

MANX SPEAKERS, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITY

ERIN McNULTY

University of Glasgow
Orcid: 0000-0002-7433-7170

ABSTRACT

Manx, the Goidelic language of the Isle of Man, has no extant traditional native speakers. However, thanks to the efforts of language activists and others involved in language revival, there exists a community of around 2200 people who claim competence in the language (Isle of Man Government 2021), of which a smaller portion will have advanced competence in Manx. All members of the Manx speaker community could be described as ‘new speakers’, having acquired this revitalized minority language primarily through means other than first language transmission in the home (O’Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 1).

The members of the Manx new speaker community, despite many having acquired “a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence” (Jaffe 2015: 25) in the traditional language of the Isle of Man, vary in terms of their national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Postmodern approaches to sociolinguistics challenge the assumption of a straightforward link between identity, especially national identity, and linguistic practice. The complexity of the relationship between language and identity is especially evident in cases of multilingual minority language communities – such as the extant Celtic-speaking communities.

The present paper explores the relationship between identity and language use among Manx new speakers. It discusses the following specific question: How do new speakers of Manx understand and identify with ‘Manxness’? The paper uses a corpus of sociolinguistic interview and ethnographic observation data gathered from fieldwork among the Manx new speaker community as part of the author’s PhD thesis. The researcher, a Manx new speaker herself, spent six months gathering data, both through traditional sociolinguistic methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, and through ethnographic methods, namely participant observation in various contexts. The analysis of this novel spoken corpus offers a much-needed view into identity and language use in a 21st-century Celtic language community that lacks extant native speakers.

Keywords: Manx, identity, new speakers, Manxness, cultural heritage, multilingualism

1. An Introduction to Manx

Manx, or Manx Gaelic, is the autochthonous Goidelic Celtic language of the Isle of Man. Manx (*Gaelg* to its speakers) is one of the many minority languages across Europe, and elsewhere, that underwent linguistic obsolescence in the 19th and 20th centuries. This continued to such an extent that the traditional Manx speaker community lost its last speaker, Ned Maddrell, in 1974 (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996). The exact ‘end point’ of the traditional variety of Manx is contentious (see discussion in Lewin 2016, 2021). However, it is likely that first language transmission of Manx had been disrupted much earlier than 1974, probably as early as the nineteenth century. That said, 1974 at least marks a definitive cease in Manx’s transmission as a first language in the community. This was the ultimate conclusion of a long decline in speaker numbers, with speakers shifting to English as a result of trade, immigration, and cultural Anglicization (see Broderick et al. 1999, Clague 2009, Wilson et al. 2015 for further discussion).

However, the language had some degree of continuity in the community (Broderick et al. 1999, Lewin 2021) as it continued to be spoken as a second language. Today, Manx is heavily minoritized, classed as ‘critically endangered’ by UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger (Moseley 2010). Since the 1990s there have been marginal examples of acquisition of Manx by children in the home environment, however the vast majority of Manx speakers acquire the language through means other than first language transmission in the home.

In more recent times, the Manx language has seen a revival, which has had the effect of creating a community of new speakers of Manx. Over 2,200 people reported the ability to speak, read, or write Manx according to the latest Isle of Man census, taken in 2021 (Isle of Man Government 2022). As of 2010, it was estimated that around a hundred of these could be classed as “highly fluent” (Ó hIfearnáin 2015a: 54), though this has likely since increased (Ó hIfearnáin 2015b: 111). The growth in speaker numbers has been particularly noticeable among young speakers, with the number of 10-14-year-old Manx speakers having jumped from 64 to 340 from 1991 to 2001 (Clague 2009: 176). This figure is also likely greater 21 years on. However, as Clague (ibid.) notes, this is not necessarily indicative of the fluency or linguistic competence of these young speakers, nor of the frequency with which they use the language, especially in domains other than education (Wilson 2009: 25, Sallabank 2013: 219). This discrepancy remains a problem when evaluating the ‘success’ of language revitalization programmes.

2. The new speaker

The term ‘new speakers’ refers to minoritized language speakers who typically do not acquire the language through first language transmission in the home or

local community (O'Rourke and Walsh 2020: 18). Nevertheless, a new speaker will have acquired "a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence" in a minority language (Ramallo, O'Rourke, and Pujolar 2015, in Jaffe 2015: 25). Manx represents a currently atypical situation among European minoritized languages which is likely to become more common in the future; the present-day speaker community is entirely made up of new speakers, the majority of whom have had no direct contact with traditional native speakers.

It is the intent of this article to explore how such speakers relate to concepts of language and identity, using the Manx context as a case study. However, first it is necessary to discuss the nature of identity and its relation to language. The following sections begin with a theoretical discussion on the nature of identity as it relates to language use, then discusses how this functions in linguistic minority communities. The author then discusses existing literature on language and identity in the Manx context, followed by some preliminary findings from her own fieldwork.

3. Language and Identity

Identity is defined broadly by Jackson (2017: 1) as being one's sense or concept of self: "how you view yourself and your place or positioning in the world". A person's identity may be linked to what groups or communities they are (or are not) a member of, e.g. membership of a certain nation or language community. Language plays a key role in the construction, performance, maintenance, and experience of one's identity (McCooney-Heap 2020: 37); Omoniyi (2006: 14) states that "language and identity are inseparable". Understanding identity, and its relationship to language, is therefore key to understanding how language use functions within a given community.

