

## **Aberystwyth University**

### *Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of community*

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## **Workshop Briefing Report 1**

**Workshop theme: Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of community**

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## Executive summary

- This paper reports on the deliberations of the **Revitalise** project's first workshop held at Aberystwyth University on 22-23 May 2017. The workshop was entitled '**Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of community**', and its aim was to provide an opportunity to reflect critically on recent changes in notions of community and their implications for our understanding of how to approach language revitalisation. Key conclusions arising from the workshop are listed below.
- **Territorial and networked understandings of community and space (pp. 5-7).** Traditional territory-based understandings of the factors influencing language vitality continue to hold relevance. At the same time, consideration needs to be given to how a rise in personal mobility and changes in the nature of social relations are impacting people's language practices. On this basis, it is necessary to develop understandings of the factors influencing language vitality that combine traditional territorial narratives with consideration of more networked understandings of space and society.
- **Language use and online social networks (pp. 7-8).** Research indicates that the single biggest factor influencing the language choices of minority language speakers across social media platforms is the nature of the intended audience. Therefore efforts to promote minority language use on social media should focus on seeking to create spaces or situations where the 'share of voice' enjoyed by the minority language is increased.
- **Migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation (pp. 8-11).** Language revitalisation efforts are now taking place within increasingly multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, rather than the more traditional context of majority-minority bilingualism. Consequently, greater consideration should be given to whether policies and strategies designed to promote immigrant integration cohere with those that promote language revitalisation. In addition, efforts to promote minority language acquisition should give consideration to the pedagogical questions that arise when introducing the target language to 'new speakers' who have very diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- **Aspects of the practice of minority language revitalisation (pp. 11-13).** The 'professionalisation' of language revitalisation efforts is a trend that has become increasingly evident over recent years. Such a trend brings benefits, yet it can also give rise to tensions. Moreover, broad public engagement in different language revitalisation initiatives remains vital. Yet, the general decline witnessed in many locations in levels of civic participation and the robustness of social capital means that maintaining such broad engagement is likely to be a challenge.
- **Methodological issues (p. 13).** Research seeking to assess levels of language ability and language use should be based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Also, given the emergence of increasingly mobile and networked social practices, use of ethnographic methods could help to uncover the factors that influence people's day-to-day language use practices. Yet, such work should be combined with more longitudinal research that considers the potential influence of some key decision junctures that arise during life, which can hold linguistic significance.



## Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of community

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This paper reports on the deliberations of **the first Revitalise workshop held at Aberystwyth University on 22-23 May 2017**. Revitalise is an interdisciplinary research network, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), that aims to examine the implications of some of the major social, economic and political changes witnessed across Western societies today for our understanding of how contemporary language revitalisation efforts should be designed and implemented. It brings together an international group of academic researchers, spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences, along with a number of prominent language policy practitioners. The network is led by Dr Huw Lewis (Aberystwyth University), Professor Wilson McLeod (Edinburgh University) and Dr Elin Royles (Aberystwyth University).
- 1.2. The first workshop was entitled '**Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of community**', and its aim was to provide an opportunity to reflect critically on recent changes on notions of community and their implications for our understanding of how to approach language revitalisation. On the first day, participants were encouraged to consider the implications of the shift towards increasingly mobile lives that cover a wider geographic area, and also the implications of the decline, in many locations, in informal social capital and the implications of the revolution in communication technology and the advent of what is described as the 'network society'. The second day placed a greater emphasis on contemporary migration with participants focusing both on instances of *international* and *intranational* migration. A copy of the workshop's programme can be found at the end of this paper.
- 1.3. This paper summarises the main elements of the discussion that took place during the workshop, drawing on the content of the 16 presentations delivered over the course of the two days, and also the questions and comments raised during the ensuing discussion periods. Further material providing a sense of the issues covered during the workshop, including short video clips where contributors discuss their presentations, can be found on the project's website: <https://revitalise.aber.ac.uk>
- 1.4. The paper has been organised on a thematic basis, and highlights a series of key themes that emerge when reflecting on the workshop's deliberations. The sections that follow therefore focus on insights relevant to the following themes:
  - Territorial and networked understandings of community and space
  - Language use and online social networks
  - Migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation
  - Aspects of the practice of minority language revitalisation
  - Methodological issues



