Canúintí na Gaeilge

Comhrá

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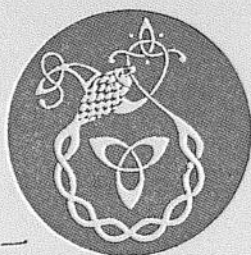
Perhaps there is no tool more essential to human life as we know it, nor more taken for granted and underappreciated, than language. To be deaf or mute, to stutter, to be autistic or to suffer from the final stages of Alzheimer's disease, is to be cut off in great measure from interaction with fellow humans. Despite the centrality of language to our humanness, we still know very little about it. How language began, how it is transmitted from generation to generation, how a child can learn language with ease while an adult labours over it are questions yet to be answered to anyone's satisfaction. As well, society has surrounded the whole question of language in a fog of myths and prejudices which are as pervasive as they are deeply rooted. They will not likely be eradicated very soon.

The Nature of Dialects

The question of dialects and the relationship between dialect and standard language are aspects of language which are shrouded in the fog of myth and prejudice. People look on 'dialect' as a corruption of language, as a substandard or illiterate form of speech or writing. To present speakers of dialect, authors often use idiosyncratic spelling and bad grammar, thereby reinforcing the widely held prejudice. Mark Twain's use of unusual spelling to reflect Southern speech patterns in **Huckleberry Finn** and **Tom Sawyer** springs to mind. Dialect is associated with a rural background, a part of the country not known for its cosmopolitan makeup or cultural excellence. Among different groups, the attitude towards dialect can vary greatly. For example, French language Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba papers invariably carry several columns per year decrying the poor quality of French spoken by the mass of the population, pleading for the government to take action to do something to correct this atrocious situation. One can hardly imagine a similar situation where newspapers in Alabama felt the need to decry the unacceptableness of the language used by the majority of the population in the state. Among Canadian

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speakers of French, among the elite classes, it seems to be a constant that their dialect of the language is inferior to that of Continental Europe. In short, to be branded as speaking a 'dialect' is to be branded as a hick, a bumpkin, a speaker of an inferior kind of language.[1]

From the linguist's perspective, however, everyone speaks a dialect of some sort. Dialects are the birthing ground of languages, the 'standard' form being derived from dialects rather than these being a corruption of the former. This process will be explored in the development of the different **Canúintí** of Modern Irish.

Language is primarily a tool for social interaction; nevertheless, this social interaction results from individuals using a shared code in their idiosyncratic ways. This dichotomy of individual and communal use is at the heart of linguistic variation and differentiation. The relationship between the individual's use of language and the community standard parallels the relationship between a regional form of a language and the standard form accepted by the language community on a large scale.

Idiolects and Dialects

Linguists use the term **idiolect** for an individual's personal variety of language. While members of a linguistic community use more or less the same forms and the same pronunciation, there are individual differences to be noticed

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[1] For decades, Irish speakers were led to believe that their language was in some way inferior to English and consequently being a Gaeilgeoir carried a stigma. This sense of the worthlessness of Irish and the 'hick' quality to the language has not yet been erased from the Irish psyche.

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from one speaker to another[2]. If you listen closely to your friends when they speak, you will be amazed at what you hear. They do not pronounce sounds exactly as you do. They may be unable to articulate some phonemes at all, or they may substitute a 't' for a 'th', or a 't' sound for a 'k'. They may use a different rhythm or intonation on their sentences or prefer certain syntactical arrangements over others, or favour certain words. They may not use words exactly as you do saying, for instance, 'supposably' instead of 'supposedly'.

The individual's use of a language usually is determined by the social environment in which he lives. We acquire language in the home; consequently, the language used by those who share that home with us is the foundation of our own idiolect. This idiolect is then molded by contact with others outside the home, by the education we receive at school, and later by those with whom we associate in the different environments which constitute our individual living space -- places of work, of worship, and of recreation. In all of these contexts, the need to be understood imposes limits on the range of variation between idiolects. When an idiolect is too extreme, the individual is simply not understood and consequently incapable of interacting with his community.

Linguists use the term **dialect** for a regional or social variety of a language which has its own distinctive grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The area in which all the major distinguishing features of that dialect are to be found is known as the **focal area**. Those areas where dialects meet are known as **transitional areas**. These areas reveal features of more than one dialect showing the blending of dialect features in local speech. On occasion, a pocket is to be found where dialect forms in use are not shared by the surrounding

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[2] The fact that no two people will have identical voice prints explains why this method of identification is often used for security purposes in military or sensitive research establishments.

area but resemble those in use elsewhere. This pocket is known as a **relic area** and testifies to the dynamic at work in language variation, where one dialect has expanded while another has retreated, leaving this island of the original dialect in a sea of speakers of a new dialect. The Gaeltachtaí in Waterford and Kerry are such relic areas surrounded by a sea of Hiberno-English speakers. They are testimony to the Irish-language presence in the area prior to the linguistic shift to English. In fact, all the Gaeltachtaí are relic areas of a dialect chain which once stretched without interruption from the southern tip of Kerry to the Hebrides of Scotland.

