

## IRISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Justin Quinn

*Of many minority languages, Irish has ended up as close neighbour to a language that was not only that of the ruling empire, but also is now a global lingua franca. Such incommensurate strengths – demographics, cultural prestige, and other aspects – might be viewed as unfortunate at first glance: Irish grows weaker as English grows stronger. But on closer inspection, the story is not so clear. This article examines some aspects of English's status as a lingua franca – linguaculture, demotion of the native speaker, intercultural communication, communities of practice – and asks what the consequences for the Irish language and its culture are, as well as which of these might be used to think about the Irish language.*

### 1

About a decade ago, in an attempt to kick-start my Irish, I went on a language course to Glencolmille for a couple of weeks. A small village on the Northwest Atlantic coast of Ireland, it is in the Gaeltacht, the officially designated Irish-speaking part of the country. Apart from providing grammar drills and conversation classes, the school wishes to showcase the culture of the language, which entails traditional music in the pubs at night. Local storytellers are brought in for sessions. There are dancing classes. One lunchtime a group from class went for a swim on the nearby beach. The water was, as the euphemisms go, bracing and refreshing. After a few minutes I found myself treading water beside a Polish woman, whose Irish was better than mine. She told me she was living in Dublin and I told her I was living in Prague. "Oh!" she said, "When I was growing up in Poland we used to watch Czech cartoons all the time." As I had seen a lot of these with my children, we discussed the merits and wonders of the Czech cartoon *Večerníček*. When returning to the school later, I realized that I had

just spent ten minutes in the Atlantic waves talking about Czech animation with a Polish woman, through the Irish language.

Humorous aspects aside, there were further elements at work in the scene. First, it was a conversation in Irish without an authority present. There was no teacher, no designated fluent person, no *cigire* (the scary school inspector of past years). The conversation was under no official auspices. This was a new experience for me, as nearly all my interactions in the language had taken place in classrooms. Second, many conversations in Irish are *about* Irish. I imagine this is a common phenomenon in other minority or threatened languages. Third, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Irish nationalism successfully welded certain themes to the language (which we will come to later), and my Polish interlocutor and I had escaped these. From the point of view of a middle-class Dublin person, the Irish language had been, culturally, a gateway mainly to a few muddy, rocky fields on the Atlantic coast. Yet here was an experience in which the language led to new possibilities. It was bracing and refreshing to be talking of matters intimately linked with my life in my adopted home of the Czech Republic through the language, and not English. Fourth, and finally, I spoke in a lingua franca (something that I can never fully experience in English, as I'm a native speaker), and that lingua franca was Irish.

## 2

What is a lingua franca? Why should it be different speaking in one? What are the implications for culture? And what can such considerations tell us about the Irish language?

A lingua franca is spoken when two or more people do not share a first language, as for instance, at the symposium on minor European languages and their cultures, which this special issue springs from. Some of the notable lingua francas are Latin, Aramaic, Russian, French, Hindustani, and Swahili. And of course English is for the moment the most widespread. Over the past few decades, applied linguists have begun examining English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), exploring how it might be diverging from English spoken in places like Canada, Australia, the US, and the UK. There is, however, a major point of disagreement: some applied linguists say that ELF language use is imperfect, much like that of language learners, and does not represent a new area of study. A second group, however, believe that ELF usage is a fundamentally new phenomenon that is separate from native-speaker use. These latter say that because the number of people who speak English as a second language is so much greater than that of native speakers, it is clear that rule-making will shift in

favour of the former. For instance, Barbara Seidlhofer has proposed that there is a particular type of English spoken in Europe that demands independent recognition from that spoken in Ireland and the UK.<sup>1</sup> She has pointed out that, paradoxically, in the EU parliament, deputies from these last two countries may be disadvantaged in communication through English.<sup>2</sup>

