


Irish Music and Dance in Tourism Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study of Irishisms

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abstract

This article investigates the role of culturally marked realia – namely Irishisms related to the semantic field of traditional music and dance – in shaping Irish national identity within tourism discourse. Traditional Irish music and dance are central not only to Ireland’s cultural heritage but also to the linguistic strategies used to promote authenticity, heritage, and communal values to global audiences. To explore this, we formulated two research questions: How are music- and dance-related Irishisms distributed and contextualized in corpus data? Do their representations reinforce or challenge the notion of authenticity? Among key objectives were examining frequency and collocational patterns in corpus-based data, exploring their pragmatic use in tourism discourse, and finding potential hidden meanings through deconstructive analysis. Using GloWbE (Global Web-based English) corpus, the study analysed lexemes such as “céilí”, “session”, “craic”, “bodhrán”, “uilleann pipes”, “clarsach”, “reel”, and “jig”. A complementary qualitative analysis of 50 tourism texts related to music and dance – travel articles, forum threads, events descriptions, and branding materials – was conducted. Discourse analysis uncovered both explicit messaging and underlying identity constructs. A deconstructive lens revealed contradictions in the portrayal of Irish music as “ancient” and “authentic”. Findings show that Irishisms play a crucial role in marketing and transmitting cultural identity, especially through contexts like festivals and pub culture. The idea that tourism discourse merely reflects heritage is challenged: narratives of marketing campaigns commodify cultural symbols and reshape tradition. For instance – traditional Irish music: much of what is presented as “ancient” actually developed after the Great Famine in the late 19th century.

Keywords: Irishisms, Irish English, corpus linguistics, tourism discourse, cultural realia

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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Despite growing scholarly interest in tourism discourse (Hannam and Knox 2015) and the commodification of culture (Monica, Pujolar, and Duchêne 2014), relatively little research has focused on how lexical Irishisms related to the semantic field of music and dance are used within tourism branding to construct and commercialize national identity. Irishisms refer to linguistic features either borrowed from the Irish language or characteristic of the Irish variety of English. They can be found at any level – ranging from phonological features and morphological units to lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and syntactic structures (Filppula and Hickey 2007). However, in this study, we focus exclusively on lexical Irishisms and aim to address the existing gap in the literature by investigating how lexemes such as “céilí”, “session”, “craic”, “bodhrán”, “uilleann pipes”, “clarsach”, “reel”, and “jig” function within tourism discourse as markers of cultural identity.

All Irish-English translations in our study are taken from *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Ó Dónaill 1977), available at teanglann.ie. All etymological definitions and historical usages, unless otherwise indicated, are sourced from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online, n.d.).

Methodological Clarification

To ensure methodological transparency, the study applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Using GloWbE (Global Web-based English) corpus, a set of above-mentioned Irishisms was examined. These lexemes were searched manually using the interface’s “List” and “Find matching strings” functions. Frequency counts and collocates were generated using the corpus’s intuitive tools, with collocates ranked by raw frequency.

For qualitative analysis, 50 tourism-related texts were selected from a balanced range of sources – split 50/50 between editorial articles and promotional campaigns. The full list of analyzed texts is available from the author upon request. Selection criteria were the following: 1) relevance to traditional Irish music and dance; 2) presence of afore-mentioned Irishisms; 3) relatively recent (up to 10 years) publication by prominent Irish tourism or media organizations. Key sources included: Ireland.com, Visit Dublin, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Heritage Ireland, National Museum of Ireland, Royal Irish Tours, Discover Ireland, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish News*, *The Irish Independent*. These platforms were chosen due to their role in shaping the public image of Irish cultural identity. Building on this corpus-based and discourse-oriented data, we now turn to a broader cultural context by examining the historical and social significance of Irish music and dance.

Traditional Irish music, song, and dance have long been central to the social and cultural life of the Irish people. Historically, Irish communal life often developed around musical gatherings (Murphy 2018), and today these elements constitute not only cultural heritage but also essential assets in the branding of Ireland as a tourist destination. Irish music is actively integrated into tourism marketing, contributing to a unique cultural image of Ireland and drawing visitors seeking heritage-based experiences (Hannam and Knox 2010). This is extremely vital for the members of the Irish diaspora, who strive for a deeper and more meaningful connection with their ancestral heritage (Everett 2016).