Research into language and identity has presented varying views on the nature of identity, particularly linguistic identity. Certain more essentialist approaches to identity involve "labelling any number of normative characteristics or practices as constituting the core of an individual or group, which are then used to define them and held true of all members of the group" (Omoniyi 2006: 16). In other words, they maintain that there is some factor which can be used to define an individual or group, and which is constant across that group in all contexts. An example of such conceptions of language and identity comes from earlier studies in variationist sociolinguistics. Such studies explain linguistic differences in terms of gender and social class, with the conclusion that individuals speak the way they do because they are a member of some pre-existing group, such as 'women' or 'working class people'. According to this view, all members of these pre-determined groups can therefore be expected to speak in a similar way by dint of their being a member of that group.

As Martin-Rubio (2006: 680) notes, popular definitions and understandings of identity often bear resemblance to an essentialist view - they “imply that there is something that defines the individual or group” (their emphasis). Such views on identity can prove useful to the communities and individuals that espouse them, for example Bucholtz (2003: 401) states that “essentialism promotes shared in-group status by the imposition of assumed norms which provide a stable social environment”. Essentialist conceptions of identity may also be employed by groups for political ends, in the form of “a deliberate forging of a common identity, perhaps as a base for social action” (ibid. 240). If a group, for example a group of minority language speakers, names and defines itself, its members are in a much better position to advocate for themselves. This kind of “strategic essentialism” (Bucholtz 2003: 240) can also be used by those in academia to “recognise and legitimate widely devalued linguistic practices” (ibid.).

The assumptions of (more or less) group homogeneity that may result from more essentialist views of identity naturally call to the fore questions of group membership, inclusion, and exclusion: who is seen to be a member of the group, and who isn't (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 243)? For example, according to a simplified example of an extreme essentialist monolingual nation-state ideology, all members of Nation X speak Language X. Anyone who identifies as being part of Nation X without command of Language X, or perhaps of the right variety of Language X, is not seen as a ‘true member’ of Nation X under this kind of ideology. The boundaries of the language community and of the nation-state are often assumed to be one and the same.

According to more essentialist conceptions of identity, the language use of certain members of a speaker group may be afforded more authenticity or legitimacy than that of other members due to the characteristics possessed by the individuals themselves, and not necessarily (or not only) those of their actual language use (Bucholtz 2003: 400). Bucholtz (ibid.) terms this “authenticity from essentialism”, such that “‘real’ group members possess inalienable or inherent characteristics criterial of membership, e.g. biology and/or culture”. The language use of speakers that are assumed to possess these valued characteristics may be viewed as more authentic than that of other speakers. A shift away from the kinds of language use associated with such speakers would then be viewed as a decrease in authenticity (ibid.).

It is clear from the (admittedly extreme) example given above that essentialist views of identity, such as “equating a language with a ‘people’” (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 246), although useful in some circumstances, are often overly simplistic, and even have the potential to be harmful, especially when applied by academic linguists to complex real-world situations of language use. Sociolinguistics today generally recognises the complexity of the language-identity relationship. Although the precise nature of identity has been a topic of

much debate, the concept of identity “seems to possess considerable explanatory force” (Wodak et al. 2009: 11) in explaining how speakers use language, and why they may value certain forms of linguistic expression and not others. Postmodern approaches to sociolinguistics often deconstruct earlier essentialist ideas such as language=race=culture=nationality=ethnicity (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 251). Instead, identity is viewed as complex and subject to change.

Evidently, postmodern conceptions of identity therefore problematise the link between, for example, national identity and language, a link which arose from earlier European nationalist movements. However, that does not mean that a link between language and national identity is not important or present for many people (Jackson 2017: 2). Bourdieu (1991) states that a linguistic variety can have symbolic value, either as being ‘superior’ to other varieties, or as emblemising a national identity.

The complexity of the language-identity relationship is further exemplified by the fact that a person can be a member of multiple identity groups. In other words, their personal identity is likely made up of more than one component part (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 249). For example, Omoniyi (2006: 18) describes identity as being “multiple and multi-layered”, while Norton (2000; in Martin-Rubio 2006: 2) speaks of identity as “multiple and non-unitary”. For Craib (1998), there are different “facets” of a person’s identity that make up a whole individual. Therefore, a person may, and most often does, identify in many ways, or as a member of many groups, while still retaining their sense of self.

Postmodern sociolinguistics also understands identity to be subject to change over time (Craib 1998: 4; Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 249). Vignoles et al. (2006: 208) state that a person’s identity is likely to be continuous. This does not preclude change over time, but rather means that an individual will create a thread or story regarding their identity over their lifetime, and their current identity will be situated within that life story. This is similar to Giddens’ (1991) claim that individuals create their own coherent identity narratives, which is what they show to others. An individual’s identity can and most likely will change, with parts being gained or lost over time, but the overall self will remain identifiable (Craib 1998: 4).

Identity is also understood not just as changing over time, but also as changing in a context-dependent way. As Perez-Milans (2016: 84) put it, understanding identity is a matter of asking “why that, in this way, right now?”. As Omoniyi (2006) explains in their Hierarchy of Identities Model, the different facets of an individual’s identity, their different ‘selves’, can become more or less salient depending on the context in which the individual finds themselves. This model views identity, or identification, as a process in which a hierarchy of identity roles are created and managed (Omoniyi 2006: 11). Any one of these roles may be privileged according to “the appropriateness of the moment” (ibid. 13), being shunted to the top of our hierarchy of identities because it is most relevant in a particular context.

The idea of identity being made up of constituent parts and of these parts as dynamic is linked to the possible reasons one might identify with a particular label or group. Vignoles et al. (2006: 308) state that those parts of a persons' identity that are most essential, namely that the individual identifies with most closely, are those that "provide a greater sense of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, and meaning". These are "motives for belonging" (ibid.), which "guide identity construction" (ibid. 309) by pressuring an individual towards certain states of identity that satisfy these motives and away from those that do not. For example, if identifying as a Language X speaker gives an individual a greater sense of distinctiveness, that is a "sense of differentiation from others" (ibid. 310), that individual is more likely to identify as a Language X speaker, and to value their identity as such. They are also more likely to experience greater well-being when their "behaviour is consistent with identity" (ibid. 309); therefore, if the individual identifying as a Language X speaker in fact has knowledge of and uses Language X, they are likely to experience greater well-being.

