
The Irish language as the first official language in the Republic of Ireland

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The Irish language was recognized as the first official language by the Irish Free State in 1922. In 1937 it was declared as the national and first official language in the Constitution. Its legal status was further strengthened by the Official languages Act 2003 which was the first legal provision of a statutory framework for the delivery of public services through the Irish language. The latest legal recognition of the Irish language was in January 2007 when the Irish language was awarded the status of an official working language in the EU.

Considering the legal status of the Irish language questions about its real status arise. What did the legislature mean by giving the Irish language such a status, what were the provisions and aims to be achieved in relevance to that status? To what extent have these aims been realized? In the first part of my paper I will endeavour to answer these questions.

Considering the legal background of the Irish language a series of questions emerge when confronting it with everyday life in Ireland: How is the concept of ‘the national language’ understood generally? How does it apply to the Irish language? What is the perception of the Irish language in Ireland by a person residing outside the Irish Republic? These are the issues I am going to deal with in the second part of this paper.

Finally I would like to show attitudes of Irish people towards the Irish language and present their opinions on the place of the Irish language in contemporary Irish society and its culture. This will lead to the conclusion that either we encounter a specific impression of ‘the national language’ or that we question the Irish language being termed as such?