The presence of Irish traditional music is evident across diverse sectors of the tourism industry, ranging from internationally known festivals such as *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*, *Cork Folk Festival*, *Ennis Trad Fest*, and *Temple Bar TradFest* to thematic travel routes like the *Wild Atlantic Irish Music Tour*, *Musical Pub Crawl*, and *Irish Music and Folklore Online Tours*. Music is also a defining feature of many iconic Irish pubs that also function as creative spaces for various performances (Murphy 2014). Such prominent Irish pubs include *The Brazen Head*, *The Celt*, *Darkey Kelly's*, *O'Donoghue's*, *The Crane Bar*, and *Matt Molloy's*. These places are actively promoted in tourism brochures and websites for their music sessions and warm atmosphere, thereby symbolizing that the tradition of Irish music is living.

The important role of traditional Irish music in the global branding of Irishness is further evidenced by its widespread use in advertising campaigns by major Irish brands such as Guinness, Bushmills, Tullamore Dew, Jameson Irish Whiskey, and the national airline Aer Lingus. These campaigns strategically employ recognizable Irish musical motifs and by doing so – evoke feelings of warmth, community, and hospitality. Apart from music, they actively employ semiotic elements such as photographs of landmarks associated with dance, music and “craic” – for instance, lively pub fronts in Galway Old Town or Dublin’s Temple Bar during music sessions, wall murals of céilí dancers in Derry, or festival stages at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann or the Saint Patrick’s Day parade. Traditional souvenirs featuring the Irish harp, uilleann pipes, or the shamrock, which is a registered trademark of the Republic of Ireland, are also widespread cultural symbols used by Irish brands.

Fáilte Ireland, or Irish tourism board, actively promotes Irish music and dance through digital media and targets both domestic and international tourists. In 2024, Ireland launched a new international campaign – Fill your heart with Ireland – which aims at promoting the country across major tourism markets such as Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and the Nordic region. It employs Irish music as a key element of Irishness together with the concept of “craic”, Irish gastronomy, hospitality and pub culture.

Irish musical heritage maintains a strong presence in global popular culture. The soundtracks of iconic films such as *Titanic*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Braveheart*, *The Quiet Man*, and *Song of the Sea* incorporate Irish folk elements to evoke myth, nostalgia, and a distinct atmosphere of dramatic anticipation. Irish folk ballads like *Leave Her Johnny* and *The Wild Rover* appear in the game *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, while Celtic music textures are integrated into *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Contemporary artists across genres draw upon Irish musical traditions, from Irish rock bands like *The Corrs*, *Mumford & Sons* and *Clannad* to international performers such as *U2*, *The Cranberries*, *Loreena McKennitt* and *Ed Sheeran*.

Dance also plays a critical role in Ireland’s performative heritage. Irish traditional dance, with its distinctive rhythmic patterns and cultural symbolism, has long served as a vehicle for national identity (Moloney 2006). Emigrants and deportees across history used dance and song to preserve community spirit and cultural memory while abroad. Events such as house parties (historically called *céilí*, from the Irish “visit”) provided platforms for music and dance before these practices moved into public pubs and venues during the postwar era.

Musicologist Mick Moloney, a prominent Irish-American scholar and performer, frequently described as a “champion of Irish culture” (Sisario 2022), has emphasized the centrality of traditional music and dance in expressing Irish identity globally. He notes that such symbols often

gain stronger resonance among diasporic communities than in Ireland itself and supports this claim with personal observation:

Shortly after arriving in the United States in 1973, for example, I discovered that Irish traditional music was just one part of an arsenal of potent ethnic symbols that were used to represent Irish ethnic identity in a multicultural society. Paradoxically, the very symbols treated with affection and respect in America – including the shamrock, shillelagh, and leprechaun – were already considered old-fashioned (even embarrassing) back in the home country. (Moloney 2006, 133)

Today, Irish music and dance continue to evolve, acquiring new interpretations and significance. It is argued that the strength of Irish traditional music can be seen most of all in the remarkable ubiquity of public sessions now taking place in bars all around the world (Moloney 2006, 134). At the linguistic level, lexemes in Irish such as “ceol” (music), “craic” (fun), “bia” (food), and “caint” (conversation) are frequently used in promotional texts written in English for musical events, especially within diaspora contexts. These Irishisms infuse tourist discourse with cultural depth and emotional appeal, acting as indexical markers of Irish identity and authenticity.

Pubs are central to the semiotic construction of Irishness. According to the 2012 edition of the *Lonely Planet* guide to Ireland, pubs are portrayed as “the number one attraction for visitors coming to Ireland” (McGreevy 2012, 7).

