“My opinions and feelings of this country are very much altered since I left home”:

a contrastive analysis of Irish emigration using corpus linguistics

Abstract

In his introduction to *A history of Ireland*, Cronin (2202: xi) remarks that ‘[t]he Irish diaspora is now integrated into countless nations across the globe’. However, although the process of integration has been amply investigated by historians, only recently has empirical linguistic analysis come into focus.

This paper sets out to investigate the interrelationship between migration, language and diasporic identity formation in the context of nineteenth-century Irish emigration. More specifically, the study presents a contrastive, sociopragmatic analysis of migration experiences and identity construction as conceptualized in the private correspondence exchanged between Irish emigrants to Argentina and North America and their loved ones back in Ireland between 1880 and 1930.

Methodologically, the present investigation addresses three main research questions. First, what does personal correspondence reveal about the impact of emigration experienced by the Irish in North America and Argentina in the post-Famine years? Secondly, to what extent does the relationship between motivation to migrate and life satisfaction abroad shape migration experiences? Thirdly, to what extent did such migration experiences influence the way in which diasporic identities were linguistically constructed in the letters? By exploring these research questions the paper will briefly discuss pull and push factors as well as the process of chain migration.

The private letters on which the analysis was based come from CORIECOR, the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno in preparation), a corpus of Irish emigrant letters containing material from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth. The study takes an interdisciplinary approach that combines sociolinguistics (Chambers 2009), pragmatics and corpus linguistics (Aijmer and Rühlemann 2014; Romero-Trillo 2008) methodologies. Corpus linguistics techniques such as keyword and word list extraction and concordance search will be used to identify and collect the linguistic patterns that characterize diasporic identity discourse in the context of Irish emigration. In the second part of the analysis, a
qualitative examination of the linguistic patterns will be conducted in order to ascertain
the extend to which migration experiences and identity construction could be traced,
tested and extrapolated from the letters.

**Keywords:** Irish emigrants; letters; migration experiences; identity; corpus linguistics

**References**


