Aspects of a Shared Heritage

Essays on linguistic and cultural crossover in Ulster

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Intreoir / Introduction

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Bainisteoir Réigiúnach, Cúige Uladh, Gael Linn

The cultural and linguistic heritage of Northern Ireland is a combination of many different influences. In modern times the Gaelic heritage that is common to all has come to be regarded as the sole preserve of one section of the community, when in effect it has impacted on all of us through placenames, surnames, music and even in the ways we speak English.

With the intention of encouraging and facilitating young people to discover and reclaim this common Gaelic heritage, Gael Linn commissioned a series of lectures and essays. This was first published in 1997 for a sixth-form Enrichment Programme aimed at those who had little knowledge of our common Gaelic heritage. This revised edition, updated and extended in 2014, responds to continuing interest in and requests for copies of the original version, and in the context of today's more crowded and structured school curriculum, we anticipate that it will be used at least as much in the voluntary and community sector as in formal education settings.

We thank the schools and students who took part in the Enrichment Programme, those who gave so generously of their time and expertise in presenting the lectures, and others who contributed to the essays in this and in the 1997 edition: Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín, Mícheál Ó Máirtín, Aodán Mac Póilín, Peter Collins, Brian Mullen, Art Hughes, Gordon McCoy, Laura Spence, Chris McGimpsey, Janet Muller, Linda Ervine, and Seán Mac Nia. Thanks also to those who provided support and assistance: Joe Ó Labhraí, Terry Blain, Siuán Cullen, Séamas Bray, Liam Mac Giolla Mheanna, Mike Donaghy, Bill Brodie, Ann McQuiston, Martine Clement, Ciarán Mac Murchadh, Michael Ward, Máirtín Ó Siadhail, Ferdie Mac an Failigh, the former Central Community Relations Unit, the Department of Education, the Education and Library Boards, and Ciarán Ó Maoláin who edited the present version. Images belong to the featured organisation or are public domain, except young musicians (Armagh Pipers Club), ferns (bealtainecottage.com) and the Orange sash picture (Grand Lodge of Ireland).

We hope that you will enjoy the book and that it will be informative, inspirational and help to disperse some of the myths surrounding the Irish language and culture.

A short history of the Irish language

Micheál Ó Máirtín

The Irish language belongs to the Celtic family of languages, a linguistic grouping which also includes the Gaelic of Scotland, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, Breton and historical Continental Celtic which is also known as Gaulish. It has been established from archaeological evidence, from placename study, from inscriptions and from references by classical writers that the Celts, who were called Celti in Latin and Keltoi in Greek, were a very powerful and widespread people whose original homeland was in Central Europe. They emerged as a culturally distinct people towards the end of the second millennium BC and in the 5th century BC they began a new phase of expansion gradually spreading westwards to the Atlantic coast and into the Iberian peninsula, northwards into Britain and Ireland, southwards into Italy and eastwards into Asia Minor. They sacked the city of Rome in 390 BC and plundered the shrine of Delphi in Greece in 279 BC. However, the influence of the Celts in continental Europe began to wane as the Roman sphere of influence extended and Celtic independence was finally extinguished by the conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar between 58 and 51 BC. By the 2nd century AD, the replacement of the Celtic speech by Latin had been almost everywhere completed.

Linguistic evidence of the Celtic people who probably arrived in Ireland about 300 BC is preserved in ogham inscriptions, the majority of which are found in Kerry, Cork and Waterford. The existence of ogham inscriptions in Wales and South West Britain indicates an element of Irish expansionism into these areas around the time of the demise of Roman influence in Britain in the 5th century AD. Although the majority of these ogham inscriptions belong to the 5th and 6th centuries knowledge of the ogham script continued into the Middle Ages and was occasionally employed by scribes. Unfortunately, the linguistic material formalised by these ogham inscriptions is very scanty and they consist almost entirely of proper names.