Irish pubs abroad function as cultural ambassadors, offering immersive spaces where tourists and locals alike engage with Irish music, food, and language in curated environments (Murphy 2014). As Murphy states further: “The pub is at the very heart of Irish society. In its typically perceived setting, it is often the focal point of the local community, a meeting place, a place in which to gossip, a supporter of local events, a haven from the trials of the everyday work environment” (2014, 196).

The *Lonely Planet* guide (Lonely Planet 2012, as quoted by McGreevy 2012, 9) characterizes the Guinness Storehouse – one of Ireland’s iconic tourist destinations – as an example of strategic branding, marketing and commercial persuasion (McGreevy 2012, 9). Therein lies the persisting difficulty with the commodification of culture, which can be even more pronounced when we investigate how something as traditionally Irish as the pub is exported beyond Ireland:

The Irish Theme Bar is a commodified cultural form that has mobilised a series of signs and symbols associated with an alcohol-centred stage Irish identity ... The cultural reproduction of such ethnic signs represents a reification of their meaning. As a consequence an essentialised conception of ethnicity is constructed, commodified and consumed. (McGovern 2002, 78-79)

This insight on commodification of Irish pubs, music and live sessions underlines the urgent need to critically examine the linguistic and semiotic strategies underlying tourism branding. We will turn to this task in more detail further in this study; for now, we shift focus to the corpus-based analysis of music- and dance-related Irishisms and their patterns of usage within tourism discourse.

2. TRACING IRISHISMS THROUGH CORPUS-BASED APPROACH AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Addressing Research Question 1, namely how music- and dance-related Irishisms are distributed and contextualized in corpus data, we can claim that one of the most widespread Irishisms is the lexeme “craic”. It is a popular mental concept, unique to Irish culture, which conveys a spirit of humour, friendliness, and authentic hospitality. Despite its deep cultural association with Ireland, “craic” has English etymological roots. The original spelling, “crack”, was used in Northern England and Scotland as early as the 18th century. It was only in the mid-20th century that the term entered the colloquial register of Irish English in its Irish Gaelic-influenced orthographic form “craic” (Hickey 2011, 272).

There are several definitions of “craic”: 1) fun or enjoyment; 2) chat or conversation; 3) a wild or eccentric person. In contemporary tourism discourse, “craic” is particularly prevalent and is used almost exclusively in the first and the second meaning. “Craic” can be found in almost every description of Irish pubs or restaurants, where it symbolizes a joyful, informal atmosphere. For example, *Gallaghers Boxty House*, a traditional Irish restaurant in central Dublin, hosts gastronomic workshops titled *Irish Craic & Cuisine*. These events are held in the home of the restaurant’s owner Anna, a local who familiarizes guests with the broader sociolinguistic context of “craic” as used in modern Irish English.

Collocational usage in response to Research Question 1 demonstrated that the lexeme is embedded in present-day Irish English discourse, namely appearing in greetings such as “What’s the craic?” or “How’s the craic?”, roughly translating to “What’s new?” or “How are things?”. The most frequent collocates among adjectives are “great”, “good”, “mighty”, “brilliant” (Fig.1), which render a meaning of a lively evening or an enjoyable event. Less common but still in use – “savage” or “deadly”, which are synonymous with great craic but differ in degree of intensification. Other less popular instances show “no craic” or “minus craic”, which refer to dull or uninteresting occasions. The idiom “the craic was ninety” shows quite high frequency in Irish English (Fig.1) and describes moments of peak entertainment. This phrase might have gained popularity through the song *The Craic Was Ninety in the Isle of Man* by a famous Irish band *The Dubliners*.

