

An Náisiún Gaelach: Questions of Identity and Nationalism in the Irish Language

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Abstract

The current paper investigates the construction of nationhood in the Irish language through the use of a Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA) looking at terms coding identity in the Irish language. Using the New Corpus for Ireland the terms *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* were analysed for frequency of occurrence, semantic prosody and semantic preference in the corpus. Furthermore a collocation analysis of each of the terms was carried out. Through the use of these analytical techniques insight was gathered into the contextual usage of these terms. These insights were analysed through the prism of Kolakowski's (1995) criteria for the establishment of a nation in order to ascertain whether the usage of these terms reflected the conceptualisation of speakers' nationhood in terms of a separate and unique national identity. Findings showed evidence of a distinct national spirit, historical memory and a national body among Irish-language speakers, three of Kolakowski's criteria. While evidence surrounding Kolakowski's other criteria of a nameable beginning and an orientation to, and consciousness of, the future may be drawn from the findings, ultimately more work is needed to more rigorously establish that these criteria have been met.

Keywords: Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA), semantics, nationhood, Irish language

1. Introduction

In Russian we call *Gaeilge Íorlandscigh*, like Irish in English, *irlandais* in French and *irisch* in German – “Éireannais”, if you were to directly translate it directly back into Irish. Following this same logic, you call the language of Russia Russian, you find French in France and German is the language from Germany. But this doesn't work for “Éireannais”, because there is no such language, nor term, nor phenomenon. But there is a language called *Gaeilge*, spoken by the *Gaeil* in the Gaeltacht. I feel as though there is a sense of stubbornness in calling *Gaeilge Íorlandscigh*, like trying to put on a sheet on a bed for which it is far too small [my translation]. (Bayda, 2011, p. 56)

This paper comes at a time when there is increased attention around the Irish language in some areas of society, throughout the island of Ireland. Prior to the re-establishment of the Northern Irish Assembly in 2020, which had failed to sit for more than two years, the

resolution of issues surrounding the introduction of an Irish language Act in Northern Ireland were seen as central to the debate on Assembly formation (RTÉ, 2018; Devenport, 2018).

At the same time, evidence can be observed of a substantial shift in the demographics of those speaking the Irish language on a daily basis. While the population of the Gaeltacht areas, “the small, scattered and geographically isolated communities of traditional Irish speakers located on Ireland’s western and southern peripheries that have been geographically defined by the Irish State as the country’s officially Irish-speaking areas” (O’Rourke and Brennan, 2019, p.20) has remained relatively stable over the past decade (Government of Ireland, 2017) the number of people speaking Irish daily outside the education system in these areas has declined sharply and it is predicted that Irish will cease to be the primary community language in the traditional Gaeltacht heartlands at some point over the next 10 years (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). Conversely, the number of schools at primary and secondary levels outside of the traditional Gaeltacht areas teaching entirely through the medium of Irish continues to increase, with just over 8% of students in the Republic of Ireland in Irish medium education in the 2018/2019 school year (McCárthaigh, 2019).

In a survey commissioned by Irish language lobby group Conradh na Gaeilge in 2018 to mark its 125th anniversary, two in three people in the Republic of Ireland were shown to believe the state should be providing more support to the Irish language (Conradh na Gaeilge, 2018) despite the foreshadowing of its death as a community language in its historical heartlands. The current study seeks to examine the complex relationship between the state, the language it purports to support and the identity of its speakers. How do Irish language speakers situate themselves in terms of national identity and what role does language play in the formation of this identity?

The present study employs a Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) and examines the usage of three key lexical items encoding nationhood and identity as shown in an Irish language corpus, seeking to shed light on how Irish language speakers define themselves in Irish speaking contexts. The specific research questions examined will be stated in the next section before looking at dictionary definitions of the terms. In section 3, a brief historical context surrounding the terms to be investigated in this study will be offered and previous studies in the area of nationhood in corpus linguistics will be described. In section 4 an outline of the methodology employed in this study is provided before a discussion of the findings of the corpus in section 5.

