

An Analysis of Dual-Language Advertising Effectiveness in Ireland

An echo or a voice?



INTRODUCTION

This document highlights the findings from a research study into the effectiveness of advertising in the Irish language, following the introduction of the Official Language (Amendment) Act 2021.

The research aims to understand the real-world impact of running campaigns in both English and Irish languages. The analysis moves beyond surface-level metrics to uncover the complex interplay between language, comprehension, and cultural resonance.

It reveals several differences in performance, which point to a need for a strategic evolution in how Irish language advertising is conceived and created.



The context & our approach

This study forms part of a broader body of WPP Media research into the impact of the introduction of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021. Our ongoing WPP MediaTrack research monitors general recall and perception of ads in the Irish language, and by channel.

The research in this document is based on a selection of campaigns that ran in both the English and Irish language. The study ran across six separate nationally representative samples (n=800 per group), across three waves. In each wave, one group was shown the campaigns in the English language only; one group was shown the campaigns in the Irish language only.

Fieldwork was run via Bounce Insights in April, August and October 2025, in order to cover as broad a range of campaigns as possible. Campaigns were not limited to WPP Media clients.

"This research moves beyond simple compliance, providing the first strategic roadmap to understand the crucial difference between direct translation and genuine cultural connection."

Eimear McGrath
Research Director, WPP Media



Executive Summary

The central narrative is one of challenge and opportunity.

The Challenge

A widely-used direct translation approach results in Irish language ads being heavily dependent on their English counterparts for basic comprehension, leading to significant communication gaps.

The Opportunity

A highly engaged and receptive audience exists, particularly among proficient Irish speakers, who demonstrate exceptional likeability for Irish language creative.

The Imperative

To unlock this potential and advance the normalisation of the Irish language – a key objective of the Act – a fundamental shift is required from simple translation to 'transcreation', i.e., developing campaigns natively for the Irish language to foster genuine cultural connection and maximise impact.

Underlying Support

While our data shows challenges in understanding and recall for Irish language ads, the public's underlying support for the language in advertising is remarkably strong and consistent, indicating a readiness for more effective and culturally resonant campaigns.