## 2. Territorial and networked understandings of community and space

- 2.1. During his presentation Professor Rhys Jones argued that the academic and policy literature focusing on the vitality of minority language communities has often been influenced by a highly territorial geographical imagination. This leads to an emphasis on identifying territorial regions in which a particular language occupies a strong (or even dominant) demographic position, and on monitoring the vitality of the language within individual communities located in such regions. Jones referred to Wales as a case where such geographical imaginations have been particularly prevalent, as evidenced by the stress placed both by the Welsh language movement and, more recently, by the Welsh Government on the need to protect the Welsh language in its areas of highest density (*‘Y Fro Gymraeg’*) and also to protect specific communities within this area.
- 2.2. Jones acknowledged that the insights afforded by such a territorially-based approach to the issue of language vitality cannot be discounted completely. At the same time, he asked whether placing too much of an emphasis on territorial factors could mean that we fail to grasp the significance of recent changes in the nature of social relations for people's language practices. On this basis, he argued for a more nuanced discussion in which traditional territorial narratives are considered alongside more networked understandings of space and society. Such an approach would entail greater recognition of factors such as the following:
  - People do not live, work and socialise in one place or community.
  - Places or communities are not uniform, nor bounded or enclosed.
  - Every place is unique based on its connections and links to other parts of the world.
  - Every place can be understood as a node and a meeting point within diverse networks.
- 2.3. By focusing on examples from different parts of the county of Carmarthenshire in West Wales, Jones sought to demonstrate how increased personal mobility and commuting has led to stretching our everyday social practices across wider areas. This affects adults and children alike and impacts areas such as school attendance, engagement in extra-curricular activities, participation in recreational activities and consumer behaviour. In turn, such trends also have implications for how and where people use language. This has not led to a situation where the demolingistic features of specific territorial communities can be discounted as when discussing language use. However, significant insight into the factors that influence language use may also be gained by focusing on the language speakers themselves and analysing the networks and activities in which they participate from day-to-day. Studying the linguistic characters of such networks may be a challenging task, but it may lead to valuable and novel insights regarding how to intervene in order to promote greater language use.
- 2.4. As part of his presentation, Jones highlighted two examples from Wales that researchers and practitioners concerned with language revitalisation could reflect upon in order to develop a better understanding of what a more networked understanding of society and



space may entail. First he referred to the Wales Spatial Plan.<sup>1</sup> While this document is not primarily concerned with language, Jones suggested that the manner in which it identifies six distinct regions without defining hard boundaries ('fuzzy regions'), thus reflecting the different linkages involved in daily activities, was particularly pertinent for designing interventions aimed at influencing people's social language use. Second, he highlighted the *Gweithredu'n Lleol*<sup>2</sup> micro language planning pack, which advocates the concept of neighbourhood as opposed to the more static notion of community. Within *Gweithredu'n Lleol* the neighbourhood is presented as a network of connections that follows factors such as local geography, travel patterns, work and leisure patterns and local economic history. Local language planners are then encouraged to conceive of language use as a phenomenon that reflects these trends and therefore to design interventions in light of this.