| HELP | ① | ★ | RE-USE WORDS | ALL | US | CA | GB | IE |
|------|---|---|--------------|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| 1 | 🔍 | ★ | GREAT | 251 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 226 |
| 2 | 🔍 | ★ | GOOD | 129 | 1 | 1 | 19 | 104 |
| 3 | 🔍 | ★ | BIT | 108 | | | 2 | 105 |
| 4 | 🔍 | ★ | HAVING | 72 | | 1 | 5 | 65 |
| 5 | 🔍 | ★ | IRISH | 50 | 2 | | 3 | 43 |
| 6 | 🔍 | ★ | MIGHTY | 44 | | 2 | | 42 |
| 7 | 🔍 | ★ | MUSIC | 37 | 1 | | 3 | 33 |
| 8 | 🔍 | ★ | ENJOY | 36 | 1 | | 5 | 29 |
| 9 | 🔍 | ★ | AGUS | 27 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 23 |
| 10 | 🔍 | ★ | FUN | 24 | 2 | | 1 | 21 |
| 11 | 🔍 | ★ | NINETY | 23 | | | | 23 |
| 12 | 🔍 | ★ | CEOL | 20 | 1 | | 1 | 17 |
| 13 | 🔍 | ★ | IRELAND | 16 | | | 1 | 15 |
| 14 | 🔍 | ★ | OH | 15 | | | | 15 |
| 15 | 🔍 | ★ | BRILLIANT | 13 | | | | 13 |
| 16 | 🔍 | ★ | BAR | 13 | | | 2 | 11 |
| 17 | 🔍 | ★ | MISS | 13 | | | | 13 |
| 18 | 🔍 | ★ | DEALER | 12 | | | 10 | 2 |
| 19 | 🔍 | ★ | ENJOYING | 12 | | | 2 | 10 |
| 20 | 🔍 | ★ | BANTER | 11 | | | | 11 |
| 21 | 🔍 | ★ | PINTS | 10 | | | | 9 |
| 22 | 🔍 | ★ | PUB | 10 | | | | 10 |
| 23 | 🔍 | ★ | ALTOGETHER | 10 | | | | 10 |
| 24 | 🔍 | ★ | DUBLIN | 10 | 1 | | | 9 |
| 25 | 🔍 | ★ | PUBS | 9 | | | | 9 |
| 26 | 🔍 | ★ | ENJOYED | 9 | | | 1 | 8 |
| 27 | 🔍 | ★ | CRACK | 8 | 2 | | 2 | 4 |
| 28 | 🔍 | ★ | CEOIL | 7 | | | | 7 |
| 29 | 🔍 | ★ | LADS | 7 | 1 | | 1 | 5 |
| 30 | 🔍 | ★ | LAUGHTER | 7 | | | 1 | 6 |
| 31 | 🔍 | ★ | CANT | 7 | | | | 7 |
| 32 | 🔍 | ★ | PLENTY | 7 | | | | 7 |
| 33 | 🔍 | ★ | PINT | 6 | | | | 5 |
| 34 | 🔍 | ★ | APOLLO | 6 | | | 6 | |
| 35 | 🔍 | ★ | WHATS | 6 | | | | 4 |
| 36 | 🔍 | ★ | LOCALS | 6 | | | 2 | 4 |
| 37 | 🔍 | ★ | DANCING | 6 | | | | 5 |
| 38 | 🔍 | ★ | CHAT | 6 | 1 | | 3 | 2 |
| 39 | 🔍 | ★ | BEER | 6 | | | 1 | 5 |
| 40 | 🔍 | ★ | FESTIVAL | 6 | | | | 6 |

Figure 1. The most frequent lexical collocates of the lexeme “craic” in the GloWbE corpus.

*Screenshot captured from the corpus interface.

Drawing on frequency patterns, as shown in Figure 2, “craic” is used almost exclusively in informal communication and has a strong prevalence in Irish English compared to other English varieties.

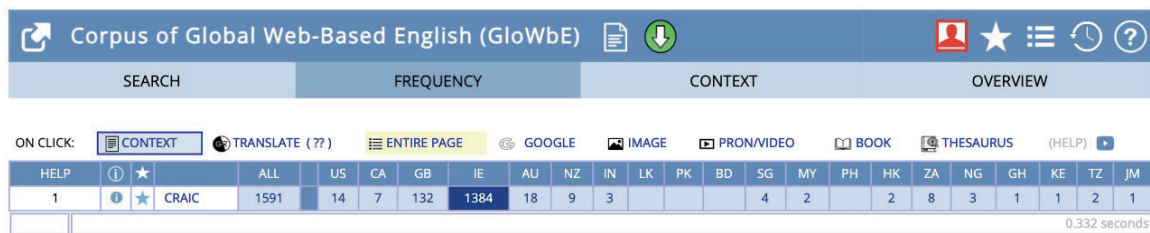


Figure 2. Frequency of the lexeme “craic” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.

In response to Research Question 2, we examine how “craic” is represented in tourism narratives and how its use contributes to the construction of cultural authenticity. As one of the most recognizable Irishisms throughout the world, “craic” is not merely a lexical unit – it contains an entire emotional frame that aligns Irish character with joy, warmth, and informal sociability. Its frequent appearance in promotional materials, restaurant slogans, and pub descriptions illustrates how language is used not just to reflect but to actively construct a commodified version of Irish culture.