Causes of Dialect Variation

The causes of dialect variation are many, but the principle causes are clear. The origin of the speakers, and the degree of contact with speakers of other languages or dialects. The linguistic situation in England which emerged as a result of the Teutonic/Germanic invasions illustrates this clearly. The mainland tribes which settled in Celto-Roman England between the 4th and 8th. centuries spoke related but different languages. Each area of settlement evolved in its own way, with influences from other groups, from the Romanized Celts living in the area when they arrived, from the Norse spoken by the Viking invaders and settlers, from Church Latin, from Norman invaders and colonists. The extent to which these influences affected the dialect varied greatly, with the Scots language revealing a greater Norse influence and a lesser Norman influence than the dialects of the Southern part of the country.

As well, phonetic developments occurring in one area did not spread to other areas. The greatest phonetic transformation to affect the language of Southern England after Chaucer involved the change in pronunciation of all the long, stressed vowels. Through this change, Old English **mus** [muːs] became **mouse** [maus], **sae** [seː] became **sea** [siː]. But

in Scots, **mus** remained **mus** and **sae** remained **sae**.

The PBS series on the **History of English** traced the origins of the East Coast American dialects to the homeland of the original settlers, showing how, to-day, the distinguishing features of American dialects still exhibit the features of the areas of England from which those settlers came.

Newspapers recently publicized the results of DNA testing which revealed that in the West of Ireland, the DNA record shows that these people are genetically descended from the original post-ice-age hunter-gatherers [Iberians][3] with little admixture of genetic material from later invaders. We have no information about the language spoken by these original Iberians, although some linguists theorize that Basque spoken in Northern Spain, is the modern descendent of that original speech. Basque is a linguistic isolate, that is, a language unrelated to any other language in the world. It has survived in the mountainous regions of the Provincias Vascongadas in Northern Spain owing to the geographic inaccessibility of the region through long periods of history. Perhaps the distant ancestor of Basque was also the language of those hunter-gatherers who made their way to Ireland when the ice cap retreated. What this does indicate is that the Celtic language which eventually evolved in Ireland was largely adopted by people of non-Indo-European origin.

Origin of the Celtic Languages

Indo-European evolved into Celtic in Central Europe, Bohemia, and Southern Germany, Bavaria, which,

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[3] No one knows for sure when the first settlers came to Ireland but when the last Ice Age ended some 10,000 years ago, the first inhabitants gradually made their way from the highlands of Northern Spain into the grassy lowlands of Europe, eventually reaching Ireland. When the Celtic speaking peoples arrive is less certain, with estimates ranging from 1500 to 500 BC.

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incidentally, derives its name from that of a Celtic tribe.
Quite probably the distinctive features of Celtic speech
resulted from contact with speakers of other languages
already living in the area. No doubt, some changes resulted
from the internal evolution of Indo-European forms due to the
isolation of this group from the parent group. Others resulted
from the merging of Indo-European with local substrata
producing a new speech with elements of both fused together.

The Celtic tribes of Central Europe migrated to other
regions of the continent and to the British Isles. At their
widest extension, they were to be found from the Atlantic
coast of Ireland, the shores of the North Sea, the Iberian
Peninsula, Central Europe, the Balkan Peninsula to areas of
Central Turkey (Galatia) and possibly into the Far East, in
Chinese Turkestan. This expansion was the result of at least
two major migrations, one in the second millennium BC and
the other perhaps as late as 500 BC. Given the wide spread of
these tribes, the linguistic spread must have been equally
great. It is highly unlikely that a uniform speech
characterized all these regions. Each would have developed
its own peculiar twang as the result of internal evolution of
the parent form plus external influences absorbed from
peoples with whom they came into contact. We have few
records of the forms of Continental Celtic. What we do have
comes from inscriptions on monuments, graves or passages in
Greek and Latin texts. Not enough survives to allow the
development of a full description of the grammar of
Continental Celtic languages or of their phonetic systems.

The Arrival of the Celts in Ireland

From the beginnings of the known history of Celtic
speech in Ireland, a difference has existed between Insular
Celtic forms and those of Continental Celtic and between the
forms of Celtic in Ireland and in Britain. This can be
attributed to a number of factors. The earliest Celts to arrive
in Ireland are not likely to have come directly from the

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Bavarian homeland. Most likely, they were a fringe group living on the coast of the North Sea in what is now Northern Germany or Holland.[4] They probably sailed to the first island, worked their away across it before reaching Ireland at a later date, perhaps centuries later. Others undoubtedly reached the island directly sailing across the North Sea and down the West coast of Scotland. As well, tribes must have reached Ireland from the coast of France and from the Iberian peninsula as the Milesian legend proposes. Given the isolation of Ireland, modifications to the language and to cultural modes and mores on the mainland would have taken a long time -- perhaps a century or more -- to reach them. That contact with the continent was maintained can be seen in the residue in Ireland of Hallstat and La Teine cultures, both of which evolved in Continental Europe.

