiki to be editable by these translators alone Facebook is facilitating and encouraging the creation of this community of what I am terming 'senior translators' who oversee the translation effort of the other translators of the

community. On the *Style Guide Wiki* these translators can stipulate how they want certain words/phrases translated, how style issues should be resolved, and so on. Facebook adds to the importance of the *Style Guide Wiki* by telling translators on the homepage of each app to ‘Use the Style guide for your language’. In the information it provides on the function and parameters of the wiki when the app is first opened to a language, it describes it as ‘a place where style rules decided by the [language] translation community can be codified, so that translators are aware of these rules prior to and during their translation activities’. Facebook encourages the formation of style rules and their codification in explicit written form through these instructions. The company encourages all of the community to be involved in the formation of the *Style Guide Wiki*, but those outside of the top 20 of the *All Time Leaderboard* do not have editing rights and can only contribute ‘by posting their ideas for the style guide to the discussion forum’.

Discussion of Facebook’s Language Policy

This section will consider three aspects of Facebook, the *Translations* app and language policy. Firstly, Facebook’s policy decisions with regard to the degree to which Facebook promotes minority languages and accommodates non-English speakers will be considered. Secondly, the extent to which the community’s translation is shaped by ‘top-down’ approaches within the community of translators and intervened in by Facebook itself will be discussed. Finally, how

the community of translators' policy decisions are co-produced in a dialectical process will be considered using a case study of the term 'mobile phone'.

Facebook and multilingualism – 'to help even the smallest cultures connect'

Facebook as an organization does not have an explicit language policy document or statement, but, from looking at the site, comment can be made on their implicit language policy in relation to minority and non-English languages and their speakers. The company's founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, states that the ultimate goal of the localisation process is for users to use the site in their native language(s) (Facebook, 2008). As an organization, Facebook appears 'bottom-up' in its ideology associated with the *Translations* app, with an agenda aimed at including minority languages and communities. They do so of their own accord and not at the behest of an official language policy authority or legislation. The company stresses its inclusive approach towards minority language communities, with an employee writing that: 'we're always looking to add new languages to help even the smallest cultures connect with everyone around them' (Little, 2008). The conscious decision to include speakers of 'commonly ignored languages' stems from a number of strategic reasons, including the desire to increase the SNS's reach (Ellis, 2009: 239) and for symbolic effect. Facebook acknowledge that the inclusion of these languages helped the SNS to gain a 'loyal following' from these language communities (Wong, 2010). They also call attention to their inclusion of right-to-left languages, highlighting their imminent arrival in 2009 on the *Translations* apps '... we will be supporting translation for these right-to-left

languages: Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Yiddish and Divehi' and with one *Facebook Blog* post dedicated entirely to this topic (Haddad, 2009).

However, this openness in terms of multilingualism is not present in all aspects of the website and its implicit language policy. The interface of the *Translations* app and the instructions on how to use it are only available in English, which excludes all non-English speakers from using the app and from being translators (Lenihan, 2011). The default of US English adds further complications as some terms that are not relevant for other languages are open for translation, an example being 'zip code' in the Irish context, since there are no postcodes in the Republic of Ireland. Also, at the beginning of this study in 2009, when communicating with Facebook, even in relation to translation issues, Facebook only wanted communication in English (Lenihan, 2011). In this respect the company is engaging in observable efforts to influence the language practices of their users, a language policy. The site is, however, becoming more multilingual, with the interface of the *Translations* app itself being translated and with the company now also supporting communication in languages other than English – although at present only in eight languages, all of which are 'supercentral' (de Swaan, 2001) languages such as Spanish and French. Minority and lesser used language communities may translate and use Facebook in their own languages, but cannot engage or communicate with Facebook and its staff.