This commodification of “craic” demonstrates how language undergoes both semantic revaluation and symbolic appropriation in service of branding. In his *Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, Fintan Vallely (1999) suggests that use of “craic” in English is largely an exercise on the part of Irish pubs to make money through the commercialisation of traditional Irish music. It is widely argued that such terms become marketable assets in late-capitalist economies, repurposed to add cultural value to tourism products (Heller, Pujolar and Duchêne 2014). In this context, “craic” becomes a semiotic anchor for stereotypical Irishness that is both emotionally potent and commercially strategic (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern 2002, 91).

The shift in spelling of the lexeme is one more branding instrument. As noted earlier, the original English spelling “crack” was used in the mid-20th century in the colloquial register of Irish English together with the Irish Gaelic-influenced orthographic form “craic”. Donald Clarke (2013), writing in *The Irish Times*, links this shift in spelling to the strategic rebranding of the Irish pub as a tourist attraction during the 1990s.

It is not only language that undergoes commodification – performative traditions such as music and dance are equally embedded in these processes. “Craic” is embodied in Irish social life, which is often organised around music. We now turn to another key Irishism: “session” or “céilí” in Irish – now synonymous with Irish (and Scottish) traditional social dancing. It originally meant simply “a visit”; “an evening’s entertainment involving a visit to whichever house in a community was hosting the gathering on a particular evening” (Murphy 2018). From the linguistic perspective, “céilí” has undergone semantic broadening as it originally referred merely to a home visit, and is now widely used to denote a traditional dance event or even a social gathering involving music and dancing.

This integral part of both Scottish and Irish culture continues to hold significant sociocultural value today. These informal gatherings of musicians take place in pubs, private homes, and at festivals, where traditional Irish music is performed collectively. The modern format of such sessions emerged in the mid-20th century among Irish emigrants in London, and since then, their

popularity has grown steadily in various countries (Rogers 2020). Murphy (2018) states that informal music gatherings today are commonly held in pubs, where the musical performance blends with friendly conversation, craic, singing, storytelling, and general mischief.

The lexeme “céilí” illustrates the functional flexibility of Irishisms as it appears as a verb in digital media (e.g., articles titled *How to céilí dance?*, *Want to learn how to céilí dance with your friends..?*). It is present almost exclusively within Irish English (Fig.3) while the term “session” is broadly used in English within academic, technical, or business contexts (Fig.4). In Irish English though, it has a culturally specific connotation, referring to informal musical gatherings in pubs or homes.



Figure 3. Frequency of the lexeme “ceili” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.

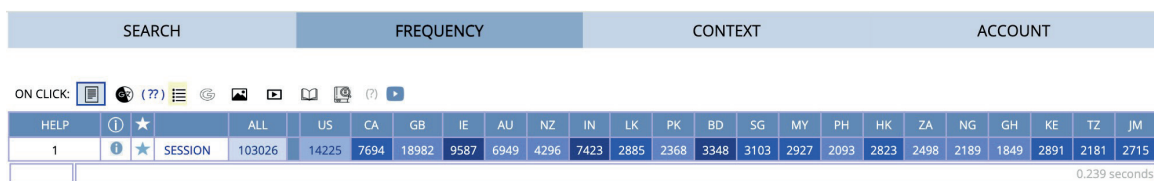


Figure 4. Frequency of the lexeme “session” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.

Corpus-based evidence from GloWbE confirms the frequent use of Irishisms like “bodhrán” (traditional Irish drum), “uilleann pipes” (elbow pipes), and “clarsach” (Celtic harp) (Fig. 5,6,7). The etymology of these lexemes often reinforces their cultural embeddedness: “uilleann” derives from the Irish “elbow”, referencing the playing technique of the pipes (Moloney 2006). While such terms are less common in general discourse, they are prevalent in specialized music-related contexts, especially on websites such as thesession.org or discoverireland.com, where musicians and enthusiasts discuss playing styles, materials, and historical significance of instruments.



Figure 5. Frequency of the lexeme “bodhrán” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.

The lexeme “bodhrán” appears over 500 times in GloWbE’s Irish English sub corpus, often discussed in relation to craftsmanship and performance technique (Fig.5). Similarly, “uilleann pipes” occur alongside other instruments like the fiddle and flute, often in contexts emphasizing their uniqueness. “Clarsach”, although much rarer (Fig.7), appears in historical and heritage-related texts. These findings demonstrate how Irishisms function not only as linguistic tokens but also as markers of national identity.