- 2.5. Presentations by Meirion Davies on the work of the *Mentrau Iaith* in Wales and by Calum Iain MacLeod on the work of *Comunn na Gàidhlig* in Scotland also raised the themes of territory and geography. Davies explained that *Menter Iaith Conwy*, the organisation that he leads in north west Wales, faces a diverse demography which combines inland, sparsely populated rural areas with a high density of Welsh speakers (>70%) and more populous coastal areas where the density of Welsh speakers is much lower (<5% in some cases). Given this context, their language promotion activities have tended to distinguish between the two types of areas and it has often been the case that different types of interventions have proved necessary in the two areas (e.g. activities focused on intergenerational transmission in the coastal areas and activities focused on creating employment opportunities through the medium of Welsh in the inland areas).
- 2.6. Furthermore, Davies explained that a *Menter Iaith* such as his will need to operate differently from *Mentrau* located in more urban areas of south Wales, such as Cardiff, the Welsh capital. *Menter Iaith Caerdydd* must respond to the different demographic context, one characterized by a striking increase in the numbers of Welsh speakers owing to the growth in Welsh-medium education across south Wales and also the migration of young Welsh speakers towards the capital to work in sectors such as the media, education and government. The main priority for *Menter Iaith Caerdydd* is therefore to develop networks that allow Welsh speakers to use the language, e.g. offering a wide range of leisure activities through the medium of Welsh.
- 2.7. Distinctions between rural and urban contexts and between high-density and low-density areas were also evident in the presentation by Calum Iain MacLeod from *Comunn na Gàidhlig*. MacLeod explained that branches of the organisation that were based on the Western Isles tended to work separately from those based in more populous urban areas, due to the different demographic contexts. In addition, he explained that while *Comunn na Gàidhlig* had made efforts to emulate some of the practices and initiatives of the *Mentrau Iaith* in Wales, a lack of density of speakers had meant that this was often

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, *People, places, futures – the Wales spatial plan* (Cardiff, Welsh Government, 2008). Available online: <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/development-plans/wales-spatial-plan/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, *Gweithredu'n Lleol: a framework to facilitate micro language planning among Welsh neighbourhoods* (Cardiff, Welsh Government, 2012). Available online: <http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/publications/gweithredun-lleol-resource-pack/?lang=en>



difficult, particularly when operating beyond the islands. This point served to highlight that even when seeking to develop minority language networks (e.g. social activities for children to encourage greater language use in Edinburgh) a certain concentration of speakers is still required.

- 2.8. In summary, a number of discussions during the workshop touched on the need to take greater account of networked understandings of community and space as part of discussions focusing on the vitality of minority language communities. At the same time, it was generally agreed that insights afforded by more traditional approaches that are primarily territorial in nature cannot be discounted. Indeed, as was indicated during one of the discussion periods, in certain cases simple geographical reality may place a limit on the mobility and networking that features in people's everyday lives (e.g. the fact that all of the higher density Gaelic speaking areas are found on islands). On this basis, a key challenge over the coming years for researchers and practitioners is how to develop a discussion regarding the factors influencing language vitality that coherently combines a consideration of territorial and networked understandings of space and society.

### 3. Language use and online social networks

- 3.1. One social domain that has increased in significance over recent years, underlining the move towards non-territorial patterns of interaction, is online social networks. In his presentation, Dr Daniel Cunliffe explored the nature of people's language practices in relation to social networks and suggested possible methods of influencing those practices in order to increase the use of less widely spoken languages. A key concept discussed and employed by Cunliffe during the presentation was 'share of voice', which can be understood as representing the presence or weight of a particular language within different contexts - i.e. the larger the share of voice which language X enjoys in a certain context, the larger its presence or weight within that context.
- 3.2. The concept of share of voice has influenced how others have interpreted the implications of new media, including social media for the prospects of minority languages. For example, in its 2003 report, *Language Vitality and Endangerment*, the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Language Endangerment warned that the growth of new media posed a potential threat to minority languages as such developments could serve to further increase the share of voice enjoyed by majority languages.
- 3.3. According to Cunliffe, recent research indicates that the single biggest factor influencing language choices of minority language speakers across social media platforms is the nature of the intended audience.<sup>3</sup> When conversing with specific small audiences, where the language competence of the interlocutors is known, use of the minority language tends to be more likely. However, as is often the case when engaging on social media, the intended audience may be extremely broad, and when this is the case it is more likely that a majority language will be used. Indeed, the wider the intended audience, the greater the likelihood that a majority language will be used. This highlights the significance of the concept of share of voice on people's language practices across social media platforms - the wider the audience, the smaller the perceived proportion of

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<sup>3</sup> Lysbeth Jongbloed-Faber, *Friezen op sosjale media*. (Ljouwert, Mercator Research Centre, 2015).





minority language speakers being engaged (i.e. the language's share of voice), resulting in a much lower inclination to use the minority language.

