**Abstract**

It is estimated that 70 million people around the globe can claim Irish heritage and, although Irish ancestry may be distant for many, the Irish language is active in numerous communities worldwide. The current vitality of Irish as a minority language within Ireland has been addressed in many studies, however research on Irish-language use within diasporic communities is relatively scarce, documented in some limited research but widely evidenced by the existence of cultural and language groups. This paper reports on research conducted in Ireland (North and South) and in several communities in the Irish diaspora (in Australia, the U.S. and Canada) on constructions of socio-cultural identity among those learning and using the language.

Research was conducted through qualitative interviews with Irish-language users and participant observation in a variety of Irish-language environments. Data collected provides the basis for a synchronic sociology of the Irish language worldwide, revealing differing patterns of usage in distinct communities of practice, some regionally specific and some determined by other factors. Content analysis of the data’s emergent themes allows for an exploration of dominant competing discourses that impact on Irish and minority-language use, including discourses of ethnicity, tradition and minority. These discourses are examined in their historical and political contexts and considered as frames within which the Irish language is made meaningful as a social action in local environments.

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