The Emergence of Goidelic Celtic

Whatever cultural contacts were maintained with the continent and with Britain, the Celtic speech of Ireland, called **Goidelic**, was effectively isolated from other forms of Celtic speech and subjected to the influence of a substratum or substrata which were different from those found elsewhere. The Celtic speech here remained 'conservative' in form, retaining features which had become archaic or which had disappeared elsewhere. One case in point is the preservation of the [k] sound in words such as **ceann** [head] which had evolved into a [p] sound in Celtic Britain, for example, in Welsh, where it became **pen**, or the Irish **cúig** which evolved as **pump** in Welsh and **pymp** in Cornish, or the Irish **ceathair** which became **pedwar** in Welsh and **peswar** in Cornish. The forms found in British Celtic were possibly

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[4] Henri Hubert in **The History of the Celtic People** cites agricultural archaeological evidence to support his case that the original Celts in Ireland came from the shores of the North Sea -- land division, farming techniques, style of housing etc. resemble those found in Holland and Germany at the time.

forms which evolved at a later period on the Continent and were imported into Britain but which failed to penetrate into Ireland.

Whether the language(s) which evolved into Old Irish was (were) the speech of one group or of several groups of Celtic speakers, we do not know. However, by the time of recorded history, a native form of Celtic had emerged on the island, traditionally called **Goidelic**, from which we get **Gaelic**. Perhaps the essential elements of this dialect had emerged on the continent and were brought to Ireland by these people, but most probably the distinctive features emerged in Ireland itself. By the time of Saint Patrick, the Celts of Ireland and whatever peoples had inhabited the island in prehistoric times had come together to form a homogeneous linguistic and cultural group. This is not to say, however, that dialectical variation did not exist in the island. It is highly unlikely that Ireland would have been free of such variation which is the rule the world over.

Old Irish

The Celts in their oral tradition had evolved a standardized form for their language to preserve legends of heroes and heroines, of battles and conflicts, relating events in the distant past, the arrival of the Milesians, the heroes Cú Chulainn, Conal Cernach, Fergus Mac Roich, Conchubar Mac Nessa. Just as Homer recorded the events of the Trojan War in a stylized form of Greek which suited his epic poetry, the ancient Irish bards who told of the **Táin Bó Cuailgne** (The Cattle Riad of Cooley) likewise used a style of language suited to their purpose. There were rules of rhythm, rhyme, assonance and the like, preference for certain words and syntax depending on the requirements of poetic context. The bard was fully aware that the forms he used were not those used to transact the business of the market place; they were

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forms reserved for a loftier purpose.[5] Within early Irish society, this standardized literary form was shared throughout the island and exported to Scotland when the Irish expanded there in later centuries. Like the epic of Homer, these bardic productions were replete with details of ancient life, the names of household items, instruments of war and the like. They preserve a picture of Celtic life in Ireland, of social organization and institutions, of relationships between people, between 'rulers' and the 'ruled' that had survived for hundreds of years.

The Old Irish period also saw the beginnings of a written form for the language, **Ogham** script. This consisted of a notational system to indicate consonants with markings to the right or the left or diagonally across a vertical or horizontal line. Vowels were indicated by a series of dots. These markings on stone monuments date from the fifth century. The monuments are found in many parts of Ireland, the largest number being found in the south and southwest. The Ogham script testifies to the Latin influence in the island, since the consonants are represented on the basis of their values in Latin, rather than their values in Irish, that is, the system did not reflect any contrast between broad and slender consonants, nor the effects of lenition and eclipsis. As well, consonant sounds not found in Latin were not represented in the notational system. This system was obviously the preserve of a specialist. Furthermore, the cumbersome nature of the notation make it impractical for all but short sentences and personal names on monuments.

The Old Irish period with the adoption of the Roman

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[5] It is also quite possible that the pronunciation used for this literary form was different from the pronunciation of the common man, much as actors today who do "Shakespearean" drama use a 'stage English' for such purposes, that is, a pronunciation which is certainly not that which Shakespeare would have used, but which is not the pronunciation of the contemporary masses either.

alphabet to record the Irish language, marks the beginning of the tradition of written Irish. From the start, the system was not satisfactory. The phonemic inventory of Irish greatly exceeded that of Classical Latin. While the Latin letters matched nicely the phonemes of Latin, this was not the case with Irish with its parallel series of broad and slender consonants and phonetic mutations such as lenition. Over time a system was devised with glide vowels inserted to distinguish between the broad and slender versions of a consonant and a dot was added over the consonant or an h after the consonant to indicate lenition. A stroke over the vowel served to distinguish the long from the short varieties. The spelling which became regularized by copyists in monasteries came to reflect the pronunciation of earlier stages in the language. Given the inherent conservative nature of written language, it persisted over the centuries with the gap between the spelling and the spoken form becoming ever greater.