Among the lexemes analysed, especially “clarsach”, a Celtic harp, stands out not only as a musical instrument but also as a national symbol. The harp is featured on the Irish passport and in the logos of world-famous brands such as *Guinness* and *Ryanair*; in the logos of Irish tourism-related institutions like *Heritage Ireland* and *Kilkenny Castle*, and Irish media, for instance the newspaper *The Irish Independent*. The logo of an airline group *Ryanair* incorporates a stylized harp wing, exemplifying the creative use of national symbols in contemporary graphic design. As Moloney (2006, 126) notes: “There is also the tradition of the Irish harp, once an elite instrument, which since the late eighteenth century has been emblematic of the country of Ireland itself”.

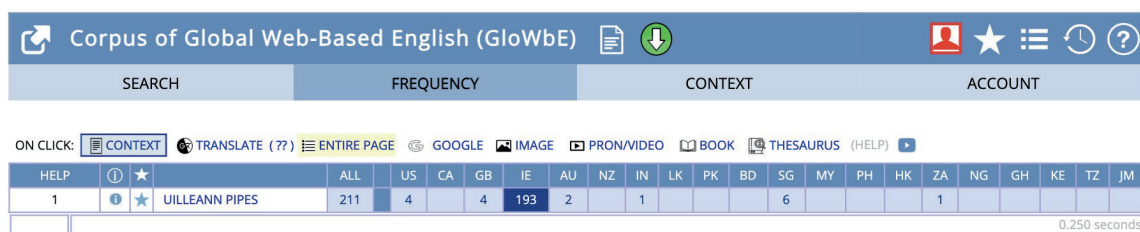


Figure 6. Frequency of the lexeme “uilleann pipes” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.



Figure 7. Frequency of the lexeme “clarsach” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus.

Scholars in the field of musicology highlightspecific defining characteristics in Irish dance music that distinguish it and make it easily recognizable. Musicologist Luke McDonagh (2022) identifies among these its internal melodic coherence, distinct regional and individual stylistic features, as well as the presence of variation and ornamentation.

The most widespread form of Irish dance music today is “reel”, a musical form that developed as early as the mid-18th century. Etymologically, the lexeme reel derives from Old English “rēolan”, meaning “to whirl” or “to rotate.” A semantic analysis of the term reflects the core principle of the dance: quick, rotational movements, often involving a partner’s change of direction, which resembles spinning or twirling in place.

In the context of social media and marketing, the term “reel” is now widely used to denote short video clips, especially on platforms like *Instagram* and *TikTok*. These new media trends have led to high global frequency of the lexeme “reel” in all major English varieties represented in the GloWbE corpus (Fig.8). While in Irish English the term carries the same media-related meaning

its usage is still more commonly associated with music discourse, where it refers to a dance or musical style.

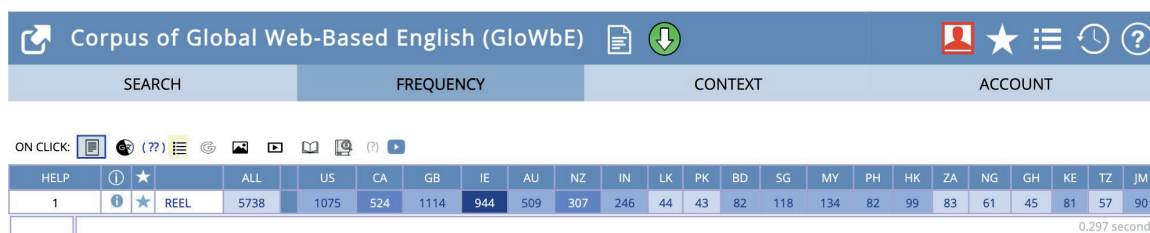


Figure 8. Frequency of the lexeme “reel” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus. Screenshot captured from the corpus interface.

Another prominent form of traditional Irish dance music – second in popularity only to the reel – is the jig. The jig also denotes a lively folk dance that gained popularity in Ireland as early as the 16th century. There are several types of jigs: light jig, single jig, double jig, slip jig, and treble jig, the latter performed in special heavy footwear known as jig shoes (Randel 2003).



Figure 9. Frequency of the lexeme “jig” in the different varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus. Screenshot captured from the corpus interface.

