

**LANGUAGE POLICIES TO
CATER FOR A LANGUAGE DIVERSE AUDIENCE**

Nearfm vs. Antxeta Irratia

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CASE STUDY: NEARFM

Background to the language policy of NearFM

The community radio project in the north east of Dublin city predates the official creation in 1995 of NearFM radio by 10 years and from the very beginning it has been an inclusive project where special attention has been placed on the issue of languages. The radio is located in Coolock, a mainly working class area. Like in most areas of the country potential listeners are mainly English speakers, with just a 10 or 15 % of audience with a good level of Irish, and of them only 2 or 3% would be considered as frequent users of Irish in everyday life. In these circumstances English was chosen as the main language of the station, but nevertheless it was decided to build the Irish language into the ethos of the organization.

Promoting the Irish language

It could be said that even if English was the principal language of the station, the objective has always been to produce as many programmes in Irish language as possible, always depending on the availability of volunteers/staff ready to take on the task. The idea was never to simply fulfil the licence's requirements of programming in Irish but to go beyond that, something not very common in the Irish radio landscape even today.

To illustrate this point, simply as a curiosity, we reproduce the words of one of the founders of the station, Tomas Mac Ruari, "*such was the number of us interested in the Irish Language that some of the management meetings were conducted in Irish. Then, for non-Irish speakers we wrote the minutes in English*".

The process of incorporating Irish language in the radio life included not only Irish language programming but also training and courses for a staff and even co-organising projects: "*We have always fulfilled the requirements of the licence in terms of Irish programming, but we can say that we have always done more than just covering the requirements. We have been proactive, running lots of projects with local schools and with local languages bodies to try to encourage the use of the language. And that is something that is an on-going long term commitment.*" [Ciaran Murray, NEAR media coop manager]

It can be said that the station has put time and effort to encourage the integration of Irish in the programming up to a level where nowadays the station is registered to give certificated radio training fully in Irish, and this is done in order to make it attractive for future Irish speaking volunteers to participate in the radio. This is one of the initiatives taken to try to encourage volunteers to produce programmes in Irish because despite the facilities and encouragement given the level of interest is still lower than what the management would like. But the fact remains that at the moment in NearFM there are several Irish speaking volunteers who produce their programmes entirely in English. The reality is that the management can't impose volunteers to do programs in Irish. Volunteers may prefer doing programmes in English, because they are afraid of losing the audience but more importantly because it is much more difficult to find other workmates or programme guests who would be able to express themselves fluently in Irish.

To all these we have to add that the financial support for the promotion of the Irish language by government's institutions has decreased in the last few years. Consequently, it could be said that because of the lack of financial resources along with lack of volunteers' enthusiasm there are a fewer programmes in Irish than what the management would wish for. As an alternative solution to this situation NearFM has arrived to an arrangement with the Dublin based Irish speaking radio station Raidió Na Life, to broadcast some of their programmes.

"Irish speaking programs are broadcast every week day for an hour or half an hour. We take programmes from Radio Na Life two of the week nights but on other nights we produce ours."[Dorothee Holtkamp NearFM outreach coordinator]

Introduction and promotion of multilingual programming

One of the main ideas of NearFM has always been giving a voice to minorities, linguistic minorities included. The 90's were the time when in Ireland took place the first important non English speaking immigration movement in decades, possible centuries if we do not take into account one or two small exceptions. The first considerable group to arrive were Bosnians fleeing the Balkan conflict, which came to Dublin through the UN Program Refugee programme. And was with this initial group that NearFM did its first attempt to open its doors to non-native languages. Many of the members of this initial group didn't have any English, but despite that the station actively sought to get in contact with the newly arrived Bosnian community in order to offer them the possibility to make programmes in their own language. For the Bosnians this opened the opportunity to deal with specific issues on their community while at the same time helping in the process of integration in Irish society.

During the period between 2000 and 2007, the highest the period of immigration of non-English speakers to Ireland, NearFM encouraged new minority communities to engage with the radio. During this period the station had programmes in Bosnian, German, Chinese, Rumanian, Servo/Croat, and nowadays there are still on air programmes in Polish, Italian, Brazilian as well as French and Spanish. What is more, they cooperate with Radio France International broadcasting some of their programmes through NearFM.

We could say that the incorporation of foreign spoken programs in the radio schedule has been very successful. The proof of that is the feedback from listeners, who call or write to the station to give some comments in relation to these programmes. Interestingly, as it happens that not only immigrants, but also Irish natives listen to the foreign speaking programs: *«In the past when we have had technical problems to broadcast the Radio France International program, we got phone calls and emails from listeners. But there weren't French people, but Irish people who were learning French or who had lived in France and enjoyed listening to the French program.»*[Soledad Galiana NearFM radio manager]

The radio is opened to any new radio programme proposals. Basically, all propositions are submitted to a programming committee, which is made of by volunteers, staff and community members. This committee's role is to evaluate if the initial idea of the program is appropriate and interesting for the station. Proposals for programmes in a non-native language go also through this same process and get approved or rejected in the merit of the proposal rather than the language of the programme.