- 3.4. A further point highlighted by Cunliffe is that people's language practices can vary across different social media platforms, and that this can be explained by the particular type of networks in which people participate. For example, on platforms such as Facebook there is a greater tendency to replicate social world connections and, by implication, have a greater control of the share of voice. This can impact upon language use on these types of platforms. Analysis of Facebook groups where Welsh is being used substantially illustrates a link with geographical areas where one finds high proportions of Welsh speakers and suggests a link between language use on social media and location.
- 3.5. On the basis of these observations, Cunliffe highlighted a key conjuncture that the advocates of minority languages should consider in order to facilitate greater use of such languages across social media:
  - If we can influence the network, we can influence the share of voice.
  - If we can influence the share of voice, we can influence the use of the minority language.
- 3.6. Cunliffe also identified possible ways of influencing the types of networks in which people participate in order to augment the share of voice enjoyed by minority languages. These included:
  - The use of recommender algorithms to persuade Twitter to preferentially recommend content in a minority language to its speakers.
  - The use of social influence: e.g. encouraging famous people to tweet in a minority language (there is evidence that this has worked in the case of Frisian).
  - Interventions to explicitly create networks.
  - Aggregating content.
  - Creating specific online minority language 'ghettoes' or enclaves.
- 3.7. Examples of initiatives that reflect some of these practices in relation to the Welsh language include Twitter networks such as *Yr Awr Gymraeg* (The Welsh Hour), *Awr y Dysgwr* (The Learner Hour), *Bloedd y Bore* (Follow Friday for Welsh speakers). While it is unclear whether these are always conscious attempts, they demonstrate people speaking Welsh, and provide a more concentrated Welsh experience. Examples of aggregators linked to the Welsh language include *y Blogiadur* and *Ffrwti*. With respect to 'ghettoes' or enclaves, research has highlighted the benefits in creating exclusively minority language social media platforms.<sup>4</sup> Yet, echoing points made in a different context by Meirion Davies and Calum Iain MacLeod, it was noted that this requires a sufficient number of speakers and speakers who are used to operating across a range of different social media platforms. Examples of this in Welsh are *Maes-e* and *Clecs*.

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<sup>4</sup> Derek Lackaff and William J. Moner, 'Local languages, global networks: mobile design for minority language users', *Proceedings of the 34th Annual International Conference on the Design of Communication*, (2016).



- 3.8. Overall, technology can act as a multiplier for the majority language share of voice. This is significant as share of voice in a social network can influence not only consumption (what we read) but also production (languages used to engage). Yet, current evidence suggests that it may be possible to increase minority language use by increasing share of voice in particular spaces within social media.

#### 4. Migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation

- 4.1. A number of presentations during the workshop discussed the implications for language revitalisation efforts of contemporary migration and the move towards increasingly diverse societies. As Dr Kathryn Jones emphasised in her presentation, this is a vital issue because a number of language revitalisation efforts are now taking place within increasingly multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, rather than the more traditional context of majority-minority bilingualism. Moreover, as Professor Bernadette O'Rourke noted in her presentation, a key question that arises for advocates of language revitalisation, given these types of circumstances, is how to allow plural linguistic identities to be maintained, but at the same time ensure sufficient spaces where the minority language can be normalised.
- 4.2. In her presentation, Dr Catrin Wyn Edwards examined how language policy makers and civil society activists in Catalonia have responded to these types of challenges as immigration to the region has evolved to encompass not only migrants from other parts of Spain, but also from further afield. During this period there have been efforts to develop a distinct 'Catalan approach to immigration' that, among other things, seeks to actively promote the learning of Catalan by migrants. A direct link has therefore been established between language revitalisation policy and migration policy in Catalonia.
- 4.3. However, also of significance, according to Edwards, has been the manner in which sections of civil society in Catalonia have sought to reinforce and build upon official policy, either through voluntary language learning support schemes such as *Voluntariat per la Llengua*, or through campaigns that seek to promote the message that the Catalan language and culture is open to all. Edwards highlighted the *Voluntariat* scheme as a particular example of best practice that could potentially be emulated in other contexts. It entails L1 Catalan speakers volunteering to be paired with Catalan learners and then supporting them in their effort to acquire the language through informal weekly meetings (e.g. over coffee). According to Edwards the merits of the scheme are manifold: given its voluntary basis it is a relatively cheap scheme to implement and maintain; it promotes the active participation of L1 speakers in the process of creating new speakers; it is also flexible and can be adapted easily to different contexts, for example within designated workplaces.
- 4.4. Another case discussed in relation to the themes of international migration and multiculturalism was Wales. However, here, the link between measures designed to respond to immigration and efforts to promote the prospects of the Welsh language were much more ambiguous. In her presentation, Dr Gwennan Higham demonstrated how Welsh Government strategies and policy documents relating to immigration avoid defining the status or role of the Welsh language in the process of integration. In contrast