'Top-down' influences and the Translations app

‘Top-down’ influence comes from outside of the community of translators, as Facebook is more involved in the translations produced than first appears. It is not explained to the translators, nor has the researcher been able to determine from observing the app, when a submitted translation is deemed to have received enough votes and becomes the translation used. This leaves it open to Facebook to determine the translation used and not the community of translators; again, this can be seen as a ‘top-down’ decision by Facebook leading to the enacting of their language policy. From looking at Facebook documentation it is clear that the site intervenes in the decisions and language policy of the communities: ‘And of course, we don’t publish the translated versions until we do a quick check of the winning translations ourselves’ (Wong, 2008). The ‘quick check’ of the translations that win appears as stage four of the translation process, described as: ‘We are getting close! Once our staff verified all the translations and tested all the functionalities, this language will be launched’. Another Facebook source tells us that linguists are on hand for ‘difficult issues’ and calls the *Translations* app a ‘hybrid model’ in that it uses both community and professional translations (Vera, 2009). Furthermore, Facebook has professional translators on hand to provide glossaries, style guides (both of which I believe are the *Glossary* and *Style Guide Wiki* elements of the app) and other materials to ‘support’ the community translators, and in some cases translate aspects of the site ‘just in case’ (Wong, 2008).

Facebook also intervenes in the ‘bottom-up’ language policy of the community of translators in the way they report translations. The *Review* element of the app was

previously known as the *Poorly Translated* section, at which time there were no entries in the Irish version of the app, meaning no translator had reported a translation as needing particular consideration by the community. However, Facebook added an auto-detection aspect to the design of the app which checks the translations submitted against the translations agreed in the *Glossary*. With the addition of auto-detection and the *Review* section, the numbers of translations open for review have increased greatly. The community must now review translations that otherwise may not have been questioned or put up for review. In these various ways, Facebook facilitates the use of the *Translations* app as a ‘bottom-up’ mechanism of language policy, but only within its own parameters and ultimately its own ‘top-down’ decisions.

The design of the *Translations* app suggests that policy decisions within each community of Facebook translators will be reached by consensus. However, as noted above, there is also a sub-community within the translator community who position themselves as senior members and as being in charge of the translation. While they do not explicitly claim to be more knowledgeable or experienced, they act in a ‘top-down’ manner instructing, influencing and counselling other translators on the *Discussion Board*. The senior translators’ authority appears to come from their perceived status from the *Leaderboard* and the *Discussion Board* elements of the app. Through the discussions on the *Discussion Board* they ensure the translation(s) and version of Irish they themselves subscribe to are used on the site. Here they also form agreements amongst themselves on translation issues, such as which version of Irish to use, the official standard or a different dialect

(Lenihan, 2011), which affect the community and the direction of the overall translation. Facebook facilitates the development of this sub-community of ‘senior translators’ by including the *Leaderboards* in the design of the app so as to give translators a rank within the community, and also by having the *Style Guide Wiki* only editable by those in the top 20 of the overall *Leaderboard*, thus giving them a position and a role different to the other translators involved.

We can see how this happens by looking at examples from the data set. Translator 1³ in particular acts as a senior member of the community throughout the *Topics* of the *Discussion Board*, starting 14 *Topics* (12.9% of the total *Topics*) and contributing 98 posts across many *Topics* (15.5% of the total posts). In these, the translator puts his views across on the Irish language itself, on the use of the app by language learners (in his view, learners should not contribute) and instructs fellow translators on how to vote and translate. He also seeks support for translations he favours:

[posting a link to a translation open for voting]

Tá duine éigean tar éis saighead Up a chliceáil ar an abairt nasctha
thuas...?!?! An féidir na daoine anseo an saighead “Down” a
chliceáil.. Táim tinn tuirseach den abairt truailithe seo

[Someone is after clicking the Up arrow on the word linked to
above ...?!?! Can the people here click the “Down” arrow. I am
sick and tired of this troublesome word] (Translator 1, 2009).

Interestingly, this translator is perceived as being part of this senior translator sub-community by the other community translators: he later replies to the above post thanking the seven translators who voted up as requested, suggesting that his ‘top-down’ language policy is accepted and acted upon.

The case of fón póca – ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’?

The above discussion considered the *Translations* app and the Irish community along with the ‘top-down’ efforts to influence the community from both Facebook and from certain members of the community. This section will argue that the Irish language community of the app is a microcosm of language policy, with many levels of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ language policy occurring as the community discusses, translates and votes.

