

“The brogue is common everywhere in Ireland, but you are taught to avoid it in reading”: notions of correctness and speakers’ attitudes in nineteenth century Ireland

In their seminal work on Historical Sociolinguistics, Nevalainen and Ramoulin-Brunberg (2016: 6) point out that the analysis of metacommentary from within the period, can be a valuable contribution to the field. Contemporary comments on earlier usage of dialect forms and dialect awareness provide us with first-hand information on how linguistic variation was perceived by contemporaries (Auer et al. 2015). Such analysis can be conducted by comparing the views of grammarians, dictionary makers, or general language observers, as well as of contemporary writers, with the voices of ordinary speakers whose views on language correctness and dialect use may be found in private correspondence.

In this paper we investigate the notions of language correctness in the voices of nineteenth century Irish English letter writers. By turning to CORIECOR (the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence*, McCafferty and Amador-Moreno 2012), we analyze the occurrence of the term *brogue*, which provides an insight into the perceptions that Irish emigrants had of their own language use. The concept of the brogue as associated with the Irish is a sign of the stigma that was associated to this particular variety of English throughout the historical period covered in the corpus (1700s-1900s). This association shows the stigmatization that such variety has undergone. Speakers echoed attitudes and perceptions of their own dialect that may have been raised in literary renderings of this variety. Grammars, dictionaries and treatises also contributed to the spread of language attitudes, ideologies and myths.

The paper will start by presenting an n-gram graph of the term *brogue*, and it will then move on to the analysis of this term in the context of the letters that form part of CORIECOR by using the tools created through the CORIECOR Visualized project: <https://corviz.h.uib.no/index.php>. The example in the title is one of the occurrences of *brogue* that can be found in the corpus. The study uses corpus linguistic techniques, but it also involves the formulation of traditional sociolinguistic questions regarding the consequences of dialect contact as a result of migration, dialect enregisterment and perceptions.

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