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Item Type	Article
Authors	Ní Loingsigh, Deirdre;Mozzon-McPherson, Marina
Citation	System;95,102363
Publisher	Elsevier
Download date	2026-05-13 00:53:45
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/10344/9291



Advising in Language Learning in a new speaker context: Facilitating linguistic shifts



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 March 2019

Received in revised form 6 September 2020

Accepted 13 September 2020

Available online 17 September 2020

Keywords:

Language advising

New speakerness

Minority language

Language learning in the workplace

Participatory action research

Irish language

ABSTRACT

This article explores a specific example of advising for language learning utilized to support new speakers of Irish in the workplace. Advising in language learning (ALL) aims to provide a context that enables learners to achieve goals in a resourceful and fulfilling way and, ultimately, to equip them with the independent learning skills necessary to sustain, and transfer, their experiences in different settings. Key to this is the skilled work of language learning advisors. This study analyzes learning interventions between an advisor and a group of fifteen adults. It focuses on their language practices and experiences as observed during an immersion program in an Irish-speaking region. Data in the Participatory Action Research were collected at audio-recorded private and group language advising consultations and facilitated discussions on language anxiety; and in participant diaries and advisor observations. Change in learners' attitudes; their reception by native speakers, reaction to language exchanges; transformative learning processes; and the advisor's skillful interventions are examined. The study concludes with reflections and recommendations on the potential role of a local ALL framework to establish positive conditions for the growth of minority languages in revitalization contexts, and lays the foundations for further research on advising for new speakerness.

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1. Introduction

Advising in Language Learning (ALL) and new speakerness are two relatively new areas of applied linguistics research. They constitute the foci of this article, which examines how an advisor's skillful work can affect the language learning experience and language usage in the context of new speakers of Irish. ALL is a process of purposeful dialogic interventions (Mozzon-McPherson, 2012) intended to create conditions enabling a language learner to: set their goals; plan resources and activities; select and review strategies and contexts for learning; and evaluate their outcomes. The term new speaker generally refers to regular and fluent users of a language that is not one's primary language of socialization (Walsh, 2019). By adopting ALL-based professional insights from learning conversations (Mozzon-McPherson 2012; 2017a), therapeutic dialogue (Ferrara, 1994; Kelly, 1996), and person-centeredness (Egan, 1998; Rogers, 1951), we introduce another interpretive lens to the growing interest in the experiences, emotions and trajectories of new speakers and their language learning journeys. Inherent are: feelings of social empowerment and disempowerment generated by the context in which the language is used

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(Oxford et al., 2014); the relationships of new speakers with the target language; their language support requirements; and the role of language learning advisors as skillful mediators of interpretations and reactions to such experiences.

Our study focuses on Irish language support interventions for professionals, in a context where Irish and English are the official languages. Although officially the first language in Ireland, Irish is a minority language. The study, a first to use a participatory approach, and specifically a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology in language advising research, establishes parameters to understand what ALL can bring to new speakers and to the processes and challenges of new speakerness (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015). It provides an opportunity to redefine the role, skills and scope of advising in a new speaker context and to observe the dynamics and impact of advisor-advisee relationships.

We review research into the skills of advising and the emerging role of advisors initially - both valuable to the development of sustained and sustainable education within different, formal and informal, learning contexts. Roger's (1951) person-centered approach to counselling informs the study, while its theoretical framework, dialogic tools and context for language advising aligns to Mynard's (2012) and Mozzon-McPherson's (2017b) models. Subsequently, we examine research into new speakerness to understand dilemmas, tensions and approaches. Four data sets relating to a Preparatory Phase, and Research Cycles One, Two, and Three of a 13-month project are discussed; Cycle Two is a particular focus. The study concludes with reflections and recommendations on the potential role of a local ALL framework in a minority language context and in language revitalization initiatives.

2. Advising in language learning

ALL and its related professionals (language learning advisors, hereafter LLAs) appeared in the education literature in the late 1980s when increased investment in, and use of, new language learning technologies gave rise to self-access language centers as specialized learning spaces in universities (Gardner & Miller, 1999) and private centers (Ehrman et al., 2003). The main intention was to create learning spaces where students could autonomously develop their language practice and access a wealth of resources and flexible technology. It was soon realized that such centers risked failing (Victori, 2000), as some did, due to the absence of expert language learning pedagogues who could mediate between users, their learning needs and goals, their awareness of their competencies, and the resources available. These mediating figures were able to create hitherto unrecognized links, open learning pathways, and develop strategies and skills to ensure that learning experiences could be resourceful, effective, and fulfilling in learning spaces that were supportive, purposeful and useful.