According to medieval sources the ogham alphabet, which consists of varying numbers of strokes and notches along the edge of stone monuments, is as follows:
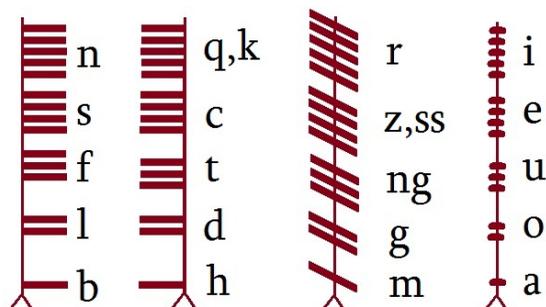
The use of the Roman alphabet for writing in Irish did not begin until Christianity, which according to tradition was introduced by St Patrick in 432 AD, had been well established in Ireland. Linguistic evidence from this early Christian period is contained for the most part in glosses and marginalia in manuscripts which have been preserved on the Continent. The influence of Christianity and the Latin language on Irish can be clearly seen at this period. The table below illustrates a sample of words which were borrowed into Old Irish from Latin.

Irish	Latin	English
pobal	populus	people
Terms related to literacy		
leabhar	liber	book
litir	litera	letter
scoil	schola	school
scríobhann sé	scribit	he writes
Religious and ecclesiastical terms		
aingeal	angelus	angel
eaglais	ecclesia	church
easpag	episcopus	bishop
feascar	vesper	vesper
reilig	reliquiae	cemetery
sagart	sacerdos	priest

It was during the early Christian period that the North Antrim Kingdom of Dál Riada established a settlement in Pictish-speaking Scotland. While the year 500 AD is

usually quoted for the establishment of a colony in Argyll, it can be assumed that the kingdom of Dál Riada was simply consolidating a process of colonisation and exploration which had been in progress for some time. The Irish influence in Scotland was obviously facilitated by the mission in the middle of the 6th century of Colm Cille to Iona, from where he is said to have converted the Picts to Christianity.

The settlers from Dál Riada and their allies gradually penetrated eastwards into the territory of the Picts until eventually around the year 843 AD the union of the Picts and the Irish speaking Scots (Scotti was a term used by the Romans for raiding parties from Ireland and came to be identified with the Irish abroad) was achieved under Cináed mac Ailpín. The expansion of the Irish speaking kingdom in Scotland and indeed into Northern Britain continued up to the 11th century. However, during the reign of Mael Colum mac Donnchadha (1058–93) Irish, or Scottish Gaelic as it is called in modern times, ceased to be the language of court in Scotland thus heralding the decline of the supremacy of Gaelic culture.

By the end of the 14th century, English speakers were dominant in Scotland apart from Lothian, Shetland and Orkney, and Gaelic, having retreated to the Highlands and Galloway, was no longer regarded as the national language of Scotland. According to the 2011 census there were approximately 58,000 speakers of Scottish Gaelic in Scotland, most of these living in the northwest of the country or in the Western Isles. A small community of Scottish Gaelic speakers has also survived on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, Canada.

While the Irish language had been extending its sphere of influence in Scotland and in the Isle of Man which had been conquered by the King of Ulaidh sometime in the middle of the 6th century, the Norsemen were sweeping the seas and plundering the coast of Scotland and Britain towards the end of the 8th century. A poet of this period welcomes the storm because it prevents the Norsemen from sailing to Ireland:

Is acher in gaíth innocht	*Bitter and wild is the wind tonight,*
fu-fuasna fairrgae findfolt	*Tossing the tresses of the sea to white,*
ní ágor réimm mora mind	*On such a night as this I feel at ease*
dond laechraid lainn ó Lothlaind.	*Fierce Norsemen only course the quiet seas.*

Although there are references to permanent Norse settlements in Ireland by the year 825 AD, the language of these Norse settlers did not have the same influence on the Irish language as the Latin of Christianity. Norse placenames such as Strangford, Dalkey, Howth, Wexford, Waterford, Limerick, Carlingford etc. are still in existence while words connected mainly to seafaring and commercial life were borrowed into

Irish. The table below illustrates some words which were borrowed into Old Irish from the language of the Vikings.

