LINGUISTIC COLONIALISM AND THE SURVIVAL OF SUBALTERN LANGUAGES: ENGLISH AND IRISH

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An essential aspect of colonialism, as a form of human behaviour that has had an enormous impact on the way the human race occupies this planet, has been the imposition of the languages of colonisers and the suppression of the languages of subaltern cultures or their marginalization as dialects. This form of linguistic pressure can be seen operating within what are today nation states – the tensions between Castilian and Basque, Catalan or Galician in Spain; the pressures on indigenous languages within Canada and the US; the use of linguistic engineering as part of a divide-and-rule strategy in the apartheid politics of South Africa. It can also, of course, be seen operating between nation states. The Japanese colonization of Korea in this century included the attempt to suppress Korean nationalism by discouraging the use of the language in public, especially in traditional ceremonies and customs, and it is ironic today that Korea has adopted a policy to uproot Japanese influences by banning Japanese feature films and discouraging Japanese music (Ito 1992). In its immediate sphere of influence on the northwestern edge of Europe, English as the dominant language of the heartland of Britain has driven the Celtic languages in its vicinity – Irish, Welsh, Scots-Gaidhlig, Manx, Cornish – close to or beyond the point of extinction, as it took over the role of both internal and external communication system in the Celtic regions.

The logic of these examples is the need for a metropolitan elite at the centre of a power system based on internal or external colonialism, to have its language adopted as the central language of the colonial territory, so as to gain easy access to regional populations, either directly or through regional elites who speak the language of the centre as their second language. As a result of linguistic colonialism, some languages have not been able to develop large zones of meaning, in space or time, though they may have developed important semantic fields and stocks of knowledge crucial to the reproduction of their particular linguistic groups. Some simply wither away. As many as 6,000 languages may have been wiped out since the explosion of European colonialism in the 15th century, as people abandoned their native languages and did not pass them on to their children.

The expansion and retraction of languages is not a random process, nor is it linked to phonological or syntactic characteris-

tics that predict which will thrive and which will perish. The global language system must be seen as dynamic rather than static. It is supported by a scaffolding of power relations, that evolved historically from trade relations and the military expansion of empires and increasingly today depends on the deployment of communication and information technologies. The aim of this paper is to examine the structure of the global language system and in particular the dominant role of English within it, as backdrop to a consideration of the fortunes of one of the Celtic languages that still survives, close to the very heartland of the anglophone world. The position of the Irish language will be explored, not only as a medium of communication whose fortunes have been tied historically to the colonial expansion of English, but as a marker of ethnic identity in contemporary Ireland.

English as Global Phenomenon

With the British colonization of North America, Oceania and large tracts of Asia and Africa from the 16th to the 19th centuries, English was on its way to becoming a world language. Unlike Dutch and Japanese, which lost ground after the decolonization of its former possessions, English became the official language of many newly independent states around the world, with the result that English is second numerically only to Mandarin Chinese in the league of major languages. Unlike Chinese, English is the most attractive option worldwide as a second language and the anglophone world is the wealthiest global language community. Europe has so far not developed a single supranational central language that serves as a *lingua franca* for the whole continent. But despite the traditional strength of Spanish, French, German and Russian in Europe, English is steadily becoming the dominant language of the European Union and is now clearly the most important second language of the whole continent of Europe.

Especially since World War II, American economic, military, and cultural influence has elevated English to the status of a global language, embedded in transnational economic systems of interest. It is the language of global politics and the *lingua franca* of such multinational industries as computing, telecommunications and oil which see the globe as a single market. English has steadily become the most important language for the importation of scientific knowledge, as natural scientists in particular increasingly express themselves in English rather than their native languages. The globalization of learning in general is pushing all systems of knowledge in this direction, with negative implications for those who do not know English. Most importantly, English is rapidly becoming the dominant language of transnational media, including advertising, music, film and television. And as Drake (1993, 277) points out, transborder data flows (TDF) deepen the global spread of English through information services and retrieval systems, strengthening thereby the incorporation of professionals and elites into a hegemonic anglophone culture.

