



LEIDEN  
UNIVERSITY  
CENTRE FOR  
LINGUISTICS

**BRIAN Ó CURNÁIN**

DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

&

**CONCHÚR Ó GIOLLAGÁIN**

UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

**FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY**

**The Sociolinguistics of Irish.  
A Differential Diagnosis of Unidirectional Bilingualism**

*Sociolinguistics of unidirectional bilingualism.* From the point of view of linguistic transfer and bilingualised first-language acquisition of Irish as a minority language, the earlier and more intensive acquisition of English is leading to major changes in acquisition. The acquisition thresholds can be divided into three main stages: (1) fully traditional language in the oldest generations (2) nontraditional language of intermediate generations (3) reduced language of the latest speakers.

*Demographics.* Both the historical and up-to-date demolinguistic evidence indicates threshold levels of sociolinguistic vitality regarding proportional demographics of the minority language speaker population. Retaining sufficient speaker densities above the threshold figure is proving challenging for minority languages against the dynamics of unidirectional bilingualism.

*Bilingual competence.* The oldest generations of first-language Irish speakers have better competence in Irish than in English, whereas the reverse is true of the youngest generation. The greater competence in English of the latest generation correlates with their high level of linguistic transfer from English and the current stage of language shift to English in the surviving areas where Irish was until recently the dominant vernacular.

*Balancing bilingualism.* If members of a society cannot but acquire a majority language completely, it seems likely they cannot acquire their minority language completely. Regarding issues of bilingualised and incomplete minority language acquisition, it is proposed that a policy of delayed bilingualism would be optimal, entailing an initial period of enhanced monolingual minority-language acquisition, followed by later acquisition of the majority language.

**Lipsius 3.07  
16.00-17.00 hrs.**

**There will be snacks/drinks afterwards in the LUCL common room in Wijkplaats 4!**

**More information:** [www.hum.leiden.edu/lucl/news-events/lucl-colloquium](http://www.hum.leiden.edu/lucl/news-events/lucl-colloquium)

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