Irish	Norse	English
beoir	bjorr	beer
fuinneog	vindauga	window
Maritime terms		
ancaire	akker	anchor
dorú	dorg	fishing-line
trosc	trosk	cod
Commercial terms		
mál	mal	tax
mangaire	mangar	pedlar
margadh	mrkadr	market

With the defeat of the Vikings by Brian Boru in 1014 at the Battle of Clontarf, the Irish-speaking world of Ireland and Scotland seemed to be at the height of its political and cultural independence. However, with the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland in the late 12th century a new cultural and linguistic dimension was added to the Irish language. Many of the new settlers spoke Norman French while others spoke English. Many of the new settlers became assimilated into the Irish speaking community and became, it was said, "more Irish than the Irish themselves". The compatibility of the Anglo-Normans or "Old English" with their Irish speaking neighbours and how the two had become one was recorded as follows:

Do bhíodar caoin sibhialta tréitheach,
ba mhaith a ndlithe, a gcreideamh 's a mbéasa,
Gach duine d'úmhlaigh, do bhí a chuid féin leis.
Do bhíodar ceannsa mar cheann cléire.
Do shíolraigh a bhfuil trí na chéile
do bhí an Gael Gallda is an Gall Gaelach.

They were gentle, civilised and talented,
their laws, religion and language manners were good.
Anyone who submitted held on to his property.
As ecclesiastical leaders they were gentle.
They intermarried
so the Irishman was English and the Englishman Irish.

The assimilation of the Norman French speakers into Irish society is reflected in the

large number of words which entered the Irish language during this period. The table below illustrates this point.

Irish	Anglo-Norman	English
buidéal	botel	bottle
clairéad	claret	claret
dinnéar	diner	dinner
pardún	pardon	pardon
spéir	spere	sphere/sky

Administrative, legal and military terms

aturnae	aturnee	attorney
barántas	warrantie	warranty
contae	cuntee	county
giúistís	justice	justice
léas	les	lease
seirbhís	servise	service

Architectural terms

áirse	arche	arch
gairéad	garet	garret
pálás	palais	palace
seomra	chaumbre	chamber/room

Implements

casúr	cassur	hammer
compás	compas	compass
siséal	chisel	chisel

Such was the state of assimilation that by the year 1500 the Irish language had swallowed up French and seemed about to make a final conquest of English which had become the language of some walled towns and castles. Although several measures were taken, e.g. the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 and a letter from Henry VIII to the town of Galway to discourage or ban the use of the Irish language and customs, it was not until the 17th century that the language began to decline.

The collapse of the Gaelic world and the Gaelic aristocratic lifestyle due to the defeat at Kinsale in 1601, the Cromwellian settlement of 1654, the Williamite campaign (1689–91) and the enactment of the Penal Laws in 1695 meant that the Irish-speaking aristocracy was replaced by an English-speaking landowning class. English was gradually becoming the language of the upper class and the sole language of

government and public institutions. The passing of the old order was lamented by an unknown writer in the poem "Chill Chais" which refers to the demise of the great house of one of the branches of the Butler family near Clonmel in County Tipperary.

Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta gan adhmad?
Tá deireadh na gcoillte ar lár;
níl trácht ar Chill Chais ná ar a teaghlach
is ní bainfear a cling go bráth.
An áit úd a gcónaíodh an deighbhean
fuair gradam is meidhir thar mhnáibh,
bhíodh iarlaí ag tarraing tar toinn ann
is an t-aifreann binn á rá.

Now what will we do for timber,
With the last of the wood laid low?
There's no talk of Cill Chais or its household
And its bell will be struck no more.
That dwelling where lived the good lady
Most honoured and joyous of women
Earls made their way over wave there,
And the sweet Mass once was said.

Even though the Irish language had been denied any official status and had been positively discouraged or suppressed during the increased Anglicisation of Ireland which took place in the 17th and 18th centuries, it is estimated that there were still approximately four million speakers of the language in the early part of the 19th century. However, it was in the 19th century that a massive language shift took place making English the dominant language and relegating Irish to areas in the far west or otherwise hard to reach; these became known as the Gaeltacht, i.e. the Irish-speaking areas. The Census of 1891 shows that the eastern part of Ireland had become mostly Anglophone while Irish was the majority language only in parts of some western counties – Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry, Cork and Waterford. Why a nation abandoned one language for another is a phenomenon that is not easily explained.