In the world language system, about a dozen very large languages (Mandarin Chinese, English, Bengali, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Hindi and Malay) play a key role as *lingua francas* for more than half of the world's population, facilitating communication between people having different native languages. Among these supranational languages, English occupies a unique place as a super-central language, that is, a central code facilitating communication between bilingual speakers competent in their own supranational central language and in the super-central language of English. De Swaan (1992, 317) suggests this hierarchical constellation of interrelationships can best be visualized in a Venn diagram in which English, in the centre of a set of overlapping circles, inter-

sects with a dozen supranational languages that each overlap with a number of national languages. These, in turn, intersect with local languages. This floral figuration of overlapping sets of petals shows the role of the central languages in which translation of regional languages is available. It also demonstrates the role of the super-central language at the heart of the flower, in which translation is available to every other central language. This position is occupied not by Mandarin Chinese, the world's largest language, but by English, the world's second largest, and helps explain why use of English as a second language is expanding so rapidly. Speakers of peripheral languages are motivated to learn the super-central language rather than any other, since that is the language from which translation to every other language, directly or through an intermediary central one, is available. This presents a dilemma: if they open their cultures widely to English, cultural autonomy and self-determination can be eroded. But if they refuse contact with English, they may be left behind in the race towards modernization (Tsuda 1992). Once a language has gained a super-central position in the constellation, however, for that reason alone it will tend to gain speakers and go on expanding. Native speakers of the super-central language, by the same logic, have little to gain in learning a second language but of course profit in terms of expanded communication potential when peripheral language speakers learn their language.

A crucial factor which helps explain the rapid expansion of English today is that internationally traded information and entertainment originates primarily from the anglophone world. As Collins (1990) points out, anglophone states and enterprises are particularly strongly represented in the global information content sector. Of the world's 50 largest enterprises ranked by total media turnover, 35 are anglophone and account for 66% of the group's total turnover. Twenty five of these are based in the United States, six are UK domiciled enterprises, three are Canadian, and one is Australian. English language publishing accounts for more than half of the world book market, while the US film and television industry has dominated world screens for many decades (Wasko 1994). Despite experiencing persistent, sizeable deficits in their overall trade balances, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia produce huge surpluses on overseas trade in the global information sector.

A Lesser Used Language

If English is programmed by historical material forces to go on consolidating its dominant position at the centre of the global language system, what of the small, weak languages which are feeling stresses that push them ever closer to extinction? Out of the 5,000 languages currently in use, about 20% are spoken by at least 10,000 people and it is the opinion of some geolinguists (e. g. De Swaan 1991, 310) that this number of speakers is too small for viability, given the need for a workforce of hundreds of thousands to sustain production, communication, and administration in a nation state. But many small languages exist in situations where the apparatuses of communication and administration in the nation state are serviced by other language groups. This is true in India, for example, where there may be as many as 100 languages that have 10,000 speakers, or in Melanesia, the most linguistically fragmented area of the world, where, for instance, Vanuatu with a population of 128,000 contains 112 languages (Litteral 1991, 14). These small vernaculars are increasingly seen as important in the context of development, especially for the female population, where there is generally a higher percentage of illiteracy and monolingualism than in the male population.

One of the notoriously difficult tasks in any part of the world is to arrive at a reliable quantification of the frequency of use of a language and the levels of ability in that usage. The case of Irish is no different. The most reliable estimates come from the National Survey of Languages (O Riagain and O Gliasain 1993) which gives the following profile: outside the Gaeltacht, that is the area mostly in the west of the country where Irish is spoken as a native language, 70 to 80% of the population does not use Irish at all and does not interact with people who speak Irish in their presence. One in ten claims to have spoken Irish in the previous week and less than 5% report speaking Irish frequently at home or at work or reading/writing Irish frequently. Reading/writing has declined over the last 20 years as has attention to Irish language programmes on television and radio, though the availability of such programmes on the most popular channels has also declined in this period. Irish is never used in about 7 out of 10 homes and where at least one person uses it, this usage is occasional or seldom rather than intensive. However, attendance at leisure events (Irish music sessions, dances, sports) has doubled and in some cases trebled since 1973, thus increasing exposure to the language if not use. Since Irish is taught in the school system, some competency in the language is spread evenly across the population. About half the sample reported little or no Irish, while about 40% felt they could manage a few simple sentences or parts of conversations. There has been little or no change in the numbers claiming fluency in spoken Irish over the last 20 years but there has been some improvement in the ability to read Irish. About half of the 1993 sample reported little or no reading ability but more than twice as many claimed high reading ability as claimed high speaking ability (24% versus 11%) and reading abilities have increased over 20 years (the top 3 points increased from 34% in 1973 to 42% in 1993).

