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Why Languages Change
With Applications to the History of the Irish
Language

All languages change. This is a universal law as true and ineluctable as death and taxes. Trying to stop change in language, a task to which not a few academics devote themselves with Laputan zest, makes harnessing the wind and the tides seem like sensible propositions. Our experience teaches us that change is essential and necessary. As society evolves, language evolves in tandem to meet its needs. Over the centuries, Classical Latin became the exclusive preserve of academics and the ruling classes and ceased to reflect the speech of the population at large. It survived in the hallowed halls of 'Laputa'[1] , while the language that served the needs of the people, known as Vulgar Latin, evolved to form the Romance family of languages of which Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romansch and French are the most familiar modern representatives.

The genetic code we humans pass on to our descendants contains original genetic material formed when life arose on the planet. To this have been added the genetic mutations which, for example, cause a branch to form on a tree while a wing forms on a bird and an arm and hand on a human. The similarities and developments in morphology are clear as day to the student of evolution; they point to the underlying unity of terrestrial life forms. Similarly, the languages we now speak are built on the foundations laid perhaps over a million years ago when our humanoid ancestors began to separate from our primate relatives. The American Linguist, Hayakawa, points out that, despite our vaunted modern sophistication, we have yet to develop something equivalent to the articulate speech evolved by our "primitive," tree-climbing ancestors.

Theories of Language Origin

Although linguists debate whether language evolved once in Africa, and spread with the diffusion of a specific human type, [*the monogenesis*

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1 During Gulliver's third voyage in Swift's Gulliver's Travels, he visits the island of Laputa, an island located in the skies above, cut off both physically and metaphorically from the real world below. In the novel, Laputa is symbolic of scientific and academic pursuits which are impractical or excessively theoretical.

theory] or whether language evolved independently in different parts of the world corresponding to a suitable phase in evolution of different human types [*the polygenesis theory*], it is unlikely we will ever know for sure, given the evidence available to us now[2] .

This, however, has not prevented linguists from speculating on the origin of language. The names given to some of their theories suggests these theoreticians are not as unimaginative as usually assumed. The *Babel* theory, based on the story in Genesis, identifies language as a gift (or a curse) from God. When man aspired to Godhood and attempted to storm heaven by building a tower, God taught him a lesson by creating the confusion of languages we experience as a species, the symbol of conflict and misunderstanding ever since. The Babel myth doesn't tell us much about the origin of language, but it does underline the role of language in human society, both as a tool of cooperation and a source of friction and division as well. The *bow-wow* theory holds that the first words were imitations of sounds made by animals or sounds heard in nature.[3] 'Bow-wow' would be the word for dog, 'moo-moo' for cow and so forth. This theory presumes that early man named the animal for the sound it made much as little children still do today. However, no language has yet been found where the word for any animal resembles the sounds they make. The *yo-he-ho* theory suggests that the first words derived from ejaculations of fear or surprise, or grunts of physical exertion, sounds make when lifting something heavy, for example. The *pooh-pooh* theory[4] claims that there is a mystical relationship between the word and the thing it represents; thus, a chair is a chair because it's a chair and no other word could possibly do the job. Clearly, this does not explain why there are so many different words for *chair* in the thousands of languages in the world. The *sing-song* theory holds that the first words derived from primitive chants which were mere utterances of sounds in specific patterns, not actual words. According to the theory, snippets of these chants broke off, in time, to form

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[2] Proponents of the *monogenesis* theory seem to be more numerous these days. They argue that it is unlikely that language arose independently in different parts of the globe. The evidence of existing languages suggests that there is an underlying unity in the deep structures of all languages making it unlikely that *polygenesis* occurred.

[3] All languages of the world have a limited number of onomatopoeic words, that is, words like bang or splat or crack which imitate the sound they refer to. The **bow-wow** theory sees this as the source of the first words.

[4] The name here sounds rather like an assessment of the merit of the theory rather than a description of its tenets.

words. When Aristotle speculated about the nature of language, he underlined its conventional nature, that the meaning of words and the uses of forms are the result of 'consensual agreement', but he never pursued the mystery of how this agreement came about. How could you come to agree on the meaning of words if you could not speak in the first place.

In short, we do not know how language began and probably never will. At one time, it was presumed that by studying the languages of newly discovered stone-age peoples in remote corners such as the Amazon jungle, New Guinea, the Philippines, or by studying the early records of contemporary languages, or by observing the process of language acquisition in children, some glimpse of the birth of language might be obtained. Quite unexpectedly, such study revealed instead the complexity and sophistication found in the most highly "uncivilized tongues" and the most intricate and subtle processes involved in language acquisition in children. Nothing has ever been found which is half way between the signalling system of animals and articulate speech of humans. Linguists must content themselves with a study of the causes and effects, the directions of change in existing tongues accepting that this casts no light on the origin of speech itself.

The Processes of Change

Perhaps some day Star-Trek-like time travel will make possible a return to the source of human language to provide an answer to how it all began, but failing this, we can arrive at an understanding of the forces producing change by analyzing the dynamic at work in the world to-day. The evidence shows evolution of basic root forms, syntactical structures, the gradual transformation of one function into another just as the wing and the hand reflect distinct evolutionary paths of the same basic morphology.[5]

Linguistic change is gradual, occurring over time, generally

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[5] The study of root words shows the evolution of a concept and the inter-relatedness of seemingly disparte things. For example, the words ankle and anchor derive from a common root meaning to bend, while the word bed in flower bed and fossil derive from a common source meaning to dig.

imperceptible to the speakers of a language.[6] This metalinguistic awareness, indeed, is very recent in human intellectual development, perhaps two thousand years old, at best.[7] Even today, the field is fraught with misunderstanding, ignorance, and prejudice, despite our supposed progress.

The two sources of change in language are commonly referred to as *internal* change, that is, change resulting from the passing on of language from one generation to another, and *external* change, that is, change resulting from contact with other languages. It is important to note that no language exists in isolation. There is no such thing as a pure language, one unique in the universe, free from non-native elements, and no such thing as a mongrel or corrupted language. All have grown through internal mutation plus contact with other tongues. To the linguist studying this phenomenon, all languages are equally good, equally beautiful, equally valuable. All are equally able to express thought[8] and to meet the needs of their speakers. Subjective assessments of this sort -- beauty, purity, usefulness -- reflect the tastes and prejudices of individuals; they have nothing to do with any language itself.

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[6] Witness the inevitable surprise when you step onto the bathroom scales. Where did all that extra weight come from?

[7] The development of writing systems, progressing from pictographs to ideographs to syllabaries and alphabets reflect a growing understanding of the way language is structured. The earliest commentaries on language which reveal an understanding of grammatical forms and classifications, syntactic arrangements and phonological processes are more recent. The earliest, found in India and Greece, show how technologically advanced civilizations had relatively little understanding of the instrument that made their progress possible.

[8] A common misconception is that one 'thinks' in a language, a misconception that is rooted in a Romantic view which attributes to language powers which it does not have. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as it is known, argues that the language one speaks shapes one's view of the world, in short, that the language itself determines thinking. According to this theory, the fact that Spanish uses some 5 verbs to express the semantic concepts covered by the one verb 'to be' in English implies dramatically different ways of seeing the world. There is no objective, observable evidence that this is true in any meaningful way. Language teachers are guilty of this error when they insist that you must 'think' in the new language you are studying. The language(s) one speaks has(ve) no effect on the actual thinking process itself. Human language has evolved as a tool of the brain... All languages are based on the same deep structures -- all are equally complicated, or simple,--and they have evolved in tandem with the processes whereby the brain handles information. The language we speak might be compared to the language of a computer, a tool to facilitate the machine's work but a tool which does not determine the way the machine works. Facility with expressing thought is a habit. As a child, you learn a language which permits you to express thought. Language is a question of habit and use. The same is true of any second language you learn. It's all a question of practice and familiarity and habit.

Factors Influencing Change

Several factors affect the rate and kind of change. Geographic isolation, an agricultural economy, political and social stability, literacy and a fixed norm for a language slow down the rate of change. The island of New Guinea illustrates the role of isolation in language evolution. Upward of a thousand languages, some with as few as 100 speakers, have survived in the isolated mountain valleys of the island until recent times. Languages spoken in remote regions, often mountainous or insular, change more slowly. The Basque language was once spoken over a much wider area than at present. It has retreated from the area which the Romans called "Aquitania" (located in Southwestern France) to the mountainous regions of the Pyrenees in Southern France and Northern Spain. Basque predates the coming of the Indo-Europeans into Europe several thousand years ago. Remoteness discourages contact with other language groups and promotes linguistic 'conservativeness'. Languages of isolated regions often preserve unusual forms and words. The English of the outports of Newfoundland preserves words, phonetic features, grammatical forms which have been lost elsewhere. Of the Scandinavian languages, Icelandic is the closest to the original Old Norse from which Norwegian, Swedish and Danish also evolved. The isolation of the island has slowed down the pace of change. Likewise, an agricultural economy which discourages travel, puts the brakes on change. In 19th. century China, peasants rarely left the area where they were born. A day's walk in any direction might find them in a village where they could not understand the language in use. The Amish and Mennonite communities throughout Canada and the United States have preserved their own centuries old German dialect thanks to their agricultural economy. Linguists head for rural areas when they want to study the preservation of dialects, not to cities.