A first publication on advising (Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001) and the development of a related professional qualification recognized that LLAs required specific training and knowledge to engage successfully in learning conversations with language learners. In these conversations, dialogue is co-constructed and active listening and mindful use of language become core to help learners discover their own best strategies to address specific needs or challenges (Gremmo, 2007; Mozzon-McPherson, 2017a). LLAs engage in one-to-one and group learning conversations, organize group workshops, deliver awareness sessions on different language learning strategies and study skills, arrange and monitor tandem learning schemes (reciprocal language exchanges) and use and design different kinds of self-directed learning resources typically in self-access settings. This model has been replicated and adapted to different cultural settings worldwide (Rubin, 2007), generating a wealth of new research and insightful practices (Carette & Castillo, 2004; Mynard & Carson, 2012; Nicolaides & Magno e Silva, 2017).

The skills of advising, originally mapped by Kelly (1996), are regularly studied by applied linguists interested in investigating the impact of targeted dialogic interventions by advisors (Gremmo, 2007; McCarthy, 2018) or teachers (Carson, 2012) on sustained self-directed learning (Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013), and positive language achievements (Hobbs & Dofs, 2016) in formal (Reinders, 2012), and informal settings (Benson, 2017). (Ní Loingsigh (2015)) and Kato & Mynard, 2016 have drawn on Mezirow's theory of transformation (1991) in the process of ALL.

Research has illustrated that the focus of an effective advising session starts with active listening; this entails the ability to observe, notice, feel, interpret and reflect whilst listening to the words (Mozzon-McPherson, 2017a). Kelly (1996) introduces a fundamental difference between the macro skills primarily applied in a teacher-learner dialogue and the micro skills distinctively applied in advisor-learner dialogues. The subtle difference lies in who leads and owns the dialogic stages and how they are performed. Macro skills such as initiating, goal setting, guiding, modelling, supporting, giving feedback emphasize a preference on content over process, and a more passive view of the learner.

By contrast, a targeted use of micro skills shifts the perspective of advisor-advisee/teacher-student to one of co-learners in a partnership involving turns in leading the learning conversation, with a gradual ownership by the advisee of the direction of the learning process. On the part of the advisor, the skillful dialogic application of attending, restating, and paraphrasing, summarizing, questioning, interpreting, reflecting feelings, empathizing and confronting (Kelly, 1996) requires an ability, willingness and readiness to listen actively and reflect on advisee's beliefs and values, which guide learning behavior. Simultaneously, advisors need to be aware of such values and beliefs influencing their advising behavior. This helps LLAs to see and accept the advisee as equal and care for their overall wellbeing. This ability to suspend judgement, patiently support agreed choices and hand over strategic learning tools to the advisee requires specific training (Mozzon-McPherson, 2017b).

In advising sessions, a learner's emotions can blur the learning path (Tassinari, 2016) but emotions can also be helpful (Yamashita, 2015). Simultaneously, advisors have to face their own emotions, contradictions and delusions and ensure that, in an attempt to help a learner, they constantly check that they are not imposing a specific view of language learning and problem solving (McCarthy, 2018). The advisor's own beliefs, assumptions, and emotions often inform perspectives and

interpretations of a specific language and its related object of interest and concern. These are shaped by acquired habits and behaviors, expressed through forms or absence of dialogue, and filtered through feelings and reactions. Advising is therefore about balancing perspectives and interpretations. These advising skills help advisors describe an incident or a problem, decide how to read their role in it, and explain substantial variations in how learners approach it (Mozzon-McPherson, 2017a).

Questions on accuracy and fluency are recurrent aspects of language learning that learners want to explore; depending on the emphasis and value placed on these competencies, advisors and learners must then address more or less achievable goals and the possible emotional pull these may have on a learner. Speaking like a native is an often-used filter describing the goal of language learning. This can become an unreachable goal, which may act as a demotivating factor. The notion of native speaker, embracing issues of purity, legitimacy and authenticity, has been extensively challenged (Cook, 1999; Kramsch, 1998). This also appears to be as problematic in research into revitalizing minority languages and new speaker research (Costa, 2015; Doerr, 2009; Faez, 2011; Hornsby, 2015). Skilled advisors gradually unpick these constructs to help learners see that often their assumptions, which form their worldview, can, in some instances, be either unhelpful or even irrelevant, in comparison with other measurable, and equally significant, criteria of good language performance. However, the emphasis and emotional energy invested in this effort to perform as a native speaker is real. This reality needs to be acknowledged, accepted and understood before limiting the power it may have on the learning journey.