These figures provide some refinement on those provided in the Census – approximately one million people, or 30% of the population report being "Irish speaking" – which are often expressions of sociocultural affinities and group loyalty rather than reliable quanitifications of actual use for everyday communication or competence. Indeed, Hindley (1990) devotes an entire chapter to the difficulties encountered in geolinguistic statistics, especially in a country where Irish is taught in the schools and supported by a wide range of grants – which sometimes makes it rewarding to exaggerate the degree of use of Irish in communities where unannounced observation shows it to be little used. Census figures indicate that about 58,000 people live in the Gaeltacht (official Irish-speaking areas), though only half of these claim to maintain Irish as mother tongue, and Hindley suggests a majority of these demonstrate no practical loyalty to the language by transmitting it to their children as first language. His analysis of official statistics (including those of the government scheme which awards a "deontas" or grant for every Irish-speaking school child) leads him to the conclusion that it is safe to set an upper limit of 10,000 on the number of habitual native speakers living in communities with sufficient attachment to Irish to transmit it to a substantial majority of their children as the language of the home and community. Many others living in the Gaeltacht, he concludes (1990, 251), share grave doubts about the advisability of continuing to speak Irish and may well end their lives "more fluent in English and in normal circumstances no longer using Irish."

If we then revise the number of "Irish-speakers" that appears in Census statistics, we can assume that about 10,000 native speakers who habitually use the language and 5% of the rest of the population (about 175,000 people) who report using Irish "frequently" (O Riagain and O Gliasain 1993, 43). This compares with the fig-

ure of 70,000 Scots Gaidhlig-speakers reported in the 1991 UK Census of Population, but in this case also, careful examination is needed to determine how Census self-declarations are to be interpreted. It also compares with the figures of 45,700 speakers of Faroese in the Faroe islands, and 23,000 speakers of Swedish in the (Finnish) Aland Islands, examples of much more secure minority languages in Europe analysed by Hindley (1990).

Linguistic Identity and Nationalism

There is an important sense in which statistics on language use or competency do not tell the full story of people's relationship with language. The notion that each language is a unique symbolic construct with its own particular way of encapsulating experience and encoding a distinctive system of concepts, values and beliefs, is often associated with Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) and also informs the work of other founders of linguistic anthropology, such as Franz Boas and Edward Sapir. This is not the place to analyse the later critiques of the Whorfian hypothesis that language exerts a formative influence on thinking and cultural behaviour, but to note that it is related to the much older belief, which predates the science of linguistic anthropology, that languages are related to specific kinds of "thought worlds" which belong to specific ethnic or national groups.

In the case of Irish nationalism, the assertion of a close affinity between language and national identity formed the core of the work of the Gaelic League since its foundation in 1894. Through the period of rebellion and the War of Independence, the League created the cultural environment in which the first Irish government could launch its language revival policy with a large measure of popular support. This political role of language is asserted in its classic form in the 1892 speech of the League's founder Douglas Hyde, on "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland", in which he argued for the need to be rid of the central Irish ambivalence of "imitating England yet apparently hating it". Hyde traced this to the notion that "within the last 90 years, we have, with an unparalleled frivolity, deliberately thrown away our birthright and anglicized ourselves", thus, ceasing to be Irish without becoming English (Browne 1985, 55). For Hyde, the essential Irish reality is the Gaelic, deriving from ancient Ireland, "the dim consciousness of which is... at the back of Irish national sentiment". This was to foreshadow a later linking of the language with a concern for the psychological distress suffered by generations of Irish people because of colonial oppression, a condition which would keep them culturally mute, uncreative, aping English manners, unable to express the vital life of their own country because they were ignorant of their language, the only vessel capable of bearing that life into the future.

For the League, and for many of the early 20th century revolutionaries influenced by 19th century romantic social theory, Irish independence was meaningful only if it meant rebuilding a distinctively Irish civilization which had been destroyed by colonialism, in which personal liberation would take place within a healthy, integrated community. The executed leader of the 1916 Rebellion, Padraic Pearse, had argued that if bilingualism could work in Belgium, it could work in Ireland, allowing English to be used along with the ancestral language (Lee 1991, 136). The revival of Irish, harbinger of ideas that would initially feel alien but then also intimately familiar, would be the catalyst of cultural regeneration. Language revival as discovery rather than imposition was to begin most seriously in the national school system, which in the 19th century under colonial control had served to drive another nail into the coffin of the language.

