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Dossier “New speakers of minority languages: belonging and legitimacy”

Becoming a new speaker of Irish: linguistic *mudes* throughout the life cycle

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Abstract

This paper offers a preliminary analysis of linguistic *mudes* in the case of new speakers of Irish, namely, critical junctures in favour of Irish adopted during the life cycle. It begins by explaining the concept of the *muda* and outlines its importance in providing a deeper understanding of what it means to ‘become’ a new speaker of Irish. Drawing on ethnographic data from a corpus of mostly highly competent speakers, seven *mudes* are identified in the case of Irish: primary/secondary school, immersion school, university, family, work and retirement. Speakers' perceptions of each *muda* are explored and the impact of each critical juncture on language practice is considered. It is concluded that some *mudes* are more gradual than others and that sociolinguistic context is linked to the extent to which the new speaker adopts Irish as an important part of his/her linguistic repertoire.

Keywords

critical sociolinguistics, new speakers, linguistic *mudes*, minority languages, Irish

La conversió en nous parlants d'irlandès: els mudes lingüístics al llarg del cicle vital

Resum

Aquest article ofereix una anàlisi preliminar dels mudes lingüístics en relació amb els nous parlants d'irlandès, és a dir, aquells moments decisius en els quals s'ha adoptat l'irlandès durant el cicle vital. Es comença explicant el concepte de muda i se n'esbossa la importància a l'hora d'adquirir un coneixement més profund del que significa «convertir-se» en un nou parlant d'irlandès. A partir de dades etnogràfiques provinents d'un corpus format majoritàriament per parlants molt competents, s'identifiquen set mudes en el cas de l'irlandès: escola primària/secundària, escola d'immersió, universitat, família, feina i jubilació. S'analitza la percepció de cada muda per part del parlant i es té en compte l'impacte de cada moment decisiu en la pràctica de la llengua. S'arriba a la conclusió que alguns mudes són més graduals que d'altres i que el context sociolingüístic està lligat a l'abast de l'adopció de la llengua irlandesa com una part important del seu repertori lingüístic per part del nou parlant.

Paraules clau

sociolingüística crítica, nous parlants, mudes lingüístics, llengües minoritàries, irlandès



1. Introduction and methodology

This paper applies the concept of linguistic *mudes* to new speakers of Irish and examines speakers' perceptions of the changes necessary in order to 'become' a new speaker. A *muda* refers to a critical juncture in the life cycle where a speaker changes linguistic practice in favour of the target language. In the case of Catalan such changes may be dramatic, reflecting the language's strong social and institutional presence. Irish is in a weaker position, so the intention of this paper is to shed light on how *mudes* function in the case of minoritised languages which are neither as widely spoken nor enjoy the same institutional support as Catalan (Pujolar & González, 2013; Pujolar & Puigdevall Serralvo, 2015).

This working paper presents a selection of data from a corpus of recent interviews with approximately 50 new speakers of Irish, ranging from highly competent and fluent speakers of Irish to less proficient speakers. Although categorisation of any type is problematic with ethnographic research such as this, at one end of this continuum of speaker types are what Piller (2002) describes as 'expert speakers'. In interviews, many of the 'expert speakers' reported 'passing' as native speakers, many used features of traditional language and all reported communicating easily and fluently in Irish across a range of topics, both among their own group and with traditional speakers. At the other end of the spectrum we find more recent newcomers to the language, who self-identify as 'learners'. Interviews were semi-structured and took a narrative biographical approach in order to investigate the speaker's linguistic background and language practice and ideology. Additional field notes were also made. The interview protocol and coding procedure were adapted from guidelines developed for the NEOPHON project at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). This paper has benefitted from our participation in the Open Data Seminar organised by NEOPHON in November 2013.

2. Sociolinguistic context

Irish is spoken throughout Ireland in networks and as a community language, to varying degrees, in a number of small areas known as the Gaeltacht, located mostly along the western coast. In Republic of Ireland censuses, two questions are asked about competence and use of Irish:

- (1) Can you speak Irish?
- (2) If 'yes', do you speak Irish?
 - a. daily, within the education system
 - b. daily, outside the education system
 - c. weekly
 - d. less often
 - e. never.