We can also see that language plays a vital role in the relation of one's identity to other identities does not occur in a vacuum, and is often constructed and maintained in contrast to others' identities. It is relational, as it serves to "describe the relationship between entities" (Wodak et al. 2009: 11). This relationship may be one of similarity, which may take the form of positioning one's identity as close to or the same as some concept or group. Or it may be one of difference, which involves positioning one's identity as distinct or separate from a concept or group (Edwards 2012; Craib 1998). Omoniyi (2006: 14) refers to identity construction as "the construction of otherness in order to construct the self". Language is a useful tool for an individual to claim or perform similarity or difference between their own identity and another's. In the words of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 181): "the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which [...] he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished".

4. New speakers – Identity and Language Minoritization

Existing research seems to suggest that the relationship between language and identity functions in a unique way in certain multilingual contexts, such as those of language minoritization. Such multilingual settings further problematise any direct link between language and identity. Minority language speakers are most likely multilingual, and may identify both with their minority language speaker group and with the majority language of the nation-state. Jackson states that, due to the intertwined nature of language and culture for many people, being

multilingual in a world that largely privileges monolingual ideologies and identities may “trigger feelings of loss or inbetweenness” (Jackson 2017: 5). This may lead to the development of hybrid or mixed identities made up of different “cultural selves”, which may be associated with the use of different languages (ibid. 7). They give the example of a bilingual speaker who associates the use of a minority language with a “local self” and the majority language with a “global self”. Language minoritization therefore further problematises views of identity that stem from essentialism due to the “multiple loyalties” to which minority language speakers are often subject (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 253).

Within minority language contexts, the relationship between the minority language and new speakers’ identities in particular seems to function in a specific way. New speakers may negotiate their identity in contrast with other groups. For new speakers of Irish this includes “native speakers, non-Irish speakers, or those with the *cúpla focal* who acquired it at school but rarely use it” (O’Rourke and Walsh 2020: 31). This will likely vary between communities. For example, new speakers of Manx cannot easily construct their identities of new speakers in contrast to native speakers, as they do not have access to such a group. These other groups may also identify an individual as a new speaker, but this may not necessarily carry the same connotations as it might have for the new speaker themselves. It may mean something more negative, for example the new speaker label “can be used as a derogatory label to contest the legitimacy of new speakers as “real” speakers” (O’Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 57). This may be seen in the example of the Irish label *Gaeilgeoir* (‘Irish speaker’), which is “sometimes used as a derogatory label to describe learners of Irish and/or Irish language enthusiasts” (O’Rourke and Walsh 2020: 18).

The identification of oneself as a ‘new speaker’ does not occur in a vacuum. As Jaffe (2015: 29) notes, one’s self-identification as a new speaker may rely on other new speakers ratifying this self-identification, which may not always happen. This begs the question as to what an individual’s identification as a new speaker is ‘worth’ if they do not operate in this role within their communities from the perspective of other community members. We might also ask what relation other speakers’ view of a self-identified new speaker has to linguistic competency. Jaffe (2015: 29) states that “attributions of speaker identity have a variable relationship to speakers’ displayed competence, depending on the evaluative framework in operation. Sometimes, relatively limited linguistic tokens are ‘taken as’ indices of significant competence; on other occasions relatively substantial tokens are misrecognized or ignored.” That is to say, different speakers and different communities may have different competency criteria by which they judge membership to a new speaker cohort, and different structural features may be more or less important within this.

Members of linguistic minority communities may also find more use for essentialism than most. Edwards (2012: 493) states that the symbolic function of language is thrown into “stark relief” in minority language settings. As aforementioned, essentialism can be a useful tool to create a group norm that may be differentiated from majority linguistic and cultural practices (Bucholtz, 2003). This can be a good base for further struggles for language justice for an oppressed group. It may also be a basis for (re)constructions of social identities, traditions, and heritage during decolonisation. The language, or the idea of the language, may become a positive marker of intergroup identity and a marker of distinctiveness against enforced homogeneity by the dominant culture, regardless of the competence of individual community members in the language. This is evident in the function of Jèrriais and Guernsiais in the Channel Islands as reported by Sallabank (2013).

New speakers also often have strong feelings about the minority language (Hornsby 2015: 121), and the minority language may serve as an important part of the construction of a new speaker’s identity. In a similar vein, O’Rourke and Walsh (2020: 33) state that some new speakers of Irish use the language “to express and symbolise their individuality”. New speakers may therefore be less likely to view the language as solely an instrument for communication, but also as a symbolic representation of something external to the language and as a part of their own individual lifestyle. That said, new speakers have multiplicities of identities which may interlink with their identity as a speaker of a minority language (Jaffe 2015: 29). For example, heritage may be an important pole for some new speakers (Jaffe 2015: 29), but not for others, particularly those who do not have heritage links to the traditional language.

The idea of personal choice seems to be an important aspect of new speakerhood; this is an identity group which, in contrast to some other groups such as native speakers, a person can choose at any time to become a part of. Most new speakers have made an active commitment (of whatever type or intensity) to become a speaker of the minority language and thus an agent in its revitalization, which imbues some level of status but also involves sustained emotional, mental, and often financial labour (Jaffe 2015: 29). Individuals may therefore have a “vested interest” in identifying as a new speaker (Hornsby 2015: 121). That said, not all new speakers will have made the choice to learn the language themselves (i.e. child new speakers), or they may have made the choice to learn the minority language for financial (or similar) reasons (e.g. some Galician new speakers – see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2015). We should therefore note that identity may function differently for these types of new speakers for whom the notion of personal choice operates in different ways.