2. Statement of Research Questions

The central research question addressed in the current paper is: Does the usage of terms regarding national identity in the Irish language establish a distinct identifiable Irish speaking nation based on the criteria laid out by Kolakowski? In order to answer the central research question it is first necessary to respond to the sub-research question: How are notions of nationhood codified in usage of the terms *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* in the Irish language?

2.1 Definition of Terms

In order to answer the above questions, it is necessary to define the terms surrounding identity to be used in the study. From the author's own knowledge of the Irish language the terms *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* have been chosen as relevant terms in this area. Definitions of terms here are all taken from the primary Irish-English dictionary published in the twentieth century, Ó Dónaill's *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (1977). *Gael* is defined as an

Irishman or woman (Ó Dónaill, 1977). *Gaelach* is defined as Irish, or attached to Ireland or Irish culture, with the secondary meaning of native to Ireland, homely, pleasant or common and ordinary (Ó Dónaill, 1977). *Éireannach* is defined as either an Irish person or of Irish culture (Ó Dónaill, 1977).

3. Previous Studies

3.1 Historical Context

A wealth of research exists on the role of the Irish language in the establishment of the Southern Irish state in the years both preceding and subsequent to independence. While this study is less concerned with the historical position of the language but rather with how the Irish-speaking population as it is constituted today codifies its identity through language, a small note about the historical positioning of the term, can provide context for the insights elicited in the corpus analysis.

The term *Éireannach* is recorded as having been used as far back as the 17th century as “break[ing] down the ethnic distinctions that historically separated the Gaelic Irish from the Old English, the descendants of the Anglo-Norman invaders of the twelfth century, and unit[ing] them as a new Irish Catholic nation” (McQuillan, 2015, p. 71). A seminal text which emerged in the 17th century was that of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (Basis for Knowledge about Ireland) written by Seathrún Céitinn in which the Catholic identity was presented as the defining characteristic of the *Éireannach*, not whether a person was a native *Gael* of Ireland or a later settler from abroad (Cunningham, 2001). Céitinn’s nation was in this way explicitly *Éireannach* rather than *Gaelach*. In the present day the term *Éireannach* is the official term used in reference to citizens of the Irish nation-state *Éire* (see Article 9 in Bunreacht na

hÉireann / Constitution of Ireland, Government of Ireland, 1945). This is likely to influence its use in the corpus.

In the period leading up to the foundation of the state, tensions surrounding identity are evidenced by the prominence of the Gaelic Revival movement, a movement which had as its primary aim the preservation of the Irish language (Ó Tuathaigh, 2008). This was linked to the larger promotion of indigenous culture, as evidenced in the 1892 manifesto of one of its most prominent activists, Douglas Hyde, who would later go on to be the first President of Ireland. This manifesto, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland’, states that the heart of the Irish people lies in its Gaelic history, literature and culture (Hyde, 1892). Prominent members of the revival movement were of the explicit view that the new state should be founded on the Gaelic heritage (Ó Torna, 2005; O’Leary, 2004). Journalist, activist and theorist D.P. Moran provides an example of this viewpoint stating “The foundation of Ireland is the Gael and the Gael must be the element that absorbs” (1905, pp. 36-37). Moran, in the same work, further advocated explicitly for an Irish Ireland in which the Irish language was spoken, the Catholic religion was practiced, materialism was rejected and only indigenous sports were played.

While the nation-state ultimately employed the term *Éireannach* in Irish for its citizens, it is also the case that the state also attached some symbolism and import to the Gaelic culture in its infancy, establishing the Irish language as the first official language of the state, mandating the teaching of Irish in schools and promoting indigenous Gaelic culture. This has meant that that which is *Gaelach*, of the *Gael* and that which is *Éireannach*, of the *Éireannach* people, have existed in ill-defined categories for centuries. The current study may provide greater clarity surrounding the usage of these terms as it relates to identity and nationality in the Irish language.

