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## The Irish Language in Ireland

**Content Language**

### Primary Sources

**Language**

**Glottocode**

**ISO-3 code**

**Dialect(s) + Glottocode(s)**

### Metadata of State(s) Covered in Article

**State:** Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland

**Region(s) [optional]:** Ulster | Connacht | Munster

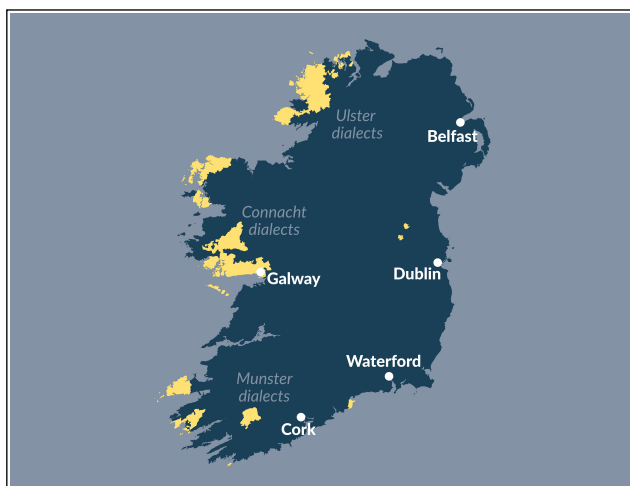
**No of Speakers in State and Optionally Region(s):** 1,826,267; Republic of Ireland 1,761,420 (Central Statistics Office 2017); Northern Ireland 64,847 (Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency 2012)

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Language policy | language shift | language attitudes | education | standardisation | media

## Illustrative Map



**Fig. 0:** Map of Ireland, with Gaeltacht areas highlighted (Ó Murchadha 2021)

## 1. Linguistic description

Irish is an Indo-European language belonging to the Insular branch of Celtic languages. This branch comprises Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Typologically, Irish is most closely related to the other Goidelic or Q-Celtic languages – Scottish Gaelic in Scotland and Nova Scotia, and Manx on the Isle of Man.

Like the other Celtic languages, Irish has a verb subject object basic word order. There are four cases (nominative/accusative, vocative, dative and genitive) and two genders – masculine and feminine (Old Irish also had a neuter gender). Initial stress is the default lexical stress pattern and there is a system of initial mutations (lenition, eclipsis, and prefixing consonants to vowel-initial words) that are applied under different grammatical conditions and that change the sound at the beginning of words.

It is believed the Celtic language was first introduced into Ireland in the first millennium BC (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Dochartaigh 1992; Ó hUiginn 2008). The earliest written evidence for an archaic form of Irish comes from the 4th century AD in the form of “Ogham,” a writing system comprising inscriptions carved mainly onto standing stones. The arrival of Christianity from the 5th century AD brought Latin and literacy, with the Latin alphabet subsequently adopted for Irish writing. The earliest Irish writing dates from the late 6th century and is mainly in glosses and marginalia in scriptures and Latin texts. The evidence from these periods suggests Irish was the language of Ireland (Ó Dochartaigh 1992). There is little to suggest that any other indigenous language was spoken (Ó hUiginn 2008). Notwithstanding the presence of Latin, there is also little to suggest that any language other than Irish was widely spoken (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 66).

The history of Irish is divided into distinct periods based on changes that occurred in the language: Old Irish (7th–10th century), Middle Irish (10th–13th century), Early Modern Irish (13th–17th century), and Modern Irish (17th century to present). Modern Irish is sometimes further divided into post-Classical Irish (17th to late 19th century), and late modern Irish (late 19th century to present; Ó hUiginn 2008). Latin was present in Ireland during the Old Irish period and Irish borrowed words from Latin, particularly words relating to writing and ecclesiastical matters (Ó hUiginn 2008). There were also exchanges during this period between Ireland and present-day Wales, and Irish borrowed from Welsh (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 69). Despite these contacts, the Old Irish period probably includes the timespan during which Irish had the widest geographical spread (Ó Dochartaigh 1992). This changed from the late 8th century following the arrival of the Vikings, the introduction of Old Norse and its establishment as the language of urban centres (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Dochartaigh 1992). Old Norse influenced Irish from the mid-9th century (Greene 1976), particularly in personal and place names and in the lexicon of commerce and seagoing (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 72).

The Anglo Normans arrived in 1167 and brought with them French and English, as well as Welsh, Breton and Flemish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 75; Risk 1970). Latin, French and then English subsequently became established in administration. Although English came to dominate in urban centres, Irish was the language of popular usage elsewhere. In time, Irish also became common among the Anglo Normans. Despite its limited use in administration, Irish developed a highly codified standard called Classical Irish that was practised in higher domains in Ireland and Scotland. Many borrowings from French during the Early Modern period are attested, especially in architecture, administration and warfare (Ó hUiginn 2008; Risk 1970).

The prestige status of English became copper-fastened and language shift from Irish to English progressed following a series of plantations by the Tudor and Stuart states from the mid-16th to the early 17th century. This intervention reintroduced English to Ireland as the language of the new Protestant settlers (lowland Scots was also introduced). This period was a watershed in the history of Irish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Dochartaigh 1992). Although the number of Irish speakers increased following the plantations, the proportion of Irish speakers in the population decreased (Ó hUiginn 2008). Following the plantations, English became the exclusive language of government. It came to dominate high status domains and occupied a prestige position in society (Kelly & Mac Murchaidh 2012; Ó hUiginn 2008). Throughout the 18th century, the Penal Laws precluded Catholics, who comprised the great majority and who were overwhelmingly Irish speakers, from occupying roles in the professions and in parliament, and barred them from buying land, entering Trinity College Dublin and voting.

Under these conditions, shifting language (from Irish to English) and religion (from Catholicism to Protestantism) occurred, initially mainly among those of higher status with most to gain from shifting (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Ciosáin 2005; Ó hUiginn 2008). Irish and English became differentiated in their status and the socio-economic profile of their users: Irish came to have low overt prestige and became the language of a social underclass, while English was held in high esteem and was the language of the ascendancy and upward mobility.

It was in the 19th century that language shift really became established. Census data suggest that from 1770–1800 there was a modest decline in the use of Irish (Fitzgerald 1984: 123–127). This became a drastic decline from 1800–1830 and it became more dramatic still from 1830–1860 (Fitzgerald 1984: 128–129). Language shift was greatly accelerated by the Great Irish Famine (1845–1850) in which one million people are estimated to have died and another one million emigrated, the majority of whom were Catholic Irish speakers. However, the lack of institutional support, either state or religious, for Irish was a key factor in the language shift already well underway by then.

For political movements in 19th-century Ireland, Catholicism was the touchstone of political identity and English became important for political mobilisation and expression (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 97, 101). Although most of the population was Catholic and Irish speaking, the Catholic Church was a profoundly anglicising institution (Ó Ciosáin 2005). Relatedly, a print culture did not develop in Irish in the 19th century, as it did in other minority languages, due to a distrust of Irish printing by the Catholic Church (Ó Ciosáin 2005). Printing in Ireland was overwhelmingly in English and literacy tended to be acquired in English (but see Ni Dhonnchadha 1991; Wolf 2014).