to Catalonia, such documents tend to follow UK state policies very closely, treating integration as a process to be conducted solely through the medium of English and viewing any mention of the Welsh language as something that would be counterproductive. Higham also drew on interview data to demonstrate how such views tend to be reproduced among many ESOL language tutors working in Wales. Yet, significantly, it was reported that a different view emerges from interviews conducted with immigrants attending ESOL language courses in Wales. Among this group, multilingualism tends to be viewed in a more positive light and the Welsh language as an additional communicative tool that could assist the process of establishing links with a new community. In summary, Higham highlighted that thus far in Wales there has been no effort to link governmental strategies relating to immigration and integration with those seeking to promote the Welsh language. On the basis of her research, this appears to represent a missed opportunity as such individuals appear willing to challenge the traditional monolingual view of integration in the UK.

- 4.5. On the other hand, the presentation by Carys Lake focusing on the work of Gwynedd County Council's language immersion centres drew attention to an example where the Welsh language plays a much more central role in the process of responding to immigration. Gwynedd, in North West Wales, is one of the regions with the highest percentage of Welsh speakers and for a number of decades the area's local authority has adhered to a pro active language promotion policy that often goes beyond requirements set out in national language strategies. Given Gwynedd's policy of seeking to ensure that Welsh is the main language of all the county's schools, and in response to growing migration into the county by non-Welsh speakers, a series of five Welsh immersion centres have been established since the mid-1980s. Four of these centres cater for children aged 6-11 and one caters for children aged 11-14. Originally, the centres were opened to respond to growing migration to Gwynedd from different parts of the UK, but more recently the centres have also responded to instances of international migration (e.g. migration from parts of Eastern Europe to West Wales since around 2004). In light of some of the attitudes encountered by Higham in her research, it was revealing to hear Lake note that evaluations indicate that the immersion centres have been equally successful helping children from both backgrounds to acquire the Welsh language, and that there is no indication that coming from a non-English-speaking home poses undue challenges. It was also noted that evaluations indicate that attending immersion centres has not posed difficulties for children with additional learning needs. Discussing this example of best practice also underlined that the extent of language immersion provision varies greatly across Wales at present, a point also highlighted by Dr Kathryn Jones in her presentation.
- 4.6. A number of the presentations during the workshop touched on the issue of how immigrants themselves perceive efforts to promote the minority language. As noted above, Higham's research pointed to a tendency among immigrants to view multilingualism in a more positive light and to view the Welsh language as an additional communicative tool that could assist the process of integration. Dr Huw Williams reported that these were views that he had encountered among many immigrant communities through his involvement in efforts to develop a new Welsh-medium school in Grangetown and Butetown in Cardiff, the most multi-ethnic districts in Wales.