During the period of my research, ‘mobile phone’ was the most discussed term on the Irish language *Translations* app *Discussion Board*, appearing in four separate *Topics*. Anecdotally there is an ongoing debate about the Irish language term for ‘mobile phone’ [cell phone]. The online version of the Irish language national terminology database, the realisation of a ‘top-down’ policy, gives two translations: *teileafón póca* and *fón póca* (pocket phone) (Focal.ie, 2010) and the terms *guthán ceallach* (cell telephone), *guthán soghluaiste* (mobile telephone) and *guthán póca* (pocket telephone) are also in use. *Guthán soghluaiste* is seen as more ‘traditional’, coming from the Irish for ‘telephone’, *guthán*, while *fón póca* is generally thought of as a ‘modern’ term, but it is also seen by some as too Anglicised. On the *Discussion Board* four versions of ‘mobile phone’ are

discussed: *fón póca*, *guthán póca*, *guthán soghluaiste* and *guthán ceallach*. *Fón póca*, the translation to be used as per the Irish app's *Glossary* from stage one of the translation process, appears to be the term favoured by the majority of the translators, but others nevertheless have different opinions.

One issue associated with the translation *fón póca* and discussed here is *béarlachas*, a term used to describe words that are seen to be too influenced by the English language. The use of *fón* is thought to be too close to the English 'phone' or 'fon' as used in colloquial Hiberno-English. An example of this from one translator is the post:

mobile phone should either be *guthán soghluaiste* or *guthán póca*
(I would argue that "*fón póca*" is a straight-up english calque and
should be avoided in this case) [sic] (Translator 2, 2008).

This is framed as a clear statement of the individual's beliefs which operate as a sort of personal language policy (Spolsky, 2004, 2012) implemented through their practice, i.e. translating and voting, and is a definite attempt to influence other translators. In a sense the translator is acting as a 'language broker' – a category of 'actors who... can [and I would add do] claim authority in the field of debate' (Blommaert, 1999, p. 9). This is a level of language policy which would be traditionally defined as a 'bottom-up' community translation effort, in which the translator is challenging the 'top-down' decision of the community (in this case

the use of *fón póca*) in favour of their own preferred choice (*guthán soghluaiste* or *guthán póca*) (Androutsopoulos, 2009).

A *Topic* in favour of *fón póca*, the translation chosen during stage one of the translation process, was started in reaction to other translations being submitted. The translator here reinforces the community's consensual beliefs associated with this translation, i.e. the 'top-down' community language policy (Spolsky, 2009):

Can we decide once and for all that we are using the term *Fón Póca* for mobile phone, as was decided at the glossary stage. The point of the glossary is to stop people translating one thing seven different ways. If we're not consistent then this will be the worst translation ever. Regardless of whether *guthán póca*, etc. is "more correct" – *Fón Póca* was chosen in the first stage – will people stop using terms other than those from the glossary. (Translator 1, 2008)

This example again illustrates a statement of language policy by means of a reaction to other translators' 'bottom-up' language practices in submitting and voting for other translations of 'mobile phone'. In this case the statement attempts to enforce the community's language policy hegemony (Wright, 2004). The use of 'we' is interesting to note, as it can be seen as an attempt to create solidarity with other translators and increase cohesion among them. But the use of 'people' illustrates that some of the community are seen as 'others' and are excluded. Different levels of language policy, both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up', are thus

occurring within the community of translators. Furthermore, we can see that language policy is an ongoing process, rather than the endpoint of a process such as this: Translator 1 is not willing to let this translation be decided by the voting process of the app, rather he re-iterates the ‘top-down’ policy and instructs that the community follow this.

The individual translator with the most posts on this subject wants yet another translation of ‘mobile phone’, *guthán ceallach*, to be used:

D’ar leis an tOllamh Nicholas Williams (COBÁC), gur cóir “*guthán póca*” a úsáid, cé go ndéarfainse “*guthán ceallach*” a bheith i bhfad níos fearr.

[According to Nicholas Williams (UCD) [University College Dublin, Ireland], *guthán póca* should be used; however, I think *guthán ceallach* is a lot better] (Translator 3, 2008).