Advising provides the supportive tools to smooth some of the pathways where learners 'get stuck' and creates the learning spaces where they can experiment with the language, reflect upon their discoveries and review them. Parts of the learning journey may be individual, while others may be collective in the recognition that every discovery may help near the intended goal - and in the process new, unexpected outcomes, or needs, may emerge. If advising is mindful communication work, and advisors are skilled architects of learning spaces (Ní Loingsigh, 2015) how can advisors meet the needs of new and emerging new speakers and support them in the process of personal meaning making in their learning trajectories? How might the skillful interventions of a LLA and collaboration with other language practitioners in group-based learning conversations facilitate a transformation in how new speakers consider anxieties about using Irish as a second language in the professional domain? These underlying questions informed our study.

3. New speakerness: definition, roles, skills and contexts

The concept of new speaker developed around discussions on minority languages (see O'Rourke and Walsh (2020) on the origins and development of the concept). Much literature relates to lesser-used languages such as Catalan (Pujolar & González, 2013), Corsican (Jaffe, 2015), Galician (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013) and Irish (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015). Their revival, characterized by more or less effective national language policies and the rise of a social tension between first and second language speakers, generated the need to find a new neutral label, that of new speaker. All these studies' definitions of new speakerness converge and describe new speakers as individuals with little, or no, home or community exposure to the language; they have instead learnt it through formal or informal educational settings as adult language learners, in the workplace, through revitalization projects, or because of geographical mobility.

The main distinction made between new speakers and language learners is the context. Whilst new speakers are regular and active fluent users of a given language, which is not the language of socialization in early childhood, language learners may primarily acquire the language through education and may never use it in authentic cultural contexts (Walsh, 2019). Policy recommendations in official reports on new speakerness suggest that those advanced learners who are in a transitional phase to becoming new speakers should be a key target group in language planning around language revitalization (Walsh, O'Rourke, & Rowland, 2015). The term new speaker has helpfully enabled a different interpretation of the complexities of speakers' profiles in different local and national contexts with different degrees of 'purity'. However, all claim their own authenticity and ownership of the language and their legitimacy as users of that language.

Most studies report issues of authority, legitimacy, authenticity, appropriateness and ownership and conflict between a monolithic, fixed language community and a fluid, changing, emerging community. Jaffe (2015) observes that new speakers of Corsican are usually adults who have acquired a socially acceptable level of competence and have actively sought to study this language formally for heritage or practical purposes. Jaffe's emphasis on metalinguistic knowledge highlights that, within the minority language context and new speakerness trajectories, these competencies are not all equally valued; awareness of these filters is required when engaged in new speakers' contexts (Walsh et al., 2015). More recently, the notion of 'speakerhood' has emerged and the usefulness of the term new speaker has been discussed (O'Rourke, Pujolar, & Frekko, 2019). A learner trajectory in transformational advising, where language learners move towards transformation and self-advising has also been explored (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

4. Supporting new speakerness through advising: establishing a common conceptual framework

The previous sections defined and discussed the skills of advising; the skilled role of advisors; and reviewed new speakerness, its actors and contexts. Similarities, dilemmas and tensions are identified when research in the two fields is compared. Amongst the parallels are the range of emotions and beliefs that new speakers seem to experience in their attempt to learn the minority language of the community they want to join. Equally noticeable in the literature on advising is the emphasis on metalinguistic competence (Mynard & Carson, 2012) and the role of emotions when engaged in language learning (Karlsson, 2013; Tassinari, 2016). Shame, anxiety, embarrassment as well as feelings of inadequacy and resentment

are mentioned. Walsh (2019, p. 221) finds that the “emotions involved in adopting a minoritized language such as Irish appear to be qualitatively different from other languages because of the additional obstacles involved in mastering a language with a weak sociolinguistic profile”.

The difficulty in making the transition from language learner to new speaker has been noted as has the need for supports to existing new speakers to further develop their competence and use of Irish (Walsh, O'Rourke, & Rowland, 2015). To date, the role of practitioners, whether professionally trained teachers or self-selected ambassadors of language activism (Jaffe, 2015), is an aspect of new speakerness studies which has received limited attention, with little emphasis on the profile of the facilitators involved in language support (e.g. their background, training, professional needs). This gap prompted our focus on the skills of advising and the role of professional language facilitators in the new speaker context.

5. Methodology

Language support interventions and data referred to here are part of a larger PAR 13-month ALL study conducted by the LLA in the participants' workplace, a university campus. Under the provision of the Official Languages Act 2003, all public bodies in the Republic of Ireland are obliged to increase the amount and quality of services available through Irish to their 'customers', a term used in the public sector to describe service users. This University's response was to name one staff member in eighteen targeted administrative areas as the 'designated contact' for Irish-medium queries. A meeting of these personnel in the preparatory phase of the PAR project prompted the establishment of a Language Support Network (LSN) for the designated contacts, and an interest in mandatory language learning in the workplace as a research topic. The group had not previously met and they did not know each other. Members expressed clear fears of being responsible for legislative compliance, dealing with technical questions through Irish, and anxieties around having to deal with 'native speakers' in their professional roles. It was immediately apparent that these concerns and needs were hitherto unaddressed. An exploration of these, and a drive to bring about constructive change in their language practices and language support, became the focus of 'action' in the research as expressed in the specific research questions formulated in Section 2.