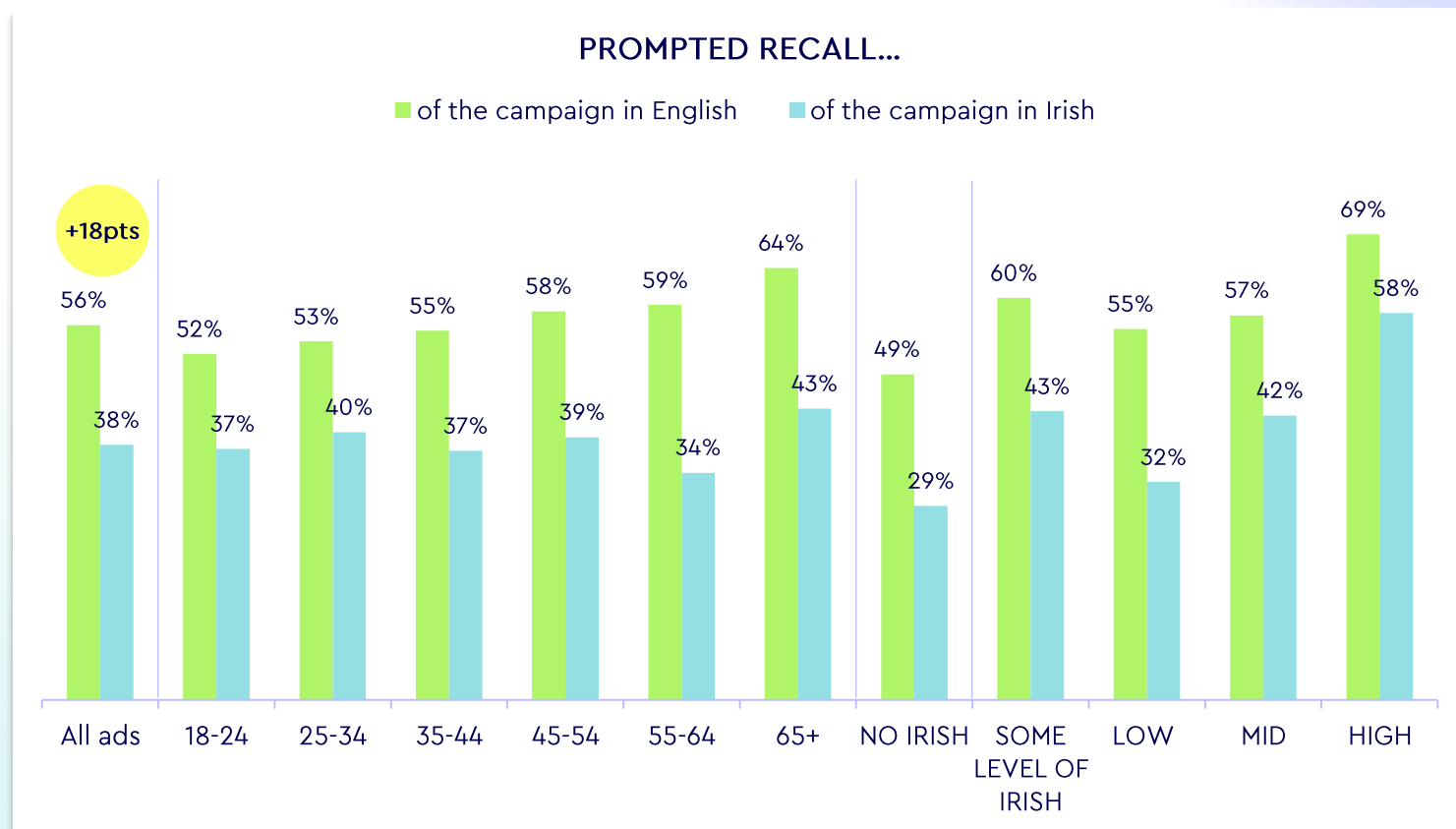
The Dependency Dilemma

Noticing the message

WPP Media's regular media tracker has shown a strong and increasing trend in the recall of Irish language ads in general, with the latest wave indicating that 57% of people recall seeing an ad in the Irish language.

However, the research in this document – prompted with campaigns – offers a more granular view. It reveals that the average recall for ads in the Irish language, when measured in this context, stands at 38%. Across our three waves of research, recall for Irish language ads is nudging upwards – 30% in wave 1, 33% in wave 2 and 38% in wave 3.

There is an 18%-point gap in recall of campaigns in the English language compared to Irish. Considering the media spend and display requirements mandated by the Act, this difference in overall recall is not only understandable but also highlights the remarkable efficiency of Irish language advertising in achieving cut-through despite a significantly smaller share of voice.