In 2011, just over 41 percent of the population or 1.8 million people reported that they could speak Irish. Only 2 percent (77,185 people) spoke Irish daily outside the education system. Approximately two thirds of these (54,010 people) were based outside the Gaeltacht. A further 110,642 reported speaking Irish weekly outside the education system (Central Statistics Office, 2013). Therefore, leaving out daily speakers in the Gaeltacht (many of whom can be assumed to be native speakers), it can be argued that there are at least 150,000 active and regular new speakers of Irish in the Republic of Ireland, representing approximately 4 percent of the population, with a much larger group of less frequent and less competent speakers. The headline statistic of 1.8 million speakers is due to the status of Irish as a core school subject from the age of 4 years, although the majority of schools teach Irish as a subject only, with all other education given through English. A small minority of pupils (approximately 5 percent) are enrolled in immersion schools known as *gaelscoileanna* (singular: *gaelscoil*) (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). In Northern Ireland, 10.7 percent of the population (approximately 185,000 people) reported some knowledge of Irish in the most recent census (2011) and 3.8 percent (almost 65,000 people) claimed that they could 'speak, read, write and understand Irish' (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2012: 18). Although many of this latter group could fit the new speaker profile, it is difficult to draw solid conclusions as the Northern Ireland census does not enquire about frequency of use. The current sample does not include data from Northern Ireland as fieldwork there had not commenced at the time of writing.

3. *Mudes* and new speakers of Irish

Based on existing literature on Catalan, seven *mudes* have been identified in the life cycle where individuals adopt more Irish into their linguistic repertoire and/or report 'becoming' new speakers of Irish: (1) primary/secondary school *muda*; (2) *gaelscoil muda*; (3) Gaeltacht *muda*; (4) university *muda*; (5) family *muda*; (6) work *muda* and (7) retirement *muda*

3.1. Primary/secondary school *muda*

The first extract is taken from an interview with G11, a highly competent new speaker who uses a traditional variety of Irish. He heard some traditional Irish at home in his early childhood but was raised and educated mostly in English. He reported more than one *muda* in his life but the following extract refers to the first occasion when he realised that his Irish was better than that of other pupils at primary school:

Bhí mé compordach sa Ghaolainn sa bhunscoil – níor chuir sí as dom a chuigint, thaitin sí go mór liom agus bhí dearcadh



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dearfach agam uirthi. Bhraith mé go raibh cumas maith go leor agam. Is cinnte pé uair a bhuaílimis le daoine eile, le daltaí ó scoileanna eile go raibh a fhios agam go raibh Gaolainn níos fearr agamsa agus againne ná mar a bhí acusan. Is cuimhin liom nuair a tháinig múinteoir ionaid [ón nGaeltacht] do bhí béim ollmhór ar an nGaolainn ansan agus bhíomar ana-thógtha léi. Chuir sí go leor béime ar an nGaolainn. Is cuimhin liom go raibh sí ana-thógtha liomsa agus bhí ana-bhród orm go raibh mé chomh maith san. Thug sí moladh dom agus thaitin sé sin liom.

I was comfortable in Irish at primary school, it didn't bother me at all, I really liked it and I had a positive attitude towards it. I felt that I had a fairly good ability. Definitely whenever we would meet other people, with students from other schools, I knew that I had better Irish and that we had better Irish than they had. I remember when a substitute teacher came [from the Gaeltacht] there was great emphasis on Irish then and we were very taken with her. She put a lot of emphasis on Irish. I remember that she was very taken with me and I was very proud that I was so good. She praised me and I liked that (G11, male, 24, field notes).