Political stability, an educated class and shared linguistic norms also slow down the pace of change. The emergence of the present nations of Western Europe gave the political and social stability in which the principle tongues currently in use evolved a standardized written form and, more recently with the extensive use of modern communications media, radio and T.V., a standardized spoken form. Since the Renaissance, but particularly in the last century with the spread of public education, the pace of change in Italian, German, English, Spanish and French has been

controlled due to a written form and the spread of literacy. The written word has had a marvellous ability to influence the evolution of the spoken tongue. It commands a respect and wields an authority not accorded the spoken word. *Littera scripta manet*, 'the written word prevails', the Romans used to say. Modern communication media, movies, radio, television, computers, have proven to be even more influential and effective in establishing a standardized form. The disappearance of dialects throughout Europe as the result of education in the 'standardized' form and the use of that form in the media bears witness to the fact.

The opposite conditions, logically, accelerate the process of change. A language spoken in a central location which favours contact with other groups is more susceptible to change as is the language of a multi-faceted economy. Political and social instability, lack of a written form, illiteracy will likewise promote change. The kind of change, however, is not the same in each case. A language spoken by a sea-faring people in contact with a variety of cultures will change by borrowing words and phrases from other languages and it, in turn, will leave its mark on the languages of peoples with whom it has come into contact. Think of the variety of words from around the world to be found in English as the result of exploration and colonization and the effect English has had on languages over the world. Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the Eastern Mediterranean world in the early Christian era, is another case in point, as is Swahili in East Africa. Modern English, the language of the United States, one of the foremost generators of modern technological advances, creates new words in many fields to fill growing lexical need of the professions. Change here is largely lexical, that is, vocabulary, borrowing words or creating new ones.

Political instability and illiteracy promote a different type of change. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the social political and economic forces which had restrained change were now gone. The unity and harmony and freedom of movement which had existed and which fostered a standardized form of the language were gone. The world which emerged encouraged the isolation of groups of people, discouraging trade and travel, and literacy was rare. Structural change, variations in usage, pronunciation continued apace and within 300 years of the fall of Rome, the Romance languages in their nascent forms had emerged. The same forces were at work in Mediaeval England. The feudal system discouraged

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freedom of movement, literacy, and the free exchange of goods and services throughout the country. Consequently, in each fiefdom, isolated effectively from neighbouring influences, language evolved independently producing the babel of dialects which are the source of modern dialects throughout England.

These two sets of forces represent, shall we say, the centrifugal and centripedal forces constantly and simultaneously at work in languages, one force favouring conservation and the other favouring change. Modern English is a case in point. The essential structures of English, phonetic, morphological and syntactical, have remained relatively stable since the age of Shakespeare thanks to political and economic stability, public education and literacy. But the language has experienced enormous lexical growth to the point that it now contains well over a million words[9] compared to the hundred thousand or so in Shakespeare's age. The conditions at work from 1066 to 1300,[10] political and social instability, isolation, limited economic activity, however, transformed the very nature of English phonetics, morphology and syntax, as well as the vocabulary base of the language.

The fundamental structures of a language remain stable over time, change being introduced slowly and progressively over many many years. This is why morphological (grammatical) change passes unnoticed in the population at large. For example, the verb **climb** in English once formed the past tense by mutating the vowel 'i' giving **clumb**. The form used in Standard English is **climbed**, the strong verb having become a 'weak' verb (ie. forming the past tense with an ending rather than a vowel mutation.) Likewise, the verb **dive**, normally a weak verb forming its past tense by adding **-ed** has mutated, in the speech of some people, into a strong verb with a vowel mutation being used to form the past tense giving **dove**. These are only minor examples of structural change but if you take a series of these little changes over time, let's say, several hundred years, noticeable, permanent change in the 'programme' (ie. structure, grammar rules) will take place. The kind of change may not be the same in all areas where a language is spoken and, in time, this may cause distinct dialects to

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9 Some would argue that this is a conservative estimate.
10 This period is known as the Middle English period, the transitional age between Old English and Modern English.

form and, in the right circumstances, distinct languages may emerge. This is how English came to be distinct from Dutch and Flemish and German.

It is impossible to predict the direction of change; nevertheless, we can say that languages evolve towards greater simplicity and regularity in morphology. Old English was encumbered with declensions for nouns and adjectives, with many classifications of each, and a similar situation with verbs. Over time, the number of these was dramatically reduced to the point that there are now, only 13 endings left. The force at work in simplifying language morphology is **analogy**. Most words in English form the plural by adding -s. As time goes by, irregular words, for example Latin borrowings like **stadium**, become regular. The plural used to be **stadia**, a Latin plural, but **stadiums** is the normal form to-day. Analogy is the force at work in the examples cited above -- dive-dove follows the model drive-drove, and climb-climbed follows the model for most past tense forms. A glance at the languages of Europe reveals a similar course of events: Latin, a highly synthetic language with numerous endings and classifications of nouns and verbs, has evolved into the largely analytic Romance languages where word order determines grammatical function and endings are reduced to a minimum. Some languages, however, like Russian and Polish, have retained a highly inflected morphology. What future evolution holds for these languages no one knows.

The thing to note here is that while   forces   restrain change -- political stability, an educated class, a written form, general literacy, free movement of people and goods and services, and unrestricted contact with other speakers of the language, the morphological evolution of a language progresses slowly. However, these same conditions foster another kind of change known as lexical growth. A thriving economy means the creation of new products, new machines, new processes and the corresponding need for words with which to refer to these novelties. New words are created by combining the roots already there in new ways -- toothpaste, for example -- or by expanding or restricting the meaning of existing words. **Gay** has suffered a narrowing or restriction of meaning, while **pot** has experienced an extension of meaning. Many languages, where new words are needed to fill lexical gaps often in technological fields, merely borrow a word already in use in another language usually making the phonological and morphological changes required to make the word 'fit' into existing patterns.

Languages in Close Contact:
The Substratum Theory

The underlying theory of languages in contact is sometimes called the *substratum theory* . Throughout history, contact between peoples has involved migrations, war, conquest. When the people who were to evolve into the Celtic tribes moved into Western Europe, Spain, the British Isles, they met peoples who had been living there for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Who these people were, where they came from, what languages they used, we do not know. Without doubt, they intermingled with the newly arrived Celts. Over time, these native populations disappeared, having been absorbed by the newcomers.[11] These original inhabitants are the substratum, the newly-arrived Indo-Europeans, the superstratum. The language of these new-arrivals was modified by the speech of these natives who, over time, abandoned their languages to adopt the now hybridized Indo-European speech which became the Celtic languages. However, these original inhabitants did not completely abandon their speech habits, and phonetic features, syntactical arrangements, words, especially place names, terms for geographic features, locations, entered Indo-European and in part helped form the new language. Thus, this aboriginal speech is a substratum to Celtic. Likewise, when the Celtic Gauls were conquered by Caesar, these Celtic languages became substrata to Latin, and the changes introduced into Latin partly account for the beginnings of Provençal, French, Walloon etc.. During the early Middle Ages, the language of the Frankish tribes which settled in the northern part of what is now France and Belgium, slowly learned the Romance language of the lands they had occupied. Eventually, their Germanic language was absorbed into the local language, giving the peculiar mixture of Germanic and Romance that characterizes modern French. Frankish is *superstratum* to Gaulish Latin.

Over the many years between the arrival of the newcomers and the disappearance of one of the languages there stretches a long period of bilingualism in which the two languages exist side by side as *adstrata* to each other. Evidence suggests that forms of Continental Celtic survived in

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11 At one time, it was believed that the new arrivals wiped out the local populations but these days it is assumed that such widescale massacres were the exception rather than the rule and that the populations mixed, interbreeding and exchanging cultural traditions, blending to form a new mixture.

the Alpine valleys of eastern Gaul until the 6th. or 7th. century AD while it is quite likely that in Armorica, modern day Brittany, a form of Celtic speech was still in use when the migration from Cornwall took place in the 5th. and 6th. centuries. Thus the period of adstrata endured for 700 years. It is during this period that change enters the surviving, language. Remember that when these people acquired the new language, they did not do so by studying a standardized form out of books... Nothing of the sort existed. As well, metalinguistic[12] awareness of forms and structures was only beginning to enter the field of 'philosophical inquiry'. People learned another language "by ear," picking it up from other speakers and imitating what they heard as best they could. We all know how difficult it can be to hear exactly what sounds are being made in a language we are trying to learn. We may not get the words just right, a syllable may be lost, or added; the verb forms may end up being a mixture of the verbal system of both languages. The same may be true for the use of nouns and adjectives. Very often, the subtleties of stress and intonation, the elements which constitute the rhythm of a language, are not learned.[13] Consequently, this imperfect acquisition of the new language gave rise to a kind of 'pidgin' speech which in time was passed on to new generations eventually forming a new dialect of the superstratum or adstratum. This is the way that *Black English* , recently renamed *Ebonics* , came into being among the different groups of slaves brought from Africa. The same process explains Haitian Creole. In short, then, the gradual adoption of a language as mother tongue by the speakers of a different language can change the essential structures of that adopted language.