3.2 Nationhood

The quote that begins this paper underlines the central impetus for this study. While Irish may be enshrined in Article 8 of the Constitution as the national language, and first official language of the State (Government of Ireland, 1945), the reality is that despite over 1.5 million citizens claiming some ability in the language (Government of Ireland, 2017), Irish is not the working language or primary community language for the majority of Ireland's population. The traditional Gaeltacht areas make up less than 5% of the geographical area of Ireland and are dispersed mainly along the western seaboard of the country (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). There is no politically defined majority Irish speaking *nation* as traditionally defined, "an individual country considered together with its social and political structures" (Harper Collins, n.d.).

The conflict between the nation and the nation-state has been debated by numerous scholars in the field of Nationalism Studies. Joseph (2017) posits *nation* as an inherently ambiguous word, referring both to the traditional demarcated and politically definable concept of a nation-state but also defining groups who may live within a single state or spread across many. Similarly, for Richmond (1987), a state may be home to numerous nations. Smith (2002) emphasises the centralism of ethnic groups in the original formation of nations, however, nation-states may ultimately be home to numerous ethnic groups. Acknowledging the above stated reality that there is no majority Irish speaking nation-state, the current study aligns its conceptualisation of a nation with these scholars, distinguishing the nation-state from the concept of a nation.

Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski lists five key criteria in the definition of a nation (Kolakowski, 1995). They were interpreted by Wodak et al. (2009) as national spirit, a historical memory whether factual or mythological, an orientation to and consciousness of the

future, a national body (interpreted as metaphorical rather than a physical infrastructure) and a nameable beginning. These criteria are adopted in the current study as a framework for the assessment of a nation.

3.3 Corpus Studies and National Identity

Given the lack of relevant research into national identity in corpus-based studies in an Irish language context it was necessary to look further afield to examine relevant literature on the nature of language and national identity. A corpus analysis of testimony given to the Quebecois Government examined how identity was created among French speaking and English speaking people in Quebec. French speaking Quebec residents were more likely to identify Quebec with notions of nationhood, coded in the greater frequency of items such as *histoire* (history), *patrimoine* (heritage), *état* (state), *territoire* (territory), *terre* (land) and *pays* (country) in the French side of the corpus when compared with the English language equivalents in the English language corpus (Freake et al., 2011).

In a European context, a more recent study by Iveson (2017) sheds light on the usage of Catalan on Twitter in the run up to a public forum on independence in 2014. While the main focus was on the usage of the language and how it related to gender, the findings have interesting implications in the context of language and nationhood. Catalan, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the predominant language used by pro-independence groups, however two English language hashtags were also among the most prominent used by supporters of independence. This, the author posits, acts as a rejection of Spanish influence in the region and recalls a dominant narrative about a Catalan nation that is more progressive and outward looking than the ruling Spanish administration.

The above examples of how corpus-based studies have been used to discuss nationhood share similarities and differences to the current study. They show how the non-hegemonic languages in their respective contexts, French in Canada and Catalan within the Spanish state, may be used to create a sense of national identity within a larger nation-state. However, both Catalonia and Quebec at various times in history have aspired to greater autonomy and even outright independence. In research for this paper, only one study was found advocating for greater autonomy for Gaeltacht regions (Breathnach, 2000) as part of a greater push for more power devolved to local governments in general across the Republic of Ireland.

This study thus hopes to shed light on the concept of a nation within a nation-state and examine whether speakers of a minority language may develop a separate national identity than that of the hegemonic group, without the explicit aspirations for statehood that are seen in places such as Canada and Quebec.

4. Methodology

The current study employs Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA) in order to answer the above research questions. This section briefly introduces the corpus, the benefits of its use and its limitations before focusing on the analytical strategy to be employed.

4.1 The New Corpus for Ireland

The proposed corpus to be used in this study is the Irish side of *Nua-Chorpas na hÉireann* (The New Corpus for Ireland) (<http://corpas.focloir.ie>), a balanced corpus of 30,200,000 tokens of written Irish gathered over a 12-month period in order to assist in the

creation of a new English-Irish dictionary (Kilgarriff et al., 2006). A number of relevant points regarding the corpus that are pertinent to this study have been raised by those involved in its compilation.

