

An Investigation in the Role of Trade Ties in Minority Language Decline: A Case Study of 19th Century Ireland

Eimear Kearins

Supervised by Dr Ronan Lyons, with help from Dr David Clingingsmith

School of Economics



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



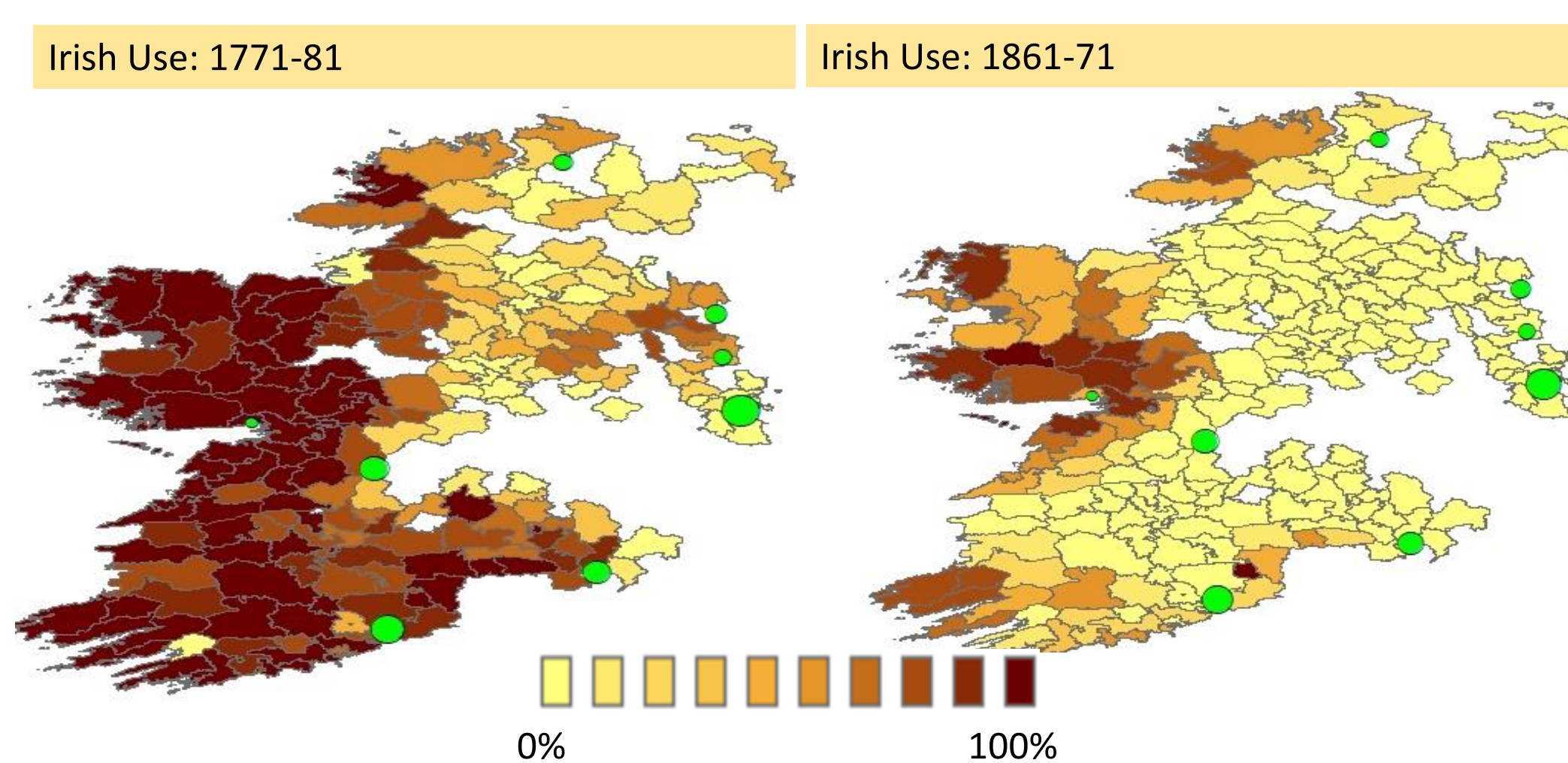
This project provides an in-depth analysis of the impact trade with England had on the decline of the Irish language during the 1800s. The Irish language suffered greatly in this century, while Irish trade with England was flourishing. In order to preserve minority languages, which are integral to our cultural identity, we must understand all the factors that impact them.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- Ireland became a member of the United Kingdom in 1801, leading its administrative and educational systems to be under their control and completely Anglicized (the Irish language was not recognised) [1]
- The Great Famine in the 1840s resulted in millions of deaths and a mass exodus of the Irish natives. [2]
- Under this new union, trade between Ireland and England was thriving, with hundreds of tonnes of goods being cleared in Irish ports. [3]

DATA

- Irish Language figures sourced from 1881 Census of Ireland & Garret Fitzgerald's paper [4] breaking down the level of Irish spoken in each decennial birth cohort (1771-81->1861-71).
- Trade figures sourced from Trade and Navigation Papers published by the UK Government.