All volunteers take part in obligatory induction training, during which the course coordinators go over all the dos and don'ts of producing a radio programme in a community radio, including content and libel laws. And after the initial induction and a period of practice volunteers are left at their own devices to produce their programmes. From that moment programming committee is in charge of regularly monitor the programmes. They don't have guaranteed that volunteers won't break the radio principles, but, like they say, it is question of the trust and responsibility: *"We deliver the training for them and when they make radio programmes, they don't want to make fool of themselves, because they know that they will have repercussion on their own community. They are public voices of their communities."*[Soledad Galiana NearFM radio manager]

Current situation

It is worth mentioning, that in NearFM minority language programmes are seen on the same level as English ones. They are broadcast at pick time (Irish at 5.30 p.m., Brazilian at 6 p.m. and Polish at 7 p.m.), when the radio is listened by the mayor part of audience. It corresponds with the station policy of making listeners aware

of the existence of other languages and consistent with the policy of supporting the integration of minority communities in Irish society.

As part of the policy of integration, the station promotes bilingualism of the non-native speaking programs, asking radio presenters to include in their programs as much as possible a native language (generally English), by translating interesting interviews or making a short summaries. The aim is to get English speakers interested on issues that are of interest to minority communities.

"(...) we think that it will be beneficial for the Polish community that non Polish speaking communities also know about them. And the same applies to all the other languages and communities It is not something that we impose, but something that we suggest."[Soledad Galiana NearFM station manager]

The radio encounters difficulties with a long term minority language programs. On the one hand the radio suffers from lack of funding, and on the other the problem is related to the type of immigration Ireland has received, relatively young and not quite settled yet: *"The main problem with minority communities is that they come to Ireland to have a life and in some way they look at making radio as a hobby, when things get more complicated, because they have children or find new job, they move on and the program goes."*[Sally]

The fact that minority language program's presenters (like many others) are volunteers in many cases means that is very difficult to maintain the continuity of the programmes. For that reason those involved in the production of the programmes are encouraged to get several people involved and not depend on one or two, so that way there is a better chance for the programme to continue if those initially involved are no longer available, or interested on keeping the programme going. That was the case of Brazilian programme, when the original group involved in the production and delivery of the programme left, there was other people ready and willing to take on the task of continuing with the programme.

An example of the multilingual policy

Polish program "Polska Tygodniówka", Tomasz Wybranowski and Katherina Sudak

Tomasz got involved in the NearFM radio in 2006. And he describes his experience up to now as very positively. The programme is put together every week with another volunteer, Katherina Sudak. In the programme they cover mainly polish issues, but they also include Irish issues. The programme has invited Irish politicians, musicians and activists. As explained by Tomasz the purpose for him to include some sections about Irish themes is really important so his Polish listeners can learn about Irish history and society while at the same time English speaking listeners have the opportunity to tune in too, and know that *"in his program he speaks well about them"*.

In Tomasz's view the idea of the multilingual policy of NearFM is very successful, and it helps to show an image of Ireland more friendly to immigrants, helping them to integrate in a new society while respecting their identity: *"No one here wants to make of us one European nation; our identities are respected in the radio. On the basis of our own cultures we can create intercultural image of Europe. To be proud Europeans we should remember about our roots. Here I can produce my programme and in this way get closer to Irish people."* [Tomasz Wybranowski producer and presenter]

Recommendations.

It is clear that NearFM has a clear commitment to allow the station to become a tool for integration, with a clear policy of inclusion of new communities and languages while still putting special emphasis on the promotion and development of the Irish language.

The fact that minority languages programmes are broadcast at pick time hours speaks highly of the commitment of the station towards the inclusion of the new communities but also of their interest in maintaining their own as it is at that same pick hour time when the Irish programmes go on air.

Current government policy that discourages unemployed people from engaging in volunteering activities (they consider that that detracts them from full time job seeking) by cutting their financial help is having a direct negative effect in the station, and particularly in the involvement of the new communities. We recommend that NearFM engages in active lobbying in order to highlight the multiples benefits of voluntary work for people unemployed in general and immigrants in particular. Such as facilitate integration, combat racism, open paths to employment and further education, among others.

A second recommendation would be to revise the policy of programme content reviewing of the no native language programmes. It is obvious that reviewing all programmes' content would mean a huge drain of the economic and human resources of the station as well as time to do it properly. While programmes in English and Irish are reviewed regularly we think that the main problem concerning minority language programmes is that the station doesn't have the resources to do it, and it has a policy based on training and trust that has its advantages but could potentially also have its pitfalls.

