

# Michael Cronin

– a consummate scholar and a nation’s treasure



**Claire O’Connell profiles Prof Michael Cronin and his outstanding contribution to the field of translation studies.**

The first thing that strikes you about Prof Michael Cronin is his humility. As Director of DCU’s Centre for Translation and Textual Studies (CTTS), he is extremely modest about the long list of awards to his name, which recognise his many books and contributions to the field of language and translation research. And, despite his humility, it’s a list that keeps growing. Recently, he was elected a member of the prestigious Royal Irish Academy, and both the French and Irish governments have appointed him to their respective National Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Michael Cronin was brought up in Dublin in an environment steeped in language. “My mother

was a very keen speaker of the Irish language and she wrote plays in Irish,” he recalls.

He decided to study French at Trinity College Dublin, viewing it as ‘another way of looking at the world’, then went on to complete a Master’s in French at University College Dublin before returning to Trinity to do a PhD on how bilingualism contributes to creativity and writing, focusing on French-speaking Canada.

“I was looking at some Quebec novelists and seeing how the contact between French and English was actually helping them be more creative,” he explains. “How bilingualism, rather than a handicap, can be an asset.”

The deep-rooted links between language and culture have remained a theme in Prof Cronin’s research. “Particularly where languages can be an opening out rather than a closing down,” he adds.

In his new book, *Translation and Identity*, he suggests that translation provides a means of retaining identity as we converse across an ever-shrinking world.

“Translation is something that allows us both to communicate with others but also to respect individual culture and language,” he says.

The CTTS also looks at areas such as improving machine translation.

“There simply aren’t enough human translators, so we are looking at approaches to machine translation which means that you

get good-quality accuracy as well as the ability to deal with large amounts of information,” he explains.

In addition, the CTTS is researching and providing training in community interpreting.

“We now have 167 languages in Ireland; we have people from all kinds of backgrounds and they are dealing with the health service, the Department of Justice, the school system, and people are disadvantaged because they don’t speak English,” he adds.

The CTTS has also assembled an online database that logs translations of Irish literature into other languages. “People often forget that writers like Beckett, Joyce and Casey have been translated into many different languages and that no one has ever tracked all this before,” says Prof Cronin.

The TRASNA database is now the largest of its kind in the world, with 17,000 entries on 350 authors. The research has tracked down translations in more than 60 languages, with some as far flung as Basque, Korean and Hindi.

“One of the big objectives of both my research and what the Centre is about is to show people in Ireland how important it is to look at how we get translated elsewhere and the impact it has had, because it has been enormous and largely unrecorded.”

Suddenly, I feel another award coming down the tracks.