Faoin Teanga

Background: About the Language

THE IRISH LANGUAGE

Irish belongs to the Gaelic or Goidelic branch of the Celtic languages, along with Scottish Gaelic and Manx. By the 5th Century AD, Irish was established as the dominant language. However, in the 16th and 17th Centuries, the structures of powerful Gaelic society were destroyed as English rule was consolidated. By the end of the 18th Century, almost half of the population was monolingual Irish-speaking, and consisted primarily of the rural poor. This class was decimated by the Great Famine of 1846-9 and by subsequent emigration. By the end of the century, monolingual Irish speakers consisted of only one percent of the population.

The Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge), established in 1893, play a key role in the development of policies in favour of Irish, many of which were adopted by native government following the establishment of the Free State in 1922. Irish was designated the "national language" in the Constitution, became a core subject of the school curriculum, and competence in it was necessary for employment in the public service.

In 1937, a revised Constitution (Article 8) designated Irish "the first official language" because it was "the national language", while English was recognised as "a second official language".

In the 1920s, the government also decided to map the "Gaeltacht", the areas of Ireland where Irish was still the community language.

The Gaeltacht was reduced considerably in 1956 following a review of the boundaries. At the same time, a dedicated government department to co-ordinate Gaeltacht affairs was set up. This was followed in 1957 by the establishment of Gaeltarra Éireann, the first state industrial development agency for the Gaeltacht. Gaeltarra's board consisted of government appointees. A Gaeltacht civil rights movement and the emergence of Gaeltacht-based co-operatives in the 1960s and 1970s culminated in a campaign for a more democratic Gaeltacht agency. This led to the establishment, in 1980, of Údarás na Gaeltachta, most of whose board is chosen directly by Gaeltacht residents in elections. At present, there are Gaeltacht areas in seven counties (Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Waterford and Meath). The economic development of the Gaeltacht has, however, been accompanied by declining percentages of Irish speakers. In 2002, a government commission reported that of the 154 electoral divisions in the Gaeltacht, only 18 have 75 percent or more who are daily speakers in Irish.

Outside the Gaeltacht, Irish is spoken as a minority language throughout Ireland. According to the 2002 Census, 1.57 million people (41.9 percent) over the age of three were returned as Irish speakers. 339,541 people (including schoolchildren) claim to use Irish every day.

Surveys reveal a high level of support for Irish as a symbol of identity, for the competent teaching of the language at school and for policies supporting the Gaeltacht, but the discrepancy between the high numbers claiming knowledge of Irish and those speaking it every day is striking. [In Northern Ireland in 2001, 10.35 percent of the population claim they have "some knowledge of Irish".]

One of the most notable aspects of Irish language revival in recent years has been the steady growth of the gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools). In both the Republic and Northern Ireland in 2004, there were nearly 200 gaelscoileanna, at both primary and post-primary, outside the Gaeltacht compared to just 16 in 1972. There have also been significant developments in Irish-language media in recent years. The Gaeltacht-based radio service, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, broadcasts 24 hours a day. Since 1996, a dedicated Irish-language television channel TG4 (formerly Teilifís na Gaeilge), has been on air. A weekly newspaper, Foinse, is produced in the Galway Gaeltacht and a daily newspaper, Lá, is published in Belfast. A cross-border language promotion body, Foras na Gaeilge, was established under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and there are also many voluntary language organisations. In 2003, the Official Languages Act was passed, giving expression to the constitutional status of Irish. That act led to the establishment of the office of An Coimisinéir Teanga.

About the language

Cúlra: Faoin Teanga

AN GHAEILGE

Baineann an Ghaeilge leis an mbrainse Gaelach de na teangacha Ceilteacha, chomh maith le Gaeilge na hAlban agus Manainnis. Faoin 5ú haois AD, b'í an Ghaeilge a bhí i gceannas mar theanga phobail. Faoin 16ú agus 17ú haois, áfach, thit an tsochaí chumhachtach Ghaelach as a chéile de réir mar a threisigh réimeas na Sasanach in Éirinn. Faoi dheireadh an 18ú haois, pobal aonteangach Gaeilge a bhí i leath de dhaonra na tíre, ar bhochtáin iad a bhformhór. Dhein an Gorta Mór ó 1846-9, agus an eisimirce a lean de, léirscrios ar an bpobal seo. Faoi dheireadh na haoise, ní raibh ach aon faoin gcéad den phobal ar chainteoirí aonteangacha Gaeilge iad.

Is é Conradh na Gaeilge, a bunaíodh sa bhliain 1893, an eagraíocht is cáiliúla a shaothraigh ar son na Gaeilge ag deireadh an 19ú haois agus ag tús an 20ú haois. Ghlac rialtas dúchais le cuid mhaith de pholasaithe an Chonartha tar éis bhunú an tSaorstáit i 1922. Tugadh "teanga náisiúnta" ar an nGaeilge sa Bhunreacht, deineadh ábhar éigeantach scolaíochta di, agus ba ghá inniúlacht inti chun post a fháil sa tseirbhís phoiblí.
I 1937, leasaíodh an Bunreacht agus deineadh "an phríomhtheanga oifigiúil" den Ghaeilge toisc gurbh í "an teanga náisiúnta" í. Aithníodh an Béarla mar "theanga oifigiúil eile" (Airteagal 8).

Sna 1920í, shocraigh an rialtas chomh maith ar léarscáiliú a dhéanamh ar an nGaeltacht, na ceantair sin d'Éirinn ina raibh an Ghaeilge fós á labhairt mar theanga phobail.

Laghdaíodh an Ghaeltacht go suntasach i 1956 tar éis athbhreithnithe ar na teorainneacha. Ag an am céanna, bunaíodh roinn iomlán rialtais a mbeadh cúram na Gaeltachta uirthi. I 1957, bunaíodh an chéad bhord stáit um fhorbairt thionsclaíoch na Gaeltachta, Gaeltarra Éireann. An rialtas a cheap bord Ghaeltarra. De thoradh ar ghluaiseacht chearta sibhialta na Gaeltachta agus teacht chun cinn na gcomharchumann Gaeltachta sna 1960í agus 1970í, tosaíodh ag áiteamh ar son eagrais fhorbartha Ghaeltachta níos daonlathaí. I 1980, bunaíodh Údarás na Gaeltachta a roghnaítear formhór de bhaill a bhoird go díreach i dtoghcháin Ghaeltachta. Faoi láthair, tá ceantair Ghaeltachta i seacht gcontae (Dún na nGall, Maigh Eo, Gaillimh, Ciarraí, Corcaigh, Port Láirge agus an Mhí). I dteannta na forbartha eacnamaíche,

tharla laghdú i gcéatadán na ndaoine a labhrann Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. I dtuairisc ó choimisiún rialtais in 2002, dúradh nach raibh ach 18 de na 154 toghroinn ceantair sa Ghaeltacht a raibh níos mó ná seachtó cúig faoin gcéad den phobal iontu ag labhairt na Gaeilge go laethúil.

Lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, labhraítear an Ghaeilge mar theanga mionlaigh ar fud na hÉireann. Dar le Daonáireamh 2002, is cainteoirí Gaeilge iad 1.57 milliún duine os cionn trí bliana (41.9 faoin gcéad). Maíonn 339,541 duine (páistí scoile san áireamh) go n-úsáideann siad an Ghaeilge gach lá.

Léiríonn suirbhéanna go bhfuil tacaíocht láidir ag an nGaeilge mar shiombal féiniúlachta, agus go dtacaíonn formhór an phobail le múineadh cumasach na Gaeilge ar scoil agus le polasaithe ar son na Gaeltachta. Is údar suntais í, áfach, an bhearna mhór idir líon na ndaoine a deir go bhfuil Gaeilge acu agus an líon a úsáideann í go laethúil. I dTuaisceart Éireann in 2001, mhaígh 10.35 faoin gcéad den phobal go raibh eolas éigin ar an nGaeilge acu.

Ar cheann de ghnéithe suntasacha athbheochan na Gaeilge le blianta beaga anuas tá fás leanúnach na ngaelscoileanna. I bPoblacht na hÉireann agus i dTuaisceart Éireann araon in 2006 bhí beagnach 200 gaelscoil, bunleibhéal agus iar-bhunleibhéal, lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht i gcomparáid le 16 i 1972. Tharla athruithe tábhachtacha ar mheáin chumarsáide na Gaeilge le blianta beaga anuas chomh maith. Craolann RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, seirbhís atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht, 24 uaire in aghaidh an lae. Ó 1996 i leith, tá cainéal teilifíse Gaeilge, TG4 (Teilifís na Gaeilge ar dtús) ag craoladh. Tá nuachtán seachtainiúil, Foinse, lonnaithe i nGaeltacht na Gaillimhe agus foilsítear nuachtán laethúil, Lá, i mBéal Feirste. Bunaíodh comhlacht tras-teorann ar son na Gaeilge, Foras na Gaeilge, faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta i 1998, agus tá cuid mhaith eagras deonach ag saothrú leo chomh maith. In 2003, ritheadh Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, a thugann brí don chosaint bhunreachtúil atá ag an nGaeilge. De thoradh an Achta sin a bunaíodh Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga.
© *An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2004.*

http://www.coimisineir.ie/
http://www.coimisineir.ie/