5. Language and Identity in the Isle of Man

The Isle of Man is no stranger to questions of identity, even outwith the Manx new speaker community. Lewis (2004: 1) describes the Isle of Man as currently undergoing an “identity crisis of cultural confidence”. She links this to the ongoing demographic shift that the Island is experiencing. Over the last two centuries, having become home to large numbers of historical and current immigrants from (mostly) the UK. The population of the Isle of Man is today made up of a high percentage of residents that have personal and/or ancestral ties to the UK. As of 2021, 49.6% of the Island’s resident population was born in the Isle of Man, and 38.3% in the UK (Isle of Man Government 2022: 11). In community discourse on the topic, the immigrant population is often contrasted with so-called ‘ethnic Manx’ residents – a term often used in the community to describe residents both born in the Isle of Man and/or with Manx ancestry (as evidenced in Lewis 2004). A not-insignificant portion of the population is also made up of those who were born on the Isle of Man to immigrant parents, or whose parents immigrated to the Isle of Man when they were very young. Various intra-communal classifications of this type have been reported on the Isle of Man (c.f. Lewis’ 2004 discussion of ‘come-overs’ vs ‘stay-overs’). The demographic makeup of the Isle of Man is therefore varied, and, in the present author’s experience (as a member of the latter group and a self-identified ‘stay-over’), the nature and strength of the connection that Manx residents have to a ‘Manx’ identity also varies greatly.

The nature of identity, and its relationship to language in the Isle of Man, is therefore a complex one. The few studies that exist on the relationship between identity formation and language use on the Island illustrate this.

Lewis (2004)’s ethnographic study explores the question of ‘Manxness’, and provides some answers to the question of what it means to be ‘Manx’ in the 21st century (Lewis 2004: 1). She defines Manxness as “an idea, a set of values” and “a way of relating to place and to each other” (Lewis 2004: 16). Within the context of demographic shift, for most a Manx identity is now not confined to a subset of residents with ancestral links to the Isle of Man; “a Manx identity could be, and has been, shared with incomers” (ibid.). She found that, although there was a desire among her participants to maintain and assert a Manx cultural distinctiveness (Lewis 2004: 13), this was not at the expense of Islanders who originated from elsewhere. Rather, various symbolic forms associated with the Island’s cultural revival (such as the Tynwald Day ceremony¹) were able to be shared across the community. As such, the “performance of Manxness” was not

¹ This is both the celebration of the ancient parliament of the Isle of Man and the country’s national day.

found to be restricted to any specific group (Lewis 2004: 14); indeed, such symbolic forms often served as “sites of cultural performance” for incomers to participate in their newly-chosen Manx identity (ibid.: 15). Indeed, a commitment to these symbolic forms was often seen as an important part of the ratification of one’s Manx identity by other community members (ibid.: 147).

The Manx language was one such symbolic form that Lewis’ informants, a mix of Manx New speakers and monolingual Anglophone Islanders, felt was important for accessing and performing Manxness (Lewis 2004: 18). This is not to say that Manx Gaelic was equated to a Manx identity by most participants, but rather that the language was, similar to other cultural reference points, a way for Island residents of all backgrounds to claim and perform their Manxness and their social and cultural commitment to the Island (ibid.: 78, 79). Again, for these informants Manx played a symbolic role in distinguishing the Isle of Man from surrounding territories, and presenting an image to the outside world that highlighted the Island’s cultural uniqueness (ibid.: 78). It should however be highlighted that among Lewis’ informants there was a range of responses with regards to their personal connections with both Manxness, the Manx language, and the Manx-speaking community.

McCooey-Heap’s (2020) study of Manx English presents similar findings with regards to the importance of language to a Manx identity. Manx English, or Anglo-Manx, is a variety of English that came to be spoken in the Isle of Man during the linguistic shift from Manx to English (McCooey-Heap 2020). There are several linguistic features that distinguish Manx English from other varieties. Most salient for speakers, though, are the various lexical items peculiar to Manx English that have been borrowed (or are perceived to have been borrowed) from Manx Gaelic. Greater knowledge and use of these lexical items by Manx English speakers was found to be associated with a stronger ‘Manx cultural identity’, as measured by engagement with various Manx cultural metrics (ibid.). Two of these lexical items in particular, *skeet* (meaning gossip; a quick glance) and *yessir* (casual form of address), were especially salient for speakers. McCooey-Heap (2020: 266) posits that these terms, especially when featured on ‘Manx-themed’ commercial goods, serve a ‘badging’ function whereby Islanders can display their affiliation to a Manx identity to others in their community.

6. The Current Study: Aims and Methodology

The present paper provides a preliminary exploration into the relationship between identity and language use among Manx new speakers. It aims to explore similarities and differences to themes on language and identity that have emerged from the existing literature on new speakers of minoritized languages. It discusses the following specific question:

1. How do new speakers of Manx understand ‘Manxness’ and its relationship to language?

The data presented was gathered by means of sociolinguistic interviews. Sociolinguistic interviews are a well-established method of gathering qualitative data in sociolinguistics, with interviews being “among the most widely-used methods of data elicitation in the social sciences” (Karatsareas 2022: 99). When interviews are approached in this way, it is the content of the interviewees’ speech that is of primary interest (Karatsareas 2022: 99). The interviews therefore involved explicitly asking participants about the role of Manx in their conception of their own identity.