The establishment of the national school system in 1831 did little to alter this as the new system provided negligible support for Irish. The prominence of English in schools was well-aligned with a desire among the population to acquire English and literacy as both were considered essential, whether for emigration or for advancement in Ireland. Education in Irish therefore likely held little appeal for the population at large (Ó Gráda 2012).

While 19th-century Irish speakers were certainly keen to acquire English, many were also positive about Irish (Wolf 2014). Although shift may have been a conscious undertaking for some, it was subconscious for others. People did not necessarily all consciously abandon Irish. Rather, the

strategies adopted for acquiring English likely left no space for the maintenance of Irish in a context in which it enjoyed little institutional support and in which English was the language of modernisation and advancement. Notwithstanding the fact that 19th-century Ireland was in many ways an Irish-speaking island (Wolf 2014), this was the decisive period for language shift. It is the period when shift in traditional communities became established, a process that continues to the present day.

## 2. Demographics

The areas where Irish has retained a presence as a community language are in the Gaeltacht (the areas highlighted in yellow on the map above), areas in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) defined by the state. Irish remains under significant pressure as a community language in the Gaeltacht (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton 2015). Virtually all Irish speakers are bilingual in Irish and English and the extent of Irish speaking in the community varies from area to area (Central Statistics Office 2017; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton 2015). Census 2016 (Central Statistics Office 2017) recorded 96,090 people living in the Gaeltacht and 63,664 (66%) of these were returned as being able to speak Irish. Some 20,586 individuals (21% of those over three years of age) were returned as speaking Irish daily outside education. This number is typically considered to represent the core Gaeltacht Irish-speaking community. However, a further 6,284 people were returned as speaking Irish weekly and can reasonably be included among the active participants in their local Irish-speaking communities. Beyond this, and as Dorian (1982) argues for Scottish Gaelic, much of the vitality of minority languages is located on the margins of core groups. Thus, communities of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht also include individuals from the 63,664 people who “can speak Irish,” whose linguistic repertoires may be less extensive or who may be less ideologically committed to using Irish, but who nevertheless use the language as they step in and out of social spheres where it has currency. In many ways, the continued vitality of Irish in the Gaeltacht relies on the interplay between core groups of habitual speakers and people on the margins of those groups (Ó hIfearnáin in press).

The Gaeltacht is an important part of the story of the Irish language, but it is not the full story. Irish also has a presence outside the Gaeltacht, both in the RoI and in Northern Ireland (NI) (see Section 4 for details on the emergence of these two polities). Although migration from the Gaeltacht is a factor, along with a decision by some families outside the Gaeltacht to use Irish in the home, the presence of Irish in education is significant. A clear difference is evident between speaker demographics in the RoI and NI, reflecting historical trajectories of language shift and the institutional supports available for Irish.

Census 2016 (Central Statistics Office 2017) in the RoI returned 1,761,420 people (of a population of 4,569,261 over three years of age) as being able to speak Irish. Of those, 586,535 are said to speak Irish less often than weekly, 111,473 speak Irish weekly, 73,803 are indicated as speaking Irish daily outside education and 418,420 are returned as never speaking Irish. These figures include the Gaeltacht speakers already discussed. In NI, where Irish has less institutional support, 64,847 people (of a population of 1,735,711 over three years of age) claim an ability to speak, read, write and understand Irish and some 4,130 people (0.2%) claim to use Irish as their main home language (Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency 2012). Leaving aside that different census speaker categories probably mean different things to different people depending on their sociolinguistic surrounds, a comparison between the number of Gaeltacht speakers and those outside the Gaeltacht shows that there are more habitual users of Irish outside the Gaeltacht than in the Gaeltacht itself. An important distinction, however, is that individuals outside the Gaeltacht who use Irish do not generally live in areas where Irish is a community language. Opportunities to use Irish may therefore be centred on organized activities or networks associated with Irish-medium schools, sports clubs or other social groups (O'Rourke & Walsh 2020; Joyce 2019).

## 3. Variation

There was probably always some regional variation in Irish (Ó Maolalaigh 2008; Russell 2005) and the earliest known reference to it goes back to the 10th century (Ó Muircheartaigh 2018). However, it is not until the 17th century that the dialects find expression in writing (Ó Dochartaigh 1992; Williams 1994). Before that, authors' adherence to the prevailing written norms mask dialectal variation that may have existed. The dialectal divisions that emerge in writing from the 17th century are along the same lines as those in today's dialects (Ó Dochartaigh 1992). We thus find the main regional dialects of Ulster in the north, Connacht in the west and Munster in the south (see the illustrative map). There remains some scholarly debate about the type of Irish historically spoken in the eastern province of Leinster and the extent to which it grouped with one of the other dialects or represented a distinct dialect unto itself (see Ó Muircheartaigh 2015: 261–272).

The dialects are mutually comprehensible, but differences are found in all areas of language. The name of the language itself, *Gaeilge*, is a good starting point when describing dialectal differences. In Ulster, it is pronounced /ge:lik'/. In Connacht, it is /ge:l'g'e/, while in Munster it's /ge:lən' or /ge:lən'/.

0:00 / 0:03

**Aud. 1:** “Gaeilge” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:03

**Aud. 2:** “Gaeilge” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:02

**Aud. 3:** “Gaeilge” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

Distinctions in vocabulary are also found. For instance, the word ‘mackerel’ in English is traditionally *murlas* in Ulster, *ronnach* in Connacht and *maicréal* in Munster.

0:00 / 0:04

**Aud. 4:** “Murlas” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 5:** “Ronnach” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:01

**Aud. 6:** “Maicréal” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

In the sound system, a north-south contrast is found for word-initial cn-, gn-, mn- and tn-. Thus, in the case of *cnoc* [hill] and *mná* [women], for example, while Connacht and Ulster generally have /krok/ and /mra:/ or /mræ:/, Munster has /kɲuk/ and /mna:/.

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**Aud. 7:** “Cnoc” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 8:** “Cnoc” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 9:** “Cnoc” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 10:** “Mná” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 11:** “Mná” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 12:** “Mná” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

The realisation of -ao- similarly diverges along north-south lines. Thus, in Ulster and Connacht, the word *caol* [narrow] is realized as /'ki:l/, while Munster has /'ke:l/:

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**Aud. 13:** “Caol” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 14:** “Caol” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:01

**Aud. 15:** “Caol” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

The dialects are further distinguishable with respect to word stress and the quality of vowels in unstressed syllables (Ó Dochartaigh 1992). The default stress pattern is for primary stress to fall on the first syllable. Apart from a small number of exceptions, Connacht and Ulster are consistent in this. In Munster, although stress does fall on the initial syllable by default, it shifts to non-initial syllables with a long vowel or with -ach(t) (/əx/ or /əxt/) under certain conditions (Ó Sé 1989). Thus, for the word *oileán* [island], we get /'e.la:n/ in Ulster, /'i.l'a:n/ in Connacht and /i.'l'a:n/ in Munster.