- 4.7. At the same time, some presentations drew attention to a more sceptical view among international immigrants. For example, Dr Nicola Bermingham explained that her ethnographic work studying efforts to teach Galician and Spanish to young immigrants from Cape Verde highlighted a clear tendency to evaluate each language according to their perceived value, and that Spanish was usually associated with notions of prestige, mobility and opportunity. It was argued that this highlighted the need for proponents of language revitalisation who wish to encourage immigrants to learn the minority language to work to develop a perception that it is also a language that opens the door to worthwhile social opportunities.
- 4.8. On this latter point, it was significant that in her presentation Professor Bernadette O'Rourke explained that recent research on the role of 'new speakers' within language revitalisation efforts has highlighted that a sense of aspiration and a desire for social advancement can be important factors that facilitate the process of language acquisition. O'Rourke also highlighted the significance of class in relation to new speakers of minority languages, for instance in that it is often members of the educated, middle class that find it easiest to access opportunities to learn and practice the new language.
- 4.9. Beyond the observations discussed above, presentations focusing on themes of migration and multiculturalism also touched on various practical points relating to how to promote minority language acquisition among immigrant communities. Carys Lake argued that the experience of the Gwynedd immersion centres highlights the importance of ensuring that the target language is introduced as a medium rather than as a distinct subject, and that when working with children or young adults there should be an emphasis on active learning where musical activities and games can play an important role. Lake also emphasised that in order to ensure that the language skills introduced during the intensive courses offered by the centres are then developed further as the children move on into Gwynedd's Welsh-medium education system, it is vital that receiving schools have appropriate mentoring systems in place. Establishing such systems depends on close cooperation between staff at the immersion centres and school-teachers.
- 4.10. In her presentation, Dr Kathryn Jones indicated that when the original introduction of the minority language does not take place in designated immersion centres, such as those that exist in Gwynedd, but rather in schools also attended by L1 speakers, it is vital that due consideration is given to the distinct linguistic circumstances of different children and therefore their specific support needs. Jones also emphasised that in such contexts, in addition to ensuring that the linguistic backgrounds and study needs of different children are taken into account, it is essential that teachers have appropriate training and support in order to respond effectively.

## 5. Aspects of the practice of minority language revitalisation

- 5.1. A number of presentations during the workshop reflected on current trends in the *practice* of minority language revitalisation. This was a particular feature of the presentation given by Professor Jacqueline Urla. She began by arguing that changing political and economic circumstances have led to a shift in how minority language advocacy is conceived and conducted. A striking example of this has been the increasing effort to frame minority languages as economic assets that can be harnessed to promote



growth and employment, for example in sectors such as marketing and tourism. Urla argued that this trend was particularly evident in the Basque Country where the Basque language has come to be considered as a sector of the economy in its own right. Interestingly, a similar emphasis on the need to harness the economic value of language was also evident in the presentation of Meirion Davies on the work of *Menter Iaith Conwy*. He discussed projects that have drawn on funds from the EU Rural Development Programme in order to promote employment opportunities for Welsh speakers in sectors linked to tourism, such as outdoor activities. More recently, these types of projects have led to a broader discussion among several *Mentrau Iaith* across Wales regarding the possibility of developing a Welsh-medium labour market.

- 5.2. A second trend identified during Urla's presentation was the 'professionalization' of minority language promotion, which has entailed a move away from notions of nationalism and nation-building and increasing emphasis on 'technical' notions of quality, management, training and the regular auditing of programmes. This process was labelled as 'the rise of linguistic governmentality' in which language becomes an object that can be governed, measured and managed. Again, Urla based her reflections primarily on examples from the Basque Country. It was striking that signs of this 'professionalization' were also evident in the presentations that discussed the work of the *Mentrau Iaith* and *Comunn na Gàidhlig*. In both instances, core funding is provided by a national-level language planning body (the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Division in the case of the former and *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* in the case of the latter), and receiving this funding entails agreeing on a set of general targets. Reference was also made in both presentations to ongoing initiatives to provide CPD training for local development officers that are responsible for implementing projects on the ground. At the same time, there were signs of the tensions that can emerge when seeking to balance central management and monitoring with grass-roots implementation. In the case of both the *Mentrau* and *Comunn na Gàidhlig* it was argued that a sufficient degree of autonomy needed to be maintained in order to allow local spending priorities to be set and to allow the flexibility for new initiatives to be trialled and implemented easily.
- 5.3. As part of the move towards professionalization, and the associated development of an 'audit culture', Urla argued that the Basque Country case had seen an increasing emphasis on the need to quantify different aspects of the language revitalisation effort. This has entailed development of various quantitative indicators that, on the one hand, seek to gauge the Basque language's level of vitality/endangerment, and on the other hand, gauge how various language interventions have been implemented and assess their relative success. Urla stressed that there is nothing inherently wrong in the use of quantitative indicators - they may assist in different ways, for instance in understanding the extent to which a language is endangered. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that quantitative indicators can also entail a degree of simplification and reduction and may therefore unintentionally serve to limit our understanding of how people relate to and use language. For example, Urla warned that quantitatively categorising types of speakers could lead to a tendency to position 'real' speakers on a higher level within a hierarchy and stigmatise learners. Such quantification also risks sidelining qualitative studies and give less attention to features such as translanguaging and how a language is lived and reinvented by its speakers.