As their language support requirements arose out of a mandated situation where they were under pressure of law to improve and use their Irish, a PAR methodology was selected in order to empower the participants. The Kemmis and McTaggart model (2000; 2005) was chosen as it offered the best yield for the kinds of questions posed and the range of developments envisaged. This considers PAR as a social process - participatory, practical, collaborative, emancipatory, critical and capable of transforming both theory and practice. The scope for PAR group interaction with various kinds of external people, groups and agencies (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) influenced methodological considerations and design. Action research as a method synchronizes well with transformative learning. Although much of the literature relates to classroom research, Taylor (2007, p. 188) suggests that 'they share similar assumptions and outcomes about teaching for change, such as a participatory approach, the emphasis on dialogue, the essentiality of a reflective process in learning, and the need for action'.

LSN members were either 'designated contacts' or members of staff from targeted administrative areas. They were at different stages of the new speaker spectrum. Eight participants were independent speakers at B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR); four were at B1; and three were basic speakers at A2 level with an interest in improving their proficiency in Irish for professional purposes. Those participants below B2 are presented as learners in a transitional phase to emerging as new speakers (O'Rourke, Pujolar, & Frekko, 2019). The profile of the fifteen research participants (Appendix 1) captures their level of participation in the various stages of the 13-month project involving three distinct action research cycles. Cycle Three is not the focus of this article and data from that cycle are only referred to on one occasion. In order to observe ethical guidelines, all personal names are assigned pseudonyms.

The LLA, as principal investigator and a language teacher with an interest in transformational learning in adult education, knew some, but not all of the participants because of earlier involvement in other Irish language initiatives. The LLA conducted a needs analysis questionnaire and facilitated a series of one-to-one consultations and group language-awareness sessions, prior to accompanying the group on an immersion program. These sessions took place in the participants' workplaces in the preparatory phase and first PAR cycle respectively. The *Gaeltacht* three-day immersion program occurred in Cycle Two seven months after the LSN was originally established. [*Gaeltacht* refers to regions in Ireland where Irish is spoken as a significant community language]. The LLA, as researcher, coordinated this program.

Nine members of the LSN elected to participate in the optional one-to-one consultations (Appendix 1). Voller's (2004) format for consultations was followed. Participants had a choice to conduct the conversation in English, their L1 or in Irish, their L2. The consultations were not audio recorded. The LLA logged decisions and observations and used these as discussion triggers at subsequent group advising sessions. Furthermore, a series of guiding questions, based on the Council of Europe Language Biography (2011) stimulated private reflection on language practices between sessions.

In Cycle One, five group-learner awareness sessions were facilitated, at monthly intervals, by the LLA. Members of the LSN decided that these audio-recorded sessions would be in Irish, English was spoken when necessary. These 60–90 min workshops were devoted to an exploration of emotions and beliefs around language learning for the professional context. Topics such as planning; fitting language learning into working life; language learning habits, strategies; vocabulary acquisition and consolidation were discussed in these learning conversations. Resources relating to the local dialect of Irish were also shared in preparation for the *Gaeltacht* trip. Staff attended during working hours and embraced these gatherings as enjoyable sociable occasions to meet and use Irish and build a relationship with each other. They discussed, reviewed and reflected on actions on an on-going basis. The semi-structured written observations of the LLA are a useful log of what

participants did; what they sought to find out and interpret, and what they set out to change. A meeting to discuss useful resources and preparations for the *Gaeltacht* trip (organized by the LSN independent of the LLA) marks this as a reconnaissance stage in the PAR study prior to the commencement of Cycle Two.

Following LLA collaboration with a *Gaeltacht*-based company with a long tradition of providing Irish language programs for adults, language awareness and language improvement activities and workshops were co-designed. Participants, the LLA and course providers agreed social, linguistic and cultural learning outcomes for the program. Four practitioners were involved in coordinating activities: Éadaoin, a University language tutor, the LLA, and Róisín and Clodagh, two *Gaeltacht*-based language tutors, with substantial adult learner experience, acted as group facilitators and critical colleagues in the PAR study. They led language accuracy and conversation workshops at CEFR B1 and B2 levels and two 1-h workshops exploring language skills and language anxiety. This was the first time that participants would formally consider apprehension about using the language. It was anticipated that the facilitation of discussion by *Gaeltacht* speakers as 'outsiders' off-campus might create opportunities for richer comments and observations, and an additional forum to elaborate personal experience beyond the advising sessions.