Colonial conquest, especially since the final destruction of the Gaelic social and political order at the start of the 17th century, had inexorably destroyed the power base which supported the language and so it is important to note not only the decline in use of and competency in Irish, but perhaps more importantly, the radically new way in which colonized people identified with their own language in relation to that of the colonizer. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries language erosion was significantly class structured, as those most socially mobile adopted English, which though numerically the "minority" language of the country, was actually the medium of law, administration, commerce, education, politics and the training of clerics. When the Great Famine of the mid-19th century finally sealed the fate of Irish through starvation and emigration, it was already the language of the powerless, the masses of peasants excluded from communicating with native and colonial elites and in the places where decisions about public life are made. It is in this sense that Bourdieu (1991, 138) refers to the symbolic (including linguistic) relations of power which become established within human groups, as well as the laws of such group formation themselves (e. g. the logic of conscious or unconscious exclusion) as functioning "like prior censorship". It is ironic that in the post-famine era, English was largely the medium through which the struggle against colonial exclusion gathered momentum, as English language print media raised consciousness in the countryside about the need for land reform and facilitated the generation of revolutionary ideas in the North American diaspora (Lee 1973, 95).

Political Autonomy, Language Atrophy

The reality of independence in the 1920's was that revolutionary linguistic renewal was not supported by any corresponding revolutionary social renewal but rather suffocated in the conservative and authoritarian atmosphere of post-revolutionary Ireland, which choked its radical humanist dynamic. In the absence of a social revolution, such as reversing the depressed economic conditions of the Gaeltacht and stemming the flow of emigration, which might have materially supported the Gaelic League vision of a rediscovery of a Gaelic identity, successive governments after independence resorted to policies of compulsion in the education system, as they elevated the Gaelic League crusade to official status. Signs of disillusionment with the language revival project were evident as early as the 1920s, as the League declined in the Free State but maintained its momentum in Northern Ireland, under a governmental regime there that veered between ignoring and being openly hostile to Irish.

Linguistic revival and the cultural regeneration it promised failed at two levels. Real use of the language continued to decline with the slow but steady attrition of emigration. And the visionary project of the Gaelic League yielded to frustrated dogmatism, as the radical humanist vision failed to hold and expand its ideological power to reverse the predominantly negative attitude to Irish as the language of the conquered, unable to sustain social mobility in the modern world. Pre-revolution-wary enthusiasm for cultural regeneration mutated into cultural protectionism and an intolerance for forms of individual expression that did not fit with a narrowly conceived Catholic reactionary version of Irishness. This intolerance was soon to be enshrined in a draconian system of censorship that was to last for half a century. The new mood is caught in the extremist rhetoric of the Catholic Bulletin commenting on the awarding of a Nobel Prize for Literature to W. B. Yeats in 1923, accompanied by "a substantial sum provided by a deceased antichristian manufacturer of dynamite... Paganism in prose or in poetry has, it seems, its solid cash value: and if

a poet does not write tawdry verse to make his purse heavier, he can be brought by his admirers to where the money is, whether in the form of an English pension, or in extracts from the Irish taxpayers pocket or in the Stockholm dole" (quoted in Browne 1985, 72).

Throughout the 20th century, use of the language continued to decline, even in the Gaeltacht. There the expansion of tourism and the expectation that emigration to English-speaking countries would be almost inevitable for young people, was driving it into the position of being a kind of private code used only in conversation with friends and kin, replaced by English for communication with the outside world. And there was no doubt, either in government or in language revival circles, that if the Gaeltacht, as the well from which learning Irish as a second language could be replenished, were allowed to disappear, the will to speak Irish elsewhere would probably vanish with it. The language was steadily assuming a ceremonial function outside the Gaeltacht, settling into its role as a cherished but little-used national treasure, symbolically constitutive of a sense of national unity on which state legitimacy was built. Irish was well on the way to becoming what Findahl (1989) fears Swedish may become after another 100 years of pressure from English, a quaint "mother-tongue" kept in the family chest, a relic to be dusted off, polished up and displayed on national holidays and other festive occasions.

