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Basque and Gael speaking radio journalists: background and work patterns

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Abstract:

Radio studies have been very much sensitive with broadcasting movements established by small communities giving voice to those media that escaped from powerful national broadcasting companies. At the present time, there are radios created within influential communication companies that still maintain their differential nature. These media address its audience in a non-dominant language without underestimating their professional journalistic work patterns. In this paper we have studied Euskadi Irratia (EITB), the Basque language public radio station, and BBC Radio nan Gaidheal, the Gaelic language public radio station. Thereby, the main focus has been made on the flair and skills of these radio journalists, which have lead to establish characteristics of the XXI century's radio journalist profile working within a minority media scope. A qualitative approach to the issue has enabled as to conclude that despite the minority nature of the Basque and Gaelic language public radios, the way its journalists deal with the everyday content output reveals a sense of professionalism that equals the one of dominant language media. These radio journalists' perception is that their journalistic crafts and skills are sufficiently qualified as to work in any other Spanish or English speaking media.

Keywords: Euskadi Irratia, Radio nan Gaidheal, journalists, radio

Conducting research on the profile of journalists can incorporate different types of analysis. One of them is examining journalists through their professional standards. In this way, the formal education of the news-people will be of central interest as well as their attitudes and moral ethics and values within their everyday working life routines. Based on the sociology of work and occupations studies of the time, Americans McLeod and Hawley (1964) established the indicators that would measure the professional orientation of journalists. The pioneering survey obtained a dignify acceptance among a vast majority of the academics on the field and similar analysis were carried during the following years concluding that: journalists with a high professional orientation level look after the professional ethics and value of information; are in favour of the specialization of different knowledge areas (science, economics, social matters, and so on); and they circumvent the excessive influence of their sources of information (Pollard, 1984; Nayman, 1973); so much for journalists located throughout North America and Canada, since each area of the world experiences its own particular situation. A study on the Pacific Islands journalists profile (Layton, 1995) for example demonstrated that although overall journalists were found to be well-educated, middle-class young people comparing to the remaining population, regional and national distinctions were obvious: While in Melanesia journalists show to be high-educated indigenous and male, in Polynesia were less likely to own university degrees.

Following the latter line of study, it should be said that employees on the media can also be studied from a sociological viewpoint, that is, the one that referred to their social parameters. Thus, this standpoint becomes crucial when the working tool of a group of journalists' is a minority language. As we have seen on the study about Pacific Islands' professionals, journalists were linked to their own different identities; that will ultimately have an effect on their media output. Then, it can be state that it is vital to analyse the sociological elements of a group of journalists' which will lead us to get an insight on their identity, which will be tightly related to their work patterns and skills too. Indeed, one of the central elements of national identity is language (Edwards, 2009; Fishman 1989), as it is by verbal communication how we share our identity with others (Clément, Baker, Josephson and Noels, 2005). Language is one of the main resources when constructing and reproducing an identity (Sheyholislami, 2010) and national identities exist and are mediated by a discourse that is shaped in the language of a particular community.

Certainly, mediated communication is the most important form of communication between cultures (Barnett and Lee, 2002). The media are able to develop the use and awareness of new identities which may involve different languages, whilst creating production and consumption patterns which demonstrate cultural distinctiveness. Therefore, it can be said that media consumption is at the heart of identity construction (Bly, 1996; Kellner, 1995; Kroker and Cook, 1988; Willis, 1990). Concurrently, the media turned out to be an essential tool for transmitting discourse to a mass audience, since they can empower the weight of a language within a society (Fisk and Hartley, 2003). However, it is essential that the group of professionals in charge of producing communication through the mass media have sufficiently developed journalistic terms, a field that in fact shows deficiencies in some of the European minority language media (Zabaleta et al., 2008). In this paper we would like to establish some of the issues concerning the quality of the language used in two minority language radios and their journalists' approaches to them in their everyday working life. It must be taken into account that regional or minority language speakers living within a society have often been marginalised. It was not until the late 20th century that minority languages began to be promoted and tolerated as equals to dominant ones (Wright, 2007).

Case studies: Euskadi Irratia and Radio nan Gaidheal

Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB), the Basque Public Radio and Television Corporation, was created at the beginning of the 1980s as a result of the Basque Autonomous Community's right to "regulate, create and maintain its own television, radio and press, and, in general, all the social mass media for the fulfilment of its aims" (Organic Law of 18 December 1979). Nowadays, EITB is formed by four companies: EITBnet, S.A. (Internet Company); ETB, S.A. (Television Company); Radio Vitoria, S.A. and Eusko Irratia, S.A. (both radio companies). These companies manage the group's different media in Basque and Spanish language. Eusko Irratia S.A. is the one in charge of the management of our main object of study that is Euskadi Irratia, the only Basque-language public radio and the one which more listeners' assembles among the rest Basque speaking radio stations.

The first media owned by the Group was Radio Vitoria. Created in 1934 during the Republic, the Spanish language station became part of the property of the Basque Government in 1981 after it bought it to Vital Kutxa bank. However, the first medium created under the law that established the Basque Public Radio and Television Corporation (May 1982), was Euskadi Irratia, created on November 1982. The first entirely Basque-speaking channel had as predecessors the Popular Radios of Loyola and San Sebastian (Agirreazkuenaga, 2009) which began to spread bilingual (Basque and Spanish) radio programming during the last decades of the Francoism. Indeed, the Popular Radio of Loyola proved to be a key figure in the formation of professional Basque speaking radio journalists, as well as on the creation of new journalistic concepts and forms of expression that the language would need to cope with the modern world. Moreover, at the time when the Basque public radio was launched, besides of the lack of professionals there was the question of the usefulness of the Basque language, that is, whether the language was sufficiently developed as to be able to use it equally to inform on the Sunday's football

match as about last European Union's agreement. In this first period speech-based and music programmes fill the airtime, but as it has been demonstrated in recent years, broadcasting hard news in Basque language has been one of the main challenges of the radio channel.

In March 1996, Euskadi Irratia's new headquarters were established in the Miramon Park in San Sebastian, with fully digital facilities that integrated recording, editing, broadcasting and archiving digital information systems. In October 2008, the Basque Public Corporation changed its Internet corporate strategy and integrated its media WebPages -including the one of Euskadi Irratia- in www.eitb.com new web site. The design of this latest site would prioritize multimedia content and citizen participation. Thus, the Basque media group followed the BBC single-brand model -www.bbc.co.uk- and thus, it placed Eitb.com as the main identification symbol of the group in the Net.

BBC Radio nan Gaidheal, the Gaelic Public Radio, was founded in 1985 within BBC Scotland, the branch of the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) in charge of producing content specifically for the Scottish nation. Like Euskadi Irratia, Radio nan Gaidheal did not start from scratch. The previous attempts to establish Gaelic language radio services came by the hand of BBC Radio Highland in Inverness, which began broadcasting in 1976 on VHF, and BBC Radio nan Eilean (www.bbc.co.uk/alba). Those endeavours helped to establish news programmes that are still on air as "Aithris Na Maidne" and "Aithris an Fheasgair", the morning and afternoon news programmes respectively. The Gaelic language radio was expanded in 1996 (Cormack, 2004), and nowadays Radio nan Gaidheal's leading programmes are the two previously commented newsreels as well as its music programmes, "Rapal" and "Crunluath" amongst others.

Regarding the audience of these radios, it is not surprising to find despairing taking into account the socio-linguistic differences in both nations. Euskadi Irratia reaches 83.000 listeners per week (EGM April 2010-March 2011) -27.6% is the number of Basque speakers (779.788 people out of 2.829.750 people living in the whole Basque Country) (*Soziolinguistika Kusterra*, 2001). Radio nan Gaidheal reaches approximately 44.000 listeners per week -1,2% is the number of Gaelic speakers (58.652 people out of 5.062.011 people living in Scotland (UK Census, 2001).

In this study we will settle a pattern that, base on specific journalistic aspects, attempts to establish comparisons between radio journalists working in minority language media. Similarly, referring to the general title of this conference, in this paper we will comment on the evolution that has occurred on the journalists reporting on a minority language. Likewise, we will also be addressing media convergence processes which, in one of the case studies, have served to establish an economically efficient journalism.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology has been applied employing in-depth interviews as its main tool. This methodological approach studies the Basque and Gael radio journalists' crafts and skills from an oral perspective, which leads to the establishment of new, unpublished sources. Nevertheless, in addition to oral sources other type of data lying on archives or written sources have also been used. Equally, methods derived from ethnography (Murchison, 2010) have been applied especially when carrying out observation practices among Euskadi Irratia and Radio nan Gaidheal main newsrooms. The *in situ* observation stage has been of great significance in order to design strategies and questionnaires that would abet us in obtaining our goals.

When establishing the journalists' sample, we decided to move away from quantitative methodologies opting for a smaller but much pertinent sample. The interviewed professionals, twenty in total, were chosen depending on their post and time spent on the medium.

This research fits into a larger PhD project, and below we can observe the steps that have been followed for data acquisition:

- Linguistic and sociological study of each media's location.

- Understanding both radios media production processes (administrative structure, internal journalistic structure, programming, and so on).
- Contact and formal meeting with both stations chief editors.
- Contact, meeting and interviewing both radios staff.

Criterion for the establishment of particularities and commonalities

A number of research papers on minority media languages have examined the specific circumstances of a medium located in a specific environment. These studies are very enlightening when it comes to raising questions about the implementation and development of these media as well as the kind of journalist working there. Besides, there are also studies that take into account the development, knowledge and use of minority languages among different European media (Zabaleta et al., 2008).

Indeed, studies comparing media and journalism in different parts of the world have notably increased (Zabaleta, 2010), although there is still disagreement on its validity and value arguing that this type of research incorporates an inherent statement of some sort of universalism and Western bias (Joseph, 2009). Recently, comparative studies on minority language media and their relation with governments linguistic policies have also been developed (Kelly-Holmes, Moriarty, Pietikainen, 2009).

In this study seven variables have been taken into account to establish the profiles of two minority language radios' journalists. Firstly, we looked at the different generations that come together in both newsrooms. Assuming languages and identities are living aspects of a society, it is interesting to be acquainted with the thoughts of professionals belonging to the same culture but at the same time to different historical periods. In both cases there are quite young newsrooms, around 35 years old on average. The age difference refers to the radios' different epochs as well as to the diverse perspectives on the evolution of the journalistic language on the same medium. This comparative element helps us to establish how far apart are the self-image perceptions of the journalists belonging to different times of the history.

The professional experience of the staff is another unit for discussion and comparison. This element may seem surprising and even irrelevant to those who only think about mainstream media in majority languages. However, it is a crucial question in our two case studies, since journalism university degrees in these two lesser-used languages did not begin to develop until the 80s and 90s and therefore, the first professionals responsible for the functionality of the radio would probably come from different fields of study. This factor would also allow us to notice the criteria followed when hiring professionals for minority language media, what is praised and what downplayed: "Many people used to think it was enough to get a job because you have the language, whereas you would never go to join any other broadcasting network just because you spoke the language [...] My time in recruiting for a long time is that we have always looked for that extra knowledge. They may not have the experience but if they have the interest and if they consume the media and are aware of, then you can teach media skills" (Marion MacKinnon, Managing Editor of BBC Radio nan Gaidheal).

Furthermore, we wanted to define the different professional practices carried out in each newsroom. The creative routines and sources of information used by journalists' mirrors the medium's personality, as well as its capacity to offer relevant programming and information. The daily life of journalists has been the subject of numerous investigations (Domingo, 2008; Tuchman, 1978; Deuze, 2001) but few of them consider the situation of a professional working within a minority media scope. But, it must be underlined that the chances of finding relevant sources in a minority language are lower than in a dominant one. What is more, their everyday working life discussions would involve the lack of direct witnesses that would speak the language correctly, the excessive use of clips on the dominant language (English, Spanish) or the correct combination of local, national and international news.

Besides, journalists' routines also vary significantly depending on the degree of media convergence established in each medium. One of the main challenges –of today's media corporations –some of them have already achieved, for example, BBC Scotland– is to create integrated content and newsrooms. Nevertheless, the convergence foster in minority language media is often driven by economic pressures, that is, by a necessary to adapt to a reduced budget; this is the case of the Gaelic language journalists who need to produce news for the radio but also, from 2008 onwards, for their television counterpart.

Moreover, studying the programming is also interesting since it can show the type of audience to which the radios refer. Indeed, as these radios are producing contents for a small community –comparing to the community belonging to dominant languages–, one can assume that they programming reflects a homogeneous audience. However, including in its news not just local but national and international stories as well, suggests that practitioners of these stations do not want to exist as a pure traditional community-attached radio, an often attributed personality to radio in minority language (Cormack, 1993).

Another of the turning points refers to the self-image of these journalists. We consider vitally important to observe the journalistic self-esteem of these professionals that work in the field of minorities. Considering the short life of Euskadi Irratia and Radio nan Gaidheal so far, 30 and 27 years respectively, it is worth paying attention to the perception that these professionals have of their work: If they feel that their work is necessary for society, if it helps in some way, if it is performed rigorously or, conversely, not having much competition results in a less rigor product, and so on. The assessments they create of themselves comparing to their counterparts working in dominant languages, show us the degree of professionalism inherent in each version; thus, this point is used with a hidden aim that is establishing the perceived degree of professionalism.

The professional challenges of Euskadi Irratia's and Radio nan Gaidheal's journalists seemed interesting to include in the study after observing the differing views involved in each newsroom. We believe it is quite relevant that while some work is firmly committed to a more activist point of view –to save and develop the language and culture–, others would not mind to leave the station to work in the dominant language media. Sometimes it will also appear that those working in minority language media are living a much relaxed life as a result of working in a less competent market; this will once again depict different type of profiles from those develop din other type of media.

Results and conclusions

This study is embedded in a larger research in which data will be obtained from both quantitative and qualitative methods. This paper seeks to share data related to the qualitative methods, in fact, the section that provides more meaningful data to access a more detailed profile of radio journalists in minority languages.

Generation division is evident in both cases. On the one hand, nowadays Euskadi Irratia joins together three type of contemporaries: Journalists coming from the Popular Radios that were established during the last stage of the Francoism (Agirreazkuenaga, 2009) and although did not own any journalism title, they did bring professional and linguistic knowledge acquired in the Popular Radios; professionals that began to work on the channel in the middle of their university studies, either in journalism in Basque language or Basque Philology; and finally, the young professionals that having studied journalism in *Euskera*, enter the channel as trainees and generally stay as news speakers. Overall, the newsroom mostly consists of the second generation, that between 30 and 40 years old that own journalism or Basque Philology degrees and have spent more than 10 years in the medium. On Radio nan Gaidheal two generations have been distinguished. In this case the prevailing one is the second, consisting of professionals with university studies mainly in Celtic Studies or English literature, and with more than 10 years of experience in the field. In both cases the principal element that differ the discourse of some contemporaries from others is the prospect towards the language. Nonetheless, there is a slight difference among both cases: In Radio nan Gaidheal people belonging to the older generation make special emphasis on the

impoverishment of the language in terms of grammatical and lexical problems. In Euskadi Irratia, however, dissatisfaction stems from the lack of imagination and easiness that the language suffers on radio: "We should enjoy ourselves more. We need to work more on scripts writing and learn to have fun with our listeners" (Julian Beloki, Euskadi Irratia's weekly cultural programme's main presenter).

Coming to the production routines, for both journalists the first contact with the day's news comes from the computer program (for example, ENSP), and after, reporters from each newsroom come to the scene to collect first-hand sources of information. In both cases the major difficulty results in finding relevant testimonies on the language. Here both radios professionals agree that sometimes they feel forced to use clips in the dominant language, either because of the lack of time for translation -Euskadi Irratia-, or due to the believe that the original clip will offer added expressiveness to the story -Radio nan Gaidheal-. In both newsreels the editors try to balance the amount of local, national and international stories, but Radio nan Gaidheal professionals are more aware of the importance of local issues. Therefore, each channel have different perceptions as to what makes them special comparing to the other media. Radio nan Gaidheal considers that is its localness what provides an added value to its radio service, and, consequently, keeps its audience closeness: "There's an emphasis on the local stories because that makes our program distinct" (Angela Maclean, Radio nan Gaidheal's news presenter). In Euskadi Irratia the progress made on being able to broadcast stories from any part of the world in Basque language is highlighted, since in this way people do not have to change the channel to hear the news from Iraq in their mother tongue: "

Euskadi Irratiak lortu du mundu osoari buruz euskaraz hitz egitea. Lehengo astean Ejiptoko istiluak egon direnean han egon da kazetari euskaldun bat eta horren berri eman digu handik bertatik. (Manu Etxezortu).

As for convergence, while Gaelic language public radio journalists also work for the Gaelic television of the same corporation, the channel BBC Alba (launched in 2008), the newsroom staff on Euskadi Irratia produce Basque language content only for the radio, although specific collaborations can occur but primarily with other radio stations. Hence, Radio nan Gaidheal's professionals have to adapt their journalistic crafts and skills for each media output and be able to select which news will be more suitable for radio and which for TV. This has an appreciable impact on the construction of Radio nan Gaidheal's personality, as while the television is responsible for providing a more modern Gaelic culture, it is understood that the radio should strengthen community identity, and therefore, offer a more traditional outlook of the culture.

The imagined audience appeared to be quite different for each radios professionals. While in Radio nan Gaidheal, regardless of the program, the pictured audience is composed by their journalists- parents or grandparents (traditionalist values vision), in Euskadi Irratia the perception of the audience changes depending on the type of the program, thus referring to a wider modern public. "We always imagine our potential listener in the car. It has little time and it needs to collect lots of inputs in that short time. Thus we try to produce a fast and dynamic programme" (Jaime Otamendi, Euskadi Irratia's afternoon magazine's main presenter).

Although in general the editors and journalists of both newsrooms (Euskadi Irratia and Radio nan Gaidheal) agree that the adopted journalistic practices are as professional as the ones on their counterparts working in dominant languages, in Radio nan Gaidheal are attitudes that allude to a greater professionalism on its counterpart Radio Scotland's news team; it is said that the latter's news directors are very specialized people on the direction on newsreels. Apart from news, on the features one of producers and speakers on Radio nan Gaidheal's everyday chat and sport afternoon magazine affirms that if he could, he would produce the same program in English, because his ultimate goal as a professional communicator is reaching the widest and most diverse audience he can. In this case we should consider whether the mere fact that a professional of this radio has this thought does not raise a satisfactory commitment to the station and the product it offers. It should be mentioned that this speaker uses English words and phrases continuously in his programme. When it comes to

journalists' professional challenges, the ones in Euskadi Irratia advocate more creativity, whereas the Gaels emphasize the importance of providing quality local news in order to ensure more and more listeners.

To sum up, the Basque and Gaelic journalists share some aspects of their profiles: The average are between 30 and 40 years old; they come from places where the language has been historically spoken and today is the home of most of the speakers in the language - these are the province of Gipuzkoa in the Basque Country and the Highlands and Islands in Scotland-, although in both cases the biggest cities -Bilbao and Glasgow- are being home of increasing speakers; they are native speakers and own university degrees in journalism or Basque/Gaelic studies; they feel their crafts and skills are just as professional as those performed on other radio newsrooms working in majority languages; the major difficulty they need to deal with in their everyday working life is the lack of relevant sources in the language (Basque/Gaelic); overall they feel that there has been a deterioration on the quality of the language they offer. Both groups of journalists assent that one of the greatest advances of the station has been to be able to offer international news in Basque/Gaelic and so the listeners do not feel forced to switch to another radio in Spanish or English anymore. At the same time, journalists' profiles diverge on overall perspective towards the strategies followed by the station: While Radio nan Gaidheal pursues a very community-attached radio profile, Euskadi Irratia want to look like a modern radio station, and its professionals are clear that they have to follow that path.

Euskadi Irratia's and Radio nan Gaidheal's last 30 years evolution has mainly focused on achieving one goal: Being able to provide all kind of news in their respective minority languages. However, these general-service radios will have to start looking for other goals so as to last on nowadays competitive media market. They would need to renew the programming and take a chance on the genre of fiction, a file by which minority language radios' may regain their unique self-expression.

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