What happened to the Irish psyche that in general made it choose English rather than Irish as a means of effective communication? There may be several reasons for this language shift. The Act of Union 1801 cemented Ireland's place as part of the Anglophone world, specifically as part of the British Empire in which English was the dominant language of commerce, education and administration. The National Schools which were established in 1831 encouraged the cultivation of the English

language and made English the medium of instruction even in areas where Irish was still the language of the majority. Many national figures in political and church circles espoused and promoted English as the only language in which progress could be made in the circumstances which prevailed at the time. The people of Ireland in the 19th century were ravaged by various famines and by mass emigration, and knowledge of the English language was viewed as a passport to future security and prosperity. The Irish language may have become associated with remoteness, inaccessibility, poverty, ignorance and backwardness. Were it not for the commitment of certain individuals to the future of the language, Irish would have become extinct by the end of the 19th century as is Manx nowadays (though a language revival movement is currently trying to increase awareness and knowledge of Manx on the Isle of Man).

It is often stated that the revival of the Irish language actually took place in Belfast, in the early 19th century. Belfast, then known for its cultural liberalism ("the Athens of the North"), was home to such institutions as the Linen Hall Library, the Natural History and Philosophical Society, the Irish Harp Society, the Ulster Gaelic Society (Cuideacht Gaedhilge Uladh) and Belfast Academical Institution. The Belfast Harpers' Festival had taken place in Belfast in 1792. Middle-class Belfast Protestants were the driving force behind this revival of interest in Irish music and in the Irish language and it is one of their number, the industrialist Robert McAdam (1808–95), who is remembered in the name of the Irish Language Cultural centre, Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, in the west of the city.

These language enthusiasts working in the city and beyond organised classes in Irish, published works in and about the Irish language (e.g. Rev. William Neilson's *An Introduction to the Irish Language*, 1808), collected folktales and songs, compiled English/Irish dictionaries and added a certain prestige to the language in public life: in 1849 Queen Victoria was greeted in Belfast by a large banner inscribed in Irish.

However, interest in Irish began to wane about the middle of the century probably due to the rejection of liberalism and the pressure of industrialisation "which changed Belfast from the pleasant enlightened town it had been into a mass of dark Satanic mills where there was little room for culture of any kind."

Although groups other than those working in the north attempted to revive an interest in Irish during the 19th century (for example, the Ossianic Society, the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union), it was not until July 1893, when the Gaelic League or Conradh na Gaeilge was founded in Dublin, that the language revival got a new impetus. The aims of the new organisation were:

1. The preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue

2. The study and publication of existing Gaelic literature and the cultivation of a modern literature in Irish.

The Gaelic League set about establishing branches throughout the whole country, and in August 1895 the Celtic class of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club decided at a meeting at 32 Beersbridge Road to establish a branch in the city.   These branches organised classes for the teaching of the Irish language, Irish music, Irish history and geography, Irish dancing and debating skills and organised trips to the Summer Colleges which had been set up in the Gaeltacht – in fact, they offered an alternative curriculum to that in place in the official education system. Many of the founding members of the Gaelic League were – like Douglas Hyde, a member of the Church of Ireland and the first President of the organisation – respectable, suburban and bourgeois, and the membership reflected the religious make-up of the country. The movement was more interested in the cultural identity of Ireland than in political autonomy, and believed that language revival came before politics.

The point at which the influence of republicanism took over the Gaelic League cannot be delineated but it was certainly well into the first decade of the 20th century that well-known republican figures came to the fore in the organisation. Doulas Hyde resigned his presidency of the Gaelic League at the Dundalk Ard-Fheis (annual conference) of July 1915 because of the politicisation of the League in a strongly nationalist direction. Despite the departure of Hyde and many of his co-religionists
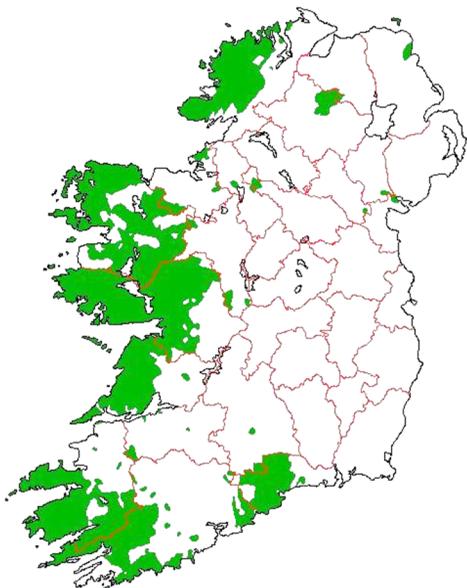
from the Gaelic League the organisation continued to grow in strength up until the creation of the two states in Ireland. Hyde was to return to national prominence when he became President of Ireland in 1938.