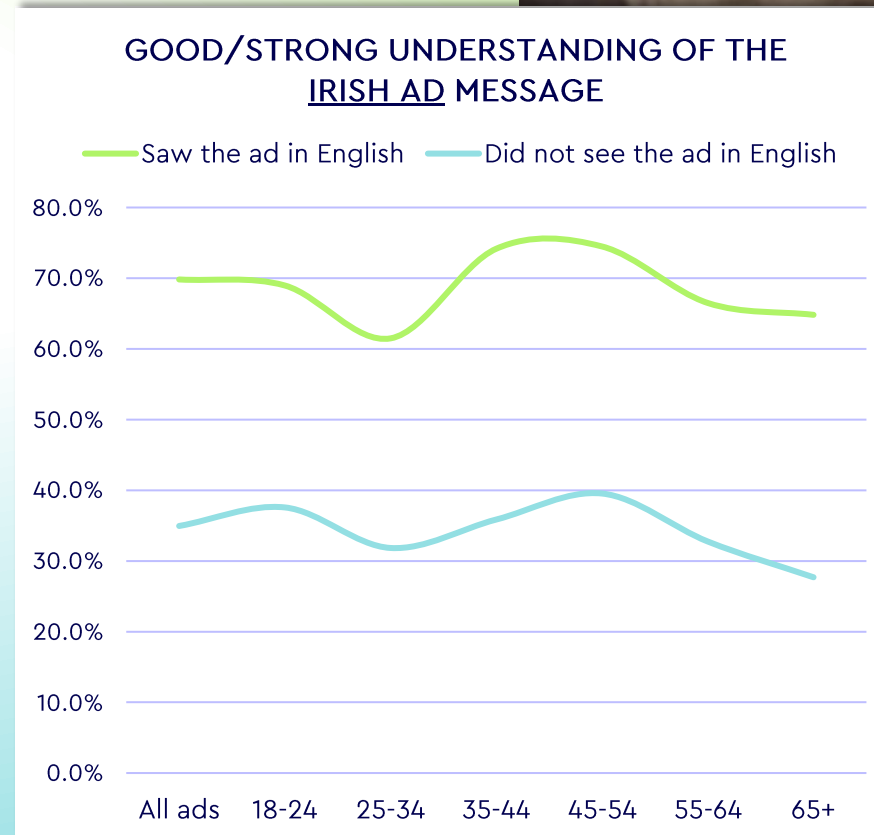


A gap in understanding

The single most important and significant finding in this study reveals a 35%-point gap in understanding for Irish language ads. This gap exists between those who recall having previously seen the ad in English (without being prompted with the English ad in the survey) and those who had not seen the English ad.

- 70% of people have a good/strong understanding of Irish ads – and they remember seeing it in English.
- 35% of people have a good/strong understanding of Irish ads – and cannot remember seeing it in English.

This variance shows that for a majority of the audience, the English ad is not merely a parallel campaign but a necessary primer – **a key that unlocks the meaning of the Irish ad**. This reliance is consistent across all age groups, indicating a systemic issue rather than a generational one.



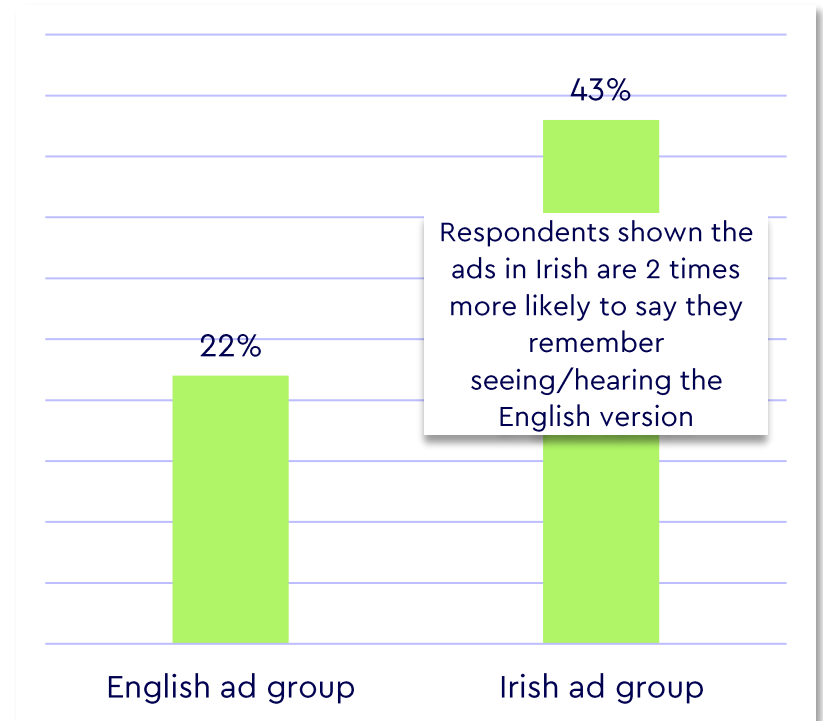
The echo of English

This dependency is further explained by our recall data. 43% of the group shown ads in Irish recalled seeing the English language version of the campaign. This is in stark contrast to the 22% of the English ad group who recalled seeing the Irish language version running in the real world.