- 5.4. In line with the above points by Urla, Dr Rhian Hodges and Dr Cynog Prys, in their presentation on community language promotion in Wales, also raised questions regarding the use of quantitative indicators by the Welsh Government in order to gauge the vitality of the Welsh language at the local level. Here again, the argument was that the need to quantify leads to an indicator that inevitably entails a degree of simplification and reduction (e.g. seeking to gauge local language vitality based on the numbers that attend government-funded Welsh-medium social events).
- 5.5. A further issue relating to the practice of minority language revitalisation that emerged during the workshop was the value of developing broad popular engagement in different revitalisation initiatives. Governments themselves cannot be fully responsible for implementing language revitalisation. Different types of groups have high levels of awareness of how people engage with language and can be a source of creativity in considering how language acquisition and use can be promoted. At the same time, it was observed that the manner in which various social, economic and technological changes (e.g. the influence of suburbanisation and commuting on people's work patterns and free time, or the influence of technology on people's leisure patterns) have led to a decline, in many locations, in levels of civic participation and, consequently, the robustness of social capital, could mean that harnessing this knowledge for the purpose of language revitalisation becomes increasingly challenging.
- 5.6. A social group mentioned during several of the workshop's presentations as one that had proven particularly difficult for practitioners of language revitalisation to engage was older children/teenagers. This issue arose during Calum Iain MacLeod's presentation on the work of *Comunn na Gàidhlig* in Scotland and also during the presentation by Dr Rhian Hodges and Dr Cynog Prys on community language promotion in Wales. The influence of technology on young people's leisure patterns was one aspect of contemporary life that was seen as significant in this context.

## 6. Methodological issues

- 6.1. During the workshop a number of contributors highlighted important methodological considerations to be taken into account when advocates of language revitalisation seek to gauge the vitality of a particular language community. One was mentioned above, namely the value of combining large-scale quantitative research focused on measuring levels of language ability and levels of language use, with smaller-scale qualitative studies. The argument was that a combination of studies can lead to a more rounded understanding of how people relate to and use languages and therefore provide a stronger basis on which to develop interventions designed to influence such practices.
- 6.2. Another important methodological consideration proposed by Professor Rhys Jones reflected on the emergence of increasingly mobile and networked social practices. Given this type of shift in people's day-to-day lives, use of ethnographic methods could help to develop a sound understanding of the factors that influence language use patterns. This type of research would entail closely following groups of speakers to gain insights into the



types of social domains and activities in which they participate regularly, and as a result assist practitioners of language revitalisation to identify key areas for intervention.

- 6.3. While several other workshop contributors endorsed the potential value of employing ethnographic methods that focus closely on day-to-day linguistic practices, it was also argued that such work should be combined with more longitudinal research. Relying solely on a micro day-to-day framework would risk losing sight of the potential influence of some key junctures or *mudes* that arise during life, which can hold linguistic significance - e.g. decisions regarding family formation, primary and secondary schooling, decisions regarding where to attend university, decisions regarding employment etc. As was highlighted by Professor Bernadette O'Rourke, these types of linguistic junctures can carry particular significance in the context of new speakers, as acquiring a new language, particularly a minority language, can often entail a change in lifestyle.