Firstly, while it was unavoidable to include the voices of non-native speakers in the Irish language side of the corpus, a conscious effort was made, where possible, to include texts written by native speakers. Moreover, the authors strived to ensure a range of texts were included from the three main dialects of Irish, Connacht, Munster and Ulster (Kilgarriff et al, 2006).

One limitation of the corpus is its age. The corpus was compiled from traditional print media, literature and web based elements, however compilation was completed in 2005, meaning it is over 15 years old at the time of this study. Technical limitations made the use of more modern corpora unviable for now.

4.2 Analytical Strategy

The online concordance software Sketch Engine was used to carry out the current study. The nodes *Gael*, *Gaelach* were searched for separately as a noun and adjective respectively and their raw frequency of occurrence noted. Technical issues relating to tagging in the corpus meant that *Éireannach* could not be separated neatly into noun and adjectival forms.

Both the semantic prosody and the semantic preference of all terms were analysed. Semantic prosody may be defined as “the consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” (Louw, 1993, p. 157). This is usually defined in terms of the negativity or positivity of the collocates of a given word. As Baker et al. (2008, p. 278) state “it is evaluative in that it often reveals the speaker’s stance”. Semantic preference here is

taken to mean “the relation, not between individual words, but between a lemma or word-form and a set of semantically related words” (Stubbs, 2001, p.65). In order to examine the semantic prosody and preference of each lexical item, 50 concordance lines for each term were generated randomly in Sketch Engine for the nodes *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach*. Nodes were examined with a span of 10 tokens to the left or right of the node. The span is defined as “a contextual window for a node, specifying how many words to the left and right it extends i.e. number of words before and/or after the node” (Begagić, 2013, p. 408).

A collocation analysis was carried out on each of the three lemmas *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach*, with the highest ranking collocates being combed for high frequency proper noun collocates of each term. *logDice* (a statistical measure used to identify collocations) has been employed for this study because of its interpretability (Gablasova et al., 2017).

5. Findings

5.1 Frequency of Occurrence in the Corpus

A search of the basic occurrence of relevant lexical items to the current study in the corpus was carried out, with results as follows:

Table 1

Frequency of Occurrence of Gael, Éireannach and Gaelach in the Corpus

Node	Part of Speech	Occurrence	per million tokens
Gael	Noun	5,958	173.41
Éireannach	Noun/Adjective	5,565	161.97
Gaelach	Adjective	3,850	111.61

The noun *Gael* is more commonly found in the corpus than the combined occurrences of *Éireannach* as both a noun (describing a person) and as an adjective. However, there are dangers associated with a blunt raw frequency analysis such as the one above. It does not take into account the context in which the words are used, the nature of the collocations and the type of texts that are populating the corpus (Gablasova et al., 2017).

For example, 2,495 instances of *Gael* were found with the collocate *Fine* immediately to the left. *Fine Gael* is the name of one of the three ruling parties in the Dáil (Irish lower house of Parliament) at present. *Glór na nGael* was another example of a high occurring collocate of *Gael*, with over 500 occurrences of *Gael* immediately to the left of *Glór na*. *Glór na nGael* is a government body tasked with improving usage of Irish in communities and the workplace. The sporting body *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* / The Gaelic Athletic Association was also identified as a highly occurring collocate, as was the word *Linn*, commonly found in *Gael Linn*, a non-political, non-government organisation dedicated to the promotion of the Irish language and the culture associated with it. Therefore, the combined instances of *Gael* (without the collocates *Fine*, *Glór na*, *Lúthchleas* and *Linn*) added to the instances of *Gaelach* are roughly 500 more than the combined noun and adjectival instances of *Éireannach*.

This would suggest that users of Irish in the corpus were slightly more likely to identify and discuss concepts of concern to the *Gael* and that which is *Gaelach* rather than the *Éireannach* people and that which is related to them. However, it is necessary to delve further into how each word is used in order to gain insight into the meaning given to these terms.