0:00 / 0:03

**Aud. 16:** “Oileán” in Ulster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:02

**Aud. 17:** “Oileán” in Connacht dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:01

**Aud. 18:** “Oileán” in Munster dialect (Ó Murchadha 2021)

Intergenerational variation is also attested in traditional communities. Younger speakers acquire a different variety of Irish to their forebears. Their Irish is influenced by English, by the Irish at school, in their peer group, in the standard, and in the media. Differences are attested across most areas of language. “English words” are by now a typical feature in everyday discourse (Darcy 2014; Ní Laoire 2016) and English influence is also found in phonology and syntax (Ó Curnáin 2007; Péterváry et al. 2014). Traditional phonological distinctions between Irish and English and between distinct sounds in traditional Irish are becoming less salient (Ó Curnáin 2007; Péterváry et al. 2014). Traditional word order in Irish is also being displaced under the influence of English (Ó Curnáin 2007). Additionally, initial and end mutations may be absent or inconsistently applied, with wide variation found in patterns of mutation (McGuigan 2016).

Irish has a significant institutional presence and many new speakers who use Irish regularly are not from the traditional communities but rather acquire their Irish through education, in Irish-speaking families outside the Gaeltacht, through individual endeavour, through networks of new speakers, or through engagement with Irish in a combination of these domains. Although some such speakers align themselves with a specific dialect, many are not concerned with traditional norms (Ó Murchadha & Flynn 2018a). Like younger Gaeltacht speakers, their Irish is shaped by

a range of influences. A number of publications describe the Irish acquired in Irish-medium education (IME) and practised by new speakers (Maguire 1991; McGuigan 2016; Ó Duibhir 2018; Ó Duibhir & Garland 2010; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey 2018). Like younger speakers in the Gaeltacht, “English words” are a typical feature among new speakers, semantic transference from English is described (Maguire 1991; Ó Duibhir 2018) and initial mutations can be absent or inconsistently applied (McGuigan 2016; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey 2017). Although not all new speakers diverge from traditional phonology, traditional phonological features are often not evident, with distinctions between sounds in Irish and in English, and between different sounds in Irish, not present (Maguire 1991).

0:00 / 0:02

**Aud. 19:** “Gaeilge” by new speaker (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:02

**Aud. 20:** “Cnoc” by new speaker (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:02

**Aud. 21:** “Mná” by new speaker (Ó Murchadha 2021)

0:00 / 0:01

**Aud. 22:** “Caol” by new speaker (Ó Murchadha 2021)

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**Aud. 23:** “Oileán” by new speaker (Ó Murchadha 2021)

## 4. Status

Irish has a different status in the RoI and NI. Following the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 (coterminous with the RoI that came into existence in 1949), Irish had a key role in nation building and was integrated into the state apparatus. Since 1937, Irish has constitutional status as national and first official language (Government of Ireland 1937). English, although being the overwhelmingly dominant language, is recognized as a second official language (Government of Ireland 1937). Although Irish is spoken habitually by a minority of people, the RoI government has not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of Irish. This can be attributed to the official status of Irish as national and first official language but also the national language ideology that sees Irish as belonging to the entire population. The Official Languages Act (2003) provides the legislative framework for the provision of services through Irish by public bodies. This act established the office of An Coimisinéir Teanga [the language commissioner] which is responsible for monitoring its implementation. Since 2007, Irish is also an official language of the European Union. At the request of successive Irish governments, though, a restricted regime has been in effect and Irish hasn’t operated as a full working language (European Commission 2019). This derogation is gradually being reduced and is due to be phased out fully by January 2022.

Although Irish seems to occupy a strong legislative position, the provisions in legislation are in fact quite limited (Walsh 2016). Even so, in 2013, Ireland’s first Coimisinéir Teanga resigned, citing repeated failures by the state to implement the legislation and arguing that Irish is marginalized within public administration. This was exemplified more recently in repeated failures and delays in providing public health advice in Irish during the COVID-19 pandemic (An Coimisinéir Teanga 2021; Walsh 2021a). A bill to amend the Official Languages Act is currently before parliament. Among other amendments, it includes a provision that 20% of new recruits to the public service should have proficiency in Irish by 2031 (Government of Ireland 2019).

NI is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Irish operates in a different legislative and political landscape: Irish has been a contentious and highly politicized issue there. NI came into existence in 1921 and comprises the six counties in the north east of the island in which there was a Unionist, mainly Protestant, majority and a Nationalist, mainly Catholic, minority. Modern politics in NI can be

understood in terms of historical divisions between Unionist and Nationalist traditions, with Unionist parties favouring the maintenance of links with Britain and Nationalist parties favouring reunification with the RoI. NI's system of government is based on the main parties from each tradition sharing power. While Irish has broad support amongst Nationalist and other parties, the Unionist parties view Irish as divisive and tend to oppose moves to strengthen its status. This makes it challenging to enact legislation to support Irish.

Nevertheless, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 paved the way for the signing and ratification by the British government in 2001 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of Irish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012). Along with Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, Irish is protected in the UK under Part III of the Charter, the highest level of protection. Nevertheless, Irish in NI has much less legislative support than is available for Scottish Gaelic in Scotland or, especially, for Welsh in Wales. In 2006, the St Andrew's Agreement, an agreement between the UK and Irish governments and the political parties in NI, expressed a commitment to establishing an Irish language act in NI. No act materialized, however. The campaign for an act has the support of most of the political parties but has been opposed by the Unionist parties. In 2017, following the collapse and suspension of the NI power-sharing assembly after a scandal over a renewable energy initiative, the Irish language moved to the centre of the political stage (see Dunlevy 2020). Sinn Féin, the main Nationalist party, refused to re-enter a power-sharing arrangement unless an Irish language act was established. It was not until 2020 that power-sharing was restored. In lieu of a commitment on an Irish language act, the parties involved committed to recognising the status of Irish and to establishing a language commissioner to protect and enhance the development of the use of Irish by public authorities (UK Government and Irish Government 2020). The campaign for an Irish language act continues. At the time of writing (August 2021), the UK government has committed to bypassing the NI Assembly and introducing an Irish language act in November 2021 if the Assembly has not done so by September 2021.

## 5. Attitudes

It has been observed that “[t]he Irish people have a complex relationship with the Irish language” (Ó hIfearnain 2009: 539). Although referring to the population of the RoI, this statement can be applied to the island in general.