The program was designed to allow occasions for social interaction, quiet time to reflect, and time to connect with each other and with native speakers in the local community. Participants were encouraged to make links between their lived experiences of Irish in the community setting and earlier and future practices in relation to the use of Irish in their professional and personal lives.

Before the event, participants received a *Gaeltacht* Diary (*Dialann Ghaeltachta*) with specified topics for reflection. Topics, chosen by the LLA/researcher, included the impact of the immersion experience on participants, the development of the group as a network, and emotional responses to interactions with native speakers. The nine diary entries collected were written in Irish. Other data from Cycle Two were transcriptions of two language awareness workshops (108 min); transcriptions of an open forum validation and review reconnaissance meeting (54 min); recorded observations of the LLA and critical colleagues in the PAR project; and transcription of a facilitated discussion with LSN members (57 min) on return to campus. The *Gaeltacht* Diary topics were discussed at the reconnaissance session; some diaries were completed on site while others were received by email on returning to campus. An independent discussion among critical colleagues (9 min) was recorded as part of peer-debriefing and validation strategies. Some questions relating to the *Gaeltacht* experience, which were discussed in advisor-participant recorded interviews in Research Cycle Three, are also drawn on briefly in the discussion of data below.

The LLA manually transcribed all audio files using verbatim transcription in Irish and English as appropriate. The standard of Irish and frequent inaccuracies made transcription and translation challenging. Quotations translated from Irish to English are tagged below. Participants approved these translations, which capture the meaning of a participant's comment rather than being word-by-word translations.

Data were sorted into two categories, data showing the learning, role and skills of the LLA and data relating to the actions and learning of research participants. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, the corpus is not publicly available. Codes annotated and labelled in preliminary analysis of data regarding LSN members were: language support requirements; language anxiety; personal learning plans in-group initiative, time constraints and getting to know each other. Early data codes relating to the LLA included inter alia, language advising skills; language learning and dialogue; sharing of strategies; group development; and relieving anxiety. The categories for analysis were reviewed in the group setting at the language advising sessions, workshops and meetings, and privately, in order to draw some relative generalizations relating to the research questions as specified in Section 2. How the mandated and minority-language setting affected what was happening was a key concern.

Mynard's (2012) Dialogue, Tools and Context Model guided final analysis. The focus was on the contextual practices of the LLA and those of LSN members at various stages of the research process. This article will examine the findings in relation to two specific themes: use of ALL skills by the LLA to create opportunities for strategy development and for personal meaning making in the context of new speakerness, and the emergence of new empathies between new speaker and native speaker of Irish because of critical learning conversations. Meaning making is understood here as the act of making sense of one's experiences through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

6. Findings and discussion

6.1. Language advising skills of practitioner; strategies for language learning, and personal meaning making of new speakers

The use of the advising macro-skills of initiating, goal-setting and guiding in the preparatory phase on campus ensured that Network members were encouraged to steer their own language practice opportunities and learning during the research cycles. Eoghan, for instance, building on facilitated discussions by the LLA on independent and active learning in Research Cycle One, reported that he and a group of LSN members had met independently during the summer period to complete language activities that they had designed for the group.

We got together at lunchtime one day a week for four weeks and everyone had a chance to discuss Irish language learning tasks. For example, I did a presentation on the TG4 (Irish Language Television Channel) documentary 'Inishark

– Death of an Island’ and we all discussed phrases and expressions (in the documentary). [Data Set: Research Cycle 1, Language Awareness Session 4. Translation].

Conscious of some of the participants’ fears of dealing with native speakers, a very clear advisory stance taken by the LLA, in an exploratory session on dialect prior to the *Gaeltacht* program, was that of nurturing confidence about impending *Gaeltacht* interactions. The intention was to prepare participants for the sounds of the language in their interactions in the *Gaeltacht* in order to relieve stress. Listening activities created practice opportunities for authentic *Gaeltacht*-based communication.

Sailí: Did you say that *ana mhaith* [very good] is Munster (dialect)?

LLA: *ana mhaith* Munster; *an-mhaith nó an-mhaith* (stresses dialect) is Connacht and Ulster pronunciation. Okay? We’re looking at these, just so that your ear is tuned to them [...] Your facilitators will be native speakers of Irish from the area. [Data Set: Research Cycle 1, Language Awareness Session 4. Translation].

Sailí, quoted above, took this groundwork very seriously and noted sixty-two observations relating to dialect and new vocabulary and phrases in her *Gaeltacht* Diary (Data Set: Research Cycle 2).