5.2 Semantic Prosody

Table 2

The Semantic Prosody of the Nodes Gael, Gaelach and Éireannach

Node	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Gael	6	1	41
Éireannach	4	7	39
Gaelach	12	1	37

A preliminary generation of 50 random concordance lines for the node *Gael* resulted in 40 proper noun compounds, 17 of which featured the political party *Fine Gael* while 8 featured *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* / The Gaelic Athletic Association. Given the focus of the current study on discourse, high occurring proper noun samples were removed (*Fine, Lúthchleas, Glór* and *Linn*) via Sketch Engine and subsequently 50 concordance lines were randomly generated.

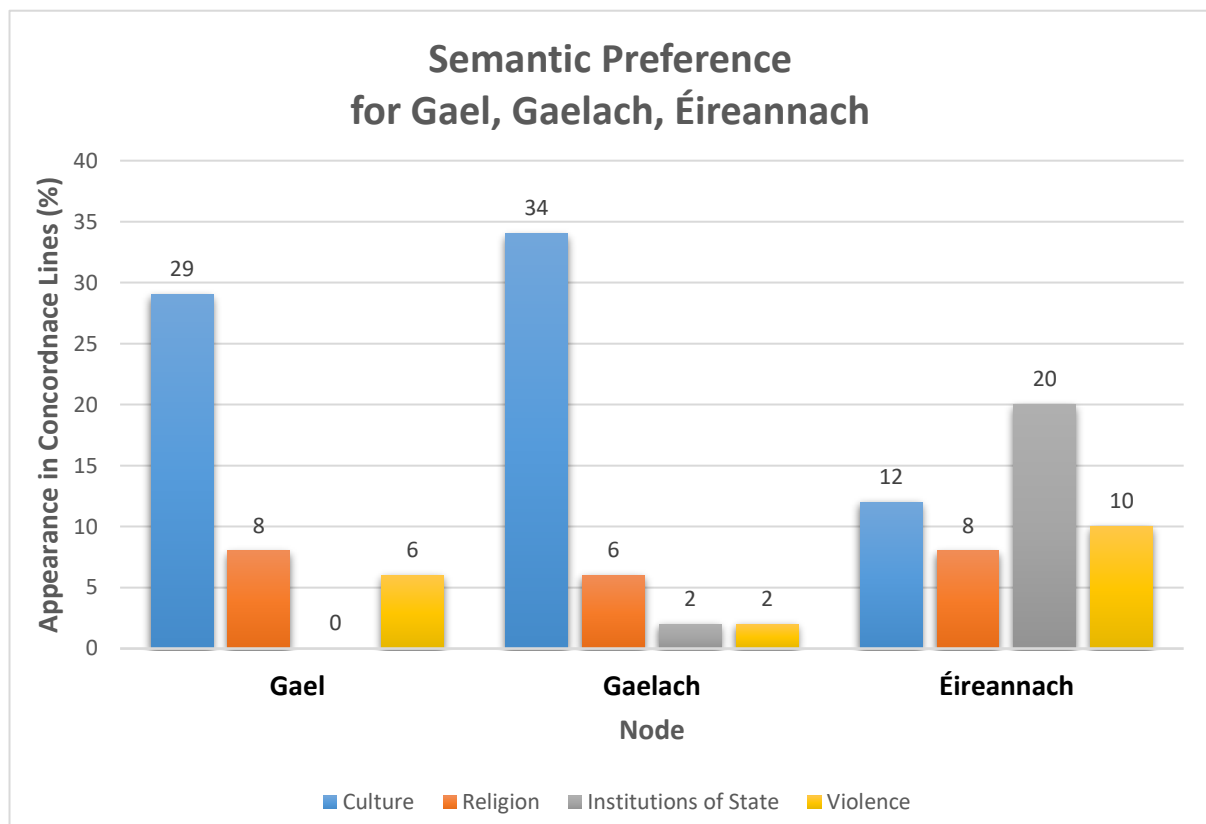
Of the 50 results obtained two were miss-tagged occurrences of *Gaeltacht* and *Gaelscoil* (a school in which Irish is the language of instruction) respectively. The vast majority of results were neutral. *Gaelach* was found to have a generally neutral semantic prosody in the 50 concordance lines analysed however it is noticeable that the positive results far outweighed those which were negative. Indeed, the only negative result related to stew (*stobhach Gaelach*). *Éireannach* showed a greater propensity to be associated with negative concepts or ideas than did the other two nodes, however it still maintained a largely neutral semantic prosody.