Lingua franca studies in English circle several other issues. The research is somewhat divided on the accompanying issue of culture. Does the English language bring with it a particular set of attitudes, positions, skills, and areas of knowledge? Is it a particular linguaculture? If we take this to mean, does the language necessarily bring with it the kind of culture found in the US and UK, then the answer is no. Yet while we may agree that there is no necessary connection, there may well be a contingent one, which we may think of as a weak language-culture hypothesis. Applied linguists use the term linguaculture (or languaculture) for this kind of connection. Karen Risager elaborates on what she calls this “cultural view of language,” that is, “language as *cultural* practice, as a carrier of various types of meaning, and the intention is to argue that language is never languaculturally neutral. Linguistic practice carries and creates meaning, no matter where in the world it is used and by whom.”<sup>3</sup>

The *EF English Proficiency Index* (2019) indicates what kind of contingent links these might be in a linguaculture: “Adult English proficiency is a strong proxy for the openness of a society. Where adults have learned to speak English, they are also, on the whole, more internationally mobile, more politically engaged, and more progressive in their outlook on gender roles.”<sup>4</sup> This might seem to loop back to older essentialist stereotypes of British/US culture, implying that somehow allegiance to open society is hardcoded in the language itself. The authors immediately reject such an implication, stating that there is not “a neat cause and effect relationship. Instead, it seems likely that the same forces that cause people to adopt English as a global tool for communication also increase

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Seidlhofer, “Lingua Franca English: The European Context,” *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*, ed. Andy Kirkpatrick (London: Routledge, 2010) 355-71.

<sup>2</sup> Seidlhofer, “Lingua Franca English” 364.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Risager, *Language and Culture Pedagogy: From a National to a Transnational Paradigm* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007) 170.

<sup>4</sup> *EF English Proficiency Index: A Ranking of 100 Countries and Regions by English Skills* (Education First, 2019) 18. <https://www.ef.com/~/media/centralescom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v9/ef-epi-2019-english.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2020). Because the statistics in this report are gathered across a broad range of regions, it is indicative only of general tendencies.

openness and reduce inequality.”<sup>5</sup> What might this mean? If a Russian human rights activist is going to learn a second language, then it is more likely to be English than, say, Swedish or Chinese. A Ghanaian feminist is more likely to learn English than, say, Russian or Czech. And they do so not because of something essential to the language itself, but because of a range of contingent facts about the language, which led to its establishment as a global lingua franca.

A further and connected aspect is community of practice. This is difficult to envisage and examine because of the language’s global spread and striation through certain professions, ethnicities, diasporas, and religions. Also, in different places, English will have a different valency. One might expect that in former British colonies, there would be widespread resistance to its use, but this turns out not to be the case. For instance, because Nigeria in the twentieth century experienced a civil war between two of its main ethnicities, each with different languages (the main ones being Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa), the language of the former colonial oppressor offers an opportunity to eirenicly sidestep conflict. (And here, as in many other places, English is not quite a distinct language, as it morphs along a spectrum from English as an international language, Nigerian Standard English to the rich varieties of Nigerian Pidgin.) The Nigerian case is then signally different from that of, say, the Czech Republic, which only began engaging with the language en masse after the fall of communism in 1989. If in Nigeria English is for the most part used *intranationally*, in the Czech Republic it is mostly used *internationally*. A further aspect of community is outlined by Anna Mauranen:

The challenge of conceptualising community for ELF research has been noted by almost all scholars who have theorised ELF, but no quite satisfactory solution has been reached yet, possibly because this has not been perceived as pivotal to understanding ELF, or perhaps in part also because the notion of community for ELF ought to be more complex than models considered so far. Communities where ELF is a dominant means of communication are not necessarily, perhaps not even very often, based on physical proximity between speakers. Neither are they close-knit communities with multiplex internal contacts.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *EF English Proficiency Index* 18.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Mauranen, “Conceptualising ELF,” *The Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca*, ed. Jennifer Jenkins, Will Baker and Martin Dewey (London: Routledge, 2018) 37.

