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# Brexit and the Impact English Language Learning in Ireland

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# Outline

- Introduction to Brexit and English Language Learning
- Boom! – How ELL in Ireland will benefit from Brexit
- Bust! – The threats to ELL in Ireland
- Status Quo! – Will ELL actually change in Ireland after Brexit
- Questions?

# Brexit Day

- March 29, 2019
- From 60 million first language users to 5 million
- Similar quantity to Danish, Slovakian, Lithuanian...
- What will happen to the English language in the E.U.?
- 74% of over 120,000 students from the E.U. (MEI, 2018)

# Ireland, Brexit, and the rest of the world...

*“more than 300 million people in the world speak English and the rest, it sometimes seems, try to”* (Bryson, 1990, p.1)

- Where is Ireland in the global English language ecosystem?
- Over 1 billion ‘learners’ of the language
- Global language, lingua franca, universal tool of communication...
- Multi-billion Euro/Dollar/Pound industry that is highly competitive
- Korea - English language learning is worth over \$18 billion (Piller & Cho, 2013)

The big question is **not** 'will Brexit change ELL in Ireland'...

...but **how** will Brexit change ELL in Ireland?

# Three Possible Outcomes

## Boom

- More students, schools, jobs...
- A recognisably vibrant sector in post-Brexit Irish economy

## Bust

- Widespread recession caused by lack of students
- More competitive: cheaper courses, lower wages, different quality of student

## Status Quo

- Steady but regular growth with new and encouraging opportunities
- Increased professionalisation and fostering of unique Irish ELT identity

**BOOM**

# Likelihoods in an ELL Boom

- UK becomes inaccessible (or with much reduced accessibility)
- Massive and rapid growth in the sector
- EU recognises Ireland as an English speaking country
- ✳ ELL will have increased value to post Brexit Irish economy (tourism)
- ✳ ELL teachers and staff would benefit as better jobs would emerge



# 3 big 'buts'

Standards of practice may drop

- 'Money to be made'
  - New and established schools looking to profit
  - Smaller schools being bought out
  - ELT could be seen as rescue job
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# 3 big 'buts'

We need a strong regulatory response

- QQI must actively protect established academic standards
  - Protect and support teachers through training, development, and rewards
  - Actively protect and support ELL through Internationalisation strategy
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# 3 big 'buts'

The external threat

- Does Ireland have the capacity for a massive influx?
  - Even **10%** of the UK's 630,000 students would increase Ireland's student numbers by 50%
  - Where is the space & where are the teachers?
  - The EU will decide what to do with English
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**BUST**

# Brexit will change English

- The EU's relationship with English is distinct
- Brexit will reduce access to learning
- English's new status as a 'minor' language
- How English is learned could change
- UK controls much of ELL - IELTS, British Council, publishing sector,



THIS IS  
ALREADY  
HAPPENING

# The EU and English

“Most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world” (Lisbon, 2000)

- Nurturing pioneering and high value research key to survival and prosperity
  - Boundary free research requires boundary free communication
  - Linguistic diversity in EU is not highly valued (Ammon 2006)
  - Equality, diversity, and efficiency benefit from a common European language
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# The EU and English

“Most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world” (Lisbon, 2000)

- English is Europe’s language
  - Language is defined by its owners
  - Do Europeans need the UK to know how to speak English?
  - Higher education: necessity for advanced research, publishing, and higher degrees
  - Europe wide degrees are taught in English e.g. unicas
  - Are IELTS & Cambridge exams suitable?
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# Europe's Language

English is the language of choice for secondary school students

- First choice for a second language in schools
  - Staple of this experience is to study in the UK or Ireland
  - English as the centre of 'new linguistic world order' (Graddol, 2004)
  - English is the dominant European language and this will not change
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# Europe's English

Brexit changes the relationship English has with Europe

- The Microsoft effect (Coleman, 2006)
  - Can Europe control its lingua franca - study, research, growth?
  - “Language is an element in the exercise of power and a metaphor for how power operates” (Ives 2004, p.101)
  - Can Ireland express its own brand of English?
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# Status Quo

# The Status Quo in Ireland

Existing state of affairs → a vibrant and growing industry

Brexit will influence changes → student numbers and student quality

Size will limit extent → not enough spaces or teachers

Drop in non-EU → Increase EU students

Ireland will remain a 'niche' market for English language learners

# Protecting the Industry

QQI, unionisation, and  
Internationalisation

- Industry expects high standards - EAQUALS etc.
  - QQI draft aims to increase standards in school
  - Teachers have organised and in a strong position
  - Industry is recognised as economically viable and important
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# The Value of 'English'

English language is more than just a means of communication

- Market in UK valued at over €1.5 Billion
  - Can the cultural value of language be measured?
  - Relationship between English and UK higher education
  - British Council serves wider purpose than language learning
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**‘English is not merely an instrument for communication, it is a value one identifies with for the social functions the language is seen as serving, its utility in the linguistic market’  
(Phillipson, 2013)**

# How has the UK responded?

Mixed responses do not provide much comfort

- International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity (2019)
- Government White Paper on Immigration
- UK and ERASMUS
- Widespread condemnation (Atack, 2019)



**What next?**



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