5.3 Semantic Preference

The figure below shows the semantic areas of the kinds of words most likely to collocate with *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* in the random collocation sample:

Figure 1

Co-occurrence of Semantically Related Items with Gael, Gaelach and Éireannach



As can be seen in 1.3 both *Gael* and *Gaelach* show significantly higher semantic preference for terms related to culture than *Éireannach*. All instances of traditional Irish music, Gaelic games or Irish dancing were all coded by either *Gael* or *Gaelach*. Interestingly, one instance of *Éireannach* in the concordance sample pondered:

(1) *An bhfuil cultúr Éireannach ann?*

Is there such a thing as an *Éireannach* culture?

Éireannach was found to co-occur with words coding state institutions or artefacts far more than either of the other two nodes. References were made to ambassadors, taxes and the post office, however, no discussion of any state institution, body or artefact was observed in the *Gael* concordance sample.

Less pressing to the current study are questions of religion and violence. References to the Protestant and Catholic faiths were almost equal among all samples. Discussions of rebel groups, wars and soldiers were far more common in the *Éireannach* sample, however, likely due to the fact that soldiers belong to armies, institutions of the state. As institutions of the state were seen to collocate strongly with *Éireannach*, it is perhaps unsurprising that discussions of wars and soldiers followed suit.

5.4 Collocation Analysis

A collocation analysis of the terms required a significant amount of curation. Firstly, taking the first node *Gael*, it was found that the prominence of the Fine Gael collocation pair (2,465 instances in the corpus) significantly skewed the results of the collocation analysis. Again, given the nature of the current study, an investigation into how notions of ‘Irishness’ are encoded in the three nodes in question, collocate samples with obvious propensity to surround discussions of the political party Fine Gael were removed from the results.

For *Gaelach* and *Éireannach*, duplication of closely related terms such as *Sasana* (England) and *Sasanaigh* (English people) was avoided, again with particular attention to the aim of the present study. Moreover, it was necessary to check that a particular collocate was not showing up high on the list based on frequent occurrence in a single document. These collocates were also removed from the table below. The scope for this collocation analysis was five items either side of the node. Minimum frequency was set to five.

Table 3*Samples of Collocates of Gael, Gaelach and Éireannach*

Gael		Gaelach		Éireannach	
Collocate	logDice Value	Collocate	logDice Value	Collocate	logDice Value
Lúthchleas	11.368	Peil	9.381	Saoránach	8.975
Gall	7.662	Cultúr	8.617	Sliocht	7.559
Gaeltachta	6.709	Traidisiún	8.599	Sasanach	7.387
Cine	6.686	Cluichí	8.509	Náisiún	7.382
Gaeilge	6.470	Dúchas	8.171	Scríbhneoir	7.289
Dílis	6.389	Taoisigh	8.080	Stát	6.761
Cairde	6.356	Náisiún	7.955	Londain	6.644
		Na hEaglaise	7.874	Ambasáid	6.629
		Rincí	7.554	Troid	6.431
		Ainmneacha	7.332	Imirce	6.425
		Pobal	7.207	Éire	6.337

Given the focus of the current study, we will begin by looking at Éire, the name of the Irish state in the Irish language. Éire was not seen to collocate substantially with the term *Gael*, however it did collocate with both *Gaelach* and *Éireannach*. Éire and *Éireannach* collocated strongly, largely related to neutral references to Irish citizens or Irish people in Ireland. This may be expected given that *Éireannach* is the official term used to refer to citizens of the Irish nation-state. Instances of Éire and *Gaelach* collocated 32 times in the phrase *Éire Ghaelach*. However, this was used almost exclusively in the corpus in a neutral

sense to refer to the type of Ireland desired by members of the Gaelic Revival movement, as described in Moran's manifesto for an Irish Ireland.