The two states which emerged in Ireland in 1922 were antagonistic towards and suspicious of each other. The Irish Free State was Catholic and Gaelic while Northern Ireland was Protestant and British. The words of Louis McNeice can be used to describe the differing cultural and political orientations of the two parts of Ireland:

> And we read black where the others read white
> His hope the other man's damnation.
> Up the rebels, to hell with the Pope
> And God save – as you prefer – the King or Ireland.

In 1922 Irish became an official language of the Irish Free State, and the revival of the language was to be fostered by the government through the education system and the civil service. A commission was established in 1925 to promote and preserve the use of the language in the then Gaeltacht areas (see map), and new Irish-speaking areas were set up in 1935 in Ráth Cairn, County Meath. The Constitution of 1937 described the language as "the first official language", a designation which it still has in the Republic of Ireland. In 1956 a government department, Roinn na Gaeltachta, was established to preserve the way of life in the Gaeltacht and promote employment for the declining local population. The language enjoyed official and legal recognition and was supported by many official and non-official sources.

Northern Ireland at the time of Partition still contained Irish-speaking areas in Tyrone, Antrim, South Armagh and South Derry (in the 1911 census, 29,423 persons had described themselves as Irish-speaking). However official policies and attitudes were extremely hostile to the language, with the result that Irish received no official recognition. Official hostility attempted to inhibit and constrain the development of

the language and several attempts were made to restrict the teaching of Irish in schools. Public life afforded the language no recognition while even the use of Irish language street names was prohibited by law. The use of Irish for the conduct of any official business was refused by administrative practice, while courts were prevented by a 1737 statute from permitting Irish in any proceedings. These officially-held negative attitudes to the language and the distrust of those who espoused Irish were evident in Northern Ireland up to the 1970s, and persist in some quarters.

According to the most recent (2011) census returns, 1,774,000 in the Republic of Ireland declared themselves to be speakers of Irish (i.e. 41.4% of persons aged 3 and over) while 185,000 or 10.65% of the population in Northern Ireland stated that they had some ability in the language. While the language still had no official or legal status in Northern Ireland the government said in 1995 that it "recognises that the Irish language is perceived by many people in Northern Ireland as an important part of their cultural heritage. It respects the special importance of Irish, encourages interest in it and appreciation of it and highlights its contribution to the cultural heritage of the whole community."[1]

In 1998, the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement recognised "the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity" and, more concretely, included an indication that the British government would, as it subsequently did, extend to Irish some of the protective and promotional measures provided for in the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (a treaty of the Council of Europe, a human rights-based regional grouping older and much larger than the European Union). The implications of the Charter, and the ongoing campaign for legal recognition of the language in Northern Ireland through an Irish Language Act (Acht na Gaeilge) are addressed below by Janet Muller. Even in the absence of that legal status, it is clear that official attitudes towards the Irish language have come a long way from the sentiments expressed by Viscount Craigavon in 1936: "What use is it to us here in this busy part of the Empire to teach our children the Irish language… We do not see that these boys being taught Irish would be any better citizens."

The 1998 Agreement also led to the creation of Foras na Gaeilge, a publicly-funded body responsible for promoting the Irish language throughout the whole island. This includes support for Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish, publishing and book distribution, the provision of advice to both governments and to public, private and

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[1] Statement from the Central Community Relations Unit to Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge conference, Belfast, 1995.

voluntary-sector bodies, and channeling financial support to projects and organisations. Although the aspiration to totally revive the language, the objective of the government of the Republic of Ireland and the various Irish language groups such as Gael Linn, Glór na nGael, Conradh na Gaeilge and Comhaltas Uladh, to name but a few, has not been achieved, there are distinct signs of hope. More people from all walks of life and from all political and religious backgrounds both North and South seem genuinely interested in wanting to know about and to learn the language, and there is North-South co-ordination of support to the sector.