Linguistic History of Ireland
The Arrival of the Celts

The linguistic history of Ireland begins with the arrival of the first humans after the last ice age some 10, 000 years BC.[14] Who these men were, how they arrived, what language they spoke we do not know. When

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12 Metalinguistic awareness refers to the conscious awareness of grammatical structures and forms, for example, knowing how the future tense is formed, what a root of a verb is and what the appropriate ending is. Most people, even today, have a very poorly developed 'metalinguistic awareness'.

13 Language teachers find this part of language the hardest to teach to students and it is often the most neglected part as well.

14 No one knows for sure when the first humans reached Ireland; since archaeological deposits or remains or discoveries are a question of happenstance, we will never know with complete certainty when human habitation of the island began.

the ice cap retreated from Northern Europe, human hunters and later farmers moved into the vast grassy lowlands. At this time, Ireland was joined to England by a sort of land umbilical cord in the area around Dublin, just as England was joined to the mainland where the English Channel now flows. When the land bridge to the mainland of Europe disappeared with the rising level of the sea, maritime commerce kept Ireland and its inhabitants in contact with what later became Scotland, England, Wales, Cornwall, France and Spain. The Ancient Phoenicians traded for tin with these little known inhabitants of Ireland.[15] Archaeological remains indicate that a people like the megalith builders of Stonehenge had also made their way into Ireland. Remains of "Beaker" culture burial centres have also been found. Unfortunately, nothing is known of their speech or if they were the same people as the megalith builders.[16] The beginnings of the linguistic continuity which gave birth to Modern Irish begins with the arrival of Celtic tribes perhaps as early as the second millennium B.C.[17]

The Indo-European Family
Emergence of the Celtic Languages

These Celts brought with them a language, or more accurately, dialects, belonging to the Indo-European family. These Celtic dialects had partially formed on the mainland of Europe some time in the second millennium B.C. The Celtic tribes were the most westerly of the Indo-Europeans. Two theories exist concerning the origins of these Indo-Europeans. The older theory places their origin on the steppes of the

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15 Cornwall was also a source of tin for ancient peoples in the Mediterranean world.

16 Perhaps the Picts who inhabited Scotland when the Romans occupied England were descendants of these original peoples. Other researchers believe that the Picts were not a pre-Indo-European people but another tribe of Celts who had arrived later than the Goidelic Celts who settled Ireland.

17 The Norwegian scholar, Carl Marstrander, reminds us that it is impossible to establish with certainty when the Celtic peoples first entered the British Isles. Their presence there is attested to from the dawn of history. The legendary history of Ireland identifies three founding peoples as it were. The first people of Ireland are called the Firbolgs, the second people, the Tuath De Danann, the People of the Goddess Dan (the same goddess who have her name to the River Don in Russia and the Danube), a Celtic people, to judge by their name, and finally the Milesians, another Celtic people, who arrived from the Iberian peninsula. Legend gives 1000 BC as the arrival date of this last group, with 1500 BC as the possible date of arrival of the previous group. The Firbolgs were there before anyone else. Whether or not this legendary history matches the archaeological record, there is no way of establishing with certainty. Douglas Hyde in his Literary History of Ireland takes great pains to stress the remarkable accuracy of detail to be found in early Irish legends and myths. Whether the accuracy of details of social life, cultural artifacts, carries over to accuracy concerning the settlement of Ireland is not certain.

Ukraine on the border between Europe and Asia. Their spread over Europe, and into the Indian subcontinent has been associated with the domestication of the horse and the development of the wheel.[18] A second theory places their origin in what is now Turkey,[19] and their spread over Europe and the Indian subcontinent parallels the spread of neolithic farming. Whichever theory one chooses to retain, the people who settled in the central region of Europe, in what is now southern Bavaria, evolved into the Celtic tribes.[20] No record has survived of this Indo-European speech. By a process of reconstruction using the patterns exhibited in the surviving members of the family, theoretical forms of root words have been proposed. Celtic clearly belongs to this family.

Salient Characteristics of Celtic

Indo-European evolved into Celtic in this area of central Europe and quite probably the distinctive features of Celtic speech result from contact with speakers of other languages already living in the area. In part, no doubt, some changes are the result of an internal evolution of Indo-European forms due to the isolation of this group from the parent group. Remember that isolation encourages development along idiosyncratic lines since contact with the 'parent' group of speakers is no longer there to serve as a restraining influence on internal change. Other elements resulted from the merging of Indo-European with local elements (substrata), producing a new speech with elements of both fused together. One feature probably resulting from a substratum, is the disappearance of initial Indo-European p. Words such as IE patir* became pater in Latin and father in English but became atir in Celtic and athair in Modern Irish. Celtic speakers were unable to pronounce this initial p and words containing this sound in Modern Irish are all borrowings from other

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18 The Celts were unparalleled horsemen. Their use of war chariots in part explains their success in dominating most of Western and Central Europe for over 1500 years. The Ancient Romans admired these martial skills of the Celtic tribes they fought, borrowing from them a number of words pertaining to warfare: caballus 'pack horse', carrus 'chariot'

19 This theory seems to explain the similarities between the Indo-European, Semitic and Hamitic language families, all of which share certain structural features which have led linguists to posit a common origin to the three.

20 Linguists used to speak of an Italo-Celtic family of languages. It was once accepted that the Italic family which grew into the Romance family was an off-shoot of a common family with the Celtic languages. The Italic group evolved from the speech of those tribes which moved south of the Alps and settled in the Italian peninsula. Some linguists today question this common origin of the Celtic and Italic families, although both clearly belong to the Indo-European family. Instead of being sisters, they are cousins.

languages at a later stage. Words such as *páiste* or *Pádraig* are borrowed from French (page) and Latin (Patricius) respectively. The original Irish word for Patrick was *Coithriche* which reflects their inability to pronounce the p sound.

A number of other features stand out. Common Celtic evolved a double series of contrasting consonants called 'broad' and 'slender'. Modern English distinguishes two kinds of 'g' depending on the vowel which follows: 'general' and 'good' illustrate the two forms. The same is true of the 'c' in 'cello' or 'cell' and 'call'. One pronunciation is used with 'broad' vowels [a,o,u], the other with 'slender vowels' [e,i]. In Common Celtic, every consonant is to be found in two variants, one broad, one slender. The system is at the heart of the grammatical system of the languages where in Modern Irish, for example, the difference between the singular *cat* and the plural *cait* is the difference in the pronunciation of the final 't'. Likewise, the difference between the two words *carr* (wagon) and *cearr* (wrong) is the difference in the quality of the [k] sound.[21]

The Celtic languages distinguish between two forms of 'it is', that is, they use two different verbs to express the concept -- is and tá. The first form is used with nouns and pronouns in those instances which express identifications, defining attributes or characteristics, while the second form is used in instances expressing adverbial qualifications: situations, locations, conditions which are accidental or temporary. Thus, Irish will say *is breá an lá é* , an expression of a defining characteristic or a classification of the kind of day in question, while *tá an lá go breá* is an expression of an impression, or a temporary situation, a condition of the day rather than a defining aspect of the day. [22]

Another unusual feature of the Celtic languages not found in any

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21 The system as it has evolved in the Celtic languages may have a broad or a slender consonant with any vowel. The glide vowel is written in to indicate the pronunciation of the consonant and does not represent a vowel sound in itself. This is the case of bád and báid. There is only one vowel in this word. The difference between the singular and the plural forms is merely the difference between the broad and slender 'd'. The 'i' here does not represent a vowel sound but merely that the 'd' is to be pronounced slender.

22 This feature is also found in modern Spanish and Portuguese which distinguish between ser and estar for the same purposes, essential, permanent or defining vs. impressionistic, circumstantial or temporary. The same is true of Italian which distinguishes between è buono and stà bene. This suggests the working of the common substratum sometimes identified as Iberian.

other language in the Indo-European family,[23] is the pronominalized preposition, that is, the blending of the preposition with the pronominal object. Thus we have *ag Seán* when the object is a noun but *aige* when an pronoun is involved. The full pattern for the preposition *ag* is *agam, agat, aige, aici, againn, agaibh, acu*. Simply put, the preposition is 'conjugated' much as other languages might do with a verb. The same pattern holds true for most simple prepositions in the Celtic languages.