The term *Gaeltachta* (the genitive form of *Gaeltacht*) frequently appeared in collocation with the term *Gael* but it was not observed to collocate with *Éireannach*. However, *Gael* collocated with *Gaillimh* (Galway) often, a region in Ireland in which the headquarters of Irish language radio stations, TG4, RTÉ Nuacht and other Irish language media are located. It is also the region of the country with the highest proportion of Irish language speakers outside the education system on a daily basis (Government of Ireland, 2017).

Notions of the *Gael* and that which is *Gaelach* are distanced from the state and institutions of the state in a way in which *Éireannach* is not. Moreover, *Éireannach* collocates with notions of citizenship in a way that *Gael* does not. Note that references to *Taoisigh*, a high ranking collocate of *Gaelach* (see 1.4) refer to the old chieftains of Ireland far before the foundation of the Irish nation-state as opposed to how the word is most commonly used in contemporary contexts, to refer to the head of the Irish Government.

The high semantic preference of culture-related terms is also borne out in the collocates of *Gael* and *Gaelach*. Tradition and heritage are also strongly associated with the node *Gaelach*. *Pobal* which denotes community was also found in collocation with *Gaelach*. Of the 37 times that this pair was observed in collocation in the corpus, it spoke of an Irish speaking community more than 30 times. In other words, a *Gaelach* community is predominantly Irish speaking in the corpus. Similarly, the Irish language collocated strongly with *Gael* but was half as likely to occur with *Éireannach* (logDice 5.271).

The third highest collocate of *Gael* post curation of the data was *cine* (race). Neither *Éireannach* nor *Éire* were seen to collocate significantly with *Gael*. However, *Éireannach*

was likely to collocate with *sliocht*, most commonly in the sense of being of Irish extraction. This may be thought to relate to how citizenship of the nation-state of Éire is codified in the Constitution as *Éireannach*. *Cine* was not found to collocate with *Éireannach*. In other words, someone may identify as *Gael* in terms of race but someone living abroad with connections to the island may be more likely to be of *Éireannach* extraction.

5.5 *An Pobal Gaelach* and Nationhood

Having analysed the usage of the terms *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* in the corpus, we will now return to the criteria of a nation offered by Kolakowski in order to attempt to answer the question of whether this usage may constitute the actualisation of a unique national identity. These criteria are: national spirit, a historical memory, an orientation to and consciousness of the future, a national body and a nameable beginning.

Wodak et al. (2009) describe *the national spirit* as taking the form of cultural practices and shared behaviours. Our corpus analysis has shown that this community strongly identified itself with Gaelic games, music and dance, what may be colloquially referred to as traditional culture. This is perhaps unsurprising given the prominence of Gaelic revival movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries and their wish to revive traditional Gaelic culture as well as language, as discussed in section 3.1. Discussions of primarily English speaking writers (*scríbhneoir*) were seen to collocate strongly with *Éireannach*, showing a divergent cultural spirit for the two groups.

The term *Gall* was one of the strongest collocates for *Gael*, a term used originally in the 9th century for Norman settlers in Ireland (Jennings & Kruse, 2009) and subsequently for Anglo-Normans and non-Irish people in Ireland (Ó Dónaill, 1977). *Éireannach* was shown to have higher semantic prosody for terms related to violence than *Gael*. However, these terms

were more likely to be associated with later armed struggles and factions of the British army that operated in the six counties that constitute modern day Northern Ireland. The term *Éire*, having been established as the Irish-language name for the state much later than when the *Gall* were first seen in Ireland, seems to reference historical accounts after the foundation of the Republic of Ireland. What is emphasised in the *historical memory* encoded by the two groups is clearly different.

The difference in the *orientation to and consciousness of the future* is most prevalent in the collocation pair *Gaelach* and *náisiún*. The concerns of the ‘Gaelic nation’ evidenced in the corpus are focused on aspects of the linguistic relationship to the nation:

- (2) *Is léir go bhfuil beocht úr ag teacht sa náisiún Gaelach agus is cinnte go gcuideoidh Teilifís na Gaeilge agus na Gaelscoileanna leis an meath a stopadh.*

It is clear that a new life is coming into the *Gaelach* nation and it is certain that *Teilifís na Gaeilge* and the *Gaelscoileanna* will help to stop the decline’.