## 7. Concluding discussion: themes for future workshops

- 7.1. Part of the concluding discussion returned to the questions raised regarding the emergence of more mobile and networked patterns of social interaction and its relevance for language planning. It was argued that, there was potential value in conceiving of language use in the context of neighbourhoods which encompass a network of connections, rather than in relation to the more traditional notion of static territorial communities. It was also argued that it would be worthwhile to see if it is possible to draw upon geographical techniques in order to map some of our social networks and through this gain a better understanding of how our day-to-day language practices interact with other dimensions such as social and economic infrastructure, transport networks or local geography.
- 7.2. Building on the above points, it was also argued that it would be valuable if the focus on issues such as mobility and territory could be combined with greater consideration of the economic dimension of language use. This could include an effort to develop a better understanding of the economic factors that influence the language choices that people make in different contexts. It should also involve an effort to conceptualize the role of class, both in people's day to day language practices, but also in terms of its influence on who leads and who participates in language revitalisation efforts. This will be a theme that will be explored further during the project's third workshop that will be held during Spring 2018.
- 7.3. Finally, returning to the discussion concerning how the practice of language revitalisation has evolved, points were raised regarding the different types of actors involved, the role of public funding, the extent to which different interventions should be self-sustaining, and whether there is a greater emphasis on social ownership models in some cases of minority language revitalisation. For example it was noted that in the Welsh case, language promotion was predominantly grassroots based during the 1960s and 1970s before becoming increasingly dependent on public sector funding. Consequently, a recurring discussion is the level of support from government. Less attention may have been given to the potential trade-offs, where organisations may have lost some autonomy, radicalism and the energy of original interventions due to professionalization.



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The risk in the Welsh context at least is an over dependence on others to fund and seek solutions. In contrast, it was noted that the Irish case has experienced an evolution from being strongly interventionist to a more laissez-faire approach. Nevertheless, other areas of public policy are increasingly interventionist with citizens being encouraged to act in certain ways, e.g. health and the environment. What are the implications for language policy? The broader question raised, applicable to other cases, is the positioning of organisations involved in language policy. To what extent should they look to being more self-sustaining? A parallel discussion is what is the appropriate balance for the role of government? These are themes that will feature during the project's fourth workshop that will be held during Autumn 2018.





## **Workshop 1: Language revitalisation, mobility and the transformation of communities**

**Date:** 22-23 May, 2017

**Location:** Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University

*Day 1: Language revitalisation and the transformation of communities*

- 9.30 - 9.45: **Opening remarks: outline of objectives and key questions**  
Huw Lewis, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University
- 9.45-10.30: **Setting the context: Globalization and the transformation of communities**  
Mike Woods, Department of Geography and Earth Science, Aberystwyth University
- 10.30-11.30: **Language policy in a post-territorial age**  
Rhys Jones, Department of Geography and Earth Science, Aberystwyth University
- 11.30-11.45: Tea/coffee
- 11.45-12.45: **Grassroots language activism in a period of social transformation**  
Jacqueline Urla, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts Amherst
- 12.45-2.00: Lunch
- 2.00-2.45: **Panel discussion - Promoting social use of minority languages: contemporary challenges**  
Meirion Davies - Menter Iaith Conwy  
Siân Lewis - Menter Iaith Caerdydd  
Calum Iain MacLeod - Comunn na Gàidhlig
- 2.45-3.45: **Panel discussion: Language, community and civil society in Wales today**  
Rhian Hodges and Cynog Prys, School of Social Sciences, Bangor University  
Robin Mann, School of Social Sciences, Bangor University
- 3.45-4.00: Tea/coffee
- 4.00-5.00 **Minority language communities, technology and social networks**  
Daniel Cunliffe, School of Computing and Mathematics, University of South Wales
- 5.00-5.30: Reflections and final discussion



*Day 2: Language revitalisation in an age of migration*

- 10.00 - 9.15: **Opening remarks: outline of objectives and key questions**  
Elin Royles, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University
- 10.15-11.15: **Migration and language revitalisation**  
Catrin Wyn Edwards, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University
- 11.15-11.30: Tea/coffee
- 11.30-12.30: **New speakers in the context of language revitalisation**  
Bernadette O'Rourke, Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Herriot Watt University
- 12.30-1.30: Lunch
- 1.30-2.30: **Panel discussion: Migration, education and language revitalisation in rural and urban contexts**  
Carys Lake, Gwynedd County Council  
Dr Huw Williams, Cardiff University/TAG Campaign
- 2.30-3.30: **Panel discussion: International migrants as 'new speakers' of minority languages**  
Kathryn Jones, IAITH  
Gwennan Higham, Department of Welsh, Swansea University  
Nicola Bermingham, Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Heriot-Watt University
- 3.30-4.00: Reflections and final discussion