One of the most phenomenal developments over the last 40 years in all parts of Ireland has been the number of pupils attending Gaelscoileanna or Irish-medium schools in traditionally English-speaking areas: in 2014 there were in Northern Ireland over 5,000 pupils attending 86 such pre-school, primary and post-primary schools (or Irish-medium units in mainly English-medium schools). The schools have a representative body, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). Likewise, attendance at Irish-language adult classes has increased dramatically, while summer colleges in the Gaeltacht areas find it difficult to cater for the demand from schools for places on their courses: perhaps 30,000 pupils study Irish in mainly English-medium schools in Northern Ireland, with almost 2,000 sitting GCSE or A-level exams in 2013.

The Irish-language broadcast and printed media scene is also in reasonable health. Speakers of Irish have access to the language on Raidió na Gaeltachta, BBC Radio Ulster, several RTÉ channels and TG4, while an Irish Language Broadcast Fund has helped to develop new content; BBC2 NI has some Irish-language output, as do over 30 on-air and online radio stations – some broadcasting wholly in Irish, such as Belfast's Raidió Fáilte.

There is an extensive corpus of creative literature currently produced in both parts of Ireland, with many active book publishers. A somewhat controversial reorganisation of state funding in 2014 seems likely to have ended the 90 years of continuous publication of one of the leading Irish-language periodicals, the monthly *An tUltach* (based in Northern Ireland). Other publications at risk included, in the Republic of Ireland, *Foinse, Nós*, *Comhar* and *Feasta*. While some may survive on the web or in other formats, there is likely be, at least in the short term, some loss of diversity of material for readers of Irish.

However, websites and social media provide new resources and platforms for information, interaction and learning; while the market has not been able to sustain a daily print newspaper, there have been efforts to fill that gap with Irish-language pages and supplements in mainstream papers, and internet portals such as the Belfast-based www.nuacht24.com and the Foras na Gaeilge-backed, Conamara-based tuairisc.ie. There are numerous online forums, blogs and reference resources, and Irish-language interfaces for many popular software products and websites.

But why bother learning a minority language in what is basically an Anglophone world? One possible answer is that in learning a language we not only acquire words and grammar, but we gain a perspective on the mosaic of life. In having more than one language we have an enriched perspective of life's patchwork quilt. We have different ways of viewing the world in which we live. With two languages, English and Irish – we have two ways of observing, commenting on and thinking about our existence on this piece of ground which we commonly share.

In the poem "Terminus",[2] Seamus Heaney wrote about the effects of having been brought up in a rural environment with the hint of industrialisation in the air. His words could equally apply to those who speak both Irish and English.

> *Is it any wonder when I thought*
> *I would have second thoughts?*
> *…..*
> *Two buckets were easier than one.*
> *I grew up in between.*

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[2] Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers, from the Seamus Heaney collection *The Haw Lantern,* Faber and Faber 1987.

Irish in placenames

Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín

Féachann tú orm anois go glé
Le lochanna móra maorga do shúl
Loch an Ghainimh ar dheis,
Loch Altáin ar clé
gach ceann acu soiléir, lán den spéir
agus snua an tsamhraidh ar a ngruanna.

Agus scaoileann tú uait le haer an tsléibhe
crios atá déanta as ceo bruithne na Bealtaine
scaoileann tú uait é, a rún mo chléibhe,
ionas go bhfeicim anois ina n-iomláine
críocha ionúine do cholainne

ó Log Dhroim na Gréine go halt na hUilinne
ón Mhalaidh Rua go Mína na hUchta,
thíos agus thuas, a chorp na háilleachta
gach cuar agus cuas, gach ball gréine,
gach ball seirce a bhí imithe i ndíchuimhne
ó bhí mé go deireanach i do chuideachta…..

You see me truly
in the majestic lakes of your eyes
Loch an Ghainimh on the right, Loch Altáin on the left
both plainly visible, full of sky,
the complexion of summer on their cheeks.

And you loosen to the mountain air
your girdle of the hazy heat of May
you loosen it, my love,
that I may wholly see
the beloved boundaries of your body

from Loch Dhroim na Ghéine to Alt na hUillinne,
from the Malaidh rua to Mín na hUchta,
below and above, body most beautiful
every hollow and curve, every sunspot,
every