Since the 1970s, national surveys in the RoI show that Irish has widespread support (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research 1975; Darmody & Daly 2015: xi; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan 2009; Ó Riagáin 2007). A significant majority (consistently around 60–70%), regard Irish positively (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research 1975; Darmody & Daly 2015: xi; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan 2009; Ó Riagáin 2007;) and believe it should be preserved or revived (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan 2009: 17). A significant majority (mostly between 60 and 66%) also believe Irish is an important element of national distinctiveness (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research 1975; Darmody & Daly 2015: 78). Most of the population are favourably disposed towards Irish in education (Ó Riagáin 2007; Darmody & Daly 2015: 80) and towards providing state services through Irish (Ó Riagáin 2007). Despite this, Irish is not an everyday concern for most people and is rarely high on the political agenda. Rather, Irish serves a symbolic heritage identity function for most (Ó Riagáin 2007; Watson 2008) and learning Irish is often more about connecting with the past than about participating in Irish-speaking society in the present.

There is a small minority who hold less favourable attitudes towards Irish. As the current President of Ireland once quipped, there are people for whom Irish is not half dead enough (e.g. see Ó Domhnaill 2014). The opposition to Irish typically draws on economic and instrumental discourses that perceive Irish to hold little value in a globalized world (Walsh 2011; Rowland 2014). Although in the 1960s and 1970s opponents of Irish organized within the Language Freedom Movement (Rowland 2014), there is currently no such group. However, critics frequently find a platform in the media to voice their opposition to Irish.

Irish is a core subject throughout compulsory schooling in the RoI. Research on the learning of Irish shows that students are generally positively disposed towards Irish and towards learning it (Devitt et al. 2018; Harris and Murtagh 1999: 9; Murtagh 2007; Ní Dhonnabháin 2014: 305). However, an underlying ambivalence and passivity is evident. Students are less positive in their attitudes to the learning process than in their attitudes to the language and its speakers (Harris & Murtagh 1999: 91) and their motivation to learn Irish can be low (Murtagh 2007). Students find the learning of Irish low in terms of satisfaction (Ó Fathaigh 1991), rate Irish as difficult and uninteresting (Murtagh 2007; Ó Fathaigh 1991; Smyth et al. 2006: 149–150), and consider it their least favourite, least useful subject (Ó Riagáin 1993; Smyth et al. 2006: 142–152).

A number of studies provide an insight into language attitudinal dynamics in NI (e.g. Darmody 2016; Darmody & Daly 2015; Mac Giolla Chríost 2001; Ó Riagáin 2007; Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure 2012). Overall, there is notable support for Irish, though not to the same extent as in the RoI. Around half of the population are supportive of Irish (Darmody & Daly 2015: xi; Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure 2012). Just under half (48%) of adults believe it should be taught in schools and a majority (64%) believe Irish-medium (IM) schools should be provided where demand exists (Darmody & Daly 2015: xi). Very few adults feel Irish should be discarded completely (Darmody & Daly 2015: 84). Negative attitudes can be gleaned from the treatment of Irish in politics and in public spaces, however. As discussed, Unionist parties tend to oppose initiatives to support Irish. Furthermore, bilingual signage that includes Irish, that was effectively banned until the 1990s but is now being introduced, can draw robust reactions, with the Irish text on such signs frequently defaced.

Attitudes to Irish in NI can be differentiated along political and religious lines. While Irish has substantial support among respondents with a Catholic background, respondents with a Protestant background are less likely to strongly support it, though only a small proportion feel negative towards Irish (Darmody & Daly 2015: 84). On the other hand, Protestants are generally opposed to any state intervention for Irish and nearly a quarter (23.8%) feel that Irish should be discarded and forgotten (Ó Riagáin 2007). That said, a sizeable minority (20%) would like to see Irish spoken in the future and are prepared to see public resources made available towards that (Ó Riagáin 2007).

It is true that attitudes in NI can reflect religious and political traditions and it is attractive to view the issue through that lens. However, it is overly simplistic to argue that attitudes to Irish are, and always have been, entirely reflective of political and religious differences (Mac Giolla Chríost & Aitchison 1998). Individuals and groups from Protestant and Unionist backgrounds have long been interested in Irish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 134–171) and continue to be (see Dunlevy 2020; McCoy 1997). A noteworthy finding in McCoy (1997) is that most respondents (55%) from “non-Catholic” backgrounds report having no particular feelings regarding Irish, with a minority being in favour or opposed to it. Substantial ambivalence is found in attitudes towards Irish among Protestants and individuals identifying as British (Mac Giolla Chríost 2001).



Such ambivalence can at least partly be attributed to historical structural factors that limit their access to Irish in schools, the public sector, the linguistic landscape and in the media (Darmody & Daly 2015: 25; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 162; Nic Craith 1999).

## 6. Revitalization and maintenance

If the post-Classical part of the Modern Irish period was characterized by a decline in the status and use of Irish, the late-modern part is similarly marked by continuing language shift, but also by a response to that shift. The Gaelic Revival at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century was concerned with asserting a new sense of Irish identity along cultural nationalist lines, based largely on traditional language and culture (Uí Chollatáin 2016; Watson 2008). Conradh na Gaeilge [the Gaelic League], founded in 1893, was one of the foremost organisations in this movement and was concerned largely with arresting and reversing the ongoing shift (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012; Ó Tuathaigh 2008). Interestingly, given the preceding discussion, Conradh na Gaeilge was initially a non-sectarian, non-political organisation and included among its membership individuals from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds alike (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005).

In time, the desire to assert a new Irish identity partly through language merged with political and revolutionary desires for Irish independence. Ultimately, this movement resulted in the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, which, following the establishment of NI in 1921 reinforced the partition of the island that remains in place today. Although the majority of the population no longer spoke Irish, the language was central to nation building in the nascent free state as it was perceived to be fundamental to the nation's shared heritage (Uí Chollatáin 2016; Watson 2008). Prior to independence, initiatives to support Irish resulted largely from activism. Following its foundation, though, the Irish state assumed responsibility for language policy and retained an overt commitment to Irish. In NI, by contrast, state support for Irish has been limited.

The general thrust of policy in the RoI over the past century has been to maintain and revitalize Irish where still spoken and to provide opportunities to learn it where it is no longer a community language. However, the state's approach to language policy has evolved over the decades and is described as having included several distinct phases (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Ceallaigh 2020; Ó hÍfearnáin 2009; Ó Giollagáin 2014a; Ó Riagáin 1997; Ó Tuathaigh 2008).

The initial phase, from 1922 to the 1950s, set the foundations of policy through the institutionalization of Irish, especially in education and the public sector. Policy in the early years was modelled largely on the pre-independence policies of the Gaelic League (O'Leary 1994; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó Riagáin 1997; Ó Tuathaigh 2008). There is general agreement that a defining characteristic of this phase is that the state took a lead role and initiated policy measures of its own volition.