3.2. *Gaelscoil muda*

G14 experienced a linguistic *muda* when he moved to a secondary-level *gaelscoil* after having been educated in an English-medium primary school. He explains how he has maintained Irish into adulthood, whereas many of his original classmates have reverted to English, in a reverse *muda* away from Irish:

G14: Bhí go leor den ghrúpa sin a bhí ag an meánscoil liom // nuair a chasaimse leo anois tá siad tar éis cúlú iomlán a dhéanamh agus níl ach cúpla focal fágtha acu ach táimse tar éis dul sa treo eile so aithníme anois go bhfuil forbairt ollmhór tagtha orm ón grúpa seo a bhí níos láidre ná mé agus anois gur mise an t-aon duine amháin atá fós ag an leibhéal sin nó leibhéal níos fearr anois agam [...] Labhraíonn siad Béarla liom anois agus uaireanta anois *like* ó am go chéile comhrá i nGaeilge ach don chuid is mó labhraíonn siad Béarla liom agus ní bhacann siad leis an nGaeilge a thuilleadh so malartú iomlán a bhí i gceist (LF).

G14: Many of that group were in secondary school with me // when I meet them now they have retreated completely and they only have a few words left but I have gone in the opposite direction so I recognise now that I have developed hugely compared to that group who were stronger than me and now that I'm the only person who's still at that level or at an even higher level [...] They speak English to me now and sometimes now, like from time to time, [we have] a conversation in Irish but for the most part they speak English to me and they don't bother with Irish anymore, so it's been a complete turn-around (LF) (G14, 27, male, interview).

3.3. *Gaeltacht muda*

High levels of competence and fluency seems to be linked to periods spent in the Gaeltacht, often during the teenage years, when thousands of pupils attend immersion courses and live with local Irish-speaking families. G9 recalls how his Irish improved dramatically due to repeated periods in the Gaeltacht:

Ansin sa dara bhliain bhí mé níos cumasaí i leith na Gaeilge so bhí mé níos fearr agus níos láidre [...] thug mé faoi deara [...] go raibh gur theastaigh uaim dul ar ais gur airigh mé an Ghaeltacht uaim agus sa chúigiú bliain chuaigh mé thuas go [coláiste Gaeltachta] agus bhain mé an méid sin taitneamh as bhí sé sin iontach d'fhoghlaim mé an méid sin Gaeilge bhí mé ag Gaeilgeoireacht an t-am ar fad ní raibh aon Béarla á labhairt agam beag nó mór.

Then in second year I was better at Irish so I was better and stronger [...] I noticed [...] that I wanted to go back, that I missed the Gaeltacht and in fifth year I went up to [Gaeltacht college] and I enjoyed it so much, that was wonderful, I learned so much Irish, I was speaking Irish the whole time, I really wasn't speaking any English at all (G9, male, 22, interview).

Another version of the Gaeltacht *muda* –immersion in an urban Irish-speaking network –was reported by A2, a highly competent speaker of Irish who lives in the United States and speaks a close approximation of a traditional variety. His initial *muda* occurred during an extended period spent living and socialising in a close network of Irish language enthusiasts in a city, one of whom invited him to Ireland:

Thairg sé domhsa go dtiocfadh liom dul agus stopadh aige i [ainm an bhaile] agus go an t-aos óg a bhí Gaedhlig acu a bhí ag teacht isteach i rith an lae nuair a bhí seisean bheadh seisean ar shiúl chun a chuid oibre agus ansin achan oíche bheimis ag dul go dtí club Gaelach [...] chuaigh mé anonn i mí Iúil nó mí na Súl Buí mar a d'fhoghlaim mé aige agus // d'fhan mé ceithre mhí ann go dtí mí Dheireadh an Fhómhair [...] gasúirí óga ag teacht isteach an toigh is ag caitheamh toitíní agus mise ag déanamh roinnt tae agus arán rósta daofa agus ceapairí agus iadsan ag caint Gaedhlighe agus mise ag freastal orthu is glanadh suas ina ndiaidh agus dul ar aghaidh mar seo [...] bhí sé crua ach chuir mé fá mo choinne Gaedhlig a fhoghlaim agus tháinig mé ina bhaile i ndiaidh ceithre mhí agus caint Gaedhlig bhí caint na Gaedhlighe agam ar dóigh.

He offered that I could stay with him in [name of town] and that the young guys who had Irish would come in during the day, when he was, he would be away to his work and then every night we would go to an Irish language club [...] I went over in July, or mí na Súl Buí as I learned from him, and // I stayed there for four months until October [...] young guys



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coming into the house and smoking cigarettes and me making tea and toast for them and sandwiches and they talking Irish and me looking after them and cleaning up after them and going along like this [...] it was tough but I knuckled down to learn Irish and I came home after four months talking Irish, I was able to talk Irish really well (A2, male, 60, interview).