The Celtic languages also stand out for their lack of an infinitive form, (such as to go, to eat) a verbal noun similar to the English gerund, doing duty for the infinitive (i.e. dul, ith). They also make use of a progressive form to indicate on-going in-progress action. This progressive form is now found in Modern Irish but also in languages which were influenced by a strong Celtic substratum, such as Spanish and Portuguese and English. Syntactically, the Celtic languages are unique among the Indo-European family in that the verb occupies the first position in sentence followed by the subject and the objective complements. The majority of the world's languages use a subject verb object, who did what, syntactical arrangement. In the early Celtic dialects, it appears the syntactical arrangements showed much greater variety with subject verb object as well as object subject verb and verb subject object as possible arrangements depending on the context. By the Middle Irish period, and again in the Modern Irish period, the Verb Subject Object sequence had become the standard arrangement for the elements in the sentence.

Nevertheless, the fundamental structure of Common Celtic is clearly Indo-European. The language had a fully developed conjugation system in verbs, with 3 persons, singular and plural, a distinction between a perfective and an imperfective past, and several moods, indicative, subjunctive, imperative, a fully developed active and passive voice, a system of cases in nouns, distinguishing a subject form, the nominative case, an objective form, the accusative case, an indirect object form, the dative case, a possessive form, the genitive case, a form used for direct address or apostrophe, the vocative case. These cases were found in different classes of nouns, spread over three 'genders', masculine, feminine and neuter in both singular and plural forms.

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[23] It seems something similar may have been found in Tocharian an extinct member of the Indo-European family in Central Asia.

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Indo-European Base of Celtic Lexicon

The fundamental vocabulary of Celtic was also clearly Indo-European as these examples from contemporary Irish will show. The pronouns, *mé, tú, eile*, words for family members, *athair, máthair, siúr, bráthair, fear*, names of animals and plants, geographical phenomena, *bó, each, éin, iasc, bláth, bád, féar, muir, uisce* common verbs *ith, beir, rith, suigh*.

The Celtic tribes of Central Europe migrated to other regions of the co. inent 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 and an area in Central Turkey (Galatia). 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 was surely 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 Grammar of Continental Celtic. What does survive, however, indicates a highly inflected language with a case system in nouns, three genders, with fully conjugated verbs for tense. voice and mood, in other words, a clearly Indo-European language, synthetic in structure, similar to Latin, Greek, Sanskrit.

The forms of Continental Celtic of which we have some record are commonly called Gaulish, spoken by the tribes inhabiting that region at the time of the Roman Conquest, Celtiberian, used in the Iberian peninsula, Lepontic, the language of the Celtic tribes which inhabited Northern Italy and who sacked Rome in the early days of the Republic (390 BC), and Galatian, the speech of a tribe which settled in Turkey and to whom St. Paul addressed an epistle. Julius Caesar identified three languages in the Gaul he had conquered, one spoken by the Aquitani in the Southwest,[24] a

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[24] This is often identified with Basque which in prehistoric times was spoken over a much wider territory than at present. No written records have been preserved of their language.

non Indo-European people, one spoken by the Gauls in The Center and the West, and a third by the Belgae in the North. When Caesar invaded Britain, he noted that the Belgae and the Britons spoke the same language.

The presence of these Celtic tribes can be seen in the place names which have survived throughout France and southern Germany. Bavaria is named for a Celtic tribe, the Boii, as are Paris, the Parisii, Belgium, the Belgae, Helvetia, the Helveltii, Bearn, the Bearni, Vosges, the Vosci. River names, the Rhine, the Seine, the Danube, the Inn, the Neckar, the Marne are Celtic. Place names ending in -dun or -briga or -hal are Celtic in origin... Verdun and Lyon (France), Bregenz (Austria), Brihuela (Spain) Leiden (Holland) Liegnitz (Silesia), Halle, Hallstadt (Germany). As well, these Continental Celtic languages contributed words to our common Western European vocabulary, words such as carrus, from which we get cart, car, carpentum, originally a two-wheeled vehicle, which has given us carpenter. Likewise caballus, pack horse, has given us cavalry, cavalier, cattus replaced the Latin feles as the words for cat, bracae, breeches, became the standard word for masculine nether apparel.

Goidelic Celtic

From the beginnings of the history of Celtic speech in Ireland, a difference has existed between Insular Celtic forms and those of Continental Celtic and also between Ireland and 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 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[25] . They probably sailed to England, worked their way across the first island before reaching Ireland at a later date, perhaps centuries later. It is also possible that they reached the island by sailing across the North Sea and down the West coast of Scotland. As well, tribes may have reached Ireland from the coast of France or 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 perhaps have taken a century if not centuries to reach them. That contact with the continent was maintained can be seen in the residue of the Hallstatt and La Teine cultures in Ireland, both of which

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[25] Henri Hubert in The History of the Celtic People cites agricultural archaeological evidence to support his case -- land division, farming techniques, style of house etc.

evolved in Continental Europe and spread to the islands.

Whatever cultural contacts were maintained with the continent and with Britain, the Celtic speech of Ireland, called Goidelic, effectively isolated from other forms of Celtic speech, 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[26] such as ceann [head] which evolved into a [p] in Celtic in Britain, Welsh, for instance, where it became pen, or Irish cúig which became pump in Welsh and pymp Cornish, or Irish ceathair which became pedwar in Welsh and peswar in Cornish. The forms found in British Celtic were later forms evolved on the Continent and imported to Britain, forms which failed to penetrate into Ireland.

The further evolution of the original Celtic tongue responded to the effects of internal evolution. One of the most potent forces for internal change is the effect of articulatory force, that is, the energy required to make certain sounds. Some require greater force than others, that is, some consonants are 'hard' others 'soft', some are 'explosive', others are 'implosive', some stop the passage of air completely [occlusives], some merely restrict the flow [fricatives], some vowels are long, others are short etc. some syllables are louder and longer than others [ie. stressed] others are unstressed and short. Modifications in the way certain groups of sounds are produced can have far reaching effects on the structure of a language as a whole. Classical Latin, for example, had evolved a mild stress on the 'long', often the penultimate, (next to the last) syllable. This stress, as far as we know, did not significantly shorten the unstressed syllables in the Classical language. However, in Vulgar Latin, the form of the language spoken by the masses, this stress became much stronger to the point that the unstressed syllables became significantly shortened. This

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26 Hence the label Q and P Celtic languages. A similar division is found between the two branches of the Italic family, the Osco-Umbrian and Latin branches. The Osco-Umbrian branch had p where Latin had qu, for example, Osco-Umbrian poi became quoi>qui in Latin. The German linguist Walde proposed that this parallel development suggested continued contact between the Osco-Umbrian branch and the Brythonic Celtic group. There is no evidence of an archaeological or cultural nature other than this coincidence to suggest that this is so. It is now generally accepted that this is merely a case of parallel evolution.

meant that unstressed vowels were unclear and eventually disappeared.[27] This, in turn, produced the loss of syllables in words, and, in many cases, the loss of the last syllable which contained the grammatical ending. One result of this was the disappearance of the neuter gender, since gender in Latin was a question of the kind of endings used on a noun. Over time, Latin, a synthetic language, evolved into the essentially analytic Romance languages of today.[28] The same things happened in Old English where the tonic stress caused the loss of syllables and particularly of endings in words. As a result, English shed its system of cases in nouns and conjugations in verbs to develop the analytic structure based on word order which we use today. Similar forces were at work in Celtic prior to the Old Irish period and ever since then as well. That is why Old Irish is a foreign tongue to any speaker of Modern Irish and why most words are unrecognizable to a contemporary speaker.

The phonetic system, then, which consisted of 'strong' and 'weak' articulations for every consonant eventually evolved into a system now known as 'lenition' or 'aspiration', that is, in certain phonetic/grammatical contexts, a stop consonant becomes a fricative and a fricative becomes a spirant, that is, the sounds [p, b, k, g, t, d] become [f, ß, x/j, ɣ, h, ɣ/j] respectively and the fricatives [f, s] become [ø , h] respectively while the nasal [m] becomes [ß]. The strong positions were the absolute initial position (the first word after a pause), initial position following a word ending in a consonant, in certain consonant clusters or when double. All other positions were weak and subject to mutation. The word **cattos** (**cat**, in Modern Irish), contains a weak **c** and a strong **t**. Consequently, when preceded by the possessive adjective **mo**, the weak **c** becomes lenited or aspirated as **ch** [x]. Predictably, the consonant in a weak position becomes lenited, while the consonant in a strong position remains unchanged. This has become the basis of much of the grammar of the contemporary

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27 The effects of stress patterns can be seen in the difference between English as spoken in England, which permits only one main stress per word, and English in North America which permits a main stress with an almost equally strong secondary stress. Thus in England, a word like *secretary* is pronounced as having three syllables, the 'a' vowel being dropped, while in North America, pronunciation places the heaviest stress on the first syllable with a secondary stress on the 'a'. The North American pronunciation would preserve the vowel, while the English pattern would see a new form for the word appearing.