The period from the 1950s to the 1970s saw a change in that approach and is characterized by the state redefining its role in language policy (Ó hÍfearnáin 2009). It has also been described as a period of stagnation and retreat by the state (Ó Riagáin 1997), as a period of de-institutionalization (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, 2012) or re-sectoralization of Irish (Ó Giollagáin 2014a). This phase involved, for example: the state rowing back on the idea of a national language revival, the compartmentalization of Irish-language issues rather than their integration across the state apparatus, a retreat from state-sponsored Irish-medium education and from the position of Irish as a compulsory subject for Leaving Certificate Examinations (the final exams at the end of post-primary schooling), and the relaxation and withdrawal of Irish-language requirements in the civil service (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005; Ó hÍfearnáin 2009; Ó Riagáin 1997).

The 1970s to the 1990s are described as involving benign neglect by the state (Ó Riagáin 1997) or, alternatively, as a phase marked by the state consulting and reacting to grassroots pressure (Ó hÍfearnáin 2009) and then engaging in the re-institutionalization of Irish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, 2012). The state increasingly moved from a lead to a supporting role during this phase. Instead of being a proactive leader, the state became a reactive facilitator and benefactor of bottom-up initiatives. This is seen for example in the development of Irish-medium radio and television and in the renewed focus on Irish-medium education.

From the 1990s to the mid-2000s, the state increasingly took a dual approach to language policy, with one strand focused on Irish as a minority- and rights-based issue and the other focused on Irish as a heritage issue (Ó hÍfearnáin 2009). This period has been marked by changes in the legal status of Irish at national and EU level, by the foundation of agencies to deal with various aspects of Irish language policy, and by increasing the responsibility on individuals and communities for maintaining and reviving Irish.

From the late 2000s to present, Irish language policy has been impacted by the global financial crash in 2008 and the austerity and policy changes that followed. Funding for Irish was disproportionately impacted in this economic context (Ó Ceallaigh 2020). This period also engendered a change of tack in language policy. In line with trends that have been identified at an international level in the era of globalization and late capitalism (Heller & Duchêne 2016), language policy has increasingly treated Irish as a commodity (Brennan 2018). The role of the state has become more concerned with providing services to its consumers, the public. The outsourcing of responsibility for language policy to state agencies and to the community, characteristic of the preceding phase above, has intensified and has become ingrained in the state's modus operandi. This is very clearly exemplified in the new language planning regime introduced in the Gaeltacht Act (2012), that places primary responsibility for language planning firmly in the hands of local communities (see Ó Ceallaigh 2020; Walsh 2021b). Despite this, it is worth underscoring that the state maintains power in language policy even though the responsibility for language planning lies with local Gaeltacht communities.

## 7. Standardization

Standard norms for writing were in place in the Old and Early Modern Irish periods. The standard variety in the Early Modern period, Classical Irish, was a highly codified standard that remained in use into the 17th century (Ó Dochartaigh 1992). Sociopolitical upheaval in 17th-century Ireland resulted in the dismantling of the structures that sustained Classical Irish. Subsequently, the standard fell into disuse and dialectal variation found expression in the written language for the first time (Ó Dochartaigh 1992; Williams 1994). By the advent of the Gaelic Revival, Irish no longer had an agreed written norm (Nic Phaidín 2008; O'Leary 1994: 9; Uí Chollatáin 2016). Robust debate ensued throughout the Revival period. Some argued for a return to Classical norms, while others favoured a speech-of-the-people model, where prestige and norms would be based on the dialectal speech of the remaining Irish-speaking communities (O'Leary 1994: 9; Uí Chollatáin 2016). Ultimately,



advocates of the speech-of-the-people prevailed, establishing a thoroughgoing regionalism with respect to prestige in Irish that still endures. Valorizing remaining traditional dialects because their authenticity quotient is perceived to be high is common in minority languages (e.g. Costa, De Korne, & Lane 2018: 12). In Irish, the authenticity associated with traditional Gaeltacht dialects means they have high prestige and are often considered as universal targets.

It was after the foundation of the Irish Free State that efforts to formally codify Irish gained real momentum. The standard was constructed by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, the translation section of the houses of parliament in the RoI. A series of handbooks preceded the publication, in 1958 and under great time pressure, of the official standard. This was a standard for writing. However, in the absence of an established spoken standard, it is also adopted by some as a guide for spoken grammar (Ó Murchadha & Kavanagh in press).

The standard contains a fundamental paradox (Ó hIfearnáin 2008). Rannóg an Aistriúcháin's role is to provide translations of the acts and standing orders of parliament and this inclined them towards uniformity and precision. On the other hand, the authors express a commitment to the speech-of-the-people ideology (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin 1958). The 1958 standard is a confluence of these commitments. The result is a mostly unitary variety, a multilectal mélange containing elements from all the dialects. Although prepared with the translation section's work in mind, the authors appreciated that the standard may have wider applications (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin 1958: viii). Following agreement with the Department of Education, it effectively became prescribed in official, semi-official and often even in unofficial writing (Mac Lochlainn 2010).

Though based on Gaeltacht speech, the standard is not the same as any dialect. It is argued that the standard's status displaces the authority of the dialects on which it is based (Ní Ghearáin 2012; Ó hIfearnáin 2008; Ó Murchadha 2016). Alongside the de Bhaldráithe (1959) and Ó Dónaill (1977) dictionaries and *Graiméar Gaeilge na mBráithre Críostaí* (Na Bráithre Críostaí 1960), the 1958 standard (including very minor revisions in 1960 and 1979) has been the established standard until recently.

Some fundamental tensions exist around language standards in Irish. The traditional Gaeltacht dialects retain an overt prestige status but enjoy little institutional support (Ó hIfearnáin 2009; Ó Murchadha 2016). The official standard enjoys significant institutional support, but it is sometimes rejected as an artificial variety associated with officialdom (Ó Murchadha & Flynn 2018b). The emergence of new forms of variation among younger Gaeltacht speakers and new speakers further complicates issues. These practices are often overtly considered the result of the incomplete acquisition of dialectal or standard norms. Research on regard for varieties of Irish reveals that traditional Gaeltacht varieties are overtly valorized while the Irish of younger Gaeltacht speakers and new speakers is held in low esteem (Ó Murchadha 2013; Ó Murchadha & Flynn 2018b). However, some value is ascribed to the Irish of younger Gaeltacht speakers and new speakers with respect to social meanings and identity functions (Ó Murchadha & Flynn 2018b). The Irish of younger Gaeltacht speakers and, especially, of new speakers is furthermore associated with the standard, in both a positive and negative sense (Ó Murchadha & Kavanagh in press). The high prestige status of traditional Gaeltacht speech is also sometimes openly questioned (Ó Murchadha & Flynn 2018a; O'Rourke & Walsh 2020). It is against this ideological backdrop that recent standardization developments are set.

After decades of stasis, a flurry of activity has recently reshaped the standardization landscape. Following calls to revise the standard (Ní Pháidín 2008), three new versions appeared – in 2011, in 2012 (Ó Baoill 2013) and in 2017. In addition, Foras na Gaeilge, the north/south implementation body responsible for lexicography and terminology, in 2013 launched the online *New English-Irish Dictionary* and in 2020 published the *Concise English-Irish Dictionary* (Ó Mianáin 2020), both significant milestones and an important part of recent developments in standardization.

