

From Dante to Fishman: the role of migration in sociolinguistics and in the language situation of Ireland

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Many core themes of sociolinguistics derive from the 'migration experience:' language contact, language shift and change, language norms and standardization, multilingualism and bilingualism, language maintenance and loss, pidgins and creoles - derive from 'the migration experience.' The poet Dante's pioneering *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (On Speaking in the Vernacular) on diglossia and language planning (the relation between high status Latin and vernacular Tuscan dialects) was written when Dante was exiled from Firenze and his discovery of alternative dialects of power 'Occitan' and 'Sicilian.' Migration continues to be a key theme in sociolinguistics (Maher 2017). It is a factor in language use and language management and policy.

Migration has significantly affected the state of the Irish language *an Gaeilge* in the Republic of Ireland as well as its sister languages in Scotland and the Isle of. Until the 20th century, Ireland was relatively homogenous: one in 40 persons was not Irish. However, more than English and Irish, according to the 2016 Census: 1 in 8 persons is non-national, 8 people who travel on a bus every day speak a language other than English or Irish at home on a daily basis, 612,018 people in Ireland, (13% of the overall population), are multilingual, i.e. speak a foreign language on a daily basis (up 19 per cent from 514,068 in 2011), Polish was the most common language, followed by French, Romanian, Lithuanian, and Russian. Other commonly spoken languages are Spanish, German, Portuguese, Chinese and Arabic.

This presentation refers to media representations (articles and letters) of migrant learners of Irish in *The Irish Independent*, Ireland's largest-selling daily newspaper in 2016-2018. Whilst the decline of the Irish language over 200 years is well documented Irish language learning is becoming more diverse. Urban Irish is moving in its own direction. Recent research indicates that Irish speakers in urban areas (Dublin, Cork, Galway, etc.) find it difficult to understand Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht due to simplifications of the phonetic and grammatical structure of Irish. Irish is becoming more urban and urbane, more 'cool' (Maher 2005, 2010) and spoken by speakers of various (migrant) backgrounds.

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