This 21%-point difference is highly significant, and it is directly explained by the mandated media spend and weights. With 20% of advertising to be in the Irish language and 5% of budget invested in Irish-language media, Irish ads are more likely to have far fewer placements and a lower frequency. This means there are simply not as many ads available for people to see, which is the primary driver of the lower recall.

In turn, this means the Irish language ad is not only being seen by people familiar with the more prominent English version, but it is also having to work much harder with a vastly smaller share of voice to achieve cut-through. **Therefore, its role becomes more complex; it must be exceptionally creative and resonant to overcome this media disadvantage and do more than simply repeat a message that has likely already been received in English.**

% who recall seeing/hearing ad in other language

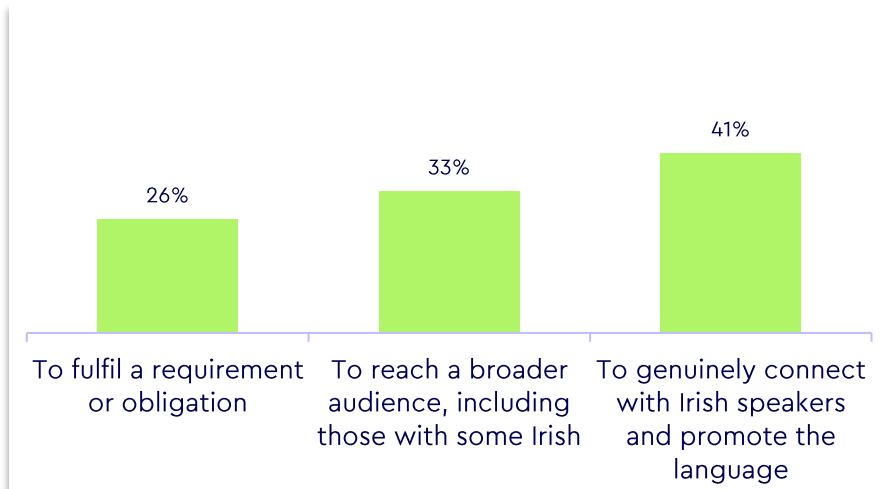


People expect a genuine connection

While Irish language ads contend with a significant media-weighting disadvantage, needing to achieve cut-through beyond simply repeating an English message, the research reveals an interesting audience expectation. When asked why brands use Irish in their campaigns, the primary response across all age groups was 'to genuinely connect with Irish speakers and promote the language' (averaging 41%).

Crucially, this sentiment is most pronounced among high-proficiency Irish speakers (48%) who are our most engaged audience. That said, those with low or mid proficiency, and even those with no Irish, also recognise this intent.

Respondents were asked the reason they think each brand used the Irish language in their campaign



We see a critical audience expectation: when brands use Irish in their campaigns, the public primarily perceives it as an effort to genuinely connect with Irish speakers and promote the language, rather than simply fulfilling a requirement. This desire for authentic engagement is a powerful insight for future strategy.

Tailoring for different audiences

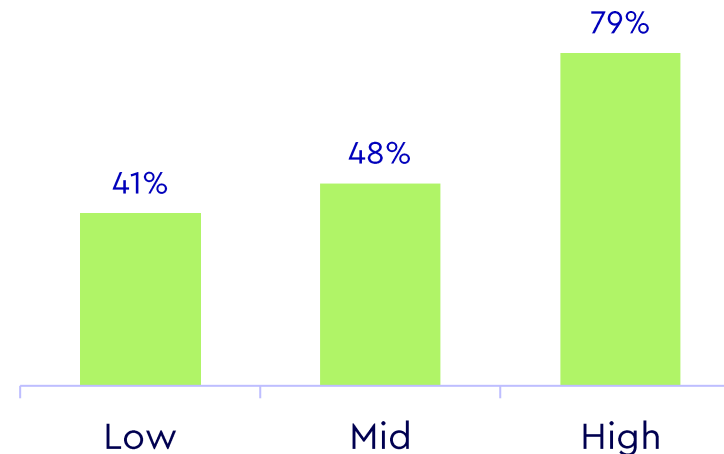
A highly engaged and receptive audience

This study categorises those who can read, write, speak, or understand Irish into three segments: 29% with Low proficiency, 43% with Mid proficiency, and 28% with High proficiency. This translates to over 660,000 High proficiency Irish speakers in Ireland, representing just under 16% of the 18+ population.