28 A synthetic language is one in which the relationship between words is expressed by the endings on words. In these languages, word order is largely free, serving to emphasize rather than to identify function. Analytic languages, on the other hand, use word order to express relationships between words and rely on a minimum of inflectional morphology , that is, endings. Latin, Russian, Hebrew are synthetic languages while English, modern Irish, Dutch are analytic languages.

language. Commenting on the directions of change in the modern Celtic languages, Martin Bale notes that lenition is as thoroughly rooted as it has ever been.

Probably as the result of the development of a stronger tonic stress, on the first syllable,[29] sounds and syllables in the middle of a word were lost,[30] endings on words disappeared and another phenomenon appeared, **eclipsis**. Consequently in the contemporary language, **n-** is prefixed to words beginning with a vowel in certain contexts, but this **n-** is merely a relic of a lost syllable formerly an ending on the preceding word. The change in the initial consonant whereby **d** becomes **n** or **t** becomes **d** is the working of the same process whereby the weak, initial consonant, was affected by the ending of the preceding word. In these changes, voiceless stops [**p, t, k**] become voiced [**b, d, g**] and voiced stops [**b, d, g**] become nasal [**m, n, ŋ**]. It is generally assumed that these changes had worked their way into the language by the end of the fifth century. The first written forms of the language date from this period.

Old Irish (500?-900)

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

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29 The effects of stress on the pronunciation of a word can be seen clearly in the stress patterns of Modern Irish. The grammar of the Christian Brothers speaks of three possible patterns of stress. One pattern permits a stress only on the first syllable, while all other syllables are unstressed. This means that a short syllable, ie a syllable with a short vowel, may receive the primary stress in a word. Another pattern, more frequently found in the languages of the world, will move the primary stress to the long syllable in a word. This syllable may be anywhere in the word -- beginning, middle, end. And yet a third possibility is there, where the first syllable and any long syllable may be stressed, thereby creating a pattern of dual stress in a word. This explains the variety of ways of pronouncing words in contemporary Irish. Each pattern, it should be noted, corresponds to a particular dialect of the language, that is, distinctive evolutions of the original language.

30 Those who learned to read and write Irish prior to the revisions to spelling made in the middle of the present century are familiar with the many silent letters and syllables that used to be found in the spelling of words. The modern system has eliminated these numerous unpronounced consonants, vowels and syllables which testify to earlier pronunciations of words in order to make the spelling a more accurate reflection of contemporary speech.

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.

These 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, Conall 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 Raid of Cooley) likewise used a style of language suited to their purpose. There were rules of rhythm, rhyme, assonance and the like, preferences 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 forms reserved for a loftier purpose. Within early Irish society, this standardized, literary form was shared throughout the island. 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 'ruled' that had survived for hundreds of years.

This *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, however, 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 Latin values, not their Celtic values, that is, the system did not reflect the contrast between the broad and slender consonants. As well, consonant sounds not found in Latin were not represented in the notation system. This writing was obviously the preserve of a specialist. Furthermore, the cumbersome nature of the notation system made it impractical for all but short sentences and personal names.

Vocabulary of Old Irish

With the coming of Christianity, Ireland was again in contact with
the mainstream European cultural influences. Many words, particularly
those related to the Christianity and to the arts of reading and writing,
were borrowed from Latin, as well as words pertaining to general culture,
words such as modern Irish *leabhar, léigh, scríobh, litir* , (Latin liber,
legere, scribere, littera) and *sagart, Domhnach, rial, eaglais, beannacht,*
altóir, aingeal (Latin: sacerdos, Dominicus, regula, ecclesia, benedictio,
altaria, angelus), and *cathaoir, saiget, sorn, cócaire* (Latin: cathedra,
sagitta, fornus, cocinarius).

With the establishment of monasteries and monastic libraries and
copying centres, a new form of learning was introduced to the Island.
Ireland became a land of saints and scholars. Monasteries were devoted to
the pursuit of learning as well as to the worship of God. Irish monks
became highly proficient in Latin, copying and illustrating manuscripts of
sacred texts.[31] The illustrations and ornamentations demonstrate the
blending of Celtic imagination and artistic taste with Christianity, clear
indications of the persistence of 'pagan' elements into the new order. The
Book of Kells is one example of the work produced by Irish monks in this
Old Irish period. As well, this manuscript form of writing letters (the half-
uncial style) was to become the basic script for written Irish until the
reforms of the mid-twentieth century.

These early manuscripts are important as well for the glosses which
have survived. These glosses are notes in the margins of the Latin texts,
translations or explanations of unfamiliar Latin words and phrases. They
give us a glimpse of the Old Irish vernacular, the everyday form of Irish
used by the copyist or the scholar studying the text. At other times, even
whole short poems were scribbled in the margins, suggesting that modern
students are not that original in their scribblings in books today. These
glosses, obviously, differed greatly from the language used in the bardic
epics where a standardized form of the language, archaic and stylized in
form, was the accepted norm.

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[31] What scholars call 'Classical Latin" in its standardized or normalized form, is the creation of Celtic monks
who transcribed texts, correcting spelling and grammatical forms in them thereby creating the form used
for Latin throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance and Modern periods.

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The Old Irish period with the adoption of the Roman 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 Latin. While in Latin the letters matched quite nicely the phonemes (sound) of the language, this was not the case in Irish with its double series of broad and slender consonants, phonetic mutations such as lenition and eclipsis. Letters were used with their Latin phonetic values, not those of Irish. A single letter was used to represent a range of sounds, for example, 'g' would represent the slender, broad, lenited versions of 'g' (ga, ge, gh) as well as the 'g' which represented the eclipsis of 'c' . In the beginning, double letters [nn, n, ll, l, rr, r] were used to differentiate between hard and soft consonants, or combinations of letters were used to make these distinctions [ch, c, th, t]. Over time, the system was revised with glide vowels inserted to distinguish between the broad and slender versions of a consonant. A dot was added over a consonant to indicate lenition. A stroke over the vowel distinguished the long from the short varieties. The spelling which had become 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.

This 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 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. By the end of the ninth century, at the end of the Old Irish period, the Picts, possibly a pre-Indo-European people whose arrival predates recorded history, had become thoroughly Gaelicized.[32] As well, Irish colonies were established in Wales and along the Western coast of England.

The Viking Influence

Towards the end of the Old Irish period, Vikings had begun to raid

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[32] The Romans called them "Picti" , painted men, because they painted their bodies to enter battle.

Ireland as they also raided the coasts of England and France. As was the case in England and Normandy, Viking towns, were established in Scotland and in Ireland itself, Donegal, Galway, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford being some of those which date from this period. Annals of the period refer to the Gallghaoidhil,[33] that is, a foreign + Irish people, that is, Viking-Irish people. A period of bilingualism accompanied the arrival of this new people who gradually assimilated to the more numerous Irish people and as a result, words of Norse origin entered the Irish language. Often, the terms refer to the sea, to sailing, to commercial enterprises in which the Norse had excelled. Some borrowing from the period include these words in Modern Irish: *stiúir, mál, margadh, beoir, fuinneog, iarla, pónaire, seol, pingin* (rudder, tax, market, beer, window, earl, bean, sail, penny). It is worth noting that the same phenomenon was repeated in England and France where the Viking element was likewise quickly absorbed into the native population following a period of bilingualism during which Norse words entered Old English and French in the same domains as mentioned above.

As the Old Irish period (500?-900) drew to an end, Ireland was an solidly Irish speaking country with a native tradition of oral literature and a written tradition based on the Latin alphabet. The Gaels, long isolated on the fringe of Europe had preserved a language which had all but disappeared on the continent under the influence of Latin and the Roman Empire. Remoteness permitted Celtic to survive here, free to evolve along its own lines. With the coming of Patrick and the Christian religion, Ireland was introduced to mainstream continental influences. The Irish absorbed the cultural influences which accompanied Christianity and thoroughly Gaelicized them. As well, the Irish had expanded into Scotland and had assimilated a new group of colonists, the Vikings. The language had been enriched by borrowings from Latin and Norse. Given the stability of Irish society and social structure, the superior numbers of Irish people, these foreign elements were easily absorbed into the fabric of the land.