The interviews were undertaken with just the researcher alone with the participant. Group interviews would have been preferable, as the small group method had certain advantages in that it reduces the power imbalance inherent in an interview for research purposes and thus reduces the impact of this on the data (Schilling 2013). However, they proved difficult to arrange with participants due to limitations of timing. The interviews generally lasted for around 45 minutes to over an hour. All data collection has been anonymised, and therefore interview participants have been given pseudonyms in the current paper and in the study in question. The majority of the interviews took place either at a participant’s home, or in a comfortable public setting, such as a café, and the participants were given control over when and where they would prefer to conduct the interview. Many interviews took place in one café in particular that often hosted Manx-medium events. As such, it was not out of the ordinary to hear Manx being spoken in this particular establishment, and this was something that the proprietors and frequent customers of the café would have been accustomed to hearing. When another setting was used, care was taken to choose a cultural hub, such as a museum, or an established meeting place for informal Manx-speaking meetups and language lessons, to reduce the possible discomfort participants might experience when speaking Manx in a public space. Only on one occasion did speaking Manx in public did attract any feedback from the public, as discussed with reference to Sam’s interview below. Participants seemed happy to speak Manx in a public setting during the interviews.

The choice of language used by the researcher is important when working in multilingual settings, which often come with an inherent linguistic power imbalance (O’Rourke 2022: 271). The sociolinguistic interviews were done through the medium of Manx, meaning that both the researcher and the participant spoke Manx for the majority of the interview, with the exception of some code-switching or tags in English which are commonly used among Manx speakers, and some specialist vocabulary for which it was more appropriate to use English.

Firstly, the ability to converse in Manx ensured that the participant had a good enough linguistic competence in Manx to provide sufficient quality data on the morphosyntactic norms of Manx new speakers. Indeed, one definition of new speakers (i.e. that of Ramallo, O'Rourke, and Pujolar 2015, in Jaffe 2015: 25) state that a "a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence" is generally a feature of the new speaker. The ability to hold a conversation in Manx was therefore sought among participants for this research.

Secondly, the decision to hold the entire interview through the medium of Manx was influenced by the researcher's previous experience gathering data among this community. In previous fieldwork, the researcher used linguistic interviews to gather structural linguistic data from new speakers of Manx. In these interviews, the interview prompts were designed to directly elicit specific linguistic structures. Therefore, the researcher spoke in English so as not to influence participants' production of the linguistic variables. However, during and after these interviews, participants expressed that it was sometimes awkward and difficult to converse in Manx when the interviewer was speaking in English. Therefore, the decision was made that in the current study the interviewer would speak in Manx unless the participant strongly preferred otherwise, which proved not to be the case the majority of the time.

A semi-structured approach was taken for the interviews in this study, although in practice the interviews tended towards the less structured end. This semi-structured approach was designed to ensure that as many topics as possible were covered during the interviews. It enabled the researcher to monitor the flow of the interviews, and to refocus back onto the desired topic if necessary. However, it also left room for me to spontaneously pose different questions if interesting research dimensions arose that I had not previously considered (Karatsareas 2022: 100).

The interviews were recorded with written consent, and then transcribed in a naturalised style, adhering closely to written discourse and spelling conventions for Manx (Bucholtz 2000: 1439). As the research questions were concerned with gathering data on morphological features used by new speakers of Manx, the transcription was broad, and did not attempt to represent phonological features or variation where that was present in the recordings. Any grammatical idiosyncrasies produced by interviewees were retained in the transcriptions, in the interest of other research questions explored by this PhD which pertain to linguistic structure. All data was anonymised, and the analysis below makes use of pseudonyms for participants.

The approach taken to analysing the interview transcript data was Thematic Analysis. Specifically, this study used Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2019; 2020), which foregrounds the active role of the researcher in the data analysis process (Clarke and Braun 2017: 297). Thematic

Analysis is an incredibly useful tool for reducing large and diverse data sets down to essential themes that are relevant to the researcher's specific questions or area(s) of interest (Clarke and Braun 2017: 297). The steps followed during the data analysis were those of Braun and Clarke (2006: 87). These are the following:

- i. Familiarizing oneself with the data
- ii. Generating initial codes
- iii. Searching for themes
- iv. Reviewing themes
- v. Defining and naming themes
- vi. Producing report

The following sections present discussion of selected findings from the author's ongoing PhD research.

7. Themes on Manxness, Language, and Identity

The researcher received varying responses to questions about Manx identity, which can be expected considering the varied backgrounds of Manx New speakers. Participants varied in terms of where they were born, brought up, or chose to settle later in life. Some were born in the Isle of Man and had at some point moved away, with most returning to or maintaining links with the Island. Others were born elsewhere, most often the UK, and had chosen to make the Isle of Man their home. Participants therefore expressed varying degrees of attachment to a 'Manx' identity.

The following sections outline selected themes on language and identity that came to the fore in the preliminary thematic analysis of interview and observational data. These themes are also discussed with reference to findings from previous studies on language and identity in the Isle of Man and other minoritized language communities, as discussed above. The quotes in the section below have been edited for ease of reading; pauses and false starts have been removed, and are indicated by an ellipsis. Punctuation has also been added, and an English translation of the original quotes has been provided. Where participants produced 'ungrammatical' forms in Manx, these have been retained in the quotes chosen.

7.1. Manxness as a Static Category

As discussed above, there are varying views on national identity present in the Isle of Man, and this was reflected in the members of the Manx New speaker community the researcher spoke to in research interactions. Some of the Manx

New speaker participants interviewed presented a view of their own relationship with a Manx identity that resembles more essentialist views of identity as discussed by Omoniyi (2006), Bucholtz (2003), and Martin-Rubio (2006) above.

As might be expected, many participants who had been born and raised in the Isle of Man clearly identified with a Manx national identity. This was true of ‘Orry’, as is shown in the following extract:

Erin: “So cre mychione ve Manninagh? C’red ta shen meanal er-dty-hon?”