The Old Irish period as well saw the expansion of Irish into Britain. In part, this was linked to the spread of Christianity with the establishment of Irish monastic communities from which monks went forth to convert the newly arrived Germanic/Teutonic tribes, but in part as well to the colonizing of what is now Scotland. By 843 Cinaedh Mac Ailpin was the King of an Irish speaking kingdom in the north of England and by the end of the ninth century at the end of the Old Irish period, the Picts, possibly a pre-Indo-European people or another Celtic tribe whose arrival predates recorded history, had become thoroughly Gaelicized. As well, Irish colonies were etablished in Wales and along the Western coast of England.

Middle Irish

The Middle Irish period is an age of transition, marking the beginnings of the retreat of Gaelic influence in the British isles. Gaelic supremacy in Scotland began to give

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way in the face of Anglo-Norman expansion into the North of the island. By the thirteenth century, the Gaelic world had retreated into the Highlands and was no longer the seat of dominant power in the land. In the twelfth century, the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland itself and with their establishment in the land, the linguistic history of the island traces a gradual increase in their power and influence and the subsequent retreat of Irish from the centres of power to the rural and remote corners of the land. It was a process which took place over hundreds of years, a process not unlike the retreat of the Celtic languages on the continent in the face of overwhelming Roman influence.

Changes in the written form introduced in this period point to changes in the spoken language, with syllables being lost, with long vowels being shortened, with the disappearance of consonants entirely. Changes introduced by copyists in texts from the Old Irish period point to changes in the vernacular, to dialect variations, which differed considerably from the older standard form. The mistakes found in the texts indicate that the declensional and other inflected forms used in the text being copied were not familiar to the copyists. As well, the new subject matter introduced into the written tradition, the Fenian Cycle relating the exploits of Fionn MacCumhaill and the Fianna [warriors], parallels the introduction of Norman tales of knights such as Sir Gawain and the Arthurian cycle.

Dialect Variation in Middle Irish

Not much is known about the variation in the spoken language at the time, except anecdotal evidence found in accounts of travellers or in observations made in passing in reports. In his study of **Irish Dialects Past and Present**, O' Rahilly comments on the unreliability of these given their unscientific and subjective nature. While they may not say much about the specifics of spoken language at the time, they do point to a variety of dialectical variation from one part of

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the land to another.

The Emergence of Modern Irish

The period beginning with the Renaissance and the Reformation established the context in which the Irish language was to evolve into the present. This period saw the destruction of the social forces which favour standardization nd unity. The centres of power and the individuals wielding that power, ceased to be Irish speakers. With the Tudor and Stuart plantations established most successfully in the north, throughout the sixteenth, the Cromwellian settlements in 1654, the penal Laws in 1695, the disempowerment of the Irish nobility, with their eventual banishment meant that the fate of the Irish language had passed out of the hands of the nobility and the educated, ruling classes becoming the language of the disenfranchised and the landless. In practical terms, this meant that the patrons who had once encouraged literary production by poets and bards no longer existed. Whatever literature or music was produced no longer penetrated into the ruling circles in the land. As well, those opportunities for free exchange of ideas, culture using Irish as the medium were curtailed.

The Emergence of the Major Dialect Areas of Modern Irish

We have a relatively clear picture of the emergence of standardized language in England and France and other European countries because the standardized form of these languages emerged gradually within the period of recorded history. A variety of historical written records trace the emergence of distinct forms throughout England. Some areas, of course, are better represented than others. The dialect of the capital city, London, eventually exerted a social and political influence over the country, and the location of the city, at a point where three dialect areas came together, made it the ideal location for the blending of elements from around

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the country. In this way, the East Midland dialect, enriched with elements from northern and southern dialects, became the standard for the written language, and to a lesser extent, for the spoken language. This is not to say that other dialects disappeared. A trip through England shows that the local flavour of dialects has not at all diminished over time, but the establishment of a standardized form served as a kind of check on greater differentiation between variant forms. This same process is to be observed in the evolution of standard French, German, Spanish and Italian, where one local dialect emerged as the most influential for political, economic, social and cultural reasons eventually becoming the foundation for the standardized written form, if not for the spoken form.

The same cannot be said for our understanding of the evolution of the standard form of Irish which was used as a literary medium in the Old and Middle Irish periods. When a written form for Irish was developed, this oral poetic standard already existed. The process through which this form emerged is unknown. Was it a compromise between divergent forms in different centres of influence in the country? How different was it from the language of the marketplace and daily life? These are questions we cannot answer.