What is remarkable about this group is their consistent and high level of understanding for advertising in both English and Irish, with no discernible disadvantage for Irish language ads.

For these proficient speakers, the primary challenge is not comprehension, but rather how to effectively leverage their deep cultural connection and appreciation for the language. This potential can be maximised through fostering deeper emotional and cultural resonance, and ultimately driving even greater effectiveness.

Good/strong understanding of the key message in Irish ads – by Irish speaking proficiency



The potential of high proficiency speakers

LIKEABILITY OF
IRISH ADS BASED
ON IRISH
SPEAKING
PROFICIENCY

LOW
40%

MID
49%

HIGH
71%

For our high proficiency group, not only do they have a strong understanding of Irish campaign messages, advertising in the Irish language is effective and well-liked.

High proficiency speakers are our most engaged and appreciative audience. They are the benchmark for authenticity.

They show the highest likeability for Irish ads (71%), a figure significantly higher than the general population's score for the English language version of the ads (56%).

They understand the nuance and reward culturally resonant creative.

The comprehension challenge: Low proficiency and no Irish

Low proficiency Irish speakers, and those with no Irish, represent a significant challenge.

They are heavily reliant on the English ad for basic understanding, which drives the 35-point comprehension gap.

Understanding and likeability scores are low but interestingly those with no Irish score marginally better than those with low Irish proficiency.

IRISH ADS	Low proficiency	No Irish
Average understanding	41%	44% +3pts
Average likeability	40%	43% +3pts

Both of these groups will have different cognitive and emotional responses to ads in the Irish language.

Strategic Implications

For Low Proficiency:

This group represents the **creative challenge**. Ads targeting them (or needing to be understood by them) must be visually clear, simple, and convey the core message without reliance on linguistic comprehension.

For No Irish:

This group highlights the **cultural opportunity**. While they won't understand the language, they are receptive to the idea of Irish language advertising. Campaigns can leverage this positive sentiment through strong branding, emotional connection, and clear visual narratives, even if the language itself is not understood.

Strategic Implications

A model of direct translation can be inadequate and lead to significant underperformance in key areas. A shift is required to unlock the potential of Irish language advertising.