Throughout the discussions this translator expresses the belief that *guthán ceallach* should be used, as he dislikes the use of word ‘mobile’ in English and prefers ‘cellular’. Here Translator 3 is also going against the community’s ‘top-down’ language policy but this translator’s language policy is also different from the ‘bottom-up’ level of Translator 2, as discussed above, to use *guthán soghluaiste* or *guthán póca*. However, Translator 3 the only translator to favour this term and does not garner support from others:

Aontaím leat i slí a [ainm], ach, tá roinnt den grí [bhrí] cáillte nuair a úsáidtear an focal *ceallach*. b'fhearr liom *guthán póca* mar shampla.

[I do agree with you in a way [name], but some of the meaning is lost when you use the word cellular, for example, I prefer *guthán póca*] (Translator 4, 2008).

As this example shows, any translator can post to the *Discussion Board*, participate in this process and go against the dominant discourse(s) (Lo Bianco, 2010); however, their views can be excluded from the community language policy by not gaining support from the wider community.

To supplement the findings from the above data, the phrases that were open for voting (at the time of these discussions) that contained the term ‘mobile phone’ were examined. This was carried out to ascertain what translations individual translators were submitting and voting on in practice, and thus to consider the performative actions of the translators (Lo Bianco, 2010). There were four versions of the phrase ‘mobile phone number’ open for voting, displayed in order of most votes first: *fón póca*, *guthán póca*, *uimhir (number) guthán póca* and *uimhir (number) guthán soghluaiste*. This shows that the translation of ‘mobile phone’ had not been resolved despite the beliefs, practices and management (Spolsky, 2012), and therefore, language policy(ies), as discussed above. The translation favoured by Translator 3 above, *guthán ceallach*, has not been submitted for voting, again illustrating the exclusion of translators and translations

which do not subscribe to the more dominant discourses (Lo Bianco, 2010). *Fón póca*, the community's 'top-down' choice, had the most votes, but the submission of the other translations shows that some translators are acting in a 'bottom-up' sense within the community. The terms *fón póca*, *guthán póca* and *guthán soghluaiste* are also submitted for the term 'privacy option for mobile phone number', but here *guthán póca* had the most number of votes with *fón póca* second. However, only *fón póca* is submitted for voting in the other two phrases containing 'mobile phone' open for voting. Thus we can see that the language policy processes around the translation of 'mobile phone' were ongoing and not adhering to the 'top-down' policy of the community.

This case study of 'mobile phone' demonstrates that 'bottom-up' language policy is made possible by the app and its practices, in that anyone can submit the translation they want, and that translations must be supported by the wider community to win the voting process, thus illustrating the social nature of this language policy (Spolsky, 2009) and also the complexities involved with it that occur within this community-driven effort.

Conclusions

As has been discussed in this chapter, Facebook actively influences the crowd-sourced translation of their site. They do so in two ways, directly through their 'top-down' involvement in the app, and indirectly by setting up the translation

process as a community based effort. By designing the app to foster community effort Facebook encourages the democratic nature of the translation, meaning that if a translation from the community is to be used, it must have been voted on positively by many of the translators. Although there may be different language beliefs and practices amongst individual translators, only one translation for each Facebook word or phrase is to be used in the final version. In the case of ‘mobile phone’, Facebook does not chose which version it prefers, but nevertheless does have an influence in that the one finally used is the one most popular with this language community as this community is influenced by its own internal overseers, the ‘senior translators’, to the exclusion of the views of others. Furthermore, in including minority and non-English languages in the *Translations* app, Facebook is influencing the language diversity of social media, providing a space for these language communities and perhaps influencing other social media to do so also.

In terms of language policy theory, Facebook, the Irish language community and their members act in both a ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ sense depending on the context of the situation, and in this way the current research demonstrates that the assumed dichotomy of ‘bottom-up’ forces as opposed to ‘top down’ forces is not always in evidence. Rather, language policy is now realised as not just unidirectional, but can be found in ‘multiple discursive relations’ (Androutsopoulos, 2009) and cannot be separated from the shared norms and normative discourses of language communities (Leppänen & Piirainen-Marsh, 2009). An expanded view of language policy is necessary, one that challenges the

accepted dichotomies, since the object of its study, the social media context, is ever changing, fluid and dynamic.

Notes

1. These are the categories of language variety Facebook use.
2. It is not outlined what level of participation/interaction with the app is meant by 'involved in'.
3. The Irish translators are anonymised here by titling them Translator 1, Translator 2, etc., the use of these figures does not equate to a ranking of their status in the community or of their contribution to the translation effort.