With the Renaissance, however, the situation becomes clearer. The existence of distinct dialect areas cannot be doubted. Of these, The Ulster, Connacht, and Munster varieties still survive, while the Leinster variety has died out. O' Rahilly laments the lack of records of Leinster speech which would permit the completion of the picture. In the last century, when native speakers of Irish were still to be found in every county of Ireland, no effort was made to elicit from these speakers a record of the Irish they knew and used. Consequently, the dialect picture which emerges is incomplete.

Gaelic of Scotland and **Manx**, both dialects of the original Goidelic Celtic which emerged in Ireland, are now considered separate languages and have had a distinct written form and literature since the 18th. century. Both of these are closer to the Ulster dialect than to the other remaining dialects of Irish, although possibly the Leinster dialect might share elements with Manx. As well, these two languages were subject to a much more extended and intensive influence from the Vikings whose Norse language has endowed Scots Gaelic and Manx with many words and possibly phonetic characteristics not found in Ireland.

From the Renaissance forward, the conditions which promote a standardized form of a language disappeared in the Gaelic world. Throughout the following four centuries, Irish would retreat from the East of the island until, in the present century, it survived in small, disconnected pockets of the most isolated and economically undesirable and depressed parts of the country. A glance at the map of Ireland will reveal that Irish survived in these areas largely due to their remoteness and isolation. Given the underdeveloped means of transportation and communication in the West of the country, free rein was given to those forces which foster idiosyncratic internal drift and differentiation.

This situation meant that the Irish speaking areas of the country were now on their own, as it were, the forces of internal evolution taking a different course in each part of the country. As the Galltacht (English speaking) encroached on the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) parts of the country, and as these Irish speaking areas shrank with time to the tiny Gaeltachtaí of 2000, the linguistic variety of the past increased multifold. Within the three major dialect areas which have survived, practically every village constitutes a dialectical variation of some sort. O Rahilly's and Ó Cuiv's description of Irish dialects and Irish speaking districts makes this clear. Linguists have studied the phonetics of many areas, and collected words, proverbs and other sayings from

those areas where Irish is still a community language. What emerges from this survey is a highly fragmented picture with strong local allegiances to particular forms of the language and a preference for English over other varieties of Irish.

In his preface to the 1961 edition of his **Teach Yourself Irish,** Myles Dillon describes the dialect situation:

Irish is still spoken in small areas of Waterford, West Cork and West Kerry, and in wider areas of Connemara (West Galway) Mayo and Donegal. Four dialects can be roughly distinguished, East Munster (Waterford) and West Munster (Cork and Kerry) forming a southern group, Connacht (Galway and Mayo) and Ulster (Donegal) forming the northern group. There are, of course, minor points of difference between Cork and Kerry, and between Galway and Mayo, and the speech of North Mayo approaches that of South Donegal. (Dillon IX)

We will now examine the main features of each dialect area concentrating on the most striking features with which the beginning student of Irish must contend. For those desiring a fuller study of the topic, especially phonetic variation and the evolution of different vowel and consonant combinations in the various dialects, I recommend they consult the classic studies by Ó Cuiv and O'Rahilly and the more recent study by Mícheál Ó Siadhail.

The Southern Dialect -- Munster

The most 'conservative' of the dialects is the Munster dialect. This means, the dialect has retained a greater degree of the old declensional and conjugational system from the past. A glance at the tables of verb conjugations given in Myles Dillon's grammar, the first edition of **Teach Yourself Irish** (1961) will reveal a full set of inflectional endings:

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táim	nílim
taoi (táir, tánn tú)	nílir
tá sé, sí	níl sé / sí
táimid	nílimid
tánn sibh	níl sibh
táid	nílid

an bhfuilim?	ná fuilim?
an bhfuilir?	ná fuilir?
an bhfuil sé?	ná fuil sé?
an bhfuilimíd?	ná fuilimíd?
an bhfuil sibh?	ná fuil sibh?
an bhfuilid?	ná fuilid?

The same holds true for the full conjugation of the verb in both present and past and future tenses:

Present	**Simple Past**
dúnaim	do dhúnas
dúnair (dúnann tú)	do dhúnais
dúnann sé	do dhún sé
dúnaimíd	do dhúnamair
dúnann sibh	do dhúnabhair
	(do dhún sibh)
dúnaid	do dhúnadar

buailim	do bhuaileas
buailir (buaileann tú)	do bhuailis
buaileann sé	do bhuail sé
buailimíd	do bhuaileamair
buaileann sibh	do bhuaileabhair
	(do bhuail sibh)
buailid	do bhuaileadar

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Future

dúnfad	buailfead
dúnfair	buailfir
dúnfaidh sé	buailfidh sé
dúnfaimíd	buailfimíd
dúnfaidh sibh	buailfidh sibh
dúnfaid	buailfid

In the paradigm for noun declension, a dative plural with the ending -**aibh** ending is presented.