Participants took the opportunity to pursue some of their individual interests during free time on the immersion program. These led to occasions for real interactions in Irish in the community, and observations in relation to local language practices. They noted comments demonstrating increased confidence and rewarding performance when using Irish in their diaries. Aisling, for instance, while hillwalking, stopped twice to converse with local farmers about the weather and football. Eoghan, an ardent fan of the games of the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.), commented on his visit to a small, rural Gaelic football club where many legends of the game, both past and present, played. His personal discovery of the club slogan in Irish on a sign at the pitch typifies his *Gaeltacht* experience. “Welcome to the *Gaeltacht* G.A.A club. Spirit. Heart. Gaelic Football. Language. Irish is our language. Let’s speak it” (Data Set: Research Cycle 2. Translation). The unearthing of the passion and emotion associated with the language and Gaelic games, in the sociolinguistic context of the community, inspired him. The LLA met their needs for minority language practice by designing the three-day program and by facilitating and guiding reflection on these experiences. Through attending to participants’ concerns, interrogating and confronting their meaning-making process, the positive feeling of participants towards communicating in Irish became apparent at the final open forum meeting:

Eoghan: What is most important to me, you mentioned confidence, personal confidence and for all of us, self-confidence. I should be more self-confident and as people mentioned earlier there is more to communication than speaking, you know. There is listening, reading, you know [...] when you speak, you express yourself with your hands and with your eyes and so forth [...] therefore we shouldn’t be worried about not having the words.

LLA: That’s it exactly. I think that your feelings of obligation and pressure (to use Irish in professional context) were reduced because these were questioned and explained [...]. Would anyone like to add anything? [...] if anyone wants to add anything in English, don’t be reluctant to do that.

Sailí: I’m thinking in Irish now! [Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Open Forum. Translation].

Sailí also noted how effective a common interest in music had been in giving LSN members access to native speakers. Local musicians were invited to perform a short concert as part of the program schedule, but they stayed to play traditional music with four LSN members afterwards. Using empathic language and summarizing strategies in learning conversations the LLA helped them make sense of their learning experience and the related positive emotions that the event generated. They were also encouraged to make connections to how they might build on this experience of successful interactions with competent speakers when they returned to their professional roles at the university:

LLA: One of the things that stood out for me most last night was Oisín, in the corner here, speaking to [local musician] in front of everyone; speaking to a *Gaeltacht* man about music. I was saying to myself, there’s no way that might have happened three months ago. [...] he’d have had his head down. That was [...] the highlight of the program for me.

Oisín: But I was on the tranquilizers! (Hearty group laughter).

LLA: No one knew that! If I was to award a prize [it would be to] Oisín, our language ambassador! (Group laughter & clapping).

Oisín: The reason I sat so close to the door was that if I didn’t understand [...]

LLA: Nobody knew that you were uncomfortable, that’s the thing you see. Music was very central the last two nights, wasn’t it? That is what put us all at ease. So, find your comfort zone I suppose, in the workplace also. We have to reflect on this.

Oisín: This was the first time for a lot of us to get our chance to spend three days trying to speak [Irish] and we’ve all improved. It’s made a huge difference.

LLA: And think it is only the first time, so what might you be like after let’s say the fifth attempt? We’ll be looking for funding for a month in the *Gaeltacht*! (Group laughter). [Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Open Forum. Translation].

Through such skilled dialogue, the advisor helped these participants identify a capacity for agency in their language learning, which came from their ability to notice their surroundings and actively take the initiative to pursue the

opportunities presented to them. Musicians and members of the G.A.A community were seen as comrades with a shared interest in the Irish language and culture rather than unapproachable native speakers. The skilled work of language advising and the importance of dialogue as a reflective and transformative tool were crucial in heightening such alertness and connectedness to areas of personal meaningfulness.

ALL established the process of skilled pedagogic dialogues (Mozzon-McPherson, 2017a) through which learning strategies were explored and developed. Drawing on the content of the language awareness sessions prior to the immersion program, participants availed of casual opportunities to share their social strategies for language learning while in the community context. They talked among themselves about how they observed their language learning. Ailín, for example, made the following contribution in English at the final review session:

[...] Well, similar to everybody else, I found myself thinking in Irish. I found that if I listened, I learnt a lot by listening [...] last night [...] I was watching an English program but I actually thought they were speaking Irish [laughter]. I spoke to other people at breakfast about that as well and they were saying the same thing - that your brain is trying to adjust to the language almost [...]. I found that really strange but I definitely felt that by listening to everybody, and by listening to conversations at breakfast and dinner, that I picked up a lot more.
[Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Open Forum].

Ailín was at a lower language competency level than the rest of the group. In an emotional private exchange with the LLA on the first day, she said that she felt 'guilty' and 'under pressure' as she sensed that she was the only one in the group 'struggling'. The confident final analysis above is an example of the substantial increase in self-awareness: in her account, she notices, listens, watches, compares, contrasts, and self-motivates, and her growing composure is evident.