For that reason we suggest, in order to avoid possible future misunderstandings or even litigations, to put in place a system where non-native language programmes are also reviewed. Our suggestion would be that at the proposal stage of the programmes, those submitting the proposal would need to include a list of people that would be ready once a month to listen to the programme and submit a brief resume of the content and characteristics of the programme so the programming committee of NearFM has a more accurate and up to date idea of the development of the programme and at the same time those involved in the programmes feel that the station has an interest in the work that they do.

CASE STUDY: ANTAXETA IRRATIA

Background to the language policy of Antxeta Irratia

Antxeta was created in 2001 and from the beginning it was based on three principles

1. Antxeta is a cross border project that covers the area known as the Txingudi Bay in the lower Bidasoa River, an area belonging to 5 town councils and over two jurisdictions, France and Spain.
2. Antxeta is a generalist community radio.
3. Antxeta's main language of communication is the Basque language in an area where the main languages are either Spanish or French, depending on the side of the river (north/south).

Antxeta is a general content radio station, it is not a thematic radio where everything that has to do with the Basque language is covered but ignores other issues, Antxeta is a radio that covers every issue relevant to the community they are based on.

Also as a community radio Antxeta sees itself as a radio that is part of the community, a community that is trying to build bridges/nexus across both sides of the mouth of the Bidasoa River. This is a community that does not see the river as a border but rather as a link *"and we see the Basque language as the glue that joins both sides together"* (Aitziber Zapirain, station manager).

From the very beginning Antxeta Irratia had a very clear language policy in an area linguistically heterogeneous and divided between two administrations and two legal situations.

In the area north of the Bidasoa River, Hendaia, Biriatu and Pausu, French is the main language and the Basque language has not official recognition. It is an area where most children are educated exclusively through French. To that we need to add that in the last 10 years a large percentage (close to 40%) of residents of the north side of the Bidasoa River have come from the South bank of the river. In the south of the Bidasoa River, Irun and Hondarribi, the main language is Spanish and the Basque language has official recognition. In this area most children are educated through Basque.

And there is also a discrepancy between the level of knowledge of the Basque language of the audience and the use of it on a daily basis, especially in the area south of the Bidasoa River where the level of knowledge is much greater than the level of use.

In relation to the media landscape of the area of coverage it is important to point out that close to a 100% of the media offer is either in French or Spanish.

From a socio-economic point of view the area has population from all socio economic strata.

Why the decision to broadcast in Basque?

That was a decision taken from the very beginning and the result of a debate that meant that Antxeta was created as a station in Basque and later another group created a bilingual station, Irulegiko Irratia that combines Basque and French Languages.

Before Antxeta was created in this area there was no other media that produced their output in Basque and in the station manager's (Aitziber Zapirain) words, *"Basque speakers should have the same right to receive the information in their mother tongue as the speaker of the majority languages"*

It is a reality that in the Basque Country there are very few bilingual radio stations, there are radios in French or Spanish that will say the odd word in Basque, but proper bilingual stations are very rare. In this situation as

explained by Aitziber Zapiain *"from a socio-linguistic point of view Antxeta was created as a breathing space, it became a reference point where people can listen to or call into in order to get information in Basque"*

Could we say that broadcasting in Basque is a political decision?

Agus Hernan, funding member of Antxeta Irratia, answer to that question is clear *"yes, of course, I like to see it as part of our DNA. We see Basque language as an integral part of our project that informs all other aspects of the radio."*

But the decision to work in Basque language had its own consequences for a radio, especially in an area where most of the media content is produced for non-Basque speaking media. The difficulty to get contents in Basque forced Antxeta to take certain decisions when confronted with the impossibility to cover certain issues when the protagonists were non Basque speakers (especially on live programmes) or the need to voice over regularly (pre-recorded content). This situation made Antxeta re-think some of their initial policies in terms of exclusive use of the Basque language and allow the use of other languages as to preserve other one of their main principles, the fact that they are a generalist radio.

Change (evolution) of language policy

Antxeta arrived to a situation where they had people willing to be part of the radio project but this was not open to them because of the language policy. At the same time, their regular listeners would not have understood how a radio with such a clear language policy in favour of the Basque language would broadcast at maximum audience times large parts of their output in other language than Basque, so they decided to include the content produced in other languages at a non-peak time, that is between 10 and 11 pm. That slot has been occupied by programmes in Spanish, French, Romanian, Arabic and it is open to other languages.

Also there are other circumstances where other languages other than Basque have been included. As an example it could be mentioned the elections broadcasts when non-Basque speaking candidates would have regular access to the station, or another example would be the sport programmes where sometimes the protagonist could be a person who cannot express him/herself in Basque.