As well, eclipsis is used after the preposition followed by the definite article. Eclipsis of the **d** and t after the article is normal. Thus we have:

ag an ndoras   **ar an dtine**

O' Rahilly points out that areas of Munster will eclipse the noun after **sa, ón** and **don**. (O' Rahilly 214)

As well, variations exist in the forms of the prepositional pronouns and in the possessive adjectives. For example, d' becomes t' before a vowel, giving **t'athair** rather than **d'athair**.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of Munster Irish is the question of which syllable receives the tonic stress. Unlike the Ulster dialect where the tonic stress is regularly on the first syllable, in Munster pronunciation, the stressed syllable shifts to the long syllable in a word. If the first syllable in a word is short, the stress moves to the long syllable in the middle or at the end of the word. Thus a word like **amadán** is stressed on the last syllable rather than on the first, and the prepositional pronoun **agam** is stressed on the last rather than the first syllable.
O' Rahilly attributes this stress pattern to the extensive influence of Anglo-Norman on the speech patterns of the

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south. This area, together with Leinster, was more thoroughly exposed to the Anglo Norman influence from the thirteenth century on with the result that when these colonists learned Irish and were eventually integrated into Irish society, the stress patterns of Anglo-Norman, with the last syllable of a word, or the internal long syllable receiving the stress were incorporated into Irish. This stress pattern was reinforced at later stages when bilingualism with English became more common, the stress pattern of English reinforcing this moving of the stress to the long syllable. In English, in words with combinations of long and short syllables, the long syllable is always the stressed syllable.

The Connemara Dialect

With the location of several Irish language publishing houses, the magazine **Cuisle** and the weekly newspaper **Foinse**, not to mention **Raidió na Gaeltachta** and **TnaG (TV4)** in Connemara, the influence of this dialect is sure to increase.

The Connemara dialects, located between two dialect areas but more closely linked to the northern group, form a transitional area, revealing a mixture of southern and northern elements. As in the southern dialect, the accent may shift to the long syllable in a word , but this occurs in some words but not in others. In some cases, the preference for one form or another shows a mixture of Munster and Ulster forms. As well, the Ulster influence was strengthened by the resettlement there of Irish speakers from Ulster at the time of the Cromwellian plantations in the mid 1600's. Consequently, particularly in Mayo where these people were resettled, the influence of the northern forms is particularly strong.

Mícheál Ó Siadhail's **Learning Irish** course is based on the Irish of Cois Fharraige. A glance over the verb conjugations shows that this dialect has developed analytic forms, that is, verb forms which consist of an invariable root

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part with a pronoun following.

Present	Past	Future
tá mé	bhí mé	beidh mé
tá tú	bhí tú	beidh tú
tá sé	bhí sé	beidh sé
tá muid	bhí muid	beidh muid
tá sibh	bhí sibh	beidh sibh
tá siad	bhí siad	beidh siad

Future

glanfaidh mé	osclóidh mé
glanfaidh tú	osclóidh tú
glanfaidh sé	osclóidh sé
glanfaidh muid	osclóidh muid
glanfaidh sibh	osclóidh sibh
glanfaidh siad	osclóidh siad

Past Tense

ghlan mé	d'oscail mé
ghlan tú	d'oscail tú
ghlan sé	d'oscail sé
ghlan muid	d'oscail muid
ghlan sibh	d'oscail sibh
ghlan siad	d'oscail siad

With other verbs forms, the first person singular retains its synthetic form while all the others are analytic in structure:

Present

glanaim	brisim
glanann tú	briseann tú
glannan sé	briseann sé
glanann muid	briseann muid
glanann sibh	briseann sibh
glanann siad	briseann siad

Some verbs which belong to the first conjugation in the Munster dialect have moved into the second here, for example the verb **labhair,** which has the forms **labhraim, labhrann** in Munster, while the forms are **labhraím, labhraíonn** in Connemara.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Connemara is the preference for forming plurals in **-í. e.g.** paidir, paidreacha, pronounced **paidreachaí**. There is a tendency to simplify the vast array of possible plurals, and, as in the above example, what has emerged is really a double plural, with the **-acha** plural ending plus the **-í**. About this phenomenon, O' Rahilly says *"Connacht Irish, in particularly, is exceedingly partial to employing unhistorical -í in place of -a or -e in words of more than one syllable, not only in plurals but also in adjectives and participles in -ta and -te."* (214)

The pronunciation of the prepositional pronouns as well reveals a mixture of Munster features, with stress on the last syllable, as well as Ulster features, with stress on the first syllable. Variation also exists in the length of the vowels in some of these. Ó Siadhail's **Learning Irish** provides a phonetic transcription of the prepositional pronouns as pronounced in Cois Fharaige, where **leo** is pronounced [lo:b] and **orthu** pronounced [orib].

Ulster Irish

The greatest numbers of native Irish speakers are to be found in the Ulster Gaeltachtaí. As well, the schools located in Donegal for teaching Irish to foreigners and to students and teachers from all over Ireland have extended the influence and popularity of this dialect. For beginners, the popular **Now You're Talking** presents the Ulster dialect.