Those participants who were at a higher language level commented on approaches to interactions with *Gaeltacht* speakers and members of the community. Cathal, for instance, tried to maximize benefit from the immersion experience by 'eavesdropping' on locals. Sailí, in a diary entry, recounted some of her social language learning strategies. She noted conversations with course tutors, with LSN participants, and the hotel staff. When asked for an example of how she had broadened her vocabulary, she recounted a dinner conversation about a book: no one at her table knew the word 'affair' in Irish and their waiter, following consultation with other staff, provided the translation. Again, throughout the program, an increased ability to self-reflect, report and identify learning junctures was noted. This kind of awareness is at the heart of advising sessions where the ultimate aim is to hand over the learning process to the learner. The high motivation levels of LSN members for independent language learning and practice following participation in the immersion program was striking. Sailí, for example, mapped out a comprehensive personal plan. One of her targets related to the recording of frequently asked questions in her administrative role and translating these to Irish (Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Diary Entry). Following on the established practice of reflecting on language learning in Cycle One, Cathal promoted the importance of recognizing the improvement that they had made (Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Open Forum). It marked a significant advance that this metacognitive language learning strategy was encouraged by a member of the LSN rather than by the LLA. He noted that their sense of improvement had given them confidence and he proposed that there was 'power in company' (Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Open Forum). The reflective dialogue facilitated by the advisor at the final review session in the *Gaeltacht*, involving LSN members, and workshop facilitators as critical colleagues, was a significant point in the research. Participants commented in their diaries that the group had become a 'proper' network. As a sense of group membership developed, their anxieties reduced.

A caring approach and the development of relational knowing and trust, informed by the skills of language advising, contributed to setting ideal conditions for transformation. Laughter, the ability not to take oneself too seriously, to be aware of the uncomfortable but be prepared to understand it and overcome it with specific social strategies, are other positive signs of a supportive space for learning which the LLA helped to create. The advisor used inclusive empathic words to expand learner statements, reinforce them and help fix the positive emotion of achievement expressed by the learners.

6.2. New speaker and native speaker: facilitating the development of new empathies

Participants commented in their *Gaeltacht* diaries on how the immersion program affected their self-assurance about their ability to deal with Irish-medium queries in their professional roles. Eoghan noted that he was 'getting more comfortable with *Gaeltacht* people'. He remarked that Róisín, as facilitator of language awareness workshops, co-designed by the LLA, had encouraged him. She disclosed that she had been concerned about her English language proficiency in her early professional life:

[...] when I was growing up here, we had no English. We had that anxiety about opening our mouths in English [...]. We were doing it at school but if someone asked us a question at school, you froze over [...]. Anyway the problem that people have with Irish not being their first language I can understand but, the only way to get over it, I suppose, is to just give it a lash [...]. It isn't difficult because at the end of the day, like anything else, it depends on your attitude inside here [...]. We shouldn't be having this sort of therapy session of a Monday evening! [Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Language Awareness Session 2. Translation].

Róisín's revelation that she understood what it was like to be anxious about speaking in a second language was a pivotal moment in the immersion program. It allowed participants to explore their own anxieties around language proficiency in a

safer way. This recognition of sameness in the other gradually allows 'relational and trustful communication' to develop (Taylor, 2009, p. 9) and creates the premises for transformation and deep learning (Mezirow, 2012). In a recorded interview with Eoghan at the end of Cycle Three, six months later, the advisor probed this interaction again:

Eoghan: The last program we did, the one in [mentions *Gaeltacht* venue] I got a lot of confidence from that.

LLA: Why was that?

Eoghan: From the attitude of the tutors, they did not put a big emphasis on accuracy or things like that, on the Irish, and I recall Róisín saying, you know, that when she started working she was anxious about having to speak in English [...].

LLA: So, you gained some insight into your own (language) anxiety did you?

Eoghan: Yes.

LLA: [...] I recall the two of you (Eoghan and Róisín) discussed it. You had said that you would not be comfortable speaking to *Gaeltacht* people especially and she put you at ease, didn't she?

Eoghan: Yes, yes.

LLA: I think that something happened during the program - for certain, something that motivated everyone, well, to challenge anxiety in general; but what, for example, do you think now about this anxiety that relates to you having responsibility to offer services through Irish (mentions university department)? Is that something that is easy for you now? Or are you still under pressure [...].

Eoghan: I'm not under any pressure - not to be too boastful like!

LLA: You are correct!

Eoghan: I'm not under pressure, I'll embrace the opportunity, the challenge.

LLA: You will look on it as an opportunity to speak (Irish)!

Eoghan: Yeah! Usually, anyone that has more Irish than me, usually they are very helpful. [...]. Now and again there will be, you know, someone [difficult], but you will get that in English as well. I wouldn't, to answer your question, I wouldn't be under pressure now to talk or to speak (Irish) on the phone.