Middle Irish (900-1200)

The Middle Irish period (900-1200), however, is an age of transition marking the beginnings of the retreat of Gaelic influence in the British

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33 Ó'Murchú points out that the term in Scotland evolved into **Galloway** , the name for a region where presumably the majority of the population was of mixed Viking-Irish origin.

isles. Gaelic supremacy in Scotland began to give way in the face of Norman-English 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.

The Middle Irish period, then, is a period of linguistic diversity and literary growth. The written form of the language remained the standard form inherited from the past, but changes were occurring in the spoken form as the result of influences of Norse, Latin and Welsh (from Irish Colonies there). The system of declension and conjugation began to change under the effects of changes in stress and sound patterns. Due to the evolution of a heavier stress on long syllables, the vowel in the unstressed syllable became a muttered, unclear vowel, no longer serving to distinguish case endings and therefore meaningless. In time, it disappeared altogether. For example, the noun 'céle' meaning companion, had the following endings in Old Irish:

Nominative:	céle
Genitive:	céli
Dative:	céliu

and become **céle** in all forms in the Middle Irish period. Clearly, the ending no longer served any meaningful purpose and with similar results in the different noun classes, a 'common' form used in most circumstances became the standard form.

Changes introduced by copyists in texts from the Old Irish period, point to the changes in the vernacular which now differed considerably from the older standard form. The mistakes found in texts indicate that the declensional and other inflected forms used in the texts being copied were not familiar to the copyist. As well, new subject matter was introduced into the written literary tradition, the Fenian Cycle relating the exploits of

Fionn MacCumaill and the fianna (warriors), tales dating from a much earlier period in Irish history. Possibly interest in these tales of warriors parallels the introduction of Norman tales of knights such as Sir Gawain and the Arthurian cycle.

Early Modern Irish (1200-1600)
The Anglo-Normans

The Classical period of early Modern Irish, 1200-1600, marks the high point of the poetic traditions in literature and the concentration of the sociopolitical context which led to the rapid decline of Irish as the dominant language in Ireland later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The most significant of these changes was the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. Invited into Ireland as allies of Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, overlord of Leinster, in his quarrel with the High King. Their arrival does not seem to have disturbed other rulers who saw an advantage in their presence. When Henry II came to Ireland in 1171, the Irish lords willingly submitted to him. By the mid thirteenth century, perhaps two-thirds of Ireland was under direct Anglo-Norman control.

Lexical Borrowings from Anglo-Norman

This Norman presence gave rise to new linguistic diversity and gave renewed importance to town life. The language of these newcomers was itself a language in transition, a Norman-French dialect heavily influenced by Middle English. Over time, the French element was replaced by English as the linguistic situation in England evolved to confer dominance on the Anglo element of the Anglo-Norman connection. These newcomers brought with them their retainers, clergymen, servants, merchants, traders of all sorts. The borrowings into Irish at this time reflect the spheres of influence associated with these Anglo-Normans. In many cases, the same words were borrowed into Middle English in the same domains and for the same reasons. Some of these borrowings include: *aturnae, constábla, seirbhís, báille* (bailiff), *giúistís, áirse* (arch), *doinsiún, póirse, seomra, compás, siséal, bagún, buidéal, buntáiste, clairéad* (claret), *dinnéar, gúna, milliún, pardún, páiste, páipéar, sicín, pláta, spás, suipéar, tuáille* . As well, personal and family names such as *Seán, Seosamh,*

Séamas, de Búrca , reflect the Norman influence.

The Classical period marks the foundations of those spelling and grammatical structures which until recent times formed the basis for the written language. During the Middle Irish period, change had entered the standardized forms. Rival schools of spelling had developed in different monasteries. Some of these changes came to be accepted but the great achievement of the *filí* in this period is the recreation of a standardized language again albeit along excessively conservative lines.

The new norms did not take into account changes in the spoken language. Some of these included the loss of middle syllables, the loss of some phonemes (the two 'th' sounds similar to those in English think and the). The loss of syllables and some endings led to the disappearance of the neuter gender as had happened to the neuter gender in Latin of which mere traces survive in the daughter Romance languages. Perhaps most significant is the substitution of word order, syntax, as the principal form of expressing grammatical relationships for the complex system of verbal and noun/adjective endings. The spelling mistakes made by copyists of this age tell us about the evolving gap between the spelling and the spoken language. It is not that the *filí* were unaware of changes, but perhaps they felt that a common form for a word was preferable to a variety of spellings since the course of linguistic evolution was far from uniform throughout the country. Thus *bodhar* which originally contained a consonant pronounced like the 'th' in the came to be pronounced with a diphthong /au/ or with a /ß/ or /v/ sound. In other cases, the spelling form retained consonants which had ceased to be pronounced, for example *bliadhain* or *oidhche, lugha, mallughadh, suidhe, ríoghdhacht.*

On a sociopolitical level, we see the interaction of the two linguistic groups and the factors at work determining the effects of one language on the other. Since the Normans were greatly outnumbered in the land, and they were spread out over a large area, they lacked the social influence needed to assimilate the native Irish. In fact, the reverse process took place, with the native Irish absorbing the Normans. During this period, the Normans were said to have become *Hibernis ipsis Hiberniores* (more Irish than the Irish themselves). Consequently, anxious to reserve for themselves positions of power and influence, the King of England resorted to the use of royal decrees and legislation to ensure political and cultural

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hegemony in the land. A law dated 1285 stipulates all Church appointees must not be Irish speaking and the Statutes of Kilkenny from 1367 caution all Englishmen living in Ireland that they must speak English and behave like Englishmen. By 1493, Irish was excluded from courtrooms and by 1547 Henry VIII cautioned English noblemen in Galway that they should raise their children to speak English.

Modern Irish
(1600-1800)

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 and 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 century, the Cromwellian settlement (1654), the Penal Laws (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 those patrons who had once encouraged literary production by poets and bards no longer existed. Whatever literature or music was produced no longer penetrated into thee ruling circles in the land. As well, those opportunities for free exchange of ideas, culture, using Irish as a medium, were curtailed.

Emergence of the Major Dialect Areas

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 the most isolated and economically undesirable and d pressed 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. Before entering into the sociopolitical dimensions of the

fate of Irish in this period, let us look at some of the changes fostered by this situation.

At this time, the unity of the Gaelic world was broken. Following the defeat of the Jacobites in the Highlands of Scotland, and their defeat in Ireland as well, contact with the Gaelic world in Britain was severed. Scottish Gaelic would continue to evolve along its own independent lines as would Gaelic on the Isle of Mann, giving rise to two independent languages in due course (the 18th. century is often given as the dividing line).

In Ireland itself, it 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 1998, the linguistic homogeneity of earlier days disappeared. As a result, we have the three major dialects which survive today, those of Ulster, Munster and Connacht. Within these dialect areas, practically every village constitutes a dialectical variation of some sort. O'Rahilly's description of Irish dialects and Irish speaking districts makes this very clear. Here is concrete evidence of the effects of isolation on the evolution of a language, a reflection of the situation which has obtained in many parts of the world and which has affected the majority of languages for as long as language has existed. Some modern methods for teaching Irish concentrate on the speech of a specific village or region, Ó Siadhail's **Learning Irish** being based on the Irish of Cois Fharraige, and Myles Dillon's **Teach Yourself Irish** on the dialect spoken in West Munster, County Cork.

Of these, the Ulster dialect has shown itself to be the most 'analytic' of the three, having freed itself of most inflections, and that of Munster the most conservative or 'synthetic' of the three, having retained more inflectional features. The conjugation of the verb **tá** in these two dialects illustrates the different path evolution has taken in the two regions:

Munster:	táim	Ulster:	tá mé
	taoi (táir, tánn tú)		tá tú
	tá sé / sí		tá sé/ sí
	táimid		tá muid
	tánn sibh		tá sibh
	táid		tá siad

Clearly, the Ulster dialect has evolved a verb which no longer inflects to reflect person. The process of analogy has even created a new pronoun for the first person plural, a form obviously derived from the -imid personal ending for the verb. The Munster dialect has retained the full range of formal endings for the verb. Only the third personal singular uses an analytic form coupled with an independent pronoun form. The same can be seen in the past tense conjugation of the same verbs:

Munster:	(do) bhíos	Ulster:	bhí mé
	(do) bhís		bhí tú
	(do) bhí sé/ sí		bhí sé/ sí
	(do) bhíomar		bhí muid
	(do) bhíobhar		bhí sibh
	(do) bhíodar		bhí siad

Similar difference exist for the creation of regular past tense forms, where Dillon's grammar still uses the particle **do** to form the simple past not only with verbs beginning with a vowel or lenited f but for other consonants as well. The Ulster dialect uses lenition alone to indicate the past tense of verbs beginning with a consonant, the **d'** being found only with vowels or lenited f.