Language and Ethnic Identity

The fortunes of Telefis na Gaeilge, the new Irish language television service which is due to be launched in 1996, though profoundly influenced by the economics of television produced in a minority language sandwiched geographically and culturally between the two major poles (US and UK) of the world's supercentral language, will of course be affected by what happens to Irish in other communication situations besides broadcasting. There is currently an expansion in the number of all-Irish schools available in Dublin and Belfast and there is some evidence that interest in language revival is spreading outside the middle class, which has traditionally been associated with the revival movement. The unresolved colonial problem in Northern Ireland plays a role in this. One of the major influences on the spread of Irish in West Belfast has been the return of young Republicans to their communities from periods spent in Northern Ireland prisons, where Irish became something of a *lingua franca* within the prison subculture. In fact, the revival of interest in Irish in Northern Ireland is intimately linked with the beginnings of "the Troubles" in 1969 which forced many people to look afresh at the question of national identity. Opening (and struggling to keep open) Irish language nursery schools in areas of severe deprivation and unemployment was part of a new effort to define cultural identity, despite (or because of?) opposition from the Northern Ireland Office to the work of movements like Glor na nGael, accused by the British government of "furthering the work of paramilitaries" (Ni Chleireigh 1991) or from Belfast City Hall to the erection of Irish street signs requested by Irish-speaking communities in the city. The atitude of Loyalists to Irish remains deeply polarized, interest in speaking the language among some sections of the Protestant community being paralleled by Loyalist paramilitary attacks on Irish cultural centres operated by Nationalists.

The future of the Irish language is ultimately to be discerned in the huge gap that exists between actual levels of linguistic competency and use of the language on the one hand, and the positive attitude to the language on the other, as an ethnic marker. The National Survey of Languages (O Riagain and O Gliasain 1993)

presents evidence that only tiny minorities occupy the extremities of opinion on a continuum stretching from wishing to see Irish either totally discarded or totally replacing English. The public is quite divided about the options to be chosen between these extremes, 39% supporting the proposition that Irish "should be preserved for its cultural value, as in music and arts", 33% opting for a bilingual Ireland with English as the principal language. Public opinion polls in general have uncovered feelings about Irish as a focus of ethnic and national identify and the National Survey continues this trend in demonstrating that a large number of people place considerable value on the symbolic role of the Irish language in ethnic identification. As can be seen from **Table 1** a clear majority in the three surveys (1973, 1983, 1993) agrees that "no real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish" and that "without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identify as a separate culture", although sizeable minorities disagree with these assertions.

Table I: Attitudes to Irish as an Ethnic Symbol

Statement	Year	Agree %	No Opinion %	Disagree %
No real person can be against the revival of Irish	1973	72	3	25
	1983	73	2	25
	1993	66	3	31
Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people	1973	64	3	34
	1983	66	2	32
	1993	60	3	37
Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture	1973	56	6	38
	1983	66	3	31
	1993	61	3	36
To really understand Irish culture, one must know Irish	1973	58	6	36
	1983	57	2	41
	1993	46	3	51
Using the Irish language would make Ireland more independent of England	1973	41	5	54
	1983	40	4	56
	1993	37	6	57

Source: National Survey on Languages: Preliminary Report (1993).

These general trends corroborate Hindley's (1990, 253) observation that speaking Irish in the Gaeltacht gives many non-Gaeltacht people a sense of completeness, of oneness with Ireland's historic and cultural traditions which they cannot experience elsewhere.

There has been a substantial shift since 1973 in favour of more State support for Irish and the belief that the Irish government has a crucial role to play, even if this entails increased public expenditure (language organizations, all-Irish schools, conducting Government business through Irish). Between 1973 and 1993, support for the proposition that the Government should "encourage or support" Irish on television grew from 66% to 75%. In the same period those who would be very/somewhat sorry if Irish were not spoken on national radio or television grew from 47% to 58%, though the usefulness of Irish is not a key criterion by which the language is evaluated by the public. At least half the population in the national sample holds

serious doubts in regards to the future of Irish "if present trends continue", although there are some shifts in a positive direction, for example away from the notion that Irish is a "dead language" (42% in 1973, to 31% in 1993) and away from the belief that "most people see all things associated with Irish as too old fashioned" (47% in 1973, 41% in 1993).