[Data Set: Research Cycle 3, Interview. Translation].

The facilitation of workshops by Róisín and Clodagh, *Gaeltacht* tutors, allowed for a novel exchange of alternative views and experiences and emotional engagement. The use of storytelling and reflection led to a shared understanding and unpacking of assumptions during the immersion program.

O'Rourke and Ramallo (2011, p. 139) suggests that rather than 'forming a unified speech community, 'native' and 'non-native' speakers of the minority language very often see themselves as being socially and linguistically incompatible'. Róisín's contribution as a critical colleague in the PAR was significant. Her views align well with Rogerian (1951) principles which inform the work of language advisors where issues of social empowerment or disempowerment are removed and replaced with individual ownership of one's life-long learning status ('we are all learners'). Participants were pushed to regard critically the needs, desires and rights of *Gaeltacht* speakers rather than focusing, in interactions with them, on insecurities about personal language competence and legislative obligations. Clodagh instigated consideration of this issue:

[...] Think of the person coming into you. That person has a right [...]. If a person comes in here to me [...] and if s/he speaks; if s/he says *Dia duit* [hello in Irish], there is a message there for me. That person is letting me know that she or he would like a service in Irish. Therefore, start thinking about the other person (instead of yourself), the person you are offering a service to. [Data Set: Research Cycle 2, Language Awareness Session 1. Translation].

This new understanding led to an increasing appreciation of the importance of respecting the rights of someone to interact with the University in Irish. It encouraged attention to both parties involved in Irish language interactions in the professional context; heretofore the attention was only on themselves and their emotions as new speakers of Irish.

The new and emerging new speakers explored and addressed issues of language anxiety and their readiness to interact with native speakers in Irish during a three-day immersion program. By operating in a supportive space of dialogue, and learning to notice diverse points of view, participants responded to and questioned each other's beliefs and assumptions. In this process, led by a skilled LLA in collaboration with local language support professionals, they reached a mutual understanding and consensus about how to deal with concerns around having to use Irish in their professional context. The study shows that it was in the dialogic moments of mutual sense making that the narratives of self-discovery occurred.

This group-based language support approach was novel in its combined use of ALL, a participatory research method, peer facilitation and full immersion. In this process of sense making and shifting feelings of native speakers from outsiders to insiders, a gradual sense of community among the LSN emerged in the PAR study. Opportunities to explore connections beyond the Network arose. This change happened through the nurturing of relational understanding established in the advisor-advisee rapport. Relationships with oneself, with others, contexts, resources and emotions within the sociolinguistic profile of Irish, a minoritized language used in the professional domain, were considered in a fresh way.

The findings emerging from this research offer an innovative and valuable alternative approach to analyse how the paradigm of new speakerhood affects the role of the LLA and vice versa. The theoretical framework and the methodology adopted illustrated how the coordinated skillful work of dialogic interventions can positively impact emotions such as anxiety and elicit confident change in learning perspectives. The findings suggest that further experimentations - with a combined model of formal and informal group language advising, followed by a structured and facilitated immersion experience and ALL skilled interventions - generate sustained change in programs aimed at revitalization initiatives such as this Irish

program. This study intentionally selected a coordinated participatory approach to foster the development of a community of advisor-researchers, tutors, native and competent speakers. The engagement in this vibrant partnership with new, and emerging new speakers of Irish nurtured the development of critical coalitions in ALL structures between all professionals and stakeholders involved in minority language learning. The resulting support for the development of informal LLA-led learning spaces and the increased attention generated by the impact of this project are also vital to the maintenance and growth of the minority language itself.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on from our research, the first study to use an ALL approach in the Irish language context, a new empathetic, participatory and dialogic framework to revitalization initiatives, targeting new and emerging new speakers is proposed. The potential of LLA's as mediators in the process of growing the numbers of new speakers both in the workplace and beyond has been highlighted. The scope of involving a skilled professional to facilitate potential new speakers to make the transition to new speakerness, and to bolster the language competence of existing new speakers, may be of use to those charged with implementing policy recommendations on how to increase the low numbers who currently make this linguistic shift (Walsh, O'Rourke, & Rowland, 2015). This study in a minority language context also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers of new speakerness and advising. Key areas to explore are narratives of advisors and new speakers; transferability of advising skills in a new speaker context; the repositioning of ALL into informal contexts; and adaptation of new local language advising frameworks.

Credit author contribution statement

Deirdre Máire Ní Loingsigh: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Writing - review & editing, Lead in Resubmission Editing. **Marina Mozzon-McPherson:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, First draft editing and Lead in first submission, Writing - .

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102363>.

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