Our inherited view of language (and culture) is often coeval with such an idea of physical proximity. It is difficult for us to conceive of a language that is not underwritten by such a community; but now we have a more protean, boundless, multi-tiered entity, made even more complex by online communication. Although the area is still being mapped, it would seem that the Nigerian case is perhaps not typical for ELF, as that is based on physical proximity (in a national territory).

Such diffusion is, however, balanced by a centripetal “general awareness of belonging to the community” of English speakers.<sup>7</sup> Mauranen continues: “An ELF identity is not as binding or strong as the national communities [...]. Speakers nevertheless seem to have an awareness of themselves as users of ELF, which for many is a central ingredient of their language identity.”<sup>8</sup> This last point is interesting. A connection between our Russian activist and our Ghanaian feminist might exist because they both use English. It is not as strong as the connection in national community, but these ELF people, if we can call them this, might have news and social media sources in common; they may have shared tastes in music or film that have come to them through English; they may even read some of the same books. To repeat: such a connection is not as strong as that within a nation or a neighbourhood, but neither is it negligible.

The language of this weak community no longer looks to native speakers for models, but begins to bend the medium itself in response to the fact that most of the time non-natives communicate with each other. This is what applied linguists call accommodation, and some of its effects are the elaboration of content and simplification of grammar.<sup>9</sup> Speech becomes more deliberately explicit; there is more “frequent paraphrasing, rephrasing and repetition, or syntactic strategies like fronting or tails,”<sup>10</sup> and, as Mauranen remarks, “discourse adaptations of this kind can also become drivers of grammar.”<sup>11</sup> Seidlhofer states that:

as a consequence of its international use, English is being shaped at least as much by its nonnative speakers as by its native speakers. This has led to a somewhat paradoxical situation: on the one hand, for the majority of

<sup>7</sup> Mauranen 40.

<sup>8</sup> Mauranen 40.

<sup>9</sup> See Howard Giles (ed.), *Communication Accommodation Theory: Negotiating Personal Relationships and Social Identities Across Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Mauranen 40.

<sup>11</sup> Mauranen 40.

its users, English is a foreign language, and the vast majority of verbal exchanges in English do not involve any native speakers of the language at all. On the other hand, there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage.<sup>12</sup>

Thus it is clear that paradoxes like that of EU communication will become more frequent, as rule-making shifts from traditional sources (usually the US and UK) to the uncharted tracts of ELF.

### 3

For the past few years I have been working on a project about how to use literature when training language teachers. In the case of the English language, it is tradition and longstanding practice that teacher trainees are taught and examined in British and US literature. Works from these literary traditions are considered inextricable from the language: they constitute its core culture. These works “showcase the best possible, and also permissible, language,” as Veronika Quinn-Novotná and Jiřina Dunková say. They continue:

Texts from a literary canon are thus used as a means of learning/teaching about a language and a culture and in turn also of learning/teaching the language and the culture. Consequently, a literary canon is, essentially, not only a country’s representation but a representation of the language.<sup>13</sup>

The question behind this research is this: what is the connection between language and culture? English is a global lingua franca: over one billion people use it as a second language, or a foreign language – about a seventh of the world’s population. When these people learn the language at third-level institutions, they are often referred to classics of the language – Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen, et al. There is an associated desire on the part of many learners to acquire an educated middle-class English accent. To know English, on the higher levels of proficiency, means to know about this cultural world.

So, for instance, in Dickens, we encounter not only a work by a native English speaker, but also much information about the English and England,

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Seidlhofer, “English as a Lingua Franca,” *ELT Journal*, 59.4 (October 2005): 339.