The 2011 standard, *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil do Scríobh na Gaeilge* [The Official Standard for the writing of Irish], was the work of a committee within the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs. Although published online, this standard subsequently never received full recognition (see Ó Murchadha 2016). By contrast, the 2012 and 2017 versions were authored by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin. They are respectively titled *Gramadach na Gaeilge: Caighdeán Oifigiúil – Caighdeán athbheithnithe* [The Grammar of Irish: An official standard – a revised standard] and *Gramadach na Gaeilge: An caighdeán oifigiúil – An treoir le haghaidh scríbhneoireacht sa Ghaeilge* [The Grammar of Irish: The official standard – the guide for writing in Irish]. The 2012 standard had official recognition until the appearance of the 2017 revision, which is now the official standard. It is interesting to note here that both the 2011 and 2017 revisions specify that they are written standards, suggesting that norms for spoken Irish should be sought elsewhere.

In a departure from the 1958 standard, the 2011 standard outlined four norms for writing, one for each of the three dialects and another for official writing. It also included innovations from the spoken language and incorporated public feedback. Separately, the 2012 version retained the idea of one centralized standard but increased the choice available within it compared to the 1958 standard. The 2017 standard, like the 2011 version, included consultations with the public. Indeed, public feedback is cited in justifying the decision to row back on the choice available in the 2012 publication (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin 2017). The act that legislates for the standard – the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2013 – includes a provision to review the standard periodically. In line with established practices in modern lexicography, the *New English-Irish Dictionary* takes a descriptive approach and includes many recent, non-traditional, innovations. There are also some instances in which the *New English-Irish Dictionary* diverges from the standard.

The developments above are illustrative of the way the state today manages Irish as a commodity that it provides to consumers in the public (Brennan 2018). Although the ultimate outcome was different, the public consultations included in the 2011 and 2017 revisions, along with the choice included in the 2012 version, speak to a willingness to cater to the perceived desires of the public as consumers of state services. Similarly, the descriptive approach taken in the dictionary, in line with best practice in lexicography, speaks to a user-oriented approach to outlining linguistic norms. A notable aspect of these recent initiatives is that they raise fundamental questions about language standards in Irish and who gets to define them. Consultations with the public, divergences between the standard and the dictionary, and provisions to review the standard periodically all point to a language ideological landscape in which linguistic norms are unsettled and up for debate, rather than being fixed and based on the unquestioned authority of traditional Gaeltacht speech or rigid, long-term decisions made unilaterally by organs of the state (Ó Murchadha & Kavanagh in press). This is a phenomenon that has been observed in contemporary standardization processes more generally (Ayres-Bennett & Bellamy 2021; Coupland & Kristiansen 2011). When considered alongside the new forms of variation in the Irish of younger Gaeltacht speakers and new speakers, it seems that questions of authority in Irish will continue to be contested and will increasingly be negotiated between the state and the public, albeit with the state retaining power in these interactions.

## 8. Education

Irish occupies a strong position in education relative to many minority languages. When analyzing Irish in education, one must distinguish between the RoI and NI and between Irish as a subject and as a medium of instruction (MoI). In the RoI, it is furthermore necessary to distinguish between Irish-medium education (IME) in the Gaeltacht and outside the Gaeltacht.

At pre-school, primary (elementary) and post-primary (secondary) levels in the RoI and NI, Irish is available as a MoI in a minority of schools. In the RoI, 7% of schools at primary and post-primary are Irish-medium (IM), with a small number of IM units also available in English-medium (EM) post-primary schools. In NI, 4% of primary and 1% of secondary schools are IM, and 1% of EM schools also have an IM unit.

The predominant presence Irish has in education is as a taught subject. At primary and post-primary in the RoI, Irish is a compulsory subject. In NI, Irish is not a core subject at primary, but can be studied as an additional subject. At secondary level in NI, all students study a modern language and Irish is an option. Where Irish is taught in NI, it is taught in Catholic or Integrated schools.

Irish is available as a subject in universities in the RoI and NI, and also in universities abroad. Irish is required for matriculation into the National University of Ireland and it is a compulsory subject in initial teacher education (ITE) for primary teachers in the RoI. IM ITE programmes and master's programmes for in-service teachers are available across a number of institutions in the RoI and NI and IM non-teacher-education programmes are also available in a number of institutions in the RoI. A fuller account of Irish in education is available in the Mercator reports on the RoI (Mercator 2016) and NI (Mercator 2019).

In the Gaeltacht, it is noted that IM pre-school (Hickey 2001), primary and post-primary (Mac Donnacha et al. 2004) education facilitates children to develop proficiency in Irish. However, the socialization of English as the language of peer interaction is also a feature of Gaeltacht education, even where there is strong institutional support for Irish and where children from Irish-speaking homes are in the majority (Hickey 2001; Mac Donnacha et al. 2004). This phenomenon is related to the status of English, but also to a well-established politeness etiquette that involves not speaking Irish where some of the company may not be comfortable in the language (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research 1975). The result is that it can be challenging to find a space for Irish in schools and facilitate students who use Irish at home to develop a deep knowledge of the language (Ní Shéaghdha 2010).

The 2016 policy for Gaeltacht education (Department of Education and Skills 2016) was one national policy response to issues in the sector. Among the initiatives emerging from the policy is a recognition scheme for Gaeltacht schools, whereby they have had to apply and meet certain criteria to be recognized. The policy also contains a commitment to distinguishing more clearly between the differentiated needs of children acquiring Irish primarily in school versus those coming to school having already acquired Irish at home. Specific and differentiated teaching time is now available to support children who speak Irish at home. Both of these initiatives are very much in line with prevailing approaches to state policy, with the state delegating responsibility to local agents and distinguishing in policy between a linguistic minority and the broader population, even within the Gaeltacht.

Although establishing IME outside the Gaeltacht featured in policy in the first decades of the Irish Free State/RoI, parental activism became the driving force behind IME from the 1970s (Kavanagh 2013: 33; Ó Duibhir 2018; Ó hÍfearnáin 2009; Ó Riagáin 1997: 25). While the departments responsible for education in the RoI and NI fund IME once established, it remains the case that IME is typically established following grassroots activism rather than state initiative. In this way, the states establish where demand for IME exists and can provide IME as a service for the significant minority who desire it.

IME outside the Gaeltacht, especially in the RoI, enjoys a reputation for high-quality education (Kavanagh 2013: 84; Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaoich 2021). Students in IME generally perform well in standardized tests of academic achievement (Kavanagh et al. 2015: xi) and rank highly in league tables that measure progression to university (a narrow measure of a school's success). Research on school choice suggests that 23% and 18% of the public would send their children to IM primary and post-primary schools respectively, if available nearby (Darmody & Daly 2015: 82). Despite the successes of IME and the support it enjoys, there is a perception among some that it is an elitist, middle-class pursuit (Kavanagh 2013: 40). Although IM schools are overtly keen to recruit students from diverse backgrounds and have some success in that regard (Nic Aindriú, Ó Duibhir, & Travers 2020), it seems that some groups, for example students from "new Irish" backgrounds, are underrepresented in IME (given how few parents in Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg [2019: 125] speak a language other than Irish or English at home). Furthermore, some parents' choice of IME is motivated by a desire to avoid what they perceive as negative influences in English-medium education (EME), including avoiding schools with students that have migrant backgrounds or special educational needs (Kavanagh 2013: 84–85).