References

- Androutsopoulos, J. (2009) 'Policing practices in heteroglossic mediascapes: a commentary on interfaces', *Language Policy*, 8, 285-290.
- Blommaert, J. (1999) 'The Debate is Open' in Blommaert, J., ed. *Language Ideological Debates* (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter), pp. 1-38.
- Blommaert, J., Kelly-Holmes, H., Lane, P., Leppänen, S., Moriarty, M., Pietikäinen, S. & Piirainen-Marsh, A. (2009) 'Media, multilingualism and language policing: an introduction', *Language Policy*, 8(3), 203-207.

- boyd, d. m. & Ellison, N. B. (2008) 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 13 (1), 210-230.
- Canagarajah, S. (2006) 'Ethnographic Methods in Language Policy' in T. Ricento (ed.) *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 153-169.
- Central Statistics Office (2012) *Census 2011: Ethnicity, Irish Language and Religion* (Dublin: Stationary Office).
- Danet, B. & Herring, S. C. (2007) 'Introduction: Welcome to the Multilingual Internet' in Danet, B. & Herring, S. C., eds., *The Multilingual Internet* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 3-39.
- Delap, B. (2008) 'Irish and the Media' in C. Nic Pháidín and S. Ó Cearnaigh (eds.) *A New View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Cois Life), pp. 152-163.
- de Swaan, A. (2001) *Words of the World: The Global Language System* (Cambridge: Polity).
- Department of Community Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (2009) *Straitéis 20 Bliain Don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 (Dréacht)/20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Draft)* (Dublin: Government Publications).
- Ducheneaut, N. (2010) 'The Chorus of the Dead: Roles, Identity Formation, and Ritual Processes Inside an FPS Multiplayer Online Game' in J.T. Wright, D.G. Embrick & A. Lukács (eds.) *Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies: Critical Approaches to Researching Video Game Play* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books), pp. 199-222.

- du Plessis, T. (2011) 'Language visibility and language removal: A South African case study in linguistic landscape change', *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 37(2), 194-224.
- Ellis, D. (2009) 'A Case Study in Community-Driven Translation of a Fast-Changing Website', in N. Aykin (ed.) *Internationalization, Design and Global Development* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer), pp. 236-244.
- European Union (2005) Council Regulation (EC) No 920/2005 of 13 June 2005 amending Regulation No 1 of 15 April 1958 determining the language to be used by the European Economic Community and Regulation No 1 of 15 April 1958 determining the language to be used by the European Atomic Energy Community and introducing temporary derogation measures from those Regulations, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005R0920:EN:NOT>, date accessed: 1 February 2010.
- Facebook (2008) Facebook Releases Site in Spanish; German and French to Follow, <http://newsroom.fb.com/News/238/Facebook-Releases-Site-in-Spanish-German-and-French-to-Follow>, date accessed: 16 November 2012.
- Facebook (2011) Facebook Factsheet, <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?factsheet> [no longer live], date accessed 30 May 2011.
- Facebook (2012) Fact Sheet, <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22>, date accessed: 14 February 2012.
- Fishman, J. (1968) *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (The Hague: Mouton).

- Focal.ie. (2010) Mobile phone search results,
<http://www.focal.ie/Search.aspx?term=mobile+phone>, date accessed: 22 June 2010.
- Foras na Gaeilge (2009) *Straitéis Idirlín don Óige (Dréacht)/Internet strategy for young people (Draft)*,
http://gaelpport.arobis40.com/uploads/documents/Dréachtstraitéis_Idirlín_don_Óige.pdf, date accessed: 22 June 2010.
- Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books).
- Haddad, G. (2009) Facebook Blog: Facebook now available in Arabic and Hebrew, <https://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=59043607130>, date accessed: 1 June 2012.
- Herring, S. C. (2004) 'Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis' in Barab, S. A., Kling, R. & Gray, J. H., eds., *Designing for virtual communities in the service of learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 338-376.
- Hine, C. (2000) *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage).
- Hine, C. (2008) 'Virtual ethnography: modes, varieties, affordances' in N. G. Fielding, R. M. Lee, & G. Blank (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (London: Sage), pp. 257-270.
- Hogan-Brun, G. (2011) 'Language planning and media in minority language and plurilingual contexts', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(3), 325-29.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1996) *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom-up* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter).