Orry: “*T’eh meanal dy row mee ruggit ayns Mannin, as cha nel eh veg smoo ny shen dooys... Aye cha nel mee... moyrnagh dy ve my Vanninagh... she fact t’ayn... as shen ooilley.*”

Erin: “So what about being Manx? What does that mean for you?”

Orry: “It means that I was born on the Isle of Man, and nothing more than that to me... Aye I’m not [...] proud of being Manx [...] it’s a fact [...] and that’s all.”

Although Orry clearly would describe himself as Manx, he did not express a large degree of emotional attachment to the label. Rather, he viewed being Manx as an undeniable fact about himself, but not one that he built a large part of his identity around.

That said, not all of the Manx New speaker participants described themselves as Manx. A lack of feeling ‘Manx’ was mostly reported by community members who had been born somewhere other than the Isle of Man, and/or who had lived elsewhere for a significant portion of their life before moving to the Island. As such, they often retained a national identity reflective of their country of origin. This was true of “Niamh”, who was born in Scotland and still identifies as Scottish, despite having lived in the Isle of Man for most of her life.

“Em” reported feeling similarly. She was not born on the Island but settled there as an adult. Despite heavy involvement in the Manx New speaker community and life in the Isle of Man in general, Em wouldn’t describe herself as ‘Manx’. When asked about feeling ‘Manx’, she stated:

Em: “*Cha row mee ruggit aynshoh [...] Cha noddym gra dy vel mee my Vanninagh.*”

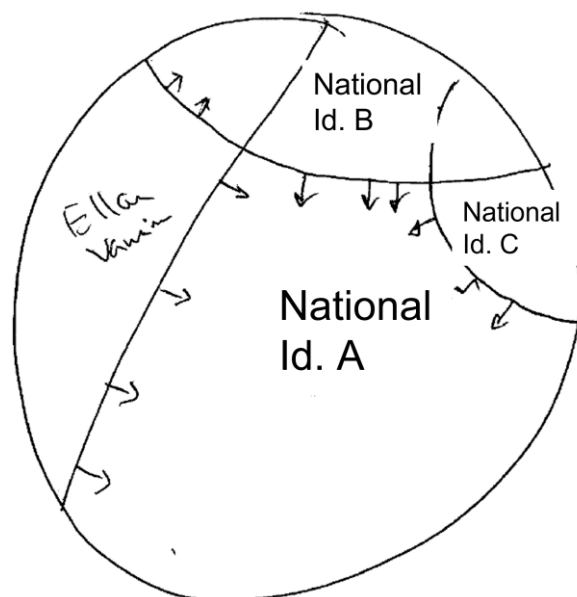
Em: “I wasn’t born here [...] I cannot say that I am Manx.”

In the above examples, participants seem to present ‘Manxness’ as some immutable category that one is assigned at some point in life, possibly birth. ‘Manxness’ is also considered to be dichotomous – one is either Manx or one is not. This is in line with a more essentialist view of identity, with a view that one either possesses or does not possess some essential criterion of group membership (Bucholtz, 2003: 400).

7.2. Manxness as Changeable

However, some participants described their identity as complex and multifaceted, more in line with postmodern conceptions of identity (e.g. that of Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001: 249). For example, Juliet was born and grew up in the Isle of Man, but has since lived in many other countries before returning to the Island to retire. She described her identity in terms of multiple affiliations; she identifies with the label ‘Manx’, but also with several other labels relating to countries in which she has lived, and roles she has fulfilled in her professional life. She also describes a growing feeling of Manxness that coincides with her return to the Island and her becoming involved with the Manx New speaker community. Despite spending her childhood on the Island, she stated that: “I feel more Manx now than I ever have.”

Other Manx speakers, some who moved to the Island from elsewhere, also describe their national identity as changing over time, again in line with



postmodern dynamic models of identity, as discussed above. For example, “Sam”, who moved to the Island from elsewhere in Europe, describes changes in the amount he felt ‘Manx’ over his lifetime in terms of percentages in a pie chart, as shown below:

The diagram as drawn by Sam shows his total individual identity as composed of several different national identities, one of which is a Manx identity, as shown by the *Ellan Vannin* (‘Isle of Man’ in Manx) label in the top left portion of the diagram. All other national identities described by Sam in the above diagram have been anonymised, thus his handwritten notes have been replaced with typed labels. As indicated by the arrows, he indicates that there has been an increase over time in the degree to which he feels varying national identity labels apply to him, include a Manx national identity. He describes a feeling of ‘Manxness’ starting sometime after his move to the Isle of Man. He also described a key point after which this feeling began to increase significantly, which was the point where he made the decision to acquire the Manx language.

7.3. Manxness, the Manx Language, and Cultural Heritage

As evidenced by the above discussion, Manx speakers vary in the extent to which they feel that they are “Manx”. For those participants in this study who did identify with this label, they gave varying reasons as to why they identify the way that they do.

Evidently, many participants, such as Orry above, relate Manxness to having been born on the Isle of Man. However, for some of these participants, more than just birth, the idea of cultural heritage was important for their identification as Manx. They would often reference the fact that they and their ancestors had been born on the Isle of Man, and had been Manx speakers. This was true of Mona, who said:

Mona: “*Ta kiangley dowin aym [rish ve ‘Manninagh’] [...] as shen yn... heritage aym neesht as gollrish ny ancestors aym [...] hie shin erash gys ny [...] queig-jeig keeadyn [...] v’ad loayrt Gaelg.*”

Mona: “I have a profound link [to being ‘Manx’] ... and that’s my heritage as well and like my ancestors... we went back to the... fifteen hundreds... they spoke Manx.”