<sup>13</sup> Veronika Quinn-Novotná and Jiřina Dunková, “World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca and the Hybrid Muse,” *Anglophone Literature in Second-Language Teacher Education*, ed. Gabriela Klečková and Justin Quinn (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

especially London. *David Copperfield* could work as what applied linguists call an “advance organizer,” that is, explaining many of the salient features of English life – character traits, institutions, even the geography of a city.<sup>14</sup> Jean Marie Schultz elaborates on this idea:

The concept of the advance organizer is based on the theory that learning only takes place when new information is integrated into the learner’s pre-existing knowledge structures. The integration of new knowledge into an existing intellectual repertoire renders cognitive schemata richer and more complex. In addition, the advance organizer bolsters cognitive comparative functions, helping learners to discriminate between new and old information chunks that may seem similar. Brandl highlights the role of predicting and previewing for the creation of effective advance organizers.<sup>15</sup>

Through the example of the Francophone novelist Chahdortt Djavann, Schultz shows how a French literary classic can help organize an immigrant’s experience, through the example of Djavann’s *Comment peut-on être français?* (*Becoming French?*, 2006), in which a Persian immigrant, Roxane, arrives in the French capital. Her feelings of chaos and confusion are mitigated by her engagement with Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (*Persian Letters*): “Through literature, which serves as an advance organizer for experience, Roxane both previews and predicts what her life will be in Paris.”<sup>16</sup>

But, as I implied above in the discussion of ELF, the connection between the English language and UK and US culture has come under strain in the last few decades. Literature is emerging from those one billion people, whether they are in former colonies or countries like, say, the Czech Republic, where English is the second language of choice. Much of the best and most lauded literature in the English language is written by people from beyond the original enclaves: Ha Jin, Aleksandar Hemon, Yiyun Li, Eva Hoffman, Lara Vapnyar, Ocean Vuong, Hisham Matar, and Vahni Capildeo, to give a few examples. This shift in contemporary literature also alerts us to a substantial archive: from well-known

<sup>14</sup> Maryam Mohammadi, Mahdi Moenikia, and Adel Zahed-Babelan, “The Role of Advance Organizer on English Language Learning As a Second Language,” *The Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2.2 (2010): 4667-71.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Marie Schultz, “Immigrant Literature and Its Use in Second Language Teacher Education,” *Anglophone Literature in Second-Language Teacher Education* (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Schultz.

figures such as Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, Isaac Bashevis Singer, to lesser-known figures such as Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Sybille Bedford, and Edith Templeton.

What are we to do with a novel that is about life in communist China by a Chinese person, written in English? How will Ha Jin's *Waiting* (1999) organize our experience of London, New York, or any other region of the UK or US? It would seem not at all. For one thing, the language is not as idiomatic and varied as in Dickens; it does not draw on as broad a range of registers or on plays of archaism and contemporary usage. Here is the first paragraph of the book:

Every summer Lin Kong returned to Goose Village to divorce his wife, Shuyu. Together they had appeared at the courthouse in Wujia Town many times, but she had always changed her mind at the last moment when the judge asked if she would accept a divorce. Year after year, they went to Wujia Town and came back with the same marriage license issued to them by the county's registry office twenty years before. This summer Lin Kong returned with a new letter of recommendation for divorce, which had been provided for him by the army hospital in Muji City, where he served as a doctor. Once more he planned to take his wife to the courthouse and end their marriage. Before he left for home, he had promised Manna Wu, his girlfriend at the hospital, that this time he would try his best to make Shuyu stick to her word after she agreed to a divorce.<sup>17</sup>

One index of the simplicity of this literary language is that you can put the passage through a few iterations of Google Translate with negligible loss of sense. Another difference is that the content of Jin's book tells you nothing (at least not directly) about the US or the UK. When learners encounter authentic texts they hope that they will also be informed about what they call in German the *realia* of the country in question. Thus Jin's book cannot work as an advanced organizer of the learner's experience.

In class discussions of this kind of work, there are voices that say that the writers choose English over their mother tongue because they want to reach a wider audience. Sometimes this position is shadowed by the suspicion that these writers are betraying their mother tongue. Such an idea is sponsored by the Romantic notion that one should only write literature in one's mother's tongue, as that, somehow, guarantees the authenticity of the writing, if not its quality. It is a Romantic idea, so it is only about two hundred years old; it is also an idea

<sup>17</sup> Ha Jin, *Waiting* (New York: Vintage, 1999) 7.

that is challenged by a couple of millennia of literary history, in which many works have been written in the authors' second or third language. Moreover, Jin's choice of English is a direct result of his own migration story – from the People's Republic of China to the US as a young researcher, and then, after Tiananmen Square, his decision not to return to China.