3.4. University *muda*

Several participants identified the university as the stimulant for the most significant *muda* of their lives to date, often linked to the fact that they encountered a critical mass of fluent speakers for the first time. Participant G17, who is himself from the Gaeltacht but spoke mostly English at home, considered that he spoke Irish well until he met other, more fluent speakers at university and began socialising with them:

Bhí ana-thábhacht ag baint leis [cumann sóisialta] mar chainteoir Gaeilge. Ní raibh sé socraithe agamsa tabhairt faoin nGaeilge *per se* san ollscoil, bhíos ag díriú ar rudaí eile. Ach bhí sárchraic againn leis an [cumann]. Mé féin agus cara eile chonaiceamar póstaer don gcumann agus chuamar ann. Agus ní raibh *sight* ar bith ar an bhfion ach bhí [imeacht shóisialta] ar siúl ach d'fhanamar agus bhí sé ar fheabhas ar fad. Ana-chraic agus ana-spraoi: daoine a bhí ar comhaois linne agus a bhí ag labhairt na Gaeilge – b'shin rud ana-thábhachtach chun sinn a threorú i dtreo na Gaeilge. B'shin spraoi nár bhain leis an teanga cheana [...] Níor shamhlaíomar é seo leis an seomra ranga. Bhí an ghné shóisialta ana-thábhachtach ar fad. Threisigh sé sin an cairdeas agus an nasc a bhí againn leis an teanga.

It [social club] was very important to an Irish speaker. I hadn't decided to take Irish *per se* at university, I was focusing on other things. But we had fantastic fun with the [club]. Myself and a friend, we saw a poster for the club and we went to it. And there wasn't any sign of the wine but there was a [social event] taking place, but we stayed and it was really fantastic. It was great fun: people the same age as us and all speaking Irish, that was a very important thing to direct us towards Irish. That was fun not connected to the language before [...] We didn't associate this with the classroom. That social aspect was very important. That strengthened our friendship and the connection we had with the language (G17, male, 30, field notes).

H1 explains that although she had attended a *gaelscoil* at primary level, she did not consider herself a speaker because the university was the first place where she began using Irish socially on a daily basis:

H1: Agus ansin sin an chéad uair *really* go raibh mé ag labhairt Gaeilge gach lá go sóisialta ag dul amach ag labhairt

Gaeilge le daoine sa rang agus bhí comhlúadar iontach againn ansin agus em ansin ina dhiaidh sin em rinne mé cúrsa [teideal] [in] [ainm na háite] agus bhí mé ag labhairt Gaeilge gach lá bhí mé i mo chónaí le cailíní a labhairt Gaeilge gach lá agus ansin uh an an [cúrsa eile] i mbliana an rud céanna bhí gach duine ag labhairt Gaeilge ach sa sa [chúrsa fochéime] ní raibh mórán Gaeilge á labhairt ag daoine *do you know I'd say* go raibh b'fhéidir / deich fán gcéad de dhaoine ag labhairt Gaeilge go rialta agus go sóisialta

I: Mar sin an gceapann tú gur tháinig an t-athrú duitse [...] gur athraigh tú i do chainteoir Gaeilge i mblianta na hollscoile mar sin, an mbeadh sé sin ceart?

H1: Yeah bheadh sé sin ceart yeah.

H1: And then that was the first time really that I was speaking Irish every day socially, going out speaking Irish with people in the class, and we had great company there, and em then after that em I did a course [title] in [name of place] and I was speaking Irish every day, I was living with girls who spoke Irish every day, and then uh the the [other course] this year, the same thing, everyone was speaking Irish but in the, in the [undergraduate course] there weren't many speaking Irish, do you know, I'd say that there were perhaps / ten per cent of people speaking Irish regularly and socially

I: So for you did the change come [...] did you become an Irish speaker in the university years so, would that be correct?

H1: Yeah that would be correct yeah (H1, female, 26, interview).