The current reality

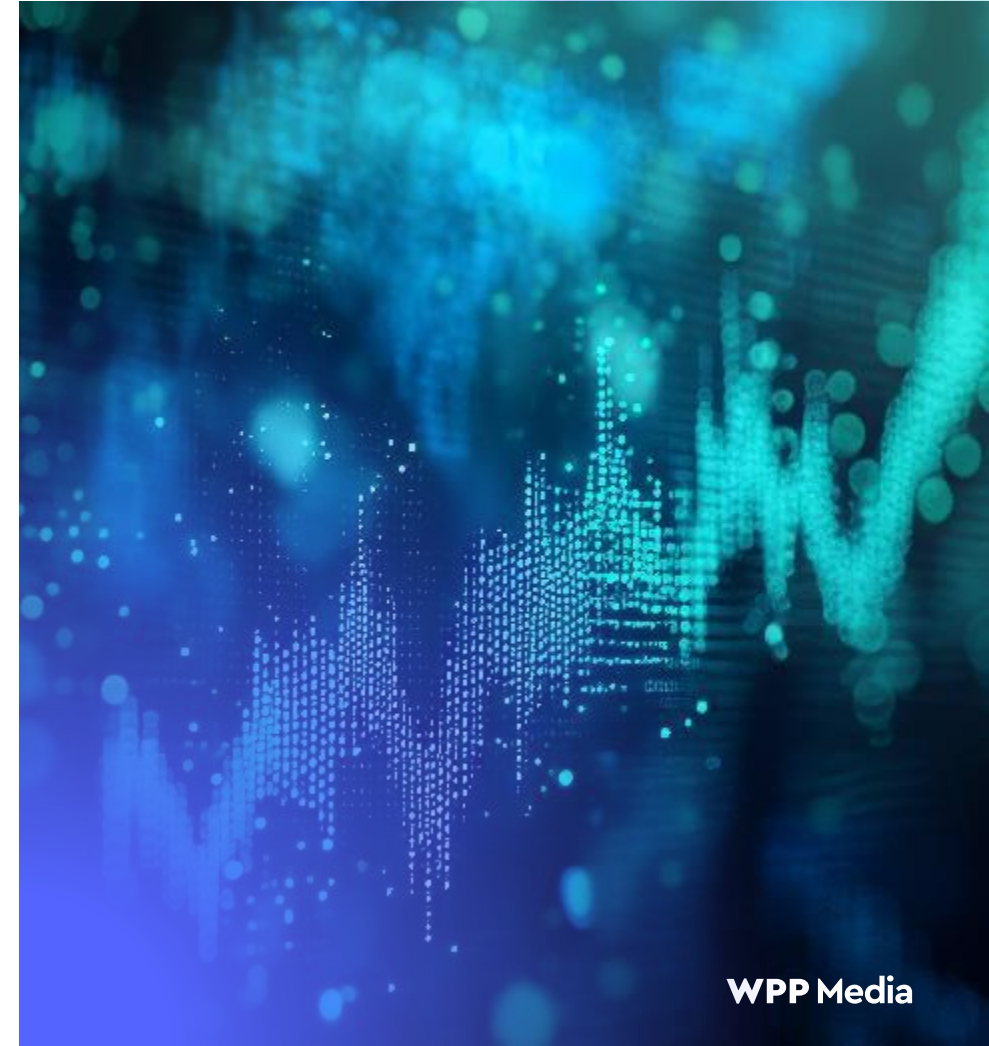
AN ECHO, NOT A VOICE

Currently, Irish language advertising, when conceived as a direct translation, often struggles to function as an independent voice. It exists in the shadow of its English counterpart, relying on the high-spend, high-reach English campaign to do the heavy lifting of message delivery. This reliance can create a communication gap for audiences who haven't first encountered the English version. While the English ad can, for many, act as a foundational primer that facilitates comprehension and potentially may foster greater Irish language understanding over time, the current approach often prevents the Irish creative from achieving independent cultural resonance.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGING

For public bodies, we acknowledge the imperative to deliver clear, functional information. In such cases, a direct translation might appear to be a straightforward and efficient method to fulfil requirements set out in the Official Language (Amendment) Act 2021.

However, even for functional messages, relying solely on direct translation carries inherent risks. While the literal meaning may be conveyed, nuances in tone, cultural context, or even the most effective phrasing for comprehension can be lost. A message that is merely translated might technically fulfil a requirement, but it may not resonate as effectively, or worse, could be misunderstood or perceived as less credible by the Irish-speaking audience.



A strategic shift from Translation to Transcreation

A complementary campaign system

This calls for a change in our creative and media strategy, whereby we stop treating the two campaigns as separate, equal entities and instead view them as a smart, complementary system.

Leverage the power of English creative

In most cases with more media spend, the English campaign is the primary driver of mass awareness and baseline comprehension. Its role is to ensure the core message reaches the widest possible audience. We should leverage this power, not ignore it.

Refine the role of the ad in Irish

The Irish ad's job is different. It is not to compete for mass recall with a fraction of the budget. Its purpose is to provide a deeper, more authentic connection with a specific and valuable audience. Its goal is cultural resonance, not just reach.

