

WHISKEY AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL: LINGUISTIC PATTERNS IN IRISH TOURISM DISCOURSE

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Ireland has been steadily growing in popularity, drawing tourists with not only its marvelous natural landscapes but also its rich cultural heritage. Even though the interest in Irish culture and tourism has been heightened in the recent decades, the academic exploration of Irishisms within tourism discourse still remains quite limited. This motivated us to examine the presence and role of Irishisms, in particular – the lexeme *whiskey*, within Ireland’s modern tourism discourse. By employing corpus-based methodology, we aim to analyze the frequency of the lexeme in different varieties of English, its collocations, and stylistic peculiarities.

Research based on corpus data can be conducted using various corpora. We chose the GloWbE corpus (The Corpus of Global Web-based English), which is considered effective for analyzing lexical items in their contemporary use. Not only does GloWbE allow for automated online research, but also provides instant results in the form of visually appealing and comprehensible tables. This extensive corpus is compiled of nearly 1.9 billion words of text from around twenty different countries, covering the period from 2012–2013 to the present. GloWbE’s data is sourced from the internet and includes blogs, forums, and social media posts, which makes its content a collection of informal material, both oral and written, leaning towards the informal or conversational end of the stylistic spectrum [1].

One of the most popular Irishisms, that finds its presence across different English varieties, is the lexeme “whiskey”, which is deeply embedded in Irish and Scottish heritage and qualifies for more than just a beverage – it is a mighty cultural symbol that represents tradition, community, and identity across the English-speaking world.

According to Online Etymology Dictionary, it comes from Irish *uisce* “water” + *beatha* “life” [2], whence *eau de vie*, itself probably a loan-translation of Medieval Latin *aqua vitae*. In Scotland, the word is spelled *whisky*, which came through Scottish Gaelic from Irish as well [3]. However the drink is well-known on an international arena, the GloWbE corpus demonstrates that the lexeme is prevailing primarily in Irish English. (Figure 1)

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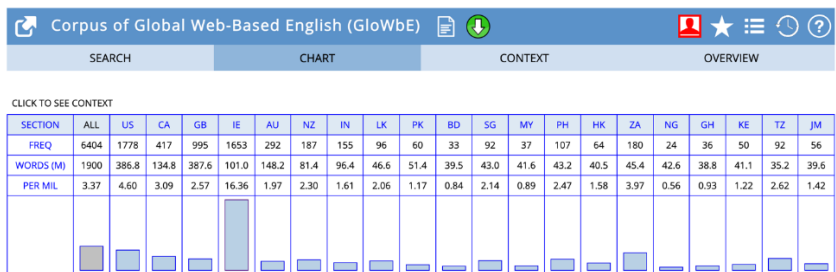


Figure 1. Distribution of whiskey/whiskeys in the GloWbE Corpus

Source: <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>

From literary works and marketing campaigns to everyday expressions, *whiskey* has shaped linguistic patterns in Irish English. Ireland and Dublin, in particular, is celebrated as a center of whiskey production, blending historical significance with modern tourism. As John Calley of *Whiskey Island* notes, “No two distilleries are the same. There are farm distilleries, island distilleries, distilleries in the middle of town, and those tucked away off the beaten track” [4].

The lexeme **is frequently used in tourism discourse: it can be found in literally every description or menu of an Irish restaurant.** There are numerous websites dedicated to whiskey tastings, thematic whiskey pubs, distilleries, and museums. When one enters these sites, they are prompted with the question: "Are you over 18 years of age?", which is an legal reminder to abstain from alcohol if you have not reached the age of majority.

The stylistic analysis of the distribution of *whiskey* reveals that the lexeme is often captured in poetic terms, with descriptors and epithets like **fire water, the water of life, a fine dram, sour mash, hard drink, strong drink, booze, and spirits.**

Irish tourism discourse consistently incorporates distinctive Irishisms to resonate with its target audience, many of whom have Irish ancestry. A notable example is the use of **grá** – an Irish word meaning "love" [5] – as seen in phrases like, "We have a particular **grá** for Irish whiskey tourism" [6]. Ireland itself is frequently referred to as "Whiskey Island," underscoring its role as a global whiskey destination, with over 70 distilleries and brand homes operating on the island as of 2024 [6].

The pandemic has dramatically changed the tourism industry, leading to innovative online experiences such as virtual whiskey tastings. Reviews on platforms like *TripAdvisor* confirm this shift: “We did a whiskey tasting on Zoom because of the pandemic” or “I organized a virtual whiskey tasting for our key customers” [7]. Even as on-site events have resumed, virtual whiskey

tastings remain popular, particularly among American tourists who frequently book them for corporate events.

In conclusion, the lexeme *whiskey* serves as a powerful cultural symbol in Irish tourism discourse, reflecting old traditions and identity. Its frequent use in descriptions, marketing materials, and online content emphasizes the beverage's cultural importance, reinforcing Ireland's image as a leading whiskey destination. The inclusion of Irishisms such as *grá* and the characterization of Ireland as *Whiskey Island* further highlight how language shapes the experience of Irish whiskey tourism. Future research could explore the interplay between language, tourism, and cultural identity, particularly in how emerging trends, such as virtual experiences, continue to evolve the ways whiskey is celebrated and enjoyed worldwide.

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