Likewise, in prepositional phrases, the Ulster dialect prefers lenition of the consonant, while Munster prefers eclipsis. For example:

Ulster: **ar an bhord**   Munster: **ar an mbord**

In the pronunciation of Ulster, all verbal nouns whether they end in ú, -**adh, amh** are all pronounced **ú**, while in Munster, a different

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pronunciation is found for each. The force of analogy has been at work here, reducing the number of variants in verb forms, thereby simplifying the structure of the language. The same process has been at work reducing the number of options open for forming plurals in nouns.

The process as we have seen, does not lead to the same result in all places. The scholars who worked on the new dictionaries for schools, the Gúm series, commented on the problems they faced in selecting the more widely used forms from the enormous variety of plural forms that had evolved in the different Gaeltachtaí over the years.

The same variety in word usage had appeared, with the word **druidim** used in some places, **dúnaim** in others to mean *close*, or **madra** and **gadhar** for *dog*.. The list could continue indefinitely of the variations that have arisen due to the full rein given to the forces of internal drift after the Renaissance and Reformation era.

The Sociopolitical Context

Most importantly, the changes meant a new place for Irish in the social landscape. It was no longer the language of towns or cities, no longer the language of education or culture. The farmer who went to town to sell his pigs or eggs or vegetables would have to learn English to deal with the merchants or dealers there. Irish, then, slowly disappeared from the world of business, from city life, from the world of government and all seats of power. To advance in society, meant acquiring a command of English. As time went by, with one failed insurrection after another, it was clear to the population that any hope of advancement would be within the context of English political, social and cultural domination. Acquiring a command of English was essential to social and material advancement.

The Nineteenth Century

With the Act of Union in 1801, Ireland was directly incorporated into the United Kingdom. Those Irish who had achieved some form of prosperity adopted English as their language, and many more came to see this as the normal way of things, there being no hope of any political independence or any remote chance of Irish making in-roads into the centres of power. Even champions of the Irish cause, such as Daniel

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O'Connell, himself an eloquent speaker of Irish, accepted without question that politics, social advancement, education, business were fields from which Irish was excluded, and that those who wished to advance in those fields must acquire a command of English. Most Irishmen, then, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, had come to look on their language as a detriment to advancement, something associated with poverty and backwardness. When the National Schools were established in 1831, Irish speaking parents in rural parts seized the opportunity to have their children educated through English, thereby ensuring they had the language needed for advancement or emigration to England or America. The Irish seemed to have despaired of ever being able to get ahead in Ireland itself. As Mártin Ó Murchú points out, when the Famine devastated Gaelic Ireland, the massive switch to English which followed was simply the logical step.

In part those leading the movements for greater political autonomy or complete independence or some form of enfranchisement for the Irish were concerned with a civic form of Irish nationalism rather than a cultural or linguistic dimension. These men were largely Protestant, members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. While one cannot doubt their sincere love of Ireland, incorporation of Gaelic Ireland into the picture of Irish nationalism did not come until the effects of the Romantic Movement, with its return to Gaelic mythology, bardic traditions, folklore and, of course, the language, percolated into these circles.[34] Consequently, these men did not see any necessary conne tion between preservation and promotion of the Irish language and their political goals. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Irish speakers in the country were not involved in, nor even aware of the movements in vogue among intellectuals and politicians. One thing they understood: whatever attempts were made to sever ties with "Mother England" inevitably led to further repression and this they did understand very well.

The Church which in the past had championed Gaelic Ireland has often been accused of deserting the cause of the Irish language in the nineteenth century. Catholic Schools had become legalized in the 1780's and the Church-run institutions chose English as the medium of

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[34] The same change is to be seen in the forms of nationalism that appeared on the European continent, in Italy, Spain, Germany etc. A sense of nationhood was based on national myths and collective memory embodied in folklore. Regionalist movements flourished in all the literatures of the major European states

instruction. The choice was not so much anti-Irish as a reflection of current trends in the country. Parents were eager to have their children educated in the language that offered a future and advancement. If they could not acquire that education in Ireland, the children would be sent abroad to England. Hence, on the part of the clergy, the choice was obvious.

The Famine years are seen as the turning point from many points of view. It meant the devastation of Gaelic Ireland. The West of the country, the poorest, the most underdeveloped suffered the greatest hardship and loss of population, either to mortality or emigration. No one knows for sure how many died or emigrated, given the inaccuracy of the census figures for the time, but it is generally accepted that the figure lies somewhere in the vicinity of two million people. Gaelic Ireland suffered the greatest loss. In the years following the Great Hunger, there followed a massive shift in linguistic allegiance, Irish speaking parents insisting on raising their children as English speakers, ensuring that the   ould never have to bear the stigma of ignorance and poverty that they themselves associated with their mother tongue. In the later decades of the century when Pádraig Mac Piarais toured the country encouraging people to retain their native language, the Irish speakers themselves protested that it was of little use to them in trying to make a living. This same attitude is still to be found among the Irish speakers of the Gaeltachtaí who fear that without a solid foundation in English their own children will be at a disadvantage when they must leave the region to make a living for themselves. Allegiance to a language must be based on more than pious sentimentality.

While the common folk who had preserved Irish language and culture from ancient times abandoned them in droves, conversely, the aftermath of the Famine saw a renewed interest in Gaelic Ireland on the part of intellectuals and politicians. This interest had first manifested itself in some intellectual circles in the early part of the 1800's with interest in Irish legends, bardic poetry and mythology. Through this literary interest, the language entered the domain of intellectual discourse and in time, the cause of the language became the heart of the movement to 'Gaelicize" Ireland again. Ó Breasláin and Dwyer trace in some detail the efforts of various figures and associations to introduce Irish language studies into the National School system to make Irish a central part of the curriculum and a requirement for admission to the National University. Pádraig Mac

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Piarais's goal was to create a bilingual school system, one in which students would preserve their Irish heritage and would still have the competence in English that would ensure their ability to achieve success in an English world.

Much of the credit for the revival of the Irish language is due to the efforts of the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) established in 1893 and dedicated to the revival of Irish as the spoken vernacular of the nation and the creation of a new literature. Branches were set up throughout the country to teach the language. As well, **feiseanna** were run locally, encouraging traditional song and dance. Under Douglas Hyde, the league secured bilingual education in primary schools in the Gaeltacht areas and, perhaps the most important achievement of all, the requirement of Irish as a core subject for matriculation in the National University.

The Irish Language and the Free State

The proclamation of the Irish Free State, some felt, ensured the survival and the restoration of Irish as the primary language of the country. There can be no doubt that much has been achieved but the results were not what the founders of the Gaelic League had hoped for. In part, lack of clear goals and methods of achieving those goals were part of the problem, but a certain idealism coupled with ignorance of the dynamics of language in society were also part of the picture. The Free State established Irish as the sole language of instruction in the Gaeltachtaí, bilingual education in bilingual areas, and solid teaching of Irish in all schools. Irish was to be the language of administration in all schools and in government and agencies of the government. At first, all government departments and state bodies operated with Irish only names. There was considerable use of Irish in the Dáil, in government offices and on the Radio. By the end of the 1940's, however, the enthusiasm seemed to have been lost and a sense of fatigue if not indifference to language matters seemed to have set in. Increasingly, the government operated in English only, and a common complaint is that services in Irish, even in Gaeltacht areas, are not available. A similar problem, it seems, is found in the church where English monoglot priests are regularly assigned to Irish language parishes. Some complain that it is now easier to obtain answers in Irish to letters sent to the European Community in Brussels than from the national government in Dublin.

·vertheless, the government has continued to provide invaluable supì for the language in many ways. A number of state agencies were created to support the Irish language such as **Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge** (1943) to coordinate voluntary Irish language organizations, **Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge** (1952) to supervise the publication of books in Irish, **Gaeltarra Éireann** an agency to oversee the economic development of the Gaeltacht districts. **Bord na Gaeilge** (1978), **Raidió na Gaeltachta** (1972) and most recently **T na G**, the all-Irish television network. These latter, it should be noted, have come about through increasing public pressure to offer such services, not through the largesse of the state on its own. The government has become reactive rather than pro-active in Irish language matters. With Ireland's joining the European Communities in 1973, Irish became an official language of the EU (the only Celtic language to be so) although not a working language.

Standardizing the Language

Establishing Irish as the common vernacular of the country was an unrealistic project, it must be recognized in hindsight, and the early enthusiasts were more idealistic than practical. The project faced many problems -- the lack of qualified teachers, the lack of written materials in the language, the lack of a standard form of the language which, you will recall, had been fractured into widely differing dialects, to some extent mutually unintelligible. Which dialect would be taught? Mistakes were made in the direction to be taken. For example, when Father Patrick Dineen set about compiling his dictionary, a monumental task, he had contemplated the possibility of introducing standard Roman type for the letters and revising the spelling to reflect more adequately the current pronunciation. His opting to preserve the half-uncial script and the traditional spelling made it necessary in any government office to have two sets of typewriters, and every bilingual form used had to be printed twice to accommodate the two type styles. As well, the half-uncial letter style made reading difficult, as some letters -- r, s and g, t -- were not easily distinguished. These necessary changes to modernize and update the language did come about eventually but perhaps the opportunity to introduce the reforms was missed at the time when they could have done the most good.

More practically for schools, the methods of teaching languages in use at the time were not those most suited to developing a population fluent in Irish. Methods stressed reading and writing, correctness of grammar, rather than fluency and conversational potential. For most students, there was no opportunity to use the language outside the school and it became painfully obvious that Irish was becoming merely another school subject like Latin. As well, the whole question of Irish was shrouded in a kind of sentimental attachment to the Gaelic past -- mythology, legend, folklore -- not to the matters of making a living in the present. The task of restoring the language had been largely conferred on the schools without exploring the ways in which the language might be reintroduced into society at large in business, or in civic government, for example. The result was that many people felt Irish was being "rammed down their throats" and, in true Irish fashion, they resisted. Furthermore, the extent to which English, middle-class, self-satisfied snobbery had penetrated into the Irish psyche was underestimated. Since the days of the National Schools, when the Irish set about making themselves *Anglicis ipsis Angliciores*, English norms of respectability and propriety were taken to heart, and these people could not see the value of learning to talk like an ignorant fisherman from Conamara or a farmer in West Cork. Having worked hard to achieve status and respectability, they'd be damned if they would return to something they had taken such pains to rise above and put behind them.

Since the 1950's, considerable progress has been made in improving the methods of teaching the language with emphasis on audio-lingual and communicative methods which promote fluency and 'usable' language. Some of these are models of excellence in language teaching, such as **Buntús Cainte**, an audio-lingual method based on dialogues, full of humour and colour, designed to provide conversational material on matters of daily life -- talking about the weather, gossiping with Cáit about her sick neighbour and things of the sort. Another excellent method, also based on the communicative approach, is the **Beart is Briathar** series for the first two years of high school. As well, modern, appropriate materials for schools and for the reading public have been generated by two publishing houses -- **Coiscéim** in Dublin and **Cló Iar-Chonnacht**. The appearance of newspapers, **Foinse** in the Republic and **Lá** in the North, have made Irish a language to discuss current local and world affairs. For teenagers, **Mahagony Gaspipe**, published by Bord na Gaeilge, discusses

popular music, movies, in language appropriate for youth.

In the 1940's and '50's, important measures were taken to modernize the language with a thorough revision of the spelling and the standard grammar, changes which should have been made back when the Gaelic League embarked on the task of revival. The spelling of the language was reformed to reflect pronunciation, every attempt being made to respect the diversity to be found in the different areas where Irish was the community language. As well, a reformed grammar was introduced, one in which the common elements of the different dialects were retained while encouraging the use of analytic forms in verbs (that is, a base form followed by an independent pronoun) although in this the norm has shown itself perhaps a tad too conservative. As well, redundant forms in nouns, such as the dative case, were eliminated and a common form substituted. Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the creation of a wonderful series of dictionaries to teach new Irish terminology for specific fields of study such as business, computers, astronomy, agriculture, library science, the hotel industry. Mártin Ó Murchú points out that Séamus Daltún's translation into Irish of the text of the treaties establishing the European Community displays a flexibility, a clarity and an elegance equal to other EU languages. The language has become a thoroughly satisfactory tool for conducting all the affairs of state and of society in the modern world.

Vocabulary Growth

With the regularization of grammatical structures, a process which normally takes place naturally over time but which in the case of Modern Irish was brought about through the school system in a matter of decades, the ground was prepared for vocabulary growth. Lexical expansion has proceeded apace. Falling back on native roots or dipping into the common pool of Indo-European roots or borrowing specific words from other languages or using paraphrases or models found in other languages, English in particular, Irish has created an impressive modern lexicon. You can easily identify the processes at work in the following examples: **riomhaire** (computer) **bog earraí** (soft ware) **cúrsóir** (cursor) **mór-riomhaire** (mainframe) **próiseálaí focal** (word processor) **bunachar sonraí** (database) **micrishlis** (microchip) **clár scátála** (skateboard) **scáta rothacha** (rollerblades) **taos fiacla** (tooth paste) **spásaire** (spaceman) **spáslong** (spaceship) **creig-ghairdín** (rock garden) **tacsaí** (taxi) **leoraí** (truck)

gluaisteán (automobile) guthán (telephone) fón (phone) traein faoi thalamh (subway) raccheol (rock'n'roll) papcheol, rapcheol, umar breosla (fuel tank) tiomáint deisil (right-hand drive) scairdeitleán (jet) ultrafhuaim (ultrasound) micreamháinliacht (micro-surgery) raonchulaith (track suit) bróga traenála (running shoes) marachuan (marijuana) andúileach drugaí (drug addict) teangeolaíocht (linguistics) meáin chumarsáide (media) cumhacht adamhach (atomic power) freasaitheoir núicléach (nuclear reactor).

Irish Medium Schooling and the Spread of Irish

Perhaps the greatest reason for satisfaction and hope for the future of the language is in the enormous popularity of the Gaeilscoileanna outside the Gaeltacht regions. The demand for Irish-medium schools has grown throughout the Republic, an ever-increasing number of parents appreciating the value of raising their children to be bilingual. These schools also require that the parents of children enrolled in such schools also take Irish classes and made an effort to use the language with the child at home. Bord Na Gaeilge provides booklets and tapes for parents to help with this incorporation of Irish into home life. This same enthusiasm has spread to the North where a Gaeltacht has emerged in Belfast itself, where nursery schools, grade schools and high schools using Irish as the medium of instruction have been increasing in number every year. Even the government, long suspicious of Irish language initiatives, has even come to fund such schools. The network in Belfast explores as well, possibilities of using Irish to make a living, establishing networks of businesses and organizations willing to incorporate Irish into daily operations.

As well, interest in the language has spread abroad. Throughout the United States and Canada, language clubs dedicated to the study and practice of Irish have sprung up. A typical Deireadh Seachtaine Gaeltachta in Esopus New York will draw some 80-100 students, and a week-long immersion week in Deer Hill, New York, held during the first full week every July draws between 40-50 people.

Prospects for the Future

Nevertheless, despite the undeniable and visible progress, the

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improvement in status of the language, some despair for the future. It seems that the defenders of minority languages, labelled zealots by some and dreamers by others, are doomed to becoming annoying proselytisers or irrelevant bores, never relinquishing despair or finding reason to rejoice. Reg Hindley declares in his recent obituary for the language [**The Death of the Irish Language -- a Qualified Obituary**] that there can no longer be any reasonable doubt that the language is dying and that in another generation, the language will have ceased to be a community language. He bases his conclusion on an examination of the census records, the number of parents receiving the **deontas**, the subsidy given to families who use the language at home, and the percentage of these children in any given school who come from families receiving the grant. He argues that few schools exist where Irish is the language of the schoolyard and questions how likely it is that these children will continue to use the language in adulthood or pass it on to their children. He also points out that native speakers of the language show little interest in the publications available in Irish, that these industries are for the 100,000 or so who have achieved a high degree of competence in Irish at school and for whom this literature is largely intended. The situation, though, is totally artificial, and there is no guarantee that the competence that these people have achieved through effort will be passed on to their children through use of Irish as a home language. The effort to sustain the language must continue to be an intellectual effort on the part of the enthusiast, an effort to be repeated with each generation, not the natural effortless result of passing on language from parent to child. The gains made must be repeated with each generation.

Mártin Ó Murchú chooses to take a more optimistic view of the situation. He recognizes that the gains my be tenuous and that with the problems which integration into the European Community entails, the accomplishments could be reversed. Nevertheless, rather than focus on those statistics pointing to a shrinking of the Gaeltacht areas, to an increasing tendency to abandon Irish in adulthood on the part of Gaeltacht emigrants, he focuses on the spread of Irish to all parts of the country, particularly to Dublin and Cork where the largest numbers of speakers are to be found. The gains made over the decades appear to be holding steady with modest increase over the decades. He points out that there are more speakers of Irish (around 1,050,000 or roughly one third of the population of the Republic) than at any time since the founding of the Gaelic League.

As well, Irish has expanded beyond the confines of the Gaeltacht regions and is to be heard in cities throughout the land. It has established itself in government, in the schools, and to a lesser extent, in business. Above all, it has established itself in the national consciousness. What was once the language of the landless and the disenfranchised is now the concern of the middle-class and the intellectuals. Above all, the Irish have accomplished this without the authoritarian and discriminatory methods used in other parts of the world. This, in itself, is no small accomplishment.

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