Embrace Transcreation

To achieve this new role, we must move from Translation to Transcreation. This means creating advertising natively for the Irish language, with strong visual storytelling. This ensures the ad is clear enough for all, while the language provides the cultural depth that our most proficient and engaged audiences crave.

Recommendations for Irish language campaigns

Transcreation considerations for your campaign

BRIEF	Re-evaluate the briefing process	Develop two distinct yet interconnected briefs. The Irish brief should not be a translation of the English brief, but rather brief that outlines the core message, brand objectives, target audience, and desired cultural resonance for the Irish-language execution.
MEDIA	Strategic phasing to leverage the Primer effect	Consider a phased media strategy where the English campaign, with its higher media spend and reach, runs first to establish baseline awareness and comprehension of the core message. The Irish-language campaign can then follow, or run concurrently with a slight delay, to build on this foundation and deliver deeper cultural resonance.
CREATIVE	Embrace the cultural opportunity for non-Irish speakers	For campaigns where the primary target audience includes those with no Irish proficiency, leverage the positive sentiment towards Irish language advertising as a <i>cultural opportunity</i> . Focus on strong branding, emotional connection, and clear visual narratives that evoke a sense of Irish identity, even if the language itself isn't understood.
CREATIVE	Invest in visual transcreation	For campaigns featuring animated content, invest in localising visual elements into Irish. This means ensuring all on-screen text, graphics, and culturally relevant imagery are rendered in Irish.
CREATIVE	Visual Storytelling	For Irish-language ads, especially those targeting low/no proficiency speakers, place a strong emphasis on clear, compelling visual storytelling that can convey the core message even without full linguistic comprehension. The language then adds cultural depth and authenticity for proficient speakers.
MEASUREMENT	Implement robust measurement & learning loops	Continuously monitor and measure the effectiveness of both English and Irish campaigns, not just for recall but also for understanding, likeability, and cultural resonance across different proficiency groups. Use these insights to refine future strategies.

Optimise Audio

Within the shift to transcreation, we acknowledge the challenge with Audio, in that it lacks the immediate visual context that can aid comprehension, particularly for those with lower Irish proficiency who might rely more on visual cues to help unlock the meaning of an ad in the Irish language.

However, audio offers a unique opportunity for intimacy and emotional connection. There are several approaches worth considering:

- Audio is highly effective at conveying emotion through tone, music, and sound effects, which can bypass some linguistic comprehension barriers.
- Acknowledge the primer effect of the English ads. For audio, this could mean phasing campaigns or designing them to reinforce messages delivered through other channels.
- Even with an English primer, keep the core message of the Irish audio ad concise and clear to maximise comprehension.



Considerations when direct translation is required

For situations where direct translation is the only viable option, these key considerations are important to enhance message clarity and minimise communication gaps.

Optimise English source material



The quality of the Irish translation is directly dependent on the clarity and simplicity of the original English script. Complex sentence structures, idioms, slang, or culturally specific references in English will translate poorly and lead to confusion in Irish.

Prioritise professional translation & review



Even with a budget that only allows for direct translation, investing in a professional, human translator who is a native Irish speaker is paramount. Avoid machine translation or non-native speakers. Furthermore, a second review by another native speaker is highly recommended.

Leverage the primer effect



As this research shows, Irish language ads often rely on the heavier-weight English ad to aid basic comprehension. Strategically plan media buys to maximise this.

Focus on visual reinforcement



When relying on direct translation for the primary ad message, utilise all available visual elements within the broader campaign to reinforce and clarify the core message.

Set realistic expectations and measure accordingly



Set realistic campaign performance expectations based on the limitations of direct translation.

Focus measurement on recall and comprehension, rather than deeper cultural resonance.



“Ligimis don Ghaeilge bláthú”

Catherine Connolly, Uachtarán na hÉireann

For more recommendations on running Irish language campaigns, contact your account team at WPP Media.

For more information on the research and measurement of your Irish language campaigns, contact Eimear McGrath eimear.mcgrath@wppmedia.com