For some Manx speakers who took part in the study, this idea of an ‘ancestral’ link to Manxness and thus to the language took precedence over birth. For example, Richard recounts how he was born in England to parents who originated in the Isle of Man. His frequent childhood visits to the Island, as well as his family links there, gave him a sense of Manxness which he noted was not always shared by his fellow community members.

Many speakers, like Mona above, also spoke about the importance of Manx having been spoken in the history of their family. Often, this served as some impetus to acquire the language in the first place, as a way of feeling closer to their ancestors and carrying on their linguistic legacy. For example, Richard discusses hearing his great aunt say *'focklyn as raaghyn quaaagh'* ("strange words and phrases") throughout his childhood, that he later realised, with the help of his parents' book collection, were from another language.

The idea of cultural heritage plays varying roles in personal identity in new speaker communities – it may be important for some, but not others (Jaffe 2015). Evidently, for some Manx speakers, an 'ancestral' link to the cultural heritage of the Manx language can be something one is born with. However, that is not to say that all Manx new speakers were in agreement on this front. In this vein, some Manx speakers were openly critical of more essentialist views of the role of cultural heritage in Manxness, in that they critiqued conceptions of Manxness that focus solely on cultural heritage. For example, Mona, although stressing the importance of ancestry and heritage for her own personal Manxness, asserts that this should not be so for everyone who uses the label:

Erin: "So *vel oo smooïnaghtyn [...] my va peiagh ayn as cha row ad ruggit ayns Mannin [...] vel ad Manninagh?*"

Mona: "*My t'ad gearree ve Manninagh [...] my t'ou gearree ve Manninagh as t'ou cummal aynshoh as t'ou gennaghtyn [...] gollrish Manninagh [...] ta shen red ennagh individual dhyt.*"

Erin: "So do you think [...] if there was someone who wasn't born in the Isle of Man [...] are they Manx?"

Mona: "If they want to be Manx [...] if you want to be Manx and you live here and you feel [...] like [a] Manx [person] [...] that is something that's individual to you".

Statements such as the above emphasise the role of personal choice and agency in identifying oneself as 'Manx', which aligns with more postmodern views on identity. They present Manxness as a category you can 'move into', a label that you might choose to adopt or identify with at some point in life. This echoes Lewis' (2004) findings that Manxness is something one may claim or perform in order to assert one's chosen identity as Manx.

7.4. The Manx Language and the Cultural Performance of Manxness

For interviewees, participation in certain cultural behaviours seemed to be a key factor for an individual being able to claim Manxness, or not. These behaviours are often intertwined with each other, and include involvement in local and political life of the Island, knowledge of and participation in cultural and historical traditions, and knowledge of and competence in the Manx language, which echoes the discussion in Lewis (2004).

Not all speakers reported using these same avenues to express Manxness, which “Voirrey” acknowledges in her discussion of the variety in the Manx-speaking community:

Voirrey: *“Ta mee gearree dagh ooilley pheigh [‘sy co-phobble] [...] jus jean ny reddyn t’ou [...] gearree jannoo [...] cha nel dagh ooilley pheigh gearree goaill arrane sy Gaelg.”*

Voirrey: “I want everybody [in the community] ... just do the things that you want to do... not everybody wants to sing in Manx.”

In the above, Voirrey, a musician herself, is referencing the fact that traditional music may be an important cultural outlet for many Manx speakers, but this is not true for every speaker, as does not preclude one from claiming membership in the Manx-speaking community.

Many of the Manx new speaker participants described how acquiring Manx and using Manx was the key cultural behaviour that they used to express their membership of the Island’s community. For example, “Juliet”, who was born on the Island, states that after beginning to acquire the language, she “feels more Manx now than [she] ever ha[s]”. This was a key point for Sam also: in order to affirm his chosen identity as a Manx person, an identity in which the Manx language played a key part in his adopting, he continues to speak Manx.

Evidently, as this study focusses on Manx speakers, the views of non-Manx-speaking members of the Isle of Man community are not represented here. However, it does seem as though, at least for some of them, the Manx language, at least in the abstract, serves as an important part of the cultural performance of their own individual Manx identity (c.f. McCooey-Heap, 2020 on the badging function of Manx on items as a way of indexing a Manx identity). For those for whom this is the case, and yet who do not speak Manx, this mismatch between self-conception and behaviour seems to result in some negative feelings.

That is to say that there seems to be a sentiment among some non-Manx-speaking Manx people that they “should” be able to speak Manx. Such discourses

of obligation became evident at various points in my research, but were made especially clear during the interview conducted with Sam. In the middle of our conversation the interview was interrupted by the entrance of his colleague, who upon hearing Manx being spoken, remarked that “I can’t speak any [Manx]”, even though she was “a local” (unlike Sam, perhaps, who originated in continental Europe) so “should be able to”. This clearly shows that the idea of being Manx and speaking Manx are linked for her, but that this has not extended to her personal acquisition of the language.

7.5. The Manx Language and the Nation-State

Many interview participants identified a strong link between the Manx language and the national identity of the Isle of Man, presenting Manx as an essential characteristic of the nation-state, or somehow emblematic of it. This is evident in the following quote from ‘Em’:

