

Digital Sustainability for Minoritized Languages Symposium

5th March 2026 saw the organization of an all-day interdisciplinary symposium on the theme of Digital Sustainability for Minoritized Languages, kindly funded by both the [Centre for Advanced Studies in Languages and Cultures](#) and the [MA in Applied Linguistics](#), and organised by Dr Isabelle Jouinot, Dr Anne Marie Devlin, and Dr Erin McNulty. The symposium's aim was to explore the challenges and opportunities for languages that are often referred to as minoritized, Indigenous, endangered, or lesser used in the age of the digital revolution. The symposium explored successes and difficulties within the development of digital technologies and the use of digital media across several language contexts: Scottish Gaelic, Manx, and Indigenous language contexts in North America. It focused particularly on comparing the affordances and constraints of recent and traditional technologies for the revitalization and reclamation of those languages by and for their communities, among different generations of speakers.

Our first speaker was [Prof. William Lamb](#), Personal Chair in Gaelic Ethnology and Linguistics in Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, who discussed recent developments in digital technologies for Scottish Gaelic, both from within and outwith the speaker community. Of particular focus was the development of Gaelic AI technologies, reconceptualised as Intelligence Augmentation [IA], prioritising the adaptation and endogenous use of AI by and for Gaelic speaker communities and connection and collaboration between them. Prof. Lamb's talk discussed challenges in developing AI technologies for Gaelic, including data sparsity and quality, the assumption that AI will 'save' minoritized languages, and the Anglo-centric structural and cultural assumptions underlying much of this technological development. These may be mitigated through better training data and benchmarking, the selection of specific models for different purposes based on research findings, and the use of competence tests with comparison to human participants.



Prof. Will Lamb delivering his talk

Notably, Prof. Lamb presented several successful projects which used AI technology to develop new tools for Gaelic speakers and researchers. These included the [Decoding Hidden Heritages project](#), which digitized paper-based transcriptions at a 96% accuracy rate, then used Transkribus to make these transcriptions available to the public to improve Gaelic speech recognition technology. Prof. Lamb is currently working on the [ÈIST \(Ecosystem for Interactive Speech Technologies\) Project](#), which provides speech recognition tools for Gaelic, including technologies such as highly accurate automatic subtitling for BBC Alba, improving accessibility. Overall, those projects highlighted the need for human engagement with the technologies for benchmarking, linguistic accuracy, transcription crowdsourcing, and verification of machine output.

The second speaker was Dr Erin McNulty, Postdoctoral Researcher in Applied Linguistics at UCC. She discussed particular opportunities and challenges around developing and using digital technologies for Manx, the extremely minoritized Gaelic language spoken by around 2200 people in the Isle of Man. Challenges included data scarcity, unclear and changing linguistic target models for speakers, and a lack of institutions, language planning and policy-making around digital developments, expertise, training, funding, and community input to oversee developments in Manx digital technologies. Dr McNulty also presented some examples of well-received digital

projects, such as the [Manx Corpus project](#), which aims to digitize all Manx written material from 1500 to today, and the [Unlocking Our Sound Heritage project](#), where archive specialists from the Manx Museum worked with the British Library to digitize and catalogue historical Manx recordings. More generally, Dr McNulty's research emphasized the importance of considering ethical issues linked to the impact of linguistic projects on speaker communities, including data collection methods and ownership, researcher-community collaboration, and ethical consent and benefits for the community members.



Dr Erin McNulty delivering her talk

Our final speaker was [Dr Kristin Dowell](#), Associate Professor of Indigenous Art & Film in the Department of Art History at Florida State University. Dr Dowell is currently in residence with the History of Art Department at UCC as a recipient of a Fulbright Scholar Award to Ireland in 2026. Dr Dowell has worked extensively with Indigenous language communities in North America, and discussed various developments in Indigenous digital media. This included a [Video Production Handbook](#) she originally developed for the Oklahoma Native American Youth Video Workshops and translated into Tibetan, Mandarin, and Irish, and which has been used and contributed to by colleagues in the Language Vitality Initiative at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution.

Dr Dowell also showcased digital media projects in the Cherokee context, including Emmy-winning [OsiyotV](#), an edutainment series that tells the stories of the people, places, culture and language of the Cherokee Nation, as well as providing [language lessons](#). In addition, Dr Dowell's talk highlighted important language reclamation and revitalization work being done by speakers of [Chickasaw](#), including transmitting the language to an emerging generation of young speakers, and telling the stories of the Chickasaw Nation and its people through the [ChickasawTV](#) digital platform. Dr Dowell also discussed the language revitalization journey of the Tolowa Dee-ni', Karuk, Wukchumni, and Kawaiisu tribes in California, told through the [Language Keepers](#) multimedia experience.



A poster of Dr Kristin Dowell's talk

Highlights from Dr Dowell's research are her close, bonding relationship built over more than 20 years of research with and for Indigenous speaker communities, the dedication of community members to saving and transmitting their languages to future generations, promoting visual sovereignty, and the creative impulse for language reclamation that more traditional technologies such as filmmaking can also support. The comparison with AI-related linguistic research opens possibilities for the transfer of ethical principles for conducting research with speaker communities using recent technological developments.

The day shed light on the challenges of sustainable digital development for Indigenous and minoritized language communities in both Europe and North America, but also showed how community-led digital projects can have important applications in language revitalization work. We hope this symposium contributes to conversations on how best to ensure the ongoing vitality and inclusion of these languages in today's

digital revolution. Overall, the event emphasized the importance of centring interdisciplinary research projects on language reclamation and revitalisation around the needs, well-being, interconnection, autonomy and overall benefits of members of the speaker communities, and working in close, human collaboration with them, including through the use of the innovative technology.