Anastasia HRECHENOK,
2nd year student of the Faculty of Humanities and Pedagogy,
National University of Life Resources and Environmental
Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine)
Scientific supervision - Associate Professor
Oksana TEPLA

THE IRISH LANGUAGE: REVIVAL AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

The Irish language, also known as Gaeilge, is one of the oldest living languages in Europe. It has deep historical roots in Ireland, and for many centuries, it was the primary language spoken by the majority of the population. However, the dominance of English, especially following the English colonization of Ireland, led to a severe decline in the number of Irish speakers. Today, Irish is recognized as the first official language of Ireland, yet it is not widely spoken in daily life.

Historically, the decline of Irish began with the English conquest of Ireland, which saw the imposition of English as the language of governance, education, and the military. As English became the language of power, Irish was gradually marginalized. The Great Famine of the 1840s, which decimated the Irish-speaking population, further accelerated this decline. By the end of the 19th century, Irish had become a minority language, with only a small fraction of the population still speaking it regularly. However, despite these setbacks, the language remained an important symbol of Irish cultural identity and resistance against English domination.

In the late 19th century, the establishment of the Gaelic League marked a significant effort to revive the Irish language. The League sought to promote Irish as a national language and as a cornerstone of Irish cultural pride. This movement spurred interest in the language and laid the groundwork for the language's revival in the 20th century. However, even with these

efforts, Irish continued to lose ground to English as the dominant language in both urban and rural Ireland.

In modern Ireland, the situation is complex. While Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland, English remains the primary language spoken by the majority of the population. Despite being a compulsory subject in schools, fluency in Irish is relatively low among the Irish public. Students often learn the language in a formal educational context but struggle to use it effectively in real-life situations. The Irish language is also seen in public signage, official documents, and in the media, with Irish-language radio stations like RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and the television channel TG4 offering programming in Irish. However, these efforts are often insufficient to reverse the dominance of English.

The government of Ireland has made various attempts to revitalize the language. One of the most significant initiatives was the **Official Languages Act 2003**, which required public services to provide communications in both Irish and English. The government has also provided funding for Irish-language media and education, and **Gaeltacht regions**, areas where Irish is traditionally spoken, have received special support. These regions remain vital to the preservation of the language, although their populations are dwindling as young people increasingly leave these rural areas in search of work or education in cities where English is predominantly spoken.

The revival of the Irish language faces several challenges. The most significant of these is the **dominance of English**. English is not only the global lingua franca but also the everyday language of business, media, and daily life in Ireland. As a result, Irish often remains a language of culture, literature, and heritage, rather than one used for practical, everyday communication. Another challenge is the **migration** from Gaeltacht regions to urban centers, which further weakens the presence of Irish in daily life. In many areas, Irish is no longer passed down from generation to generation, and younger people in these areas often grow up speaking only English.

Furthermore, while **education** plays a central role in the language's revival, it has not yet been fully effective in producing fluent Irish speakers. The focus of Irish education in schools tends to be on grammar and literature rather than conversational fluency, meaning that many students leave school with limited ability to use the language in practical settings. This gap in language education contributes to the perception that Irish is an outdated language with little relevance to modern life.

However, despite these challenges, there have been positive developments in the Irish language's revival. **Technology** has played a crucial role in making the language more accessible. Apps like **Duolingo**, along with online resources and social media, have provided new opportunities for language learners, both in Ireland and abroad. Additionally, Irish-language films, music, and literature have gained greater recognition in recent years, helping to bring the language to a wider audience, particularly younger people. Social media has also helped to create communities of Irish speakers and learners, with platforms like Twitter and Instagram being used to share content in Irish.

The **Irish diaspora** has also been instrumental in preserving and promoting the language. Irish-language classes are now offered in many countries, particularly in the United States, Canada, and Australia, where there are large Irish communities. These diaspora communities have maintained a connection to Irish culture and language, and their support has been invaluable to the language revival efforts in Ireland.

In conclusion, while the Irish language faces significant challenges in contemporary Ireland, there are also many efforts being made to revitalize it. The key to its future lies in creating environments where Irish can be used on a daily basis, whether in homes, schools, or public spaces. Continued government support, educational reforms, and the growing role of technology in language learning all contribute to the preservation and promotion of Irish. The survival of the language is crucial not just for cultural reasons, but also for maintaining a strong

sense of national identity and pride. The future of Irish may still be uncertain, but with ongoing efforts from all sectors of society, there is hope that it will continue to thrive.

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For scientists, lecturers, postgraduates, students.

Редакційна колегія:
Савицька І. М., канд. філос. наук, доц. (голова); Амеліна С. М., д-р пед. наук, проф; Харченко С. В., д-р філол. наук, проф.; Тепла О. М., канд. пед. наук, доц.

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