On a day today basis the station has evolved from a content produced exclusively in Basque, with no inclusion of any other language, to a stage where other languages (Spanish and French) have started to be included sometimes in the news. But in those cases, as Aitziber Zapiain points out, *"there will be a voice over or the presenter would explain before or after the piece what it was said in Basque language"*.

Another aspect that in some way forced the evolution in linguistic terms of Antxeta was the fact that seeing itself as a community radio, it is part of their ethos to give voice to those that generally have not access to the media, and among those citizens without voice there are non-Basque speakers, such as Romanian, Arabic speakers, migrant women... that made Antxeta open an space for new volunteers from those communities to take part in the project.

Current situation

The percentage of broadcast time in other languages other than Basque could be not higher than of 5 or 10%. In the case of programmes delivered in a language other than Basque, Antxeta has decided to open a slot at 10 pm. It is not a prime-time radio time and as Aitziber Zapiain explains "there are some presenters of these programmes that consider that it is not the most suitable time, but we try to explain to them the nature of the radio and try to make them understand that Basque is a language that is in a situation where it needs support"

With, at one time or another, up to 60 volunteers, the 10 to 11 pm time slot has been occupied by programmes in French, South American Spanish, Romanian, Arab and Brazilian Portuguese.

Antxeta is aware that many of the migrants living in their catchment area, and originally from countries such as Nicaragua, Senegal, or Romania, were not aware of the cultural realities and language diversity of the area where they were settling down themselves. For that reason the presenters from the new communities are encouraged to include in their programmes words in Basque from the very beginning. And from what Agus Hernan tells us the reaction to this language policy it is not homogeneous and in many cases the different attitudes depend not on the country of origin but on whether *"they have children or not, or if they have regularised legal situation or not"*.

The voice of the a non-Basque speaker volunteer, Claire Dutrillaux

Claire knew of Antxeta but she perceived it as a radio station in Basque where she could not see a space for her, as a French and Spanish speaker. The existence of a time slot where she could collaborate facilitated her participation. Claire was aware from the very beginning of the idiosyncrasy of Antxeta and the importance the project gives to the Basque language, what helps her to understand that the slot dedicated to her programme is not one of the maximum audiences.

The economic support for integration offered by the French State helps to carry out projects in a station that Claire thinks has already a predisposition to include in its project.

We could say that the fact that the working language of the station is Basque is seen by Claire as a barrier for her full integration in the project, but a barrier that she understands *"Basque people have to resist existing. If they want their culture to survive, they have to take care of their language, so it is very important to give to people possibility to listen to Basque radio. There are many people who everyday they have an obligation to speak French, but they are Basques... so the radio for many people is the only possibility to listen to their language"*

Recommendations

After talking to those involved in Antxeta it is clear that the project sees itself as tool to encourage and promote the normalisation of the use of the Basque language in all areas of life. The area is linguistically divided between Spanish and French speakers and Basque is the language that could be seen as a common language. It coexists with other two languages spoken by millions of people and supported by a huge media output, which makes Antxeta's management wary of introducing other languages in a large scale, as it is the only local station in the area that broadcast in Basque.

Another important element to take into account is that most of the newcomers to the area are unaware of the language diversity of the area and in many cases they are already speakers of either Spanish or French before they arrive, because they come from Spanish or French speaking areas or because they have studied those languages.

We believe that Antxeta should establish a distinction between Spanish/French speakers and new-comers from other areas with other language characteristics and approach them. There is no data available about the number of migrants from Arabic speaking countries, or Romanian, Polish, Eastern European, Middle Eastern or Far Eastern countries.

The fact that Antxeta has already established a time slot (even if off peak time) it is an start but this is mainly used by (Latin American) Spanish or French speakers, so the next step we consider should be taken would be to

try to approach other linguistic communities. If this is done, always taking into account the three funding principles of the Antxeta project - cross border/community/Basque Language - it would avoid future misunderstandings. The integration of new communities into Antxeta should be seen by them as a step to understand and get in contact with the Basque language. This would be beneficial in the long run for all as it would help the new communities reconsider the idea that French/Spanish are the only languages that they need to communicate and develop their social/work life, a concept that it would be much more difficult to change at a later stage.

The encouragement to use Basque words from the very beginning, the availability of help by translating basic sentences, the inclusion of the groups in social and cultural events are ways to facilitate the inclusion of this new communities in a way where they will see themselves as part of the host community while seeing the Basque language as a welcoming tool that will facilitate their integration rather than a barrier.

As a final comment we will like to encourage Antxeta Irratia to keep working to achieve their longer term goal of facilitating *"the volunteers that come from areas with minority languages like South America to produce their programmes in their own minority languages"*.