- Kaplan, R. B. & Baldauf Jr, R. B. (eds.) (1997) *Language Planning: From Practice to Theory* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters).
- Lo Bianco, J. (2010) 'Language Policy and Planning' in N. H. Hornberger & S. Lee McKay (eds.) *Sociolinguistics and Language Education* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters), pp. 143-176.
- Lenihan, A. (2011) "'Join our community of translators" Language Ideologies & Facebook' in C. Thurlow & K. Mroczek (eds.) *Digital Discourse: Language in the Social media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 48-64.
- Leppänen, S. & Peuronen, S. (2012) 'Multilingualism on the Internet' in Martin-Jones, A Blackledge & A Creese (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (Oxon: Routledge), pp. 384-402.
- Leppänen, S. & Piirainen-Marsh, A. (2009) 'Language policy in the making: an analysis of bilingual gaming activities', *Language Policy*, 8, 261-284.
- Little, C. (2008) Facebook Blog: Arrr, Avast All Ye Pirates!, <http://blog.Facebook.com/blog.php?post=31137552130>, date accessed: 19 February 2010.
- Madge, C. (2010) 'Internet Mediated Research' in N. Clifford, S. French & G. Valentine (eds.) *Key Methods in Geography* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd.), pp. 173-188.
- McCloskey, J. (2001) *Guthanna in Éag: an marfaidh an Ghaeilge beo?/Voices Silenced: Has Irish a future?* (Dublin: Cois Life).
- Ó Conchubhair, B. (2008) 'The Global Diaspora and the "New" Irish (Language)' in C. Nic Pháidín & S. Ó Cearnaigh (eds.) *A New View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Cois Life), pp. 224-248.

- Ó Giollagáin, C., Mac Donnacha, S, Ní Chualáin, F, Ní Shéaghdha, A & O'Brien, M. (2007) *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: Principle Findings and Recommendations* (Dublin: Dublin Stationary Office).
- Rheingold, H. (2000) *The Virtual Community*, First MIT Press Edition ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press).
- Scannell, K. (2011) Welcome/Fáilte!, <http://indigenoustweets.blogspot.ie/2011/03/welcomefailte.html>, date accessed 25 October 2012.
- Scannell, K. (2012) Indigenous Tweets, <http://indigenoustweets.com/>, date accessed 25 October 2012.
- Shohamy, E. (2006) *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches* (London: Routledge).
- Spolsky, B. (2004) *Language Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Spolsky, B. (2009) *Language Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Spolsky, B. (2012) 'What is language policy?' in Spolsky, B., ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 3-15.
- Trim, J. L. M. (2003) 'Review Essay', *Language Policy*, 2, 69-73.
- UNESCO (2009) UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger 2009, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00206>, date accessed: 1 February 2010.

- Vera, N. (2009) Life at Facebook: Nico Vera,
<http://www.facebook.com/careers/story.php?story=6> [no longer live], date accessed: 19 February 2010.
- Vossen, G. & Hagemann, S. (2007) *Unleashing Web 2.0: from concepts to creativity* (Burlington Elsevier/Morgan Kaufmann).
- Watkins, S. C. (2009) *The Young and the Digital* (Boston: Beacon Press).
- Wong, Y. (2008) Facebook Blog Post: Facebook Around the World,
<http://blog.Facebook.com/blog.php?post=10056937130>, date accessed: 19 February 2010.
- Wong, Y. (2010). Quora Question: What was the process Facebook went about getting their website translated into different languages?,
<http://www.quora.com/What-was-the-process-Facebook-went-about-getting-their-website-translated-into-different-languages>, date accessed: 24 May 2011.
- Wouters, P. (2005) 'The Virtual Knowledge Studio for the Humanities and Social Sciences', in *First International Conference on e-Social Science*,
http://www.ncess.org/events/conference/2005/papers/papers/ncess2005_paper_Wouters.pdf, date accessed 16 November 2012.
- Wright, S. (2004) *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan).