Minority Issues in Europe: Purpose and Challenges of Minority Language Media

Cumulative Doctoral Thesis, Overview Text – Craig Willis[1]

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the literature on minority language media in multiple sub-themes. Based on review of the literature since the late 1980s, the theoretical framework is contextualised around a proposed three waves of research. Within this, a number of gaps in the existing research are identified and categorised under three thematic pillars in which the five academic texts are placed. Addressing research questions embedded in the themes of the non-speaking audience, digitalisation, and social media convergence, this thesis contributes to the academic literature on minority language media on several fronts. Moreover, it provides empirical evidence towards some of the core theoretical debates concerning the purpose and challenges previously identified.

Within the first thematic pillar, this thesis compares the viewing habits of public broadcasters' non-speaking audiences across five linguistic spheres: Basque, Catalan, Galician, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh. Findings point to the aspect of unique content in the form of either exclusive broadcasting rights or cultural/geographic proximity. A concentrated focus is provided through the second article in the thesis which scrutinises the strategies of the Scottish Gaelic and Welsh broadcasters in particular with regard to non-speaking audience. The second thematic pillar concerns digitalisation and includes an article in the context of responses to the Covid-19 pandemic across several minority language settings, as well as another piece which focuses on the digitalisation process of four minority language newspapers. Finally, the third thematic pillar is concerned with the changing trends of social media consumption and implications for broadcasters. Here, a commentary piece reflects upon the diverging audience trends alongside the convergence of institutional actors and individual content creators competing alongside one another on TikTok and Instagram.

Contents

i. Acknowledgements

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ii. List of Original Publications[2]

1. Willis, C. (2024) 'How do nonspeakers view minority language media: a comparison of Basque, Catalan, Galician, Scottish Gaelic, and Welsh public broadcasters', *International Journal of Communication*, 18, pp. 3752-3771. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21200

2. Willis, C. (2024) 'Minority language broadcasting beyond the core audience: the approach of BBC Alba and S4C to non-speakers of Scottish Gaelic and Welsh', *International Journal of Cultural Policy.* DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2024.2321256

3. Bober, S., & Willis, C. (2021). The Covid-19 pandemic and minority language media in Europe: the effects of spring 2020 lockdowns. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-17.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.2005074

4. Bober, S. & Willis, C. (2023), 'The digitalization of minority language newspapers: between long-term trend and pandemic-induced adaptation', *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, 20, pp. 66-92. https://brill.com/edcollbook/title/62139

5. Willis, C. (2024) 'Divergence and convergence: The implications of shifting media consumption habits on the field of minority language media studies', *Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies*, 16(1), pp. 117-127. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/cjcs_00100_1

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[2] Referred to in this text as pieces, i.e. Piece #1, in order to not create confusion when using terms like article, chapter etc.

1. Introduction

Sustaining Europe's linguistic diversity is a multifaceted challenge which has received conscious efforts for several decades but has a longer history of reaching its present-day situation. This is an issue for national state languages but even more so for regional and minority languages which do not have the strength of being a hegemonic language of a nation state. The majority of the twentieth century was characterised by a significant decline for many regional and minority languages, under pressure from nation-building projects (May, 2000) which had begun already in the preceding centuries but had taken on a new dimension in the context of standardised education systems and the emerge of mass media. The concern of speakers of minority languages was also expressed in relation to their social capital, with Bourdieu (1991) noting their diminished linguistic capital against hegemonic languages in the market – linked to an ongoing process of stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963). Whilst the period of the 1960s and 1970s began to see a rise in language activism towards linguistic human rights, coinciding with broader societal trends related to the civil rights movement in the US, it was not until the 1980s onwards that substantive legislation was introduced on national levels and then the European level in the early-1990s. Thus, the situation today is very much an ongoing process for all of Europe's regional and minority languages that are in a situation of language maintenance or attempting to reverse language shift – to use the sociolinguistic terminology.

A significant step for the protection of national and linguistic minorities in Europe was the introduction of international legislation enacted through the Council of Europe. The *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (ECRML) was signed in 1992, followed by the *Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM) in 1995. Both of these texts contained a number of areas where languages and their speakers should be protected, with media featuring prominently in both. The OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities (HCNM) was also created in 1992 and went on to issue a series of guidelines and

recommendations in a number of areas (Packer, 2001). At the EU level, European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages was founded as an NGO in 1982 and received funding from the EU until 2010 when budget cuts forced its closure (Gál & Hicks, 2010; Vizi, 2012, p. 150). During this time, the Bureau worked to raise the profile of the issues facing linguistic minorities in particular and benefitted greatly from EU support. Moreover, the EU also played a significant role for national and linguistic minorities during the accession processes of the 2004 and 2007 expansion which saw 12 new member states join the bloc. Following the adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria in 1993, accession to the EU has required a number of political, social and economic prerequisites which includes the protection of minorities (Hughes & Sasse, 2003). Although the extent to which this has been truly beneficial for minority communities has been shown to vary (ibid.; Smith, 2003; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007; Duina & Miani, 2015) the major critique of the EU in this regard is that there are very weak – or even non-existent – laws or regulations to protect or promote minorities once a state has become a member (Hillion, 2003; Sasse, 2013). Nonetheless, the EU does maintain a focus on diversity and claims to be concerned with the protection of minorities – particularly post-Lisbon Treaty and the coming into force of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2012* which contains an explicit mention of 'national minority' as well as 'language' in regard non-discrimination in Article 21, plus respect for linguistic diversity in Article 22. Yet, it – and the Lisbon Treaty more broadly – have been critiqued for not having a substantial difference for national minorities (Barten, 2015).

In many instances, minority communities have sought to achieve stronger protection within a domestic legal context. National level legislation began to emerge at varying timeframes depending on the state and circumstances in question. One of the most substantial cases being that of the regional and minority languages in Spain which were left in a stigmatised and marginalised position by the time of the return to democracy after the Franco dictatorship (Medrano, 1995). The autonomy statutes established after the new Spanish constitution had been signed

in 1979 and paved the way for legislation related to the previously banned languages of Basque, Catalan and Galician (Nagy, 2012). Likewise, the UK began to enhance minority language protection in the 1990s after signing the ECRML with subsequent domestic legislation such as the *Welsh Language Act* in 1993 and later the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act* 2005. All of this is to say, minority languages were being strengthened at many levels (albeit far from universally) in the period of the 1980s-2000s. One of the core goals mentioned in many of these texts was normalisation of the language, through usage and attitudes. Thus, the ECRML and many of the language acts provided a framework for the different institutions and sectors which needed to be incorporated in this plan – media being one of the central tenets alongside education and use in public administration. Media was also the focus of the OSCE's HCNM, with a set of *Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media* published in 2003. Media provision had existed in many spheres before the 1980s but it was often sporadic and underfunded – for example partial hours on a radio or television station. Newspapers was one area where minority communities were stronger but it was far from the broad functionality and plurality required to be a functioning media sector. The creation of broadcasting in Basque, Catalan and Galician was a landmark change in this regard, following the autonomy statutes (Cormack, 2000, p. 389). A full Welsh language television channel was created at a similar time in the early 1980s and was followed by channels in Frisian, Irish and later Scottish Gaelic. However, several decades on, media in regional and minority languages face existential threats and the precarity of the sphere is repeatedly mentioned in monitoring as well as civil society activism. A recent report   for the Committee of Experts (COMEX) of the ECRML, focused on the impact of digitalisation and development of new media – outlining a subsequent audience shift in terms of consumption habits but also acknowledging that the effects of a current 'third digital revolution' are still unknown (Jones et al., 2020). In a similar vein, the OSCE HCNM released its *Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age* in 2019,

stressing that new media presented both opportunities and challenges to regional and minority languages.

The purpose of this framework text is to therefore outline how the academic literature related to this context has developed in terms of the theory behind media in minority languages, demonstrate where there are unanswered gaps in the subsequent literature, and demonstrate how this PhD project addresses multiple aspects of this. Accordingly, an overview of the literature is first provided – framed as three waves of literature – starting with the first developments in the late 1980s up until the early 2000s, followed by a second wave which was embedded in the context of the emergence of social media and increased competition from globalisation and the mass expansion of (majority language) media provision in the private sector. This then leads into what the author posits as a third wave of literature emerging in the late 2010s, enhanced by the Covid-19 pandemic, and beginning to address issues related to a divergence of audience habits by generation, as well as a convergence of social media and traditional media at a much greater level than previously. A summary then leads to the identified research gaps and the subsequent research questions of concern to the PhD project. This is followed by a research design section, depicting how the research questions can be thematically divided into three main pillars of research in which the five output pieces are situated. The theoretical framework of the three waves of literature is then added to these pillars to provide a visual overview of how they all fit together. Finally, an extensive summary and discussion unpacks in detail the contribution the publications included for this PhD have made to the field and various subfields thereof.

2. State of the Art and Theoretical Framework

Initial literature engaging with the topic of media in minority languages began to emerge in late 1980s into the early 1990s, following the increased provision of media – particularly whole television channels. As stated in the introduction, Spain and the UK were two of the prominent contexts for this and there were differing

reasons concerning the timing. In Spain, the end of the Franco dictatorship provided the opportunity to institutionalise existing efforts at language maintenance and revitalisation, whereas in the UK it was the result of long-term, decade-long efforts of language activists to force central governments into action (Hourigan, 2007a). As a result, scholars concerned with the minority languages began to also focus on media as a tool of this, with the presence of minority language media in certain spheres leading to calls for it in others (Cormack, 2000). Moreover, this first-wave of literature which began with stand-alone articles on individual spheres was also followed by more comparative approaches in later edited volumes in the early-1990s and 2000s. Following this, the emergence of social media channels in the mid-2000s, most prominently Facebook and Twitter saw a new focus from scholars on the actions of individuals rather than institutions, using these outlets in minority languages, in what can be termed a second wave of literature. The other main factor shaping this wave was the financial crisis of 2008-2010 onwards which led to significant pressure for many spheres and subsequent budget cuts. These factors influenced the media sphere in majority language settings as well but the added precarity of often being the only outlet in a given language meant that minority language communities really faced an existential crisis for media in their language. The literature on media in regional and minority languages was therefore dominated by these topics for much of the 2010s. However, towards the end of the decade, new social media players were emerging such as TikTok and Instagram but also platforms providing serious competition to broadcasters – for example, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+. These trends brought the convergence with social media to a new level and this thesis argues that this constitutes a new third wave of literature on minority language media. The subsequent subsections unpack this wave by wave, seeking to provide a chronological and thematic outline of the situation in which the publications for this PhD can be understood.

2.1 The First Wave

The rise of greater provision of minority languages in media during the 1980s as well as the expansion of international legislation concerning minority languages and communities, shaped the emergence of a subfield of literature focusing on this phenomena. The empirical situation was therefore ripe for academic scrutiny and this was embedded in the broader context of language maintenance and revitalisation which had been propelled in the academic world by the pioneering work of Joshua Fishman within the field of sociology of language – closely related also with sociolinguistics. Fishman (1991) outlined many elements of a strategy towards maintenance / revitalisation of languages and sought to provide an evaluative framework through his concept of the Graded Integrational Disruption Scale (GIDS). He listed media in multiple of the 8 stages, albeit towards the final stages of a revitalisation strategy – differentiating between local and national media within stages 2 and 1 (ibid. pp. 105-107). Overall, Fishman expressed scepticism with what he saw as a "mass media fetish" by language activists (2001, p. 482), yet Cormack suggests this should not "conclude from this that media have no role to play whatsoever" (2004, p. 2). Despite of, or perhaps even partly due to, Fishman's scepticism, the field of minority language media grew significantly during the 1990s and 2000s.

At its core, most of the scholarly output from this era was concerned with the possible benefits of media provision and the broader purpose such outlets have in terms of direct and indirect effects to language maintenance and/or revitalisation (Gifreu, 1986; Riggins, 1992; Cormack 1998, 1999; Browne, 1996; Cormack & Hourigan, 2007). Linked to Fishman's main intention, scholars suggested the main purpose of media in a minority language was to contribute to maintaining or rescuing the language (Browne, 1996, p.59; Cormack, 2007, p. 7) – in consideration of the detrimental influence majority or mass media have had on minority languages historically (Riggins, 1992). Indeed, Cormack (2013) later expressed precisely why the topic must be embedded in language rather than media studies, suggesting a

difference from "mainstream media studies" and rather being "concerned with how media can be used to help languages" (p. 255). Moreover, Cormack suggests that losing this core focus will leave it as "simply a part of mainstream media studies that happens to look at minority languages" (ibid.).

Browne provided a seven-point overview of what the purposes of indigenous language media should theoretically serve, going beyond the core goal of directly effecting language revitalization/maintenance (1996, p. 59). Cormack later argued that these points could also serve as an overarching guide for minority language media more broadly (2007, p. 7). These points stressed the indirect effects media provision in minority languages may have on the community and their place in the broader society, including: increasing self-esteem, combating negative images; working for greater cohesiveness and political influence, providing a visible and audible symbol of indigenous society. The indirect purposes related to societal perceptions are logical given the extensive focus on the stigmatisation of minority languages within the field of sociology of language, with Fishman's seminal edited volume featuring several examples of this being a significant challenge linguistic communities (Bianco & Rhydwen, 2001; Garciá et al., 2001; Hornberger & King, 2001). Relatedly, around this time, the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity and Cultural Expressions* was adopted by the United Nations and included a suggestion that media "could play a major role in enhancing knowledge of diverse cultural expressions" and that states should take "measures aimed at enhancing diversity of the media, including through public service broadcasting" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). Similarly, the purposes posited by Browne overlap significantly with the work of Jones on the primary functions of television in minority languages, where she lists: communicative, cultural, economic, status and linguistic (2007, p. 190). The aspect of status and its economic implications have also been explored, with suggestions that the creation of Irish language broadcaster TG4 and the employment opportunities created around the audiovisual industry had helped increase

university enrolment in Irish and continues to be a motivating factor for leaners (O'Rourke, 2011; O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020, p. 115). Therefore, these broader aspects of the purpose of minority language media can be seen as efforts to demonstrate that Fishman's scepticism of mass media is not so fundamental when considering the wider societal impact. From the legislative perspective, in an assessment for the ECRML, Moring and Dunbar (2008) unpacked in depth the provisions concerning media, including in relation to the charter's main purpose and then analysing stances taken by the COMEX.

The other core topic in this first wave of literature concerned the challenges faced by communities and media outlets, both in the creation of a media outlet in a minority language but also ongoing in terms of sustaining the outlet. Scholars considered conditions for success or 'long-term survival' (Riggins, 1992, p. 5), putting emphasis on symbolic status, financial support and reaching a sufficient number of users to sustain the outlet (Cormack, 1998). The sustainability of an outlet of course varies from purely financial for those in the private sector, to levels of public support for publicly funded media. Browne, in another seven-point list, assessed elements that have 'accompanied the growth' of indigenous language media – again applied to minority languages more broadly by Cormack (2007, p. 8) – emphasising support from majority society (Browne, 1996, pp. 232-233). Here he states that this support can come from an existing state broadcaster or a political party but would also require professional support regarding training and equipment. Alongside this, he suggests majority media would need to provide 'favourable publicity' and 'prepare public opinion' for supporting the outlet – and ideally see majority audiences view the programmes themselves. This can even overlap with the broader public utilising minority language media as a tool for learning the language as a new speaker. Browne later expanded on this notion of majority support, exploring the necessity of perceived utility – i.e. a substantially funded public media outlet in a minority language would lead to increased public awareness and therefore scrutiny (Browne & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2013, p. 9). The authors

suggest that pushback is typically in regard to (low) number of users and (low) opportunities to use such a language. Thus, it is clear that a lot of emphasis is placed on the majority population / institutions, and this would likely vary depending on the size of minority language community and the existing institutions it already has. The aspect of the audience was picked up by Moring (2007) in his application of the theory on functional completeness to media. Here he argues that a sufficient level of institutional and genre completeness is required for an outlet to be successful in contributing to language maintenance and preventing further loss of speakers. This would include going beyond core genres such as news to also include popular and youth culture or entertainment more broadly. A failure to provide a sufficient level of genre completeness will then lead to audiences looking to majority (or English) language media instead, Moring contends (ibid., pp. 24-26). Towards the later years of the first wave, in the early-2000s, scholars began to consider the challenges arising from digitalisation. Indeed, Hourigan (2007b) predicted that increasing globalisation and online connectivity would lead to increased competition and thus recommended it ought to be amongst the 'key themes for future scholarship' in the study of minority language media (p. 253).

The literature constituting this first wave, emerging in the late-1980s and early-1990s, began to take on a comparative approach very early on. Concerned with several purposes, the core scholars evidently saw minority language media as a broader tool than just providing a service to an audience group yet were unable at that stage to judge whether their theories would hold in empirical situations. The first wave also considered the challenges facing outlets both in the initial phase of launching but also ongoing – again often considered comparatively. In line with broader trends in mainstream, majority media, the second wave was born into two acute challenges relating to competition and finance towards the turn of the 2010s.

2.2 The Second Wave

In a second wave of literature, the early-2010s saw a focus on digitalisation as well as the emergence of social media as an increasing phenomenon in the context of minority languages and academic focus. This was illustrated most prominently in an edited volume Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed (2013) which featured chapters usage of minority languages on Twitter and Facebook as well as chapters on traditional media. However, whilst this volume was framed in the context of convergence, it was rather concerning social media as a competition to traditional media rather than the two coming together. The early-2010s also saw an array of standalone articles analysing the use of minority languages on social media, initially Facebook and Twitter (Cunliffe et al., 2013; Dołowy-Rybińska, 2014; Nic Giolla Mhichíl et al. 2018; Soria et al., 2018; McMonagle et al., 2019) and later also Instagram (Belmar & Heyen, 2021; Jongbloed-Faber, 2021). Moring (2013) suggested that younger individuals becoming more likely to produce than consume content online in their regional or minority language. Interestingly, one of the core theoretical foundations later applied to these contexts was also embedded in the work of Fishman (2001), applying his concept of 'breathing spaces' to the context of social media – suggesting these fora provided an 'online breathing space' for minority language users (Belmar & Glass, 2019; Cunliffe, 2019). This analysis of social media was then very much focused on the core theoretical benefit of minority language media – contributing to language maintenance/revitalisation.

With regard to research on traditional media outlets during this second wave, scholars focused much more on challenges rather than purpose. The challenges arising from changing practices with new technology were the subject of comparative analysis which looked at traditional media outlets developing their own websites as well as the digital skills of journalists, finding a variance per sphere (Zabaleta et al., 2010; 2013). A temporal analysis of this period found that the number of outlets across ten minority language spheres with no online presence whatsoever fell from 29% to 9% between 2009-2016 (Ferré-Pavia, 2018),

demonstrating a clear shift in the activity of traditional media outlets. In the realm of journalism, Vincze & Holley (2013) analysed the identity of journalists working in four minority language daily newspapers, demonstrating a differentiation from majority settings and a conscious consideration of majority language speakers being part of the audience. Indeed, when looking at the audience perspective during this wave, Moring (2013; 2019) suggested that the challenge of providing content of interest to a younger audience was an existential threat to traditional media outlets – particularly those in the private sector, such as newspapers. A report for the Council of Europe also found similar diverging audience trends by age group, suggesting the adoption of new media over traditional media could grow over time to older age groups – further endangering traditional media (Jones et al., 2020, p. 60). Further research considered broader sectors of media in terms of format and genre, such as film and cinema, considering what role public policy could play in stabilising and nurturing growth in the sector (Manias-Muñoz, 2016; Manias-Muñoz, et al., 2017) – aiming to ensure a better level of genre completeness, in Moring's terms. In terms of effects on the audience, analysis of the case of Basque language television suggested that the creation of a second channel in Castilian had hindered the progress of normalisation of the minority language (Amezaga et al. 2013). The authors suggested that this left the Basque case behind other spheres in Europe in this regard. Limited research also looked at the exposure of minority language broadcasting in the context of non-speakers, in the case of Irish (Moriarty, 2009) and Scottish Gaelic (Mackenzie, 2018) – however the findings were limited to one segment of audience or genre. All of these articles can again be seen to focus on indirect effects of media provision on language maintenance and revitalisation, similar to the first wave.

The second core challenge area during this wave of literature concerned financial constraints to minority language media outlets. Whilst this did overlap with increased competition from social media and globalisation more broadly, it was also in the context of the post-2008 financial crisis. Zabaleta et al. (2019) undertook a

comparative analysis across ten minority language spheres, finding that the period between 2009-2016 led to a reduction in the total number of physical media outlets of 15% and a 14.6% reduction of journalists (pp. 242, 249). The authors suggest that economic and digitalisation factors 'took their toll' on traditional media outlets which require higher operational costs than digital-only versions (ibid., p. 252). Similar bleak findings were reported in the context of minority language broadcasting in Spain, with suggestions that subsequent funding crises had weakened public service outlets (Guimerà Orts & Bonet, 2020). Analysis of alternative business models for minority language media outlets to overcome such financial pressures, showed that community-based funding could supplement usual revenue streams (Zabaleta et al., 2017).

To summarise, the major trends in the second wave were the challenges arising from digitalisation, the emergence of social media and also the financial crisis of the late 2000s – all of which are larger societal trends beyond the specific context of minority language. However, it should be borne in mind that it is the precarity of the media landscape in minority language contexts which leaves it more vulnerable than majority language media when facing the same challenges – i.e. the loss of a minority language media outlet can lead to no media in that language, at the extreme end. The emergence of social media as a significant phenomenon for minority language communities was evidenced by the array of publications which began to appear in the mid-2010s onwards. This was much closer to the direct effects on minority language use and contributing towards reversing language shift, however when relating to traditional media outlets it was mostly approached from the perspective of competition rather than the opportunities which could arise. In this sense, there was a significant lack of focus on a true convergence of social and traditional media, i.e. the latter utilising the former for its benefit. Furthermore, the research in this second wave began to look further at indirect effects of the theoretical purpose, such as normalisation and identity formation – yet very much on the community itself rather than the broader society. Moriarity and Mackenzie

were the two exceptions to this, considering broadcasting in the context of the wider (non-speaking) community, yet their focus was restricted to limited groups and was not subsequently followed up in later literature.

The second wave came to characterise the first major external threats to minority language media, the dual challenge of increased competition in a global media environment – including social media platforms – intertwined with the precarious financial situation which arose post-2008. Theoretical elements therefore moved on from the early debates, highlighting the new contemporary challenges and in some part attempting to offer theoretical solutions to address these. The second wave was also characterised by having two sub-strands, scholars continuing to work on traditional media and a new group of scholars focusing on social media usage – with the two together in the Jones and Uribe-Jongbloed volume but not in convergence with one another.

2.3 The Third Wave

By the late 2010s, social media had been an impactful force for over a decade and a large percentage of society had adopted the trend in some form. Moreover, new platforms had emerged, technologies had advanced, and the habits of users were changing. Whilst Facebook remained a key player, its growth had slowed and it has become more of a platform used by over 35s (Ipsos European Public Affairs, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2021), whereas Instagram grew significantly towards the end of the 2010s and the last few years have also seen TikTok develop as a serious rival and move away from its original hype as a platform for posting dancing and singing videos towards also news consumption (Newman, 2022). Thus, the style of social media has moved increasingly towards audiovisual content rather than written content. Moreover, the start of the 2020s was hugely shaped by the global Covid-19 pandemic, with the lockdown periods forcing many sectors online and demonstrating the possibilities of technology to broader areas of society. It is in this

context which a third wave of minority language media research has arguably emerged, with several factors differentiating it from the second wave.

The first major difference concerns the interaction of traditional and social media. As mentioned above, previous literature had concerned the two as separate entities which both had their roles for users and saw social media as a competitor for user's time at the expense of traditional media. However, already in the mid-2010s, media outlets had begun to create institutional accounts on Twitter and often Facebook, but also YouTube – including minority language outlets. This was predominantly in the form of media outlets posting links to articles or content hosted on their own websites, or in the case of YouTube often just shorter clips of longer content. Literature began to emerge covering these factors, such as Díaz-Campo & Fernández-Gómez (2020) writing on the use of Facebook by regional broadcasters in Spain – including in Catalan and Galician. Moreover, Costecalde (2019) considered minority language broadcasters' use of social media for viewers to access their content. However, in the last years of the 2010s and into the early 2020s, media outlets began to also create their own institutional accounts on Instagram and TikTok as well. The difference here however is that some media outlets are also creating content directly for these platforms rather than just clipping existing content. In the research context, scholars have begun to assess the use of TikTok in minority languages, for example in Catalan (Tudela-Isanta & Milà-Garcia, 2022) and Welsh (Cunliffe, 2021), but again looking at individual users rather than institutions.

The longer-term effects of the challenges outlined in the second wave, both with regard to the financial constraints as well as the increased competition. The reduction of media outlets has been explored in recent literature on the concept of 'news deserts' (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2023). Communities with a lack of news sources have been said to be at risk of having no plurality of media, an aspect accentuated in the context of minority language. Relatedly, research has also considered these issues in relation to public service

media, showing how persistent underfunding across a long period is affecting the provision and quality of output (Campos-Freire et al., 2020). On the side of competition, the increasing dominance of global streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime has been analysed in the context of new domestic legislation being needed to protect regional and minority languages from this threat (Barreiro González, 2023).

In summary, these most recent publications have arguably formed the beginning of a third wave of minority language media research, characterised again by the broader societal trends relating to shifting media consumption habits and technological advances. The adaption of traditional media outlets to these challenges moves towards a true convergence of institutional actors competing directly with individual content creators on the same platforms – mostly prominently TikTok and Instagram. This has already begun to happen in recent years with streaming platforms, pitting minority language broadcasters in competition with global actors like Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+, which is again a dramatically under-researched aspect. These challenges for an already precarious and often marginalised media environment are certainly acute but there is also potential opportunity to exploit new channels and increasingly audiovisual formats. The roots of these trends lie pre-2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic accentuated and possibly sped-up the process, firmly cementing a new era of media which remains under-researched broadly but even more so in the context of minority languages. The task for academics working on minority language media therefore is to unpack these topics and examine whether/how some traditional media outlets have adapted and could provide models for others to follow.

3. How My Research Fits Within These Waves

Envisaging the body of literature on minority language media in three waves is something which developed during the process of developing the initial focus of my PhD research during 2020 and into 2021. Whilst, the third wave of research is obviously of most relevance to the current trends effecting minority language

media, there are also areas within the first and certainly the second waves which remain under researched. Accordingly, my research encompasses elements of both.

Regarding the first two waves, a significant focus lay on indirect effects of media provision in minority languages – falling into two categories, purpose and challenges. Whilst the first wave laid down an initial theoretical framework of these two elements, the second wave advanced these but also began to provide evidence to substantiate some of the claims through specific case studies. This included in relation to the points initially made by Browne regarding links to normalisation and majority-community audience consumption / positive attitudes. Yet, this remained limited to single case studies or genres. The two cases which did cover this, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, indicated that non-speakers do constitute some of the audience and indeed had a favourable attitude towards the channel (Moriarity, 2009; Mackenzie, 2018). Yet, it is clear that this aspect warrants a more holistic assessment, across different genres and time periods as well as ideally a variety of language settings. Accordingly, the first pillar of my PhD research aims to contribute to this research gap.

The updated challenges from the second wave can also be seen in the third wave, namely the challenge of digitalisation in terms of increased competition (including from social media) and the precarious financial situation – made worse by shifting business models. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns encompassed these two elements in a nutshell – an almost 100% digital context overnight, alongside a dramatic reduction in income and also content. Thus, a second pillar of my PhD contribution relates to the topic of digitalisation.

Finally, the third wave is also the focus of a final pillar in my PhD, concerned with the convergence of institutional and individual actors in the most recent trends of social media consumption. As unpacked in section 2.3 above, TikTok and Instagram have grown much more popular since the turn of the 2020s, particularly with under 35s, at the expense of Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter. Large media outlets such as the BBC began already in 2018 to create content specifically

for these platforms and it was seen in literature on certain minority language media cases that these outlets had begun to use Facebook and Twitter. There is a research gap therefore concerning the post-2019 context, framed also by the disruptive period of Covid-19 lockdowns.

The three pillars outlined above contribute to different research gaps within the existing body of literature on minority language media, including unanswered aspects of the first two waves as well as being embedded in the core topics related to the suggested emerging third wave. Whilst the timeframe may differ therefore, the central tenant of all three pillars falls under the indirect effects of media provision on language maintenance / revitalisation, and more precisely the challenges arising from the influence of broader factors – majority audience, digitalisation and social media trends – and the ability of minority language media outlets to adapt and maintain resilience in the face of external pressures.

In accordance with these identified research gaps, the following research questions can be constructed:

- *How do non-speakers view minority language media?*
- *How have minority language media outlets adapted to recent digitalisation trends, including in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?*
- *How are the changing social media trends affecting minority language media outlets?*

To comprehensively address these research questions, comparative approaches will be taken, covering cases considered of relevance and importance to each question. The following section details the research design implemented for this, fitting both within the thematic pillars suggested above as well as the three waves of research.

4. Research Design

The five pieces submitted for this cumulative dissertation are envisioned as falling within three broad pillars of research, aiming to address the three core research

questions outlined above. Moreover, these can be seen as spreading across the three waves of literature in terms of the topics concerned. Figure 4.1, below, depicts this and categorises the five pieces into the 3 pillars and across the 3 waves of literature.

Figure 4.1. Research pillars and their position within the waves of MLM research
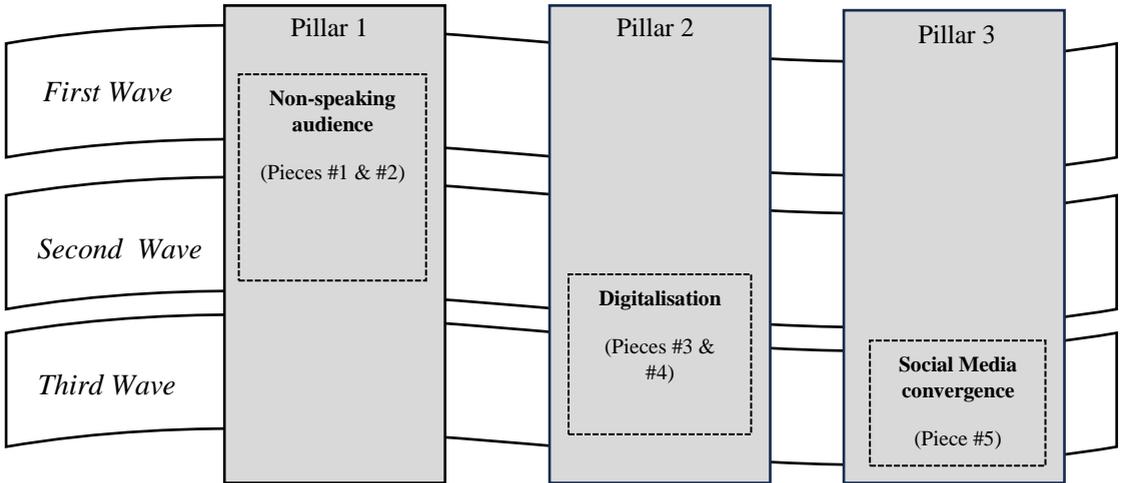
Notes: Author's own representation.

The first pillar, concerning non-speaking audience, focuses on the medium of broadcasting, in particular television. A core reason for this lies in the ability to comprehend content without language skills, unlike newspapers and radio – for the most part. Within the context of minority language television, the most prominent states to implement full channels in more than one minority language are Spain and the United Kingdom. In the former, regional broadcasting followed the Spanish Constitution 1979 and subsequent autonomy statutes, leading to the creation of TV3 in Catalonia and ETB in Basque, in 1982, followed later by TVG in Galician in 1986. In the UK context, a Welsh language channel was created in 1982 and was followed much later by a channel in Scottish Gaelic in 2008. The methodological approach to this comparison involves secondary data on viewing figures from the broadcasters as well as social attitude surveys which are publicly available, built upon with a series of expert interviews conducted with practitioners and scholars in each sphere. From this, two solo authored journal articles have been developed –

one covering the five cases and the second focusing in greater depth on the two cases in the UK.

Regarding the second pillar, the medium of newspapers was selected for assessing digitalisation for multiple reasons. Topically, it concerns a format that has been shown to be particularly vulnerable and affected by changing economic factors as well as media consumption trends (see Zabaleta et al., 2019). Secondly, it is the sole form of traditional media in the local context of the Danish-German border region and thus enabled me to work collaboratively with my colleague at the European Centre for Minority Issues. A comparative approach was taken, incorporating Flensborg Avis (Danish in Germany) and Der Nordschleswiger (German in Denmark) plus two cases in Spain, Berria (Basque) and Nos Diario (Galician). This allowed some continuity with the first pillar in terms of the broader setting (there are no newspapers in Welsh or Scottish Gaelic) and also allowed a consideration of cases with and without a kin state. In the process of this work, the Covid-19 pandemic took hold and shaped the discussions around minority language media – much like it did across all of society. In these circumstances, my colleague and I decided to consider the impact across a range of aspects related to minority language media, on a comparative level of 10 linguistic spheres.

The final pillar was very much forward-looking, concentrating on an aspect present to some degree in all of the previous work under the first two pillars. Already a factor in the early literature of the third wave at the turn of the 2020s, the Covid-19 pandemic accentuated the media consumption changes. It had yet to emerge in the context of minority language media research and thus I decided to approach it as a commentary piece, framed as future implications for the field. It was therefore based on broader data related to consumption trends in Europe and the US – particularly by age group – then linked to the context of minority language media. Such data in minority language contexts was not available at the time of writing.

5. Summary and Discussion

The five original publications (referred to as pieces; three journal articles, a book chapter, and a journal commentary) submitted as part of this cumulative dissertation were embedded in a few separate but overlapping areas of minority language media research. Organised under three pillars, relating to three overarching research questions, the pieces sit within the three waves outlined in section 2. Fundamentally within the theoretical framework of the purposes and challenges of minority language media, originally outlined in the first wave of research during the 1990s and early-2000s, the pieces offer evidence to untested aspects of the first and second waves as well as substantially contributing to the emerging third wave. This subsection will unpack the three pillars in more detail.

Regarding the first pillar, the literature review highlighted that amongst the theorised purposes of minority language media there was a gap regarding the known links to the wider community. My comparative article (piece #1) sought to address this in a broad manner, collating similarities of viewing habits in five linguistic spheres across the 40 years since the creation of the first channels in the early-1980s. The analysis facilitated a generalised conclusion based on the aspect of offering unique content, unpacked into two strands: exclusive broadcasting rights and content with a close geographic / cultural proximity to the audience. These were shown to apply to the five different cases, with near and far language distances, varying institutional set-ups and total audience sizes. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that this model of analysis could hold true in other settings – making it a potentially impactful work for the field. The second related article (piece #2) took two of the cases, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, in order to deepen the analysis and look more precisely at the strategy taken by the broadcasters with regard to non-speakers. This was again a novel piece in the field of minority language media, looking for the first time at whether and/or how broadcasters explicitly target their content towards non-speakers. In the case of BBC Alba, it was overtly explicit from the outset that they needed to pursue a 'twin-pole' strategy in order to fulfil a public-

value test – in a large part due to the limited number of Gaelic speakers. In the case of S4C, the strategy was much less explicit and had indeed shifted over time due to broader changes in circumstances. However, my analysis demonstrated that S4C does indeed target non-speakers of Welsh and that this has arguably increased over time, moving closer to the position of BBC Alba. It is the insights gained from the second case which offer the most plausibility to this strategy of non-speakers being transferable to other settings. There are multiple reasons for this, related to the ambiguity of the strategy as well as the demographic situation. Given the core mandate of minority language media to serve their speakers first and foremost, there could well be a backlash against an overt strategy to target non-speakers. Yet, it is evident that in an increasingly competitive audiovisual market it is harder to maintain audience sizes and it appears that S4C have increasingly sought to boost or maintain their audience through non-speakers. The contribution of my article (piece #2) therefore offers evidence of two different strategies for reaching non-speakers, applicable in different linguistic settings depending on the demographic size. Between the two pieces, a significant addition has been made to the literature around broader purposes of minority language media, filling a research gap which was outstanding from the first and second waves and therefore acting as a base for which further research embedded in the third wave of literature can build upon in the context of media consumption habits within the 2020s.

The second pillar of my cumulative dissertation concerns aspects related to the second wave of literature on minority language media as well as issues occurring in the third wave. Choosing to focus on newspapers in the context of digitalisation allowed the chapter (piece #4) to contribute to topics overlapping both waves, as newspapers had often been slow to react to digital changes – choosing to hold out with an ever-decreasing physical readership. During the research process, the context was greatly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and thus the article concerning this (piece #3) was borne out of this novelty. Indeed, to date it is still the only contribution to the field which substantially assesses the impact of the

pandemic on minority language media outlets comparatively. In that sense it greatly contributes to the literature but is also linked with past research looking at the minority language media outlets in times of crisis – previously this has been in relation to the post-2008 financial crises but also the ongoing digitalisation and globalisation trends. It is in this latter sense that the two pieces (#3 and #4) are closely linked, with the pandemic accelerating and consolidating existing shifts to practices of newspapers. The chapter (piece #4) compares four different newspapers from contrasting contexts, aiming to apply a most different cases approach. The analysis demonstrated that the resulting digitalisation processes / timelines varied considerably but were all leading to the similar outcome that they are managing to survive as outlets – not something that can be taken for granted, as the previous research has shown (for example, Zabaleta et al., 2019). In that sense, the chapter contributes significantly to the literature on minority language media, showing that there are several methods a newspaper can pursue in order to maintain or even grow its audience despite the significant challenges posed. It therefore contrasts much of the previous literature which had pointed a pessimistic future for printed press. In considering the role in which social media plays for such outlets, the chapter also offers one of the first examples of literature concerned with the convergence of institutional and individual actors on social media – a characteristic central to the suggested third wave of minority language media that I posited in the present overview text. The chapter was mostly concerned with Facebook and the use of newspapers to reach their audience through social media, also Twitter and Instagram to a lesser extent. However, this provided a link to the third pillar of my dissertation – concerned with shifting habits in the post-pandemic media landscape.

The final pillar is very much related to the third wave of research proposed above, emerging with the latest media trends. Pieces #3 and #4 both offered an initial insight into the consequences for minority language media outlets in a media landscape whereby social media has become a crucial tool for reaching one's audience. Accordingly, the commentary (piece #5) evidences the changing

consumption habits and argues that there is a divergence in terms of audience groups by age, alongside a convergence of actors on the same platforms. Framed as a piece directed towards minority language media researchers, the commentary concisely outlines the three waves of research mentioned above before providing evidence of the changing habits of media consumption in broader society. It is therefore the first academic contribution to theorise the implications that these latest, essentially post-Covid-19, trends could have for the subfield. Nonetheless, it does draw upon elements related to the other two pillars in my dissertation, particularly pillar 2 on digitalisation whereby social media is increasingly a tool for newspapers to reach their audience and they are also likely to be affected by this shift towards more audiovisual content. Therefore, this last piece (#5) is very much forward looking and intends to provoke subsequent research around the topics discussed and aid the third wave of literature to progress on understanding such topics and their implications on the field.

6. Conclusions

In terms of wider implications arising from all the topics in all three pillars, a few words can be said about how the findings can intersect with one another in the context of future trends and research areas. Pillar 1 was concerned with the non-speaking audience of broadcasters and Piece #2 in particular considered how this is very much a contemporary, ongoing topic for Scottish Gaelic and Welsh broadcasters. Programmes such as the S4C sub-brand, Hansh, demonstrate a clear link here with Pillar 3 given their primary mode of operation is now through TikTok and use such platforms to reach a younger and broader audience – including non-speakers or learners of Welsh. Moreover, Hansh is also an example of a brand which has successfully incorporated successful independent social media content creators / influencers into its programming – showing evidence of both the convergence and divergence factors discussed in Piece #5. Thus, there is certainly an overlap between the context of Pillar 1 and the trends of Pillar 3, with the articles included in this dissertation (Pieces #1 and #2) providing the historical groundwork for future

research to assess how minority language broadcasters can or do continue to attract non-speakers in their audience.

This last element can also tie in with Pillar 2, whereby the adaptation by minority language newspapers to digitalisation could provide new opportunities for broader audiences. On the one hand, embracing digital versions of newspapers and utilising social media channels can allow minority language newspapers/outlets to again reach audience segments which had moved away from consuming physical printed media – yet the shifting social media habits serve as a reminder that further adaptation towards other platforms might be necessary to sustain this. On another hand, increasing digitalisation and technological advances potentially opens the door to non-speakers – tying together Pillar #1 and #2. I have briefly explored this topic in a scientific blogpost (Willis, 2022), looking at how newspapers can be read through auto-translation both in the web browser but now also on apps and indeed through a smartphone camera and a translation app – thus suggesting that the model of BBC Alba (twin-pole audience strategy) could potentially work for a minority language newspaper, combining my work on Piece #2 and Piece #4 in particular. Thus, this strand can be seen as linking together non-speakers (Pillar #1) and digitalisation (Pillar #2) for a possible future research consideration in the framework of post-pandemic social media trends (Pillar #3).

Whilst the themes covered in this dissertation are not exhaustive in terms of topics forming the third wave of minority language media, they do cover some central aspects which section 2.3 outlined. I would therefore posit that the output of this cumulative dissertation enhances the field of minority language media studies on multiple, overlapping fronts, adding to the existing body of literature and laying a base for further input going forward.

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