Irish as a subject in EME can be transformative for students and can put them on a path towards using Irish regularly. However, many students are facilitated to learn just a little Irish through education. In the RoI, a long-term decline in pupil success in learning Irish in EME is described and is linked to policy changes (Harris 2008). More recently an inspectorate report (Inspectorate 2018: 52) highlights shortcomings in the teaching of Irish, particularly at primary level. Recent curriculum changes at post-primary now provide distinct curriculum specifications for IME and for EME, thereby distinguishing the minority who learn through Irish from the larger population who learn Irish as a subject. Rather than aiming to facilitate students to develop a deep proficiency in Irish, as has been the case in the past, Irish in EME today seems increasingly concerned with providing learners with a link to Ireland's linguistic and cultural heritage, and with developing linguistic, cultural and self-awareness.

In NI, the fact that Irish is taught as a subject exclusively in Catholic or Integrated schools also speaks to the value ascribed to Irish in a cultural and heritage sense. However, Mac Giolla Chríost (2005: 215) provides many examples of the learning of Irish in the Protestant and Unionist community. A number of initiatives in NI today continue to provide opportunities for people from Unionist and Protestant backgrounds to learn Irish (Dunlevy 2020). It is interesting to note that the learning of Irish here is again framed in a discourse of heritage, a discourse emphasizing the history of Irish among Protestants and Unionists and that underscores the linguistic links that Irish provides with Celtic languages in Britain.

## 9. Media

The media have long been part of the Irish-language revitalization enterprise, as evidenced in the Irish print media that burgeoned during the Revival period (Uí Chollatáin 2011). Irish language media are well developed today relative to many minority languages and Irish has a presence in the broadcast and print media in the form of dedicated IM platforms and also through IM content on EM platforms. There is a dedicated IM television station, TG4, and an IM radio station, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. In addition, there are a number of community radio stations based in the RoI and NI broadcasting exclusively in Irish. *Tuairisc.ie* is an IM online print news and current affairs service and *Nuacht RTÉ* provides an online news and current affairs service based on the IM content of the national broadcaster RTÉ. *Nós.ie* is an online culture magazine and *Comhar* is a subscription-based online and printed literary magazine. Owing to the requirements of the Broadcasting Act (2009), some limited Irish language content is found in EM outlets in the RoI. In NI, BBC Northern Ireland broadcasts IM content on radio and television. The EM print media in the RoI and NI also carry some limited content in Irish, generally in discrete sections published on a particular weekday.

The IM broadcast and print media outlets above each receive state financial support. However, the Irish-language media were developed largely as a result of action or pressure from the public rather than state initiative. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta (established in 1972) and TG4 (established in 1996) were both founded following years of activism and the establishment of pirate IM radio and television stations (Delap 2008). The campaigns for IM broadcasting drew largely on a rights-based discourse that sought the establishment of IM broadcasting for the minority Irish-speaking population. Similarly, IM community radio stations, as well as *Comhar* and *Nós.ie*, were initiated by the public. Although *Tuairisc.ie* came about as the result of a move by Foras na Gaeilge to establish an online Irish-language news and current affairs website, it was established through a public tendering process that saw responsibility for creating and maintaining the site outsourced and kept at arms' length from the state. In this respect, it is consistent with current trends in language policy whereby the RoI or NI states do not directly involve themselves in providing such services, but rather fund others to provide them.

Among the results of the development of the Irish-language media in recent decades has been the ghettoization of Irish into discrete and boxed-off spaces (Delap 2008; Ó hÍfearnáin 2000). In the broadcast media, for instance, it is observed that EM broadcasters, including the national broadcasters RTÉ and BBC, now pay little attention to Irish. This is despite, for example, requirements in the Broadcasting Act in the RoI that broadcasters, especially RTÉ, give due regard to Irish. A series of reports on the presence of Irish on EM radio in the RoI highlights the peripheral position Irish occupies on the airwaves: Irish output is low and tends to be aired at off-peak times (Walsh 2021c; Walsh, Day, & Fogarty 2019; Walsh & Day 2018). Similarly, An Coimisinéir Teanga (2019) has ruled that RTÉ, the national broadcaster in the RoI, was in breach of legislative requirements of the Broadcasting Act by not airing a comprehensive range of television programmes in Irish. As with language policy in other spheres, the media landscape provides an illustration of the manner in which Irish is increasingly treated as a minority concern for small portions of the population and as being a limited, heritage-based concern for the broader population (Ó hÍfearnáin 2009; Watson 2008).

An interesting media development in more recent times has been the carving out of a space for Irish in social media. Irish has a relatively strong social media presence (Scannell 2021). The interfaces of most of the major social networking sites are available in Irish and there is a small, dedicated cohort of social media users who interact exclusively or partly in Irish on the various platforms (Scannell 2021). An interesting feature of the development of many of the Irish-language interfaces on social media and other technological platforms is that the processes were again generally initiated by the public and not by the state or the relevant multinational corporations. In many instances, the interfaces were developed by the Irish-language community themselves and on a voluntary basis in cooperation with the relevant companies, at least initially. This is a notable language policy development in that, rather than being another example of the state responding to grassroots pressure, it is an example of large multinational corporations responding to such demands from the public. In many ways, however, the general thrust of the approach finds parallels in aspects of official state policy, the approach to language policy in the Gaeltacht since the introduction of the 2012 Gaeltacht Act, for example. The current language planning process in the Gaeltacht and the provision of Irish-language interfaces by tech companies are both characterized by a neo-liberal approach that requires members of the Irish language community to mobilize on a voluntary basis and to become the agents of their own linguistic futures. In the process, they provide a service to themselves that one might expect would be provided using the resources of the state or the relevant major global companies.

## 10. Conclusion

A story of the decline and renewal of Irish is described above and the importance of strong policy for minority languages is evident. Official policy in the RoI has never been as developed as many would like or as would be required to ensure a robust Irish-speaking Gaeltacht community and the widespread use of Irish as a second language in the general population. Nevertheless, the importance of state policy in the RoI becomes clear when compared to NI, where a lack of favourable policy can make for an inhospitable environment for Irish. Despite policy shortcomings, Irish remains a community language in areas in the Gaeltacht, albeit one that is under pressure. Many people inside and outside the Gaeltacht develop proficiency in Irish, the language attitudinal environment is quite supportive, and users of Irish generally develop literacy in the language. Official policy in the RoI now increasingly deals with Irish as a rights-based issue for a minority and a heritage-based issue for the general population. More recently, it assigns responsibility for language management to local actors. In NI, meanwhile, the policy landscape is somewhat more open to Irish since the Good Friday Agreement. These developments make for a sociolinguistic context that is fecund for investigation.