3.5. Family *muda*

A number of participants reported *mudes* with a family member, although they had spoken English to that person in the past. G6 explains how he now speaks Irish with his mother, a Gaeltacht speaker who raised him through English:

Labhraim Gaeilge le mo mháthair anois tá sé sin b'fhéidir ceathair nó cúig de bhlianta ó shin em go dtí sin is go hiondúil a bhíodh muid ag déanamh comhrá i mBéarla eh shocraigh mé agus mé ag teacht aníos b'fhéidir cúig, sé, seacht mbliana déag d'aois go raibh de cheart orm eh m'iarrachtaí í a ghríosú chun Gaeilge a labhairt liom mar / mar siocair go bhfuil Gaeilge iontach, iontach shármhaith aici agus bhí mise ag iarraidh an blas agus an saibhreas sin a thabhairt liom agus mise ag eh // go háirithe anois agus mise ar an ollscoil tchím daoine thart orm a bhfuil Gaeilge iontach nádúrtha iontach líofa acu iontach canúnach acu fosta agus tá mise ag iarraidh tá mise ag déanamh iarrachta teacht ar chanúint ar mo chanúint fhéin agus sílim gurbh é sin an modh ab fhearr é a dhéanamh ná a bheith ag caint i nGaeilge.

I speak Irish to my mother now, that is, maybe four or five years ago, em up to then we usually spoke in English, eh



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I decided when I was growing up [at] maybe fifteen sixteen seventeen that I should em try to persuade her to speak Irish to me because / because she has fantastic, excellent Irish and I was trying to take that accent and that richness with me and eh // especially now that I am at university, I see people around me who have very natural, very fluent Irish, the dialectal forms as well and I am trying, I am trying to find a dialect my own dialect and I think that the best method is to be speaking Irish (G6, male, 22, interview).

3.6. Work *muda*

Participant J1 works in an Irish language organisation and describes how the presence of traditional speakers dramatically improved her own command of Irish in the period since she joined the company:

Táimse i ndiaidh a bheith ag plé leis seo le ceithre bliana go leith so ní féidir liom a rá / *really* cé ní féidir liom samplaí a thabhairt duit ach déarfainn go gcaithfidh go bhfuil difríocht iomlán i mo chuid cainte / eh braithim féin nach bhfuil aon bhlas ar mo chuid cainte ach déanaim rudaí mar *just* braithim níos cruinne le rudaí áirithe mar shampla bheinn mar a deir muintir uilig Bhaile Átha Cliath 'labhar [l̪ˠaː] sé leis an bhfear' dhéanfainn iarracht anois LABHAIR [l̪ˠaːr̪ˠ] a rá agus rudaí mar sin atá níos cruinne agus b'fhéidir tá a fhios agam go bhfuil 'Éireannach' ['eːr̪ˠən̪ˠəx] an 'r' cruá ansin agus tarlaíonn na rudaí sin go huathoibríoch ar bhealach i ndiaidh dhuit píosa ama a chaitheamh le daoine gur cainteoirí dúchasacha iad [...] measaim go bhfuil mise go bhfuil sé de pribhléid agamsa bualadh leis na daoine is fearr b'fhéidir sa tír cuid des na daoine is fearr (J1, female, 33, interview).

I've been doing this for four and half years so I can't say // really who, I can't give you examples, but I'd say that there has to be a complete difference in my speech / eh I feel myself that I have no accent but I do things like, just I feel more accurate with certain things for example, I would, like all Dublin people, say *labhar* [l̪ˠaː] *sé leis an bhfear* I would try now to say LABHAIR [l̪ˠaːr̪ˠ] and things like that and maybe I know that there is Éireannach ['eːr̪ˠən̪ˠəx] that hard 'r', and those things happen automatically in a way after you have spent a period of time with people who are native speakers [...] I think I am, that I am privileged to have met perhaps the best people in the country, some of the best people (J1, female, 33, interview).