- (3) *An náisiún é gan a bheith Gaelach? An Gaelach é gan Gaeilge mar ' muttersprache' ?*

‘Is it a nation if it is not *Gaelach*? Is it *Gaelach* if Irish is not the ‘muttersprache’?’

These two concordance lines show the link between the Irish language and the ‘Gaelic nation’. The ‘Gaelic nation’ is concerned primarily with its survival through the protection of its language. Questions surrounding the language are much less prominent in the discourse involving *Éireannach*.

A *national body* is coded clearly through physical infrastructure in the case of the Irish nation-state. *Éireannach* shows strong semantic preference for state bodies and institutions of state. It has historically had its own currency and maintains its own embassies. The *pobal Gaelach* and the *Gael* as shown in this corpus have a strong connection to the *Gaeltachtaí*, particularly in Galway, they engage with and criticise *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, *Áras na nGael*,

Gael-Linn and *Glór na nGael* throughout the corpus, institutions a non-Irish speaker may have very little dealings with.

The *nameable beginning* of the state of Éire is traced to the early 20th century and the struggle for independence. While no definitive establishment date for a ‘Gaelic nation’ has been proven or witnessed in the corpus, if we accept that the *pobal Gaelach* as defined in this section by its Irish-language culture and traditional heritage was challenged originally by the *Gall* and subsequently by the Irish nation-state, then we may posit that the foundation of this nation has roots hundreds of years into the past. However, the date is not determinable definitively by any evidence in the corpus.

6. Conclusion

The current study sought to examine the ways in which notions of ‘Irishness’ were encoded in the terms *Gael*, *Gaelach* and *Éireannach* in order to investigate whether concepts of nationhood were encoded in language by Irish speakers in ways that would constitute the actualisation of a unique national identity.

The study has succeeded in showing a number of trends in the usage of these terms. A clear tendency was shown for the collocation of lexical items coding cultural and traditional artefacts with *Gael* and *Gaelach*, while organs and institutions of the Irish state were seen to be coded using the term *Éireannach*. The study also explored how the national identity of those identified as *Gaelach* was tied strongly to language and traditional culture. Interaction with and discussion of the nation-state *Éire* was limited amongst this group and discussions of the *Gaeltacht* and particularly the Galway region were more common.

Through the leveraging of Kolakowski’s five criteria for the creation of a nation we examined how one may go about establishing the conceptual framework for the idea of a

náisiún Gaelach however, it would be wrong to assert that this study is definitive in its findings. A number of weaknesses are clear. Firstly, the corpus includes a bias for native speakers as stated above. The majority of Irish speakers in a modern context are what Walsh, O'Rourke and Rowland (2015) designate 'new speakers', be they from within or from outside of the Gaeltacht. This may have consequences for how they view national identity. Studies into the differences between the usage of Irish by non-native speakers and native speakers in terms of identity may help define the demarcation of membership of any unique *Gaelach* nation.

Secondly, the corpus itself is now more than a decade old. The emergence of new online Irish language resources such as *Nuacht RTÉ*, *Nós* and *Tuairisc* is not reflected in the current corpus although they are contained in the newer Corpus of Contemporary Irish, published by the Gaois Research Group at DCU in 2016 (Gaois Research Group, 2016).

Furthermore, the current study focuses solely on corpus analysis, thereby ignoring potential insights from other sources. An interdisciplinary study combining insights gained from the corpus with insights from studies of history or Irish nationalism and nation building may lead to further insights into how nationalism is coded among linguistic groups in Ireland. Particular work is needed to satisfy the criteria of a nameable beginning for any *Gaelach* nation which would involve input from historians or folklorists. Moreover, the relatively small size of the corpus may need to be supplemented by other work to determine the consciousness and orientation to future criteria of any *Gaelach* nation.

The current study provides a snapshot of how a population in a linguistic minority viewed themselves and their identity at a particular moment in time and opens up the potential for greater research into the area of how identity, be it *Gaelach* or *Éireannach*, is coded in the Irish language and in the words of those who speak it.

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