The etymology of the lexeme “jig” is disputed, and most sources suggest that the word has either French or Italian origins – most likely from the French “giguer” meaning “to jump” or the Italian “giga”, referring to a type of dance as well as a musical instrument that accompanied it (Horst 1987). In Irish English, the lexeme “jig” is attested in corpora, particularly in GloWbE (Fig.9), in contexts related to dance, music sessions, and the naming of specific tunes (e.g., The Kesh Jig, The Templehouse Jig, Foxhunters’ Jig). It frequently appears with such collocates as names of instruments (e.g., accordion, fiddle), cultural events (céilí, feis), or as part of idiomatic expressions conveying spontaneous emotional reactions – such as “do a jig of joy”, an idiom found across various English varieties, which means “to be so happy or excited that one could dance in a happy or jubilant manner”.

While GloWbE corpus data confirms the frequent use of musical lexemes such as “session”, “céilí”, “bodhrán”, “uilleann pipes”, “jig” and “reel” in Irish English, particularly in culturally embedded contexts, it is equally important to examine how these Irishisms and, more importantly, the musical traditions they represent – are discursively framed within tourism promotion. Further in this article we explore how these lexemes function within ideological constructions of Irishness.

3. CONSTRUCTING AUTHENTICITY IN IRISH TOURISM DISCOURSE

In line with broader scholarship on linguistic commodification, we observe that certain Irishisms like “craic”, “session”, “sláinte”, “bodhrán”, “clarsach” and others function not only as lexical items but as communicative resources, shaped by socio-economic forces and recontextualized within tourism branding. As Muth and Del Percio (2017) also argue, the transformation of language into a commodity often involves subtle forms of linguistic policing – processes by which specific forms of expression are controlled, promoted, or suppressed in order to produce commercially desirable speakers and discourses. In the case of Irish tourism, the above-mentioned lexemes are not just celebrated for their authenticity but also instrumentalized as symbolic and emotional assets that align with rules of marketing, affective engagement, and self-branding.

Irish music sessions, which are extremely popular in Irish pubs today, also function as a performative commodity. They are often viewed as a balance of performance, community, and commerce in the scholarly discourse. For instance, Adam R. Kaul (2007) broadly analyzes the concept of the Irish music session from the ethnographic and sociocultural perspective. In fact, “even though this ‘casual, participatory, and seemingly spontaneous activity’ functions as a powerful symbol of Irish cultural heritage, its authenticity is shaped by the commercial logic of tourism economies. In commodified contexts, cultural symbols are isolated and detached from the communities that produce and sustain them” (Kaul 2007). There is a risk that certain tourism practices – like Irish music sessions for example – might lose their cultural integrity and meaning through the reduction of cultural practices to exchange-values. In order to prevent them from performing merely a symbolic function, Irish musicians should hold a mission of curating the musical content and social flow of the session and create what Kaul reframes as “credible” performances (2007) – grounded in local tradition and producer control.

This commercialization of Irish music, which manifests itself in paid sessions, coexists with a parallel discourse that idealizes the session as an uninterrupted continuation of ancient Irish musical traditions. Tourism discourse frequently presents “traditional” Irish music as an ancient and authentic element of Irish culture, often referred to as a practice dating back to the medieval period. Numerous events, festivals, and tours promote this idea of long-standing musical heritage. However, having applied a deconstructive approach, we managed to reveal the internal contradictions and alternative meanings behind this narrative.

From a poststructuralist perspective, which involves disassembling and interrogating complex textual structures (Hannam and Knox 2015), we thoroughly analyzed promotional texts about Ireland to uncover contradictions within the portrayal of Irish “traditional” music and reveal its implicit or concealed meanings. According to this methodology, as Hannam and Knox claim (2015), texts are not closed or stable systems – they inherently contain conflicting elements and permit re-interpretation. When applied to tourism discourse – namely our case with Irish “traditional” music – this approach enables us to go beyond superficial marketing narratives and explore what cultural meanings have been distorted or omitted in the construction of tourist imaginaries. Tourism narratives – especially those driven by commercial objectives – often rely on romanticized depictions of tradition and heritage as such portrayals are more effective in attracting and persuading potential consumers. In our examination of Irish “traditional” music, the deconstructive approach has proven to be especially productive.

Moloney (2006) states that the structure and style of what is now recognized as “traditional” Irish music emerged relatively recently and is a product of cultural adaptation and reinvention during times of socio-economic upheaval. He writes:

There are many pervasive myths about Irish traditional music-the biggest of all being that it is very old. There are some mediaeval strains in the music, particularly in the nondance forms, and some traditions such as the music of the harpers can be traced back to the seventeenth century. But the form, structure, and style of the traditional music played today in fact come from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the repertoire is in fact post-Famine. (Moloney 2006, 126)

Authenticity is viewed as an inherited and fixed quality, particularly within heritage discourse. However, our analysis reveals that authenticity can also be a socially constructed phenomenon. A particularly relevant example, discussed below, illustrates this process: the construction of authenticity through performance and participation in Irish music sessions.