3.7. Retirement *muda*

Participant B13 had learned Irish during her childhood at school but had not engaged in any degree of active use of the language until recently. Now in her 60s and retired she decided a few years ago to set up an Irish language conversation group as a means of

reviving her use of the language. In the excerpt below she recalls her dedication to this endeavour and how this first step led her to join established Irish language organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge (the main national voluntary Irish language organisation) and to become part of a larger Irish-speaking network and support group. Compared to some of the more 'expert speakers' described above, B13 uses a much more hybridised form of language, often slips in and out of English when she doesn't know the word in Irish and does not always adhere to the grammatical rules:

Seacht bliain ó shin buaileamar le chéile gach seachtain níor cuireamar ar ceal aon oíche eh *even* i rith an Nollag *yeah* so em fás an suim eh ag an grúpa go léir agus go oifigiúil thánamar le chéile agus dúirt duine éigin dúinn bheith páirteach le Conradh na Gaeilge chun iad a cabhair chun cur cabhair linn

Seven years ago we met every week, we didn't cancel any night, eh even during Christmas *yeah*, so em the interest of all the group grew and we came together officially and someone told us to join Conradh na Gaeilge to help them to help us. (B13, female, 60s, interview)

4. Becoming a new speaker

Participants were also asked to outline their perceptions of what happens when a *muda* takes place. Among the contributing factors identified were use of the traditional dialect, passing as a native speaker and regular use of Irish even if that means a less traditional variety. G1 criticises other weaker learners for not attempting to imitate Gaeltacht speech:

G1: Ní maith liom an chaoi a chaitheann foghlaimeoirí na Gaeilge leis na cainteoirí dúchais uaireanta // em bíonn cuid acu bíonn daoine atá líofa lofa mar a deirtear ag tabhairt amach nach bhfuil daoine sásta labhairt leo i nGaeilge agus eh thuigfinn cén fáth nach mbíonn na cainteoirí dúchais sásta iad a fhulaingt mar bíonn tuirse orthu is dócha a bheith ag plé le daoine mar seo em

I: Cad is brí le daoine líofa lofa?

Eh is dócha daoine atá suim acu sa teanga agus ach b'fhéidir nach bhfuil a dhóthain suime chun tabhairt faoi i gceart em agus is minic a mbíonn siad ag iarraidh em an oiread Gaeilge atá acu a léiriú ach em iad beag beann ar a laghad atá acu i ndáiríre daoine nach bhfuil ró-mhachnamhach is dócha faoin teanga ach em sin grúpa amháin

G1: I don't like the way that learners treat native speakers sometimes // em some of them people who are *líofa lofa* [fluent but highly inaccurate] as they say, complain that people aren't willing to talk to them in Irish and, eh I would understand why the native speakers wouldn't be willing to suffer them because I suppose they are tired of dealing with people like them em



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I: What do you mean *líofa lofa*?

G1: Eh I suppose people who are interested in the language and, but perhaps don't have enough interest to learn it correctly, em and they often try to show off how much Irish they have but em despite the fact that they have so little really, people who aren't too thoughtful I suppose about the language but em that's one group (G1, male, 28, interview).

One participant who reported 'passing' as a native speaker believes that being perceived as such gives a speaker a certain authority:

Shíl daoine gur cainteoir dúchais mé uaireanta agus i gcónaí má chuirtear ceist orm díreach *no* ní cainteoir dúchais mé ní a fhios agam an síleann duine ar bith as [an gceantar inar fhoghlaim sé Gaeilge] gur cainteoir dúchais mé ach [síleann] daoine ó áiteacha eile [é] agus b'fhéidir go dtugann sé sin níos mó saoirse duit má cheapann duine gur chainteoir dúchais tú go bhfuil // cead do chinn agat í a úsáid

People sometimes thought I was a native speaker and always if I'm asked a question directly, no I'm not a native speaker, I don't know if anyone from [the area where he learned Irish] thinks I'm a native speaker but people from other places [do] and perhaps that gives you more freedom if people think you're a native speaker, that you // can do you what you like with it (J3, male, 27, interview).

Participant H1 speaks a less traditional version of Irish and expressed discomfort at the prestige granted to Gaeltacht varieties. For her, regular use of Irish was the most important aspect of the *muda*. Attending a *gaelscoil* was not sufficient and broader social use was required:

I: Sea agus an ndéarfá ag an bpointe seo [gaelscoil] go raibh tú i do chainteoir Gaeilge an dtabharfá cainteoir Gaeilge ort fhéin?