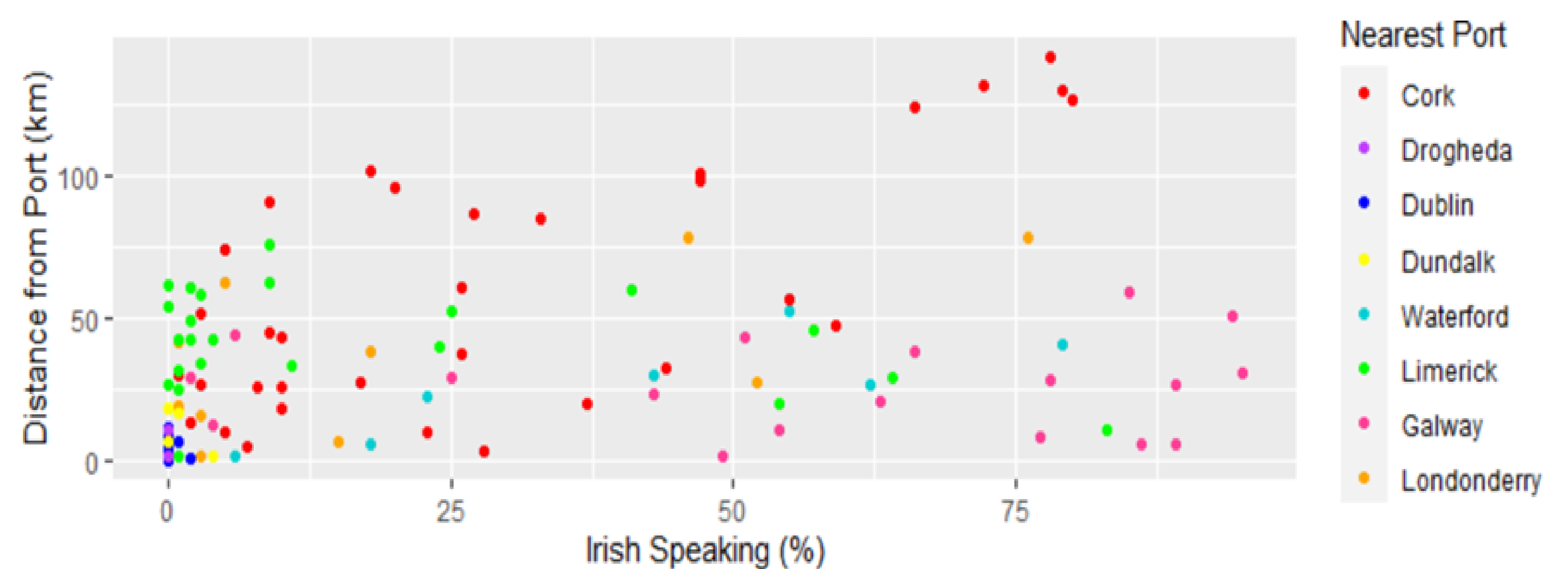
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- I conducted an extensive literature review to provide cultural context and better understand the other factors that impacted the Irish language.
- ArcGIS, a spatial software, allowed me to visually catalogue the level of Irish spoken in each county's barony for each decennial cohort. It also enabled me to identify the main counties of interest that my statistical analysis would focus on.

To the left, we can see the level of Irish spoken amongst those born between 1771-81 was a lot higher in comparison to those born between 1861-71. The green circles indicate the location of the main ports, and the size of the circles reflect the trade intensity of the ports. This visual allows us to see that the areas with very active ports experienced great declines of Irish language use.