This northern dialect shares much in common with Scottish Gaelic and throughout several centuries, the frequent

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exchanges between Scotland and Ulster reinforced these similarities. We are all aware of the plantation of English-speaking Scots Presbyterians in Ulster in the 17th century whereas the settlement of Gaelic speaking Scots in Ulster over a period of several centuries is often overlooked. Just as the Irish established Gaelic speaking kingdoms in Scotland from the fifth century onward, with the spread of Anglo-Norman influence in Scotland, Gaelic speaking Scots resettled in Ireland, thereby reversing the process of several centuries earlier. Their presence explains in large part the strong Scottish influence on Ulster Irish. The shared elements include preference for analytic forms in verbs, for lenition over eclipsis and vocabulary which is not found in other dialects of Irish.

The verb conjugation charts given for the Connemara dialect reflect the usage of Ulster as well. One striking feature of this dialect is the use of the Scottish **cha** to form negatives instead of the **ní** found in the rest of Ireland. At an earlier period in the history of the language, **cha** was practically the only form to be found in Ulster. In Donegal, both **cha** and **ní** are in use to-day, probably due to the influence of Southern forms prevalent in more recent decades.

The northern dialect also prefers lenition to eclipsis when a preposition is followed by a definite noun, that is, with the article **an.** Thus we have **ar an bhord** where Munster and Connemara would have **ar an mbord.**

In terms of pronunciation, the combinations **-abh, -amh, -adh** are pronounced **ú.** One result of this change is to eliminate the distinction between first and second conjugation verbs in the verbal noun. Thus **smaoineamh, dúnadh, bailiú,** are all pronounced with a final long u sound, strictly speaking, the ending of the second conjugation.

As well, the combinations **cn, gn, mn, tn,** now substitute an **-r** for the **-n.** Thus **cnoc** becomes **croc, mná**

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becomes **mrá, gnó** becomes **gró** and **tnúth** becomes **trúth**. This usage is also found in Scottish Gaelic (O' Rahilly 22) and seems to have spread to parts of Connemara where the **-r** and the **-n** are used interchangeably. In the 'standard' form of Irish, the **-n** has been retained, as the spelling suggests.

O' Rahilly gives some 6 pages of words which are found in Scots Gaelic and in Ulster Irish but not found in other dialects in Ireland. Given the extensive contact between these two Gaelic speaking areas, this is not surprising, and given the increased isolation of Irish dialects from each other over time in the south of Ireland, it is not surprising that vocabulary came to differ.

The differences in vocabulary may take various forms: the spelling of the word may differ, but the meaning is the same, as in northern Irish **gasúr** and southern Irish **garsún**, or the same word may have different meanings, as in **mall**, 'slow' in the south, and 'late' in the north. At times, the same concept is expressed in different words: **nóiméad** in the south and **bomaite** in the north, **féachaint** in the south and **amharc** in Ulster.

Before we proceed to look at the standardized dialect which has been emerging among non-mother tongue Irish speakers, a kind of school Irish, a comment made by O'Rahilly concerning the evolution of the three dialects mentioned above is worth remembering. He writes: *"Another point to be noted is that, wherever Irish still survives, its vocabulary tends gradually to shrink, and its grammar to break down, mainly in consequence of the lowered vitality of the language brought about by the encroachment of English and the rapid elimination of the monoglot Irish-speakers. This narrowing of the vocabulary is one of the factors which have caused the dialects to drift increasingly apart."* (245) The vitality of Irish and its future survival depends on its being used for every aspect of daily social and working life, thereby maintaining the lexical and syntactical wealth it once

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enjoyed.

Standard Irish

There is a new dialect of Irish which has emerged with the introduction of 'Standard Irish' into schools. The standardized written form of the language introduced by the Department of Education and the Translation Department of the Government is the form taught in schools and so has come to influence to some degree the forms of spoken language as well, just as new learners of English will pronounce (or mispronounce) words as they are spelled.

This standardized dialect reveals features of all the dialects while attempting to restore or revive forms and structures which were common at earlier stages in the language. For example, all the areas where Irish is a community language use a system of counting based on twenfy, while the decimal system which dates from the Roman influence in early Irish has been revived for the schools. Thus sixty is **seasca** rather than **tri fichid** and eighty is **ochtó** rather than **ceithre fichid.** The standardized form has retained eclipsis when a preposition is followed by a definite noun, and the lack of lenition of d, t, s after the article. The Christian Brothers' Grammar gives eclipsis or lenition as equally acceptable alternatives but most grammars for teach the language in school offer only the eclipsis option.

In the verb forms, the standardized language has retained synthetic forms for the first person, both singular and plural, with analytic forms for the second and third persons, singular and plural. Some grammars offer the student the options available in other dialects, using the base form plus **muid** for the first plural, and, in the future, the base form plus pronouns throughout. The imperfect past and the conditional are the two tenses which have retained full inflection for all persons.