The language planning regime introduced with the 2012 Gaeltacht Act has already been subject to critique by researchers (Brady 2018; Ó Ceallaigh 2020; Ó Giollagáin 2014a, 2014b; Walsh 2021b). There remains significant scope to develop a research agenda on the implementation of the new approach and some inroads have been made here (Brady 2018; Ó Ceallaigh 2020). An assessment of the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme established under the Gaeltacht Education Policy 2016 is also underway (Educational Research Centre 2021). Existing and ongoing investigations of the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act and the Gaeltacht Education Policy provide a foundation for researchers to explore these new arrangements, to investigate the engagement of local actors with the processes, particularly the extent to which local populations feel empowered or otherwise by them and the extent to which the new regime facilitates the maintenance and revitalization of Irish.

Beyond the Gaeltacht, important changes have occurred in education and merit attention. An integrated language curriculum, that draws on the principle of linguistic transfer between Irish and English, has been introduced at primary level (Department of Education and Skills 2019). This

curriculum also distinguishes between children in IME and EME, something that is evident again in the most recent post-primary curriculum specifications for Irish as a subject (Department of Education and Skills 2015; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2021). In NI, Irish is predicted to become the second most popular language (after Spanish) taken at A-Level (Collen 2021: 8). Furthermore, decades have passed since the RoI and NI began to experience significant inward migration and a generation of students from migrant backgrounds have engaged with Irish and their experiences are now beginning to gain attention (Smith-Christmas 2021). How users of Irish negotiate language standards is another important area of focus. Given the emergence of new forms of variation and recent developments in standardization, the way that students and the wider community engage with language norms will be an important area of investigation. Finally, given the minority rights and heritage focus of policy in the RoI and NI, a fruitful avenue for future research is to investigate the interplay between these policy strands, establishing the extent to which the concerns of the minority are addressed or lost in the tide of the heritage focus of language policy for the majority.

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## Related articles/sources in LME [optional]

(Fig. 0) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. Illustrative map: [Irish language areas](#) [map].

(Aud. 1) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. [“Gaeilge” in Ulster dialect](#) [audio].

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(Aud. 7) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. [“Cnoc” in Ulster dialect](#) [audio].

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(Aud. 19) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. [“Gaeilge” by new speaker](#) [audio].

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(Aud. 21) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. [“Mná” by new speaker](#) [audio].

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(Aud. 23) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. [“Oileán” by new speaker](#) [audio].

## External sources [optional]

(Fig. 0) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. Illustrative map [map]. *Private research material*.

(Aud. 1) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. “Gaeilge” in Ulster dialect [audio]. *Private research material*.

(Aud. 2) Ó Murchadha, Noel. 2021. “Gaeilge” in Connacht dialect [audio]. *Private research material*.

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## Appendix

### Comments

### Footnotes

	Title	Entry/Asset type	ID
Current Entry	The Irish Language in Ireland	Overview_Article	15385116
<b>Outbound links: Entries &amp; External Sources</b>	<b>Entry title</b>	<b>Entry type</b>	<b>Entry ID</b>
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-017-9438-2">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-017-9438-2</a>		
	<a href="https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/174257/1/WP524.pdf">https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/174257/1/WP524.pdf</a>		
	<a href="http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/uploads/2/4/6/7/24671559/bkmnext294_vol_1.pdf">http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/uploads/2/4/6/7/24671559/bkmnext294_vol_1.pdf</a>		
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1142498">https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1142498</a>		
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1854272">https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1854272</a>		
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.21.05har">https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.21.05har</a>		
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.57.3.443">https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.57.3.443</a>		
	<a href="https://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NA-Context-Report-Oct_2016.pdf">https://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NA-Context-Report-Oct_2016.pdf</a>		

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<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2020.09.004">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2020.09.004</a>		
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/why-minding-our-language-is-a-priority-1.1735268">https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/why-minding-our-language-is-a-priority-1.1735268</a>		
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“Gaeilge” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17228624
"Gaeilge" in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17264751
“Gaeilge” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17264882
“Murlas” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17230609
“Ronnach” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17264955
“Maicréal” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265029
“Cnoc” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17231040
“Cnoc” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265116
“Cnoc” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265267
“Mná” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264438
“Mná” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265337

	“Mná” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265444
	“Caol” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264528
	“Caol” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265510
	“Caol” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265584
	“Oileán” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264594
	“Oileán” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265802
	“Oileán” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265897
	“Gaeilge” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266007
	“Cnoc” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266100
	“Mná” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266165
	“Caol” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266238
	“Oileán” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266337
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	Gaeilge_ Connacht dialect	audio	17367326
	Gaeilge: Munster dialect	audio	17405690
	Murlas: Ulster dialect	audio	17137299
	Ronnach: Connacht dialect	audio	17405741
	Maicréal: Munster dialect	audio	17405795
	Cnoc: Ulster dialect	audio	17137432
	Cnoc: Connacht dialect	audio	17405893
	Cnoc: Munster dialect	audio	17405947
	Mná: Ulster dialect	audio	17137557
	Mná: Connacht dialect	audio	17406017
	Mná: Munster dialect	audio	17406068
	Caol: Ulster dialect	audio	17137811
	Caol: Connacht dialect	audio	17406113
	Caol: Munster dialect	audio	17406165
	Oileán: Ulster dialect	audio	17138040
	Oileán: Connacht dialect	audio	17406231
	Oileán: Munster dialect	audio	17406295
	Gaeilge: New speaker	audio	17406486
	Cnoc: New speaker	audio	17406547
	Mná: New speaker	audio	17406598
	Caol: New speaker	audio	17406664
	Oileán: New speaker	audio	17406711
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	“Gaeilge” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17264882
	“Cnoc” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266100
	“Murlas” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17230609
	“Gaeilge” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17228624
	“Maicréal” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265029

	“Gaeilge” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266007
	“Cnoc” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17231040
	“Cnoc” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265116
	“Cnoc” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265267
	"Gaeilge" in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17264751
	“Caol” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265510
	“Ronnach” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17264955
	“Caol” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264528
	“Caol” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265584
	“Oileán” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265802
	“Oileán” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264594
	“Mná” in Connacht dialect	Primary_Source	17265337
	“Oileán” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265897
	“Mná” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266165
	“Mná” in Ulster dialect	Primary_Source	17264438
	“Mná” in Munster dialect	Primary_Source	17265444
	Irish language areas	Primary_Source	17229113
	“Oileán” by new speaker	Primary_Source	17266337
	Two languages, two borders, one island: some linguistic and political borders in Ireland	Backlist_Article	15337663
	The Irish language in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland	Backlist_Article	15337618
	Sociolinguistics in Ireland: A profile	Backlist_Article	15337574