In recent years, due to effective marketing, the institutionalized practice of “seeding” sessions with paid musicians has become especially widespread across Ireland. An analysis of various digital resources – like social media pages of Irish pubs, restaurants, hotels, and cultural organizations – confirms this trend that such sessions are held almost daily throughout the country. They are often called “seeding” sessions, which refers here to the strategy of ensuring a session will happen by arranging for a small number of paid musicians to be present at a specific pub. These paid musicians initiate the session and other unpaid musicians might join in. In this way, the session can grow organically into a larger, more communal event – one that is later associated with having a great craic – a concept often linked to spontaneous enjoyment. For many tourists, the spontaneity and emotional resonance of the moment are more important than any alignment with historical continuity. Thus, we might claim that authenticity in this case emerges as a quality of the process, not merely the product of cultural performance.

We have discussed linguistic and performative commodification above, and now we turn to the commodification of Irish cultural symbols connected to the semantic field of music. In tourism contexts, the names of traditional Irish instruments, which we have previously analyzed with a corpus-based approach, namely “bodhrán”, “uilleann pipes”, and “clarsach” – frequently appear in music festival brochures and articles (written discourse), guided tour narratives and speeches at festivals (oral discourse). Additionally, they are increasingly used as branding devices across a range of commercial domains. These lexemes function as markers of cultural identity, which are recognizable far beyond Ireland.

These cultural symbols are frequently portrayed on handcrafted souvenirs, mugs, T-shirts, and decorative items – often in stylized or exaggerated forms to make them more memorable. Interior designs of Irish pubs, restaurants, and tourist centres, also feature these traditional Irish musical instruments. Sometimes real instruments are placed, other times walls are adorned with painted bodhráns or uilleann pipes. In such contexts they serve as commodified signs – objects of affective value that capture tourist attention. These symbolic forms help maintain interest in Irish culture, but they also might raise critical questions regarding heritage preservation and commercial appeal.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research questions in this study have been posed to explore the role of music - and dance-related Irishisms in shaping cultural identity within tourism discourse. Such Irishisms play a crucial role in the construction and branding of Irish national identity within contemporary tourism discourse. By combining corpus-based linguistic analysis with critical discourse and deconstructive

methodologies, the article has demonstrated that lexemes such as “craic”, “session”, “céilí”, “bodhrán”, “uilleann pipes”, “clarsach”, “reel”, and “jig” function not only as lexical units but as culturally marked realia which frequently perform affective function. These terms serve as indexical markers of Irishness, recontextualized in the global marketplace.

The findings show that these lexemes most frequently appear in informal contexts, where the language aims to build connections, atmosphere, or authenticity – namely in relation to Irish pubs, festivals, and branding within the Irish diaspora. Additionally, the application of a deconstructive approach demonstrates contradictions within prevailing tourist narratives that portray Irish music as very old and authentically medieval. Instead, our analysis confirms that the structure of what is now considered “traditional” Irish music was largely formed in the post-Famine period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This finding supports the claim that tradition is a dynamic cultural construct.

Similarly, Irish music sessions function not only as cultural events but also as a performative commodity. As Kaul (2007) argues, the session is often perceived as a balance of performance, community, and commerce, yet its authenticity is deeply shaped by the commercial logic of tourism economies. Yet these music sessions, while not rooted in Irish historical tradition that dates back centuries ago, still foster experiences that feel authentic to participants. Their authenticity lies not in heritage but in the communal spontaneity, emotional engagement, and performative credibility that define the moment.

The implications of these findings lie beyond the field of linguistics into broader discussions about globalization, urbanization, cultural politics, and the ethics of marketing – and heritage branding in particular. As Ireland is often marketed as an impressive both natural and cultural destination, there is an urgent need to ensure that tourism narratives balance the demands of marketability with the preservation of cultural integrity.

Future research might expand the scope by applying multimodal analysis to visual and audiovisual elements of tourism branding, such as posters, music videos, social media campaigns, and live performances. Ethnographic research could also prove powerful in terms of capturing audience perceptions of Irish sessions and musicians’ perspectives on heritage, authenticity, and commodification. Furthermore, comparative studies involving other – to some extent linguistically and culturally similar tourism discourses – such as those found in Scottish or Welsh contexts – could provide valuable cross-cultural insights into how heritage is globally marketed.

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