Conclusions

It is clear that the old configuration of discourses, in which thinking about the Irish language was framed, is changing. The urge to insist on a highly prescriptive sense of Irish identity, a dominant discourse half a century ago, is waning. So is its opposite, the association of Irish with backwardness. This was derived historically from the ideological codes imported from England in the high imperial era, which represented the Catholic Irish as a biologically inferior species to the "free-born Britons" and functioned to discredit Irish nationalism (Bell 1990, 87). It was reinforced after independence by middle class reactions against the imposition by Church and State of intolerant and claustrophobic cultural policies. To some extent, this underpins the functional utilitarianism ("What use is Irish?") that prevails when people consider Irish in the context of learning Continental European languages. But a newer discourse, centred on the right to communicate of linguistic minorities, is now also given wide currency, as well as some material and ideological support in EU cultural policy on Lesser Used Languages. This in turn is reinforced by a resurgence of interest within the public sphere in exploring the links between language, cultural identity and the psychological impact of colonialism. Language is often the most important embodiment of ethnicity, the means for distinguishing "us" from "them" in a process that Fishman (1972, 52) calls "contrastive self-identification." The linguistic colonization of Ireland accelerated from 1600 AD onwards and had thoroughly penetrated all social classes by the end of the colonial era. Today, the ritualized, tokenistic use of the language outside the Gaeltacht has proceeded at a pace far faster than what Findahl (1989) fears for Swedish and real use of the language as a medium of quotidian communication has shrunk to a small minority. There is evidence everywhere of a kind of postmodernization of the language, as the phenomenon of the ceremonial "cupla focail" ("the few words") spreads from being the obligatory introduction to speechmaking, to public notices, television advertising, tourist literature and even supermarket labelling. This presages not imminent revival but what Urry (1990, 130) calls "a shift from aura to nostalgia", a turn towards the past (and mythically to "the West") as a kind of secure and stable point of reference in an insecure society experiencing new feelings of discontent, anxiety and disappointment. This is not unrelated to the emergence of a new orientation to historical quaintness, at official and local levels, by way of constructing heritage (and heritage centres) as deproblematized history, developed in response to new tourism policies emerging from changes in the economy.

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JEZIKOVNI KOLONIALIZEM IN PREŽIVETJE PODREJENIH JEZIKOV: ANGLEŠČINA IN IRŠČINA

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POVZETEK

Vsiljevanje jezikov kolonizatorjev in marginalizacija jezikov podrejenih kultur pomenita bistveni vidik kolonializma. Tovrstni jezikovni pritiski lahko delujejo znotraj nacionalnih držav (npr. kastiljščina proti katalonščini in baskovščini v Španiji) in med državami (npr. v obdobju japonske kolonizacije Koreje). Na severozahodu Evrope je angleščina izrinila keltske jezike na rob izumrtja, saj je prevzela vlogo internega in eksternega komunikacijskega sistema na keltskih področjih.

Dvanajst jezikov v sodobnem svetu igra vlogo globalnega ali regionalnega sporazumevalnega jezika. Med njimi ima angleščina posebno mesto, saj omogoča komuniciranje med dvojezičnimi govorci, ki obvladajo svoj lastni nadnacionalni jezik in "super-centralni jezik" – angleščino. Uporabniki perifernih jezikov se najraje učijo "super-centralnega jezika", saj je prek njega možen neposreden ali posreden prevod v katerikoli jezik.

Nasproti dominantnemu položaju angleščine so v globalnem jezikovnem sistemu majhni jeziki, ki so vse bliže iztrebljenju, še posebej tam, kjer so izključeni iz komunikacijskih in administrativnih aparatov nacionalne države. Blizu takega položaja je tudi irščina, saj na Irskem večina prebivalstva uporablja le še angleščino.

V obdobju odpora in kasnejše osvobodilne vojne je bilo vprašanje jezikovne identitete tesno povezano z nacionalno identiteto in prizadevanji za "deanglizacijo" Irske. Toda nacionalna osvoboditev leta 1920 ni prinesla spodbud za splošno kulturno in socialno prenovo. V takih okoliščinah raba irščine neprestano upada, celo v Gaeltachtu (območje na zahodu, kjer je irščina materni jezik). Irščina je nekakšen "relikt", s katerega se obriše prah in se ga zlošči ter predvaja le ob slavnostnih priložnostih.

Sistematično marginalizacijo irščine naj bi zaustavil televizijski program v irščini, ki ga bodo začeli predvajati leta 1996. Prizadevanja za televizijski program v irščini so povezana z obnovljenim občutkom etnične identitete med Irci, čeprav obstaja veliko neskladje med dejansko stopnjo jezikovne kompetence in rabe jezika na eni strani ter (zgolj) pozitivnim odnosom do irščine kot "etničnega označevalca" na drugi strani.