#### 4

In Irish-language culture we find frequent expressions of hostility towards English. For instance, the view of the English language as the language of business, and thus somehow debased, is behind the attitudes of some Irish figures. In Michael Hartnett's view, "English [is] a necessary sin / the perfect language to sell pigs in."<sup>18</sup> That is, English is the language of huckstering, commerce, and possibly commerce that stinks; extrapolating for our times, we say English is the language of global finance. For Hartnett, it sets up a binary that positions the Irish language as spiritual, philosophical, and pure (thus, it would seem to follow that one cannot or should not conduct pig sales in the Irish language). Hartnett's is, clearly, a problematic position: it is not only a misrecognition of English, but it also impoverishes Irish. Have you written Chekhovian short-stories in Irish that are centred on a Gaeltacht pig-farmer? Then, tough luck, in Hartnett's view.

On the linguistic level Feargal Ó Béarra talks about the way in which a new expression in Irish "stinks of Anglicism and corrodes the linguistic integrity of the traditional language."<sup>19</sup> The implicit purity of Irish that he is nostalgic for is connected again with the Gaeltacht areas: they are the cradle (and, alas, the grave) of what he calls Traditional Late Modern Irish. He distinguishes this from what he calls Non-Traditional Late Modern Irish, that is, more or less, most contemporary Irish usage, for which "knowledge of English is a pre-requisite to [...] understanding."<sup>20</sup> He explains that this new language is created "by the unnatural influence of English phonology and syntax on the contemporary language so that much of contemporary Irish is really nothing more than an

<sup>18</sup> Michael Hartnett, *A Farewell to English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Loughcrew: Gallery, 1978) 67.

<sup>19</sup> Feargal Ó Béarra, "Late Modern Irish and the Dynamics of Language Change and Language Death," *The Celtic Languages in Contact: Papers from the Workshop Within the Framework of the XIII International Congress of Celtic Studies, Bonn, 26-27 July 2007*, ed. Hildegard L.C. Tristram (Potsdam: Universität Potsdam, 2007) 263. <https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/opus4-ubp/frontdoor/index/index/year/2008/docId/1750> (accessed 1 May 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Ó Béarra 262.

imitation of English.”<sup>21</sup> His mordancy culminates in the characterization of this language as “English in Irish drag.”<sup>22</sup>

Here we are to understand that drag is somehow of low value, ersatz, inauthentic, alien to the proper, healthy, natural functioning of a language. It is also a full-on binary, one that perhaps Ó Béarra is not fully aware of. Since by characterizing this new Irish as “English in Irish drag” he implicitly figures an image of what the proper Irish language might be: as cis-heterosexual able-bodied male. The binary of English–Irish used in this discourse often characterizes English in a negative light. Ó Béarra goes as far as to say that “[i]t is both an internal and external linguistic enemy.”<sup>23</sup> In drawing battle lines like this, Ó Béarra intends to protect the minority language, or at least express his love for it, but his approach has the paradoxical effect of impoverishing it. The manoeuvre necessarily sets up the minority language as somehow better, in spiritual and other intangible dimensions, than English. Ó Béarra’s emphasis on the Gaeltacht and on the native speaker also, in my view unfortunately, has the effect of consolidating the connection of the minority language with a certain range of subject matter. In the broader cultural history of Irish, this is connected with nationalist iconography, romanticized representations of the Gaeltacht areas on the west coast, that are almost pre-industrial.