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For noun plurals, some may have wished for greater simplification of the system. Given the wide range of plurals found in dialect forms, the weight of tradition in spelling seems to have been the strongest influence in the choice of forms.

Consequently, the standardized form taught does not present exclusively elements of any one dialect, but elements of each are to be found. This, perhaps, reflects what is undoubtedly happening with the growing influence of television and radio. Irish speakers listening to television and to radio hear the forms of other dialects and the strangeness of the forms and the reluctance to use other forms will slowly decrease.

The census data now show that the majority of speakers of Irish are not mother- tongue Irish-speakers, but enthusiasts of the language who have acquired it through school. The majority of people who now speak English in the world are likewise non-mother-tongue speakers. In the Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, the authors end with a discussion of the direction that English will take in those areas where it has been learned as a second language and where these speakers do not have the benefit of mother-tongue speakers to guide them in matters of vocabulary and syntax. If the experience of Montreal is of any significance, the language that will emerge will be both lexically and syntactically impoverished. Given the lack of in-put from mother-tongue speakers, these neo-English speakers invent their own structures, combine morphemes in new ways, creating a new brand of the language, a pidgin or 'creole' if you will, which is marked by the phonetics, syntax and vocabulary of their original mother-tongue.

There is no reason to imagine that Irish will fare any differently. The distinction between broad and slender consonants which forms the basis of much of the grammar of the language will undoubtedly disappear. Most second-

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language learners have difficulty pronouncing the "ch" sound using a 'k' instead, or slender "l" or "n" . most can correctly pronounce neither the broad nor the slender "r" substituting instead the English off glide semi-vowel. Literally, these people never learn to "hear" the difference between them. As well, English syntax, apparently more "logical" and "straightforward" to these people, will gradually alter the syntax of Irish, with the result that this new dialect will resemble English more than traditional Irish in structure. The genitive case will probably also disappear, being replaced by the common form or a phrase with 'de'. The absolute and dependent forms of the verbs will no doubt be replaced by regular forms.

Diarmuid Johnson has been writing a series of articles on the different Gaeltachtaí in **Cuisle** magazine. The March 1999 issue featured an article on Cúil Aodha (Cooley). In an interview, the principal of the local high school had this to say: Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil mórán suime ag déagóirí Mhúscraí sa Ghaoluinn. Tá Gaoluinn ag cuid acu sa bhaile, ach ní labhrann siad le chéile í....." When students were asked about their interest in things in the Irish language, a student answered: "Ní léimse puinn Gaoluinne dáiríribh..." and when asked about TnaG, "Dhera, Gaoluinn Chonamara ar fad athá ar TnaG." (20) A regular feature of the magazine is a section called **An Chlúid**, which discusses the use of Irish at home. The most stubborn resistance to using Irish in the home seems to come from the Gaeltachtaí parents themselves, who fear that speaking Irish will stigmatize their children and spoil their chances for future advancement. A parent is quoted in the June 1999 issue: "Ba mhaith liom Béarla a bheith ag mo chlann féin chomh maith le Gaeilge." The editors try to assure these parents: "Tá lá an bháid bháin thart, agus ní bheidh call do pháistí an lae inniu a dhul go Sasana ná go Meirceá munar mian leo é. Má bhíonn Gaeilge ag duine óg sa lá atá inniu ann, bí cinnte go mbeidh obair ann dó sa mbaile amach anseo..." The advantages of bilingualism are outlined both as practical for the job market and as

practical for personal culture: "Níl fáth ar bith nach mbeadh Béarla agus Gaeilge ar a dtoil ag páistí na linne seo. Agus ní féidir go mbeadh an t-aos óg gan Bhéarla agus an chaoi a bhfuil an saol. Tá buntáistí ach nach raibh ann in aimsir an bháid bháin, agus tá deiseanna ann dóibh nach raibh ann ar chor ar bith sa tseanaimsir. Níl uathu ach an deis a thapú."

While the interest in Irish language medium education seems to enjoy great vitality now, especially in the face of resistance from the powers that be in the Department of Education. It is to be hoped that this enthusiasm for bilingual education continues. At present, the struggle seems to be between all-Irish schools, where an Irish language environment is given to students both in class and in the schoolyard, as well as in the home, where parents are expected to do their share in reinforcing the efforts of the schools and the students. and an all-Irish programme in English-language schools. The Roinn sees no reason to open separate schools, thereby taking programmes away from existing schools. Consequently, Irish medium schools often have to be self-financing for several years before the authorities recognize the schools officially and fund them.

More than anything else, these new Irish speakers must have a reason to keep using Irish when they leave school, for work, for recreation, for cultural development, or these efforts will prove no more successful than those of the past. Students of Irish from North America are surprised at how few opportunities present themselves to hear and use Irish in Ireland. God willing, the new millenium will see come true the dreams of Douglas Hyde and Patrick Pearse.

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