

University of Pannonia  
Faculty of Humanities  
Multilingualism Doctoral School

## **EVALUATION**

**NAGY, Levente:**

### **Contemporary Gaelic Language Revival Efforts in the English-Speaking World**

Reviewer: *István Csernicsekó*

#### **1. Summary of the Dissertation**

This dissertation investigates contemporary efforts to revitalize Gaelic languages in the English-speaking world, with a primary empirical and analytical focus on Irish. The author formulates the central research problem around the question of whether Irish has moved beyond the status of a “trophy language”—valued symbolically as a marker of cultural and national identity but used only marginally in everyday communicative practice—and whether recent developments justify describing the current phase as one of accelerated revitalization.

The dissertation is structured in a clear and conventional manner. Following an introduction and historical overview of the Gaelic languages, the literature review situates the research within broader debates on minority language maintenance, revitalization strategies, language policy, and technological integration. The theoretical framework is grounded primarily in Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and Spolsky’s model of language policy, which together provide the conceptual scaffolding for the empirical analysis.

Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods design. The empirical core consists of three data sources: (1) secondary analysis of the 2014 Irish language survey, (2) interpretation of the 2022 Irish census data published by the Central Statistics Office, and (3) an original online questionnaire conducted by the author, yielding 65 responses from UK-based participants. The questionnaire explores awareness of Gaelic languages, self-reported competence, language attitudes, learning contexts, and perceived trends in revitalization. These datasets are triangulated and interpreted through the lenses of language practices, beliefs, and management.

The findings suggest a cautiously optimistic picture. The author identifies increased visibility of Irish in education, media, and digital platforms, alongside strong positive attitudes toward the language, particularly among younger cohorts. Digital tools and online communities emerge as especially important drivers of contemporary engagement. At the same time, the dissertation highlights persistent tensions between symbolic support and functional, everyday use, as well as the continued fragility of intergenerational transmission outside Gaeltacht areas.

The dissertation concludes that Irish is undergoing a meaningful, though incomplete, transformation: while structural challenges remain, current trends indicate a shift from purely symbolic preservation toward more diversified and socially embedded forms of use.

## **2. Use of Relevant Scholarly Literature**

The dissertation demonstrates substantial engagement with core literature in sociolinguistics, language policy, and minority language revitalization. Foundational theoretical frameworks—most notably Fishman’s work on reversing language shift and Spolsky’s model of language policy—are used consistently and appropriately. The author also draws on widely cited scholarship on language attitudes, symbolic power, nationalism, and bilingual education (e.g. Baker, Bourdieu, Anderson), situating the study within established academic debates.

Importantly, the literature review extends beyond abstract theory to address applied and practice-oriented research, including communal revitalization efforts, educational models, and the role of digital media in language maintenance. This applied orientation aligns well with the empirical aims of the dissertation. The author shows awareness of contemporary policy discussions and institutional frameworks relevant to Irish.

A minor limitation concerns scope alignment: while the title refers to “Gaelic languages” in the plural, the literature engagement is most systematic for Irish, with Scottish Gaelic and other varieties functioning primarily as comparative or historical reference points. This choice is explicitly justified and does not undermine the internal coherence of the study, though tighter alignment between title, scope, and literature could strengthen conceptual clarity.

Overall, the dissertation makes appropriate and effective use of key scholarly literature and situates its empirical contribution within relevant theoretical and applied frameworks.

## **3. Research Methods**

The methodological design is coherent and well justified. The mixed-methods approach—combining large-scale institutional datasets with an original exploratory survey—allows the author to examine both macro-level trends and micro-level attitudes. The triangulation of census data, survey reports, and original questionnaire responses strengthens the credibility of the analysis.

The analytical framework based on Spolsky’s tripartite model (practices, beliefs, management) provides a clear structure for interpreting the data, while Fishman’s GIDS is used as an evaluative tool to assess the relative robustness of language use across

domains. This dual framework is appropriate for the research questions and is applied consistently.

The original questionnaire component adds value but is methodologically limited by its small sample size and convenience sampling. The author explicitly acknowledges these limitations and avoids overgeneralization, framing the survey as exploratory rather than representative. Ethical considerations are addressed appropriately for low-risk, anonymous data collection.

#### **4. Original Research Contributions**

The dissertation's originality lies in its integrative synthesis of multiple data sources through a stable theoretical lens. The author provides an updated empirical picture of Irish language use and attitudes in the 2010s–2020s, highlighting generational differences, the growing role of digital media, and the persistent gap between symbolic valuation and everyday practice.

A key contribution is the layered interpretation of revitalization dynamics, showing how supportive ideologies and institutional management do not automatically translate into habitual use. The emphasis on digital environments as emerging domains of language engagement represents a timely and relevant contribution to current debates.

#### **5. Structure, Style, and Language**

The dissertation is logically structured and generally well written in clear academic English. Arguments are developed systematically, and conclusions are appropriately cautious and reflective. Figures and tables are integrated effectively into the analysis.

#### **6. Overall Assessment**

The dissertation meets the academic and professional standards expected of a PhD thesis in sociolinguistics and multilingualism. It demonstrates theoretical competence, methodological awareness, and the ability to conduct independent empirical research. The arguments are coherent, evidence-based, and relevant to contemporary discussions of minority language revitalization.

With minor formal corrections and clearer alignment between title and empirical scope, the dissertation is suitable for acceptance and defense. I therefore consider the work to be worthy of the PhD degree.

Berehove/Beregszász – Veszprém, December 15, 2025



*István Cserniczkó*