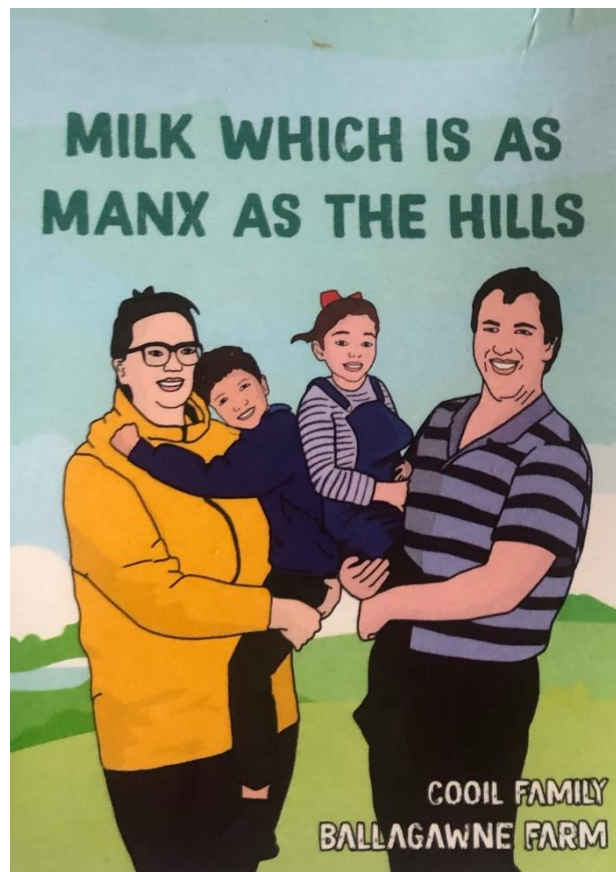
Em: *“T’eh [y Ghaelg] ayrn jeh’n Ellan as ta mee smooïnaghtyn dy beagh yn Ellan ny smoo boght gyn yn Gaelg.”*

Em: “It’s [Manx] part of the Island and I think the Island would be poorer without Manx.”

Em clearly views Manx as an essential component of the Island itself. However, like many other Manx New speakers interviewed, Em found it difficult to expand on or qualify her opinion. For her, the ideological connection between the Isle of Man as a nation and the Manx language is self-evident, to the extent that she became slightly exasperated at the interviewer’s attempts to probe deeper into her statement. However, this exchange in and of itself exemplifies the link that is often made between the language and the nation-state in the Isle of Man, both by speakers and non-speakers of Manx, that is commonly made but rarely analysed closely.

Some Manx new speakers, however, were able to provide more information about how they viewed the link between the Manx language and the broader national identity of the Isle of Man. Some, such as ‘Juliet’, couched their discussions in the physical environment, citing connections between the language and physical space in the form of the Island’s place names, many of which derive from Manx, with greater or lesser degrees of Anglicisation. Through this discussion, Juliet recalls her growing awareness and understanding of her physical environment as intimately connected to her journey as a learner-speaker of Manx. For her, the acquisition of the language provides another layer of understanding of and belonging to the Island.

The connection between Manxness and the physical landscape is a common link made in the Isle of Man, both within and outwith the Manx speaker community. This is evidenced by the common saying “as Manx as the hills”, as evidenced by the below image, taken from a milk carton produced by a local creamery.



The company in question is clearly emphasising the ‘Manxness’ (and thus localness, and thus desirability) of their product by making use of this commonly-heard refrain. Some of the Manx New speakers I met with, however, were critical of such ideologies when expressed by non-Manx-speaking Islanders. Juan’s statement implies that the link between Manxness and physical landscape is incomplete without knowledge of the Manx language.

Yet other speakers referenced the role of the language in the group social identity of residents of the Isle of Man. Illiam, for example, explained that he considered Manx to be a “kind of social glue” intended to bring the community

together. In this kind of view, the language serves as a positive symbol of a Manx identity that would be accessible to anybody living on the Isle of Man. This links to the idea of “Manxness” as a shared symbol as discussed by Lewis (2004) above.

8. Concluding Comments

This paper explored some themes emerging from existing literature and ongoing sociolinguistic studies on how identity and language work in the context of new speakers of Manx on the Isle of Man. The current study begins to shed light on the varying ways in which new speakers of Manx conceptualise their own identity as speakers, as well as the identity of their communities. Some speakers present their views on their own and others’ identities in a way that aligns more closely with essentialist conceptions of identity, viewing ‘Manxness’ as a fixed quality that an individual either does or does not possess, often for reasons largely out of one’s control, such as birth or family heritage. Yet other speakers express views on identity that bear closer resemblance to postmodern understandings of identity, highlighting the role of agency and personal choice in an individual identifying as Manx. Many of these speakers also discussed the changeable nature of their own identities and identification with Manxness. All of the above highlights the complexity of identity for members of linguistic minority communities, especially for new speakers.

The paper also highlighted how the Manx language has emerged as a key site for the performance of a Manx identity for many of its new speakers. The language is one of a constellation of cultural practices that new speakers engage in to signal or ‘badge’ their Manx identity. The Manx language was also shown to be a ‘gateway’ for many speakers in their adoption of a Manx, or at least more Manx, identity. And yet, it was also established that, for many speakers, identifying as ‘Manx’ is not a prerequisite for being a Manx speaker, and indeed the two may be mutually exclusive. The identity label *Gaelgeyr*, or Manx speaker, has therefore emerged as an identity label in its own right, connected to but not dependent on a Manx national identity or any other cultural practice. The language therefore brings together a community of varying national backgrounds and connections to Manx culture more broadly.

All of the above highlights the need for further research in the area of language and identity for new speaker communities. This is particularly true in the Manx context: the current paper summarises everything that has been written on the subject to the best of the author’s knowledge. The current author would also welcome further research on how identity ties into language practices in minoritized language communities that are undergoing revitalization, particularly where there is no extant traditional speaker identity model to orient oneself

towards. This would be particularly relevant for such subsections of new speaker communities that experience marginalization in other ways, e.g. due to racism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia. It would be pertinent to consider how such speakers construct their identities outside of the typically male, white, and heterosexual traditional speaker archetype. The agentive use of linguistic structure and variation by new speakers in order to index identity in new speaker communities like that of the Isle of Man would also be of great interest to this author.

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