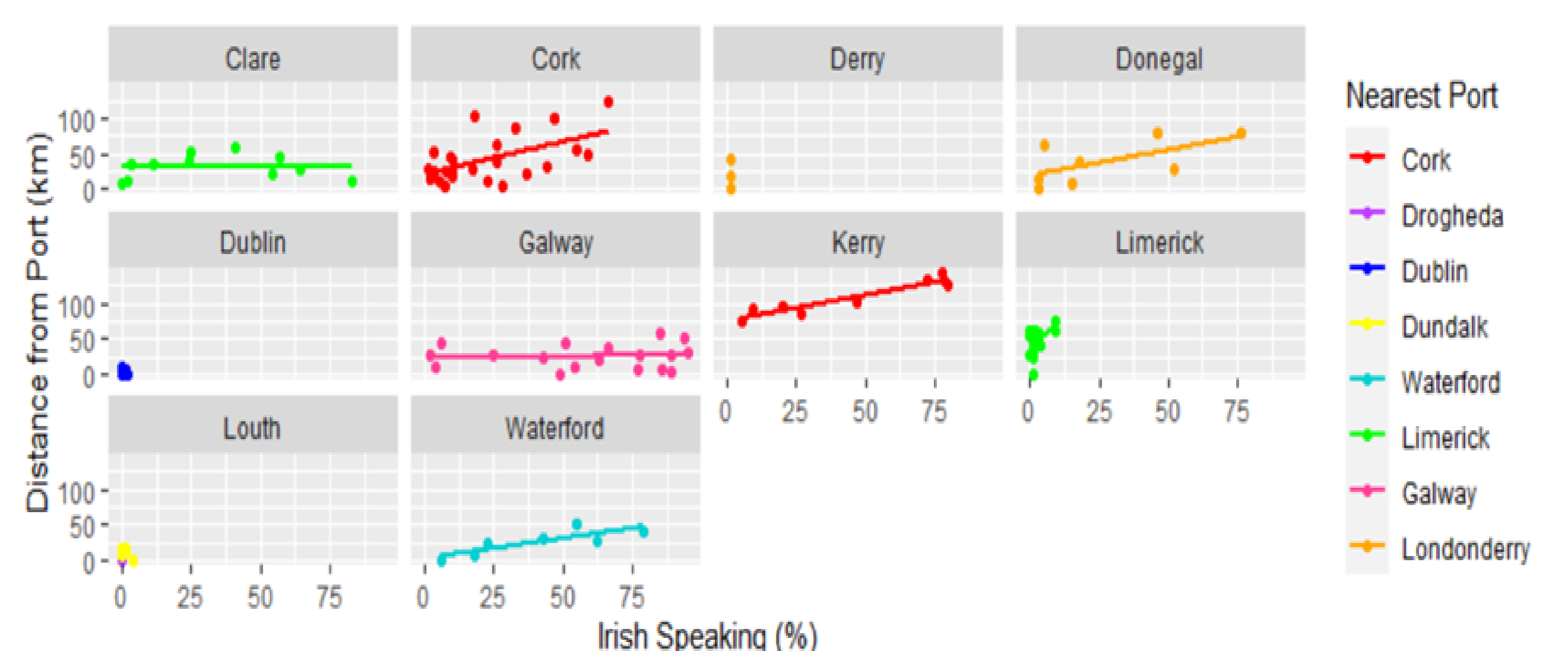
STATISTICAL TEST

- Using R, I created scatterplots, plotting the level of Irish in each barony against the distance of the barony from an active port.
- I then conducted regression analysis on the data, which calculates the intensity and nature of the relationship between the variables identified.
 - Dependent/ Outcome Variables (3): Irish Level, Young Cohort; Irish Level, Old Cohort; Fractional Change between the cohorts
 - Independent/ Explanatory Variables: Distance from Port; Proximity to Port x Tonnage in Port; Proximity x Port Tier; Market Access



RESULTS & ANALYSIS

- The scatterplots show a positive relationship between distance from trade and Irish language use -> as distance from a port increases, Irish language use also increased.
- We can see this link on a county by county level, particularly in Cork, Waterford, and Limerick. These three counties each once had extremely high levels of Irish speakers and a port that became very active in the 19th Century. The effect is not as present in counties like Galway and Clare- Galway had a very small port with little trade intensity. The effect of trade was not felt as much in these counties, and we can see a less drastic decline in language level.
- The regression analysis provided statistical evidence to reinforce the scatterplot observations. The correlation coefficient indicated a strong positive relationship between distance from trade and Irish language use. The market access & proximity*tonnage coefficients were negative, indicating that as trade intensity and baronies' access to markets increased, language use decreased.
- The p-value for all three dependent variables is miniscule (far less than commonly used 5% significance level), highlighting the significance of the relationship between each dependent variable and the independent ones.
- R Squared figures for the dependant variables ranged from 22-45%, suggesting the regression model fits the data very well. It makes sense the model doesn't account for 100% of language decline, as there were other factors that also played a role.



CONCLUSION

I have provided evidence that a link exists between the decline in Irish language and the intensified trade ties Ireland developed with England during the 1800s.

The results of the study are too statistically significant to ignore it as a contributing factor. By understanding the way a language is negatively impacted, it can make revitalisation efforts more effective and significant. The project also makes the case that future research into this area for other minority languages would be worthwhile so as to ensure minority languages do not fall victim to globalisation and economic progress.

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References: [1] Wolf, Nicholas M. "An Irish-Speaking Island: State, Religion, Community, and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770-1870 (History of Ireland & the Irish Diaspora)". 2014, University of Wisconsin Press. [2] Guinnane, Timothy W. "The Great Irish Famine and Population: The Long View." *The American Economic Review* 84, no. 2 (1994): 303-8. [3] Solar, Peter M. "Shipping and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ireland." *The Economic History Review* 59, no. 4 (2006): 717-42. [4] FitzGerald, Garret. "Estimates for Baronies of Minimum Level of Irish-Speaking Amongst Successive Decennial Cohorts: 1771-1811 to 1861-1871." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, vol. 84C, Royal Irish Academy, 1984, pp. 117-55.