H1: *No* ní thabharfainn *no*

I: Cén fáth?

H1: Mar ní raibh mé ag labhairt Gaeilge le aon duine [...]

I: Mar sin chun a bheith i do chainteoir Gaeilge dar leat caithfidh tú a bheith á // á húsáid go rialta?

H1: *Yeah yeah* ceapaim [é] *yeah*

I: Yes and would you say at that stage [gaelscoil] you were an Irish speaker, would you call yourself an Irish speaker?

H1: No I wouldn't no

I: Why?

H1: Because I wasn't speaking Irish to anyone [...]

I: So to be an Irish speaker you think you have to be // to be using // using it regularly?

A: *Yeah yeah* I do *yeah* (H1, female, 26, interview).

There were also some examples of speakers who openly opposed the the ideal of the Gaeltacht native speaker and described their Irish as 'Dublin Irish'. This was the case of B1 who was brought up in an urban context and who took pride in her non-traditional way of speaking:

Níl mé as an Gaeltacht *you know* ní raibh mé riamh i mo chónaí ann tá Gaeilge as Baile Átha Cliath agam so sin é *you know*

I am not from the Gaeltacht you know, I was never living there, I have Dublin Irish, so that's it you know (B1, female, 40s, interview)

5. Conclusions

We can draw the following provisional conclusions from the data presented above.

In the case of Irish, linguistic *mudes* occur throughout the life cycle and can be numerous and cumulative in the case of speakers whose exposure to the language increases over time. In Irish in contrast to Catalan, *mudes* may be less dramatic and more incremental, reflecting the language's relatively weak sociolinguistic presence. In other words, speakers may refer to a number of *mudes* during their lives, each representing a cumulative improvement in their ability in Irish. Some speakers identify one *muda* as being more important than the others but, despite their obvious competence in Irish, there is a strong sense from the data that many participants consider themselves to be on a journey in terms of improving their Irish. This was the case for both 'expert speakers' and 'learners' alike. Although not applicable to themselves, some speakers in this sample referred to others who had undergone reverse *mudes* away from Irish (those who did not maintain regular practice of Irish beyond immersion education).

There is a strong link between *mudes* and education, reflecting the status of Irish as a core school subject (if not necessarily the medium of instruction). The most common *muda* in this sample occurs during the years at university, linked to the presence of a critical mass of fluent speakers. The Gaeltacht was another important stimulant for a *muda* and often led to dramatic improvements in competence. The family *muda* represents a radical and fundamental shift in long-established language practice with a close relation; it often occurs subsequent to other *mudes* and also follows on from a heightened sociolinguistic awareness by the speaker. In contrast to Catalonia, the work *muda* was uncommon, reflecting the limited number of posts requiring a high level of competence in Irish. Moving away from work and retirement was a *muda* not explored in the Catalan context, although it emerged more frequently amongst the older new speakers of Irish we interviewed in our study. Like other life stages, retirement represents a significant life change and 'becoming' a



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speaker of Irish at this point on one's life is often linked to having more free time and –for many– finally fulfilling a life-long desire to put their school Irish into actual use.

The majority of the speakers featured hold the traditional speech of the Gaeltacht in high esteem but there is tension between this overt ideology and practice, due to variations in the extent to which even highly competent new speakers adhere to traditional Gaeltacht norms. Less competent speakers report less exposure or contact with the Gaeltacht and a traditional Gaeltacht variety, but aspirations to becoming a 'better' speaker and an 'expert speaker' are also linked to acquisition of Gaeltacht varieties. As we have highlighted elsewhere, the data in our study suggests that varying degrees of nostalgia for the past and a rootedness in place continue to shape emerging new speaker identities (O'Rourke and Walsh, 2015). This conflict between overt and covert ideologies about target varieties of Irish warrants further investigation. The regular use of Irish, even in less traditional forms, is deemed essential by some speakers, but all participants illustrate indirect support for this position through their regular and committed practice of Irish.

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