Hartnett and Ó Béarra represent an extreme position, but still their assumptions about the connections between Irish language and culture illustrate long-standing patterns. Also, their judgement is skewed by understanding Irish almost purely in relation to English. And English here is the language of, first, the British Empire and, second, of globalism. For them, it would seem, the English language is necessarily and inextricably part of a particular imperialist, commercial linguaculture. In these lights, the language towers over Irish, like Godzilla, all rampant heedless destruction. But as aficionados of the Japanese fictional monster will know, Godzilla *saves* humanity. When faced with such a binary, it is helpful to remember that English, though incommensurate in many ways, is developing in a similar fashion to some minority languages. That is, the connection between language and culture is being revised – the linguaculture is changing. It might help if we think of Irish not in opposition to English, but *like* English. For my purposes, like English insofar as the connection between language and culture is no longer fixed. To think of Irish in this respect as something like a lingua franca.

<sup>21</sup> Ó Béarra 262.

<sup>22</sup> Ó Béarra 265.

<sup>23</sup> Ó Béarra 266.

This is happening in studies of the Irish language. Scholars are questioning the longstanding connections between Irish and certain cultural formations. Above I dwelled on Ó Béarra's characterization, "English in Irish drag," because it raises broader issues of gender in relation to Irish. When Ó Béarra criticizes contemporary Irish, it is hardly coincidental that one of the social phenomena associated with contemporary Irish is that of gayness. John Walsh comments:

Irish is an example of a minoritised language which was long associated with conservative rural communities, a reified Catholic discourse of national identity and language ideologies based on nativism (O'Leary 2004). Such a discourse not only marginalised urban new speakers of Irish but also exhibited hostility to gay/queer citizens who did not benefit its particular version of Irishness.<sup>24</sup>

Walsh demonstrates that these "ideologies of authenticity" are upset by new speakers, who decouple, first, "language and territory (they acquire the language despite not being from the area where it is spoken)," and second, "language and the organic notion of language transmission, assumed to be heterosexual (they acquire the language despite it not being spoken to them by their parents)."<sup>25</sup> As Noel Ó Murchadha points out, this traditional idea of Irish is still the one that receives most consideration in state planning, and thus prestige accrues only to those speakers who adhere to the traditional models.<sup>26</sup>

In 2018 *An Foclóir Aiteach / The Queer Dictionary*, was published in recognition that the Irish language needed to establish a vocabulary for these new social

<sup>24</sup> John Walsh, "National Identity and Belonging among Gay 'New Speakers' of Irish," *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 8.1 (2019): 54.

<sup>25</sup> Walsh 60.

<sup>26</sup> "[T]aispeánann an plé i gcaibidil 4 gur ar mhúnla na gcanúintí traidisiúnta Gaeltachta a bhronntar an gradam, an stádas agus an dlisteanacht sa dioscúrsa ar an teanga ardghradaim agus léirítear go bhfuil an seasamh sin intuigthe i ngnéithe difriúla den phleanáil oifigiúil teanga. Idé-eolaíocht oileánach is ea í sin a dhiúltaíonn stádas mar chainteoir barántúil don té nach bhfuil ag teacht le hurlabhra thraidisiúnta na Gaeltachta." [The discussion in chapter 4 demonstrates that the prestige, status and legitimacy in the discourse about the highly regarded language is conferred upon traditional Irish dialects, and it shows that this stance is implicit in various aspects of official language planning. It is an island ideology that denies status of authentic speaker to those who do not conform to the model of traditional Gaeltacht speech.] Noel Ó Murchadha, *An Ghaeilge na Nua-Aoiseacht Dhéanach: An Meon i leith éagsúlacht teanga sa Ghaeilge* (An Spidéal: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2018) 247.

phenomena, otherwise Irish speakers would, as is usual in such cases, resort to code-switching.<sup>27</sup> The introduction of terminology might seem to confirm the idea of Irish language and culture as somehow, prior to this, uncontaminated by such rearrangements (following the logic of the binary that these new ideas are purely English in origin, and thus somehow foreign). But of course these are not really new social phenomena in Ireland, and unsurprisingly scholars are turning to history to establish an archive. As historian Gerard J. Lyne remarked: “In Ireland, [...] homoerotic sentiment survived among the Gaelic literati until well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, it is only with the ascendancy of English in Ireland from the eighteenth century on that these sentiments disappear from the literature, and indeed have been deliberately overlooked by scholars, at least to the present day.<sup>29</sup> So English stamps queerness out; or English brings it in. Which is it to be? This contradiction indicates that the English language itself does neither.

## 5

These changes illuminate the contingency of Irish linguaculture. For all the extremity of his position Ó Béarra also helps us understand how lingua franca usage of Irish among native speakers of English is driving changes in grammar and lexis. He may deplore these changes. But after the deploring is done, then what? This question is important for policy makers in Ireland, where there is understandable reluctance to let go of Gaeltacht areas as they are, historically, one of the most important guarantors of the language. This is not to say that when the Gaeltacht goes, the language will be fully deterritorialized. Throughout this article, I may have seemed to have set up a zero sum game between traditional and lingua franca Irish, but the reality, like that of English, is more of a continuum, as for instance, inter-generational transmission takes place also outside Gaeltacht areas, bolstered by national curricula in secondary schools which can help maintain levels of historical richness in the language. However, for the most part rule-making will shift to Irish-language schools in urban areas, and perhaps, more faintly, even to far-flung locales like Prague, for instance,

<sup>27</sup> *An Foclóir Aiteach / The Queer Dictionary* (Dublin: Union of Students of Ireland, 2018). <http://usi.ie/focloir-aiteach/> (accessed 1 May 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Gerald J. Lyne, “Poets, Patrons and Homosexuality in Medieval Ireland,” *Irish Times*, 20 August 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/poets-patrons-and-homosexuality-in-medieval-ireland-1.3597337> (accessed 1 May 2020).

<sup>29</sup> “At some date undetermined – but perhaps around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century – such sentiment apparently disappears. Thereafter Gaelic Irish reference to homosexuality (where it occurs at all) becomes in general pejorative.” Lyne.

where I am happy to have the opportunity to meet with a mixture of Czechs and Irish to talk the language once in a while – to talk in Irish as a lingua franca.

As with English's new global status as a lingua franca, "physical proximity" becomes more attenuated. Also, people who speak Irish adopt many of the lingua franca strategies that ELF scholars describe, and which I mentioned earlier (among them, elaboration, explicitness, repetition, paraphrase, etc.). In this, the Irish language is not in any sense *following* English patterns, but rather both languages, when employed by second-language speakers, are following the deeper dynamics of all lingua francas. In this qualified sense, ELF research may help us to understand what is happening with Irish at the moment.

We may think that there is a point where the analogies end. English, after all, is spoken around the world as a second language by over a billion many people, while Irish is used in this way by perhaps a few thousand people. These numbers must count for something. Perhaps they mean that, for the most part, people resort to English when they have no other language in common. It is a decision made out of necessity, whereas use of Irish will always be a *choice*. From anecdotal evidence, I know that it is also a choice even for native speakers of the language to use Irish over English (a choice that they do not always make). However, if Irish appears weaker in terms of numbers, then paradoxically the fact that only a small amount of people use it as a lingua franca might serve to strengthen all the more a sense of belonging and a shared community of practice. If our Ghanaian feminist meets our Russian activist and they chat in English, they can assume an amorphous shared number of cultural values (for a start, they probably both read the *Guardian*). But if their lingua franca is Irish, then their transnational commonality is many, many times more intense. They are unlikely to have learned the language without the culture; in other words, they will share a tiny, but powerful linguaculture. Part of that linguaculture might even be experiences in the Gaeltacht, or what is now left of it. When conversing with the Polish woman in the Atlantic waves, I was speaking Irish as a lingua franca, and we were taught for the most part by people from urban areas of Ireland. But it was also important that we had come to the small village of Glencolmcille, which still has official Gaeltacht status. In any case, because of the smallness of that linguaculture, such speakers of Irish are also likely to share strong opinions about linguistic diversity, the English language, globalization, and a range of other issues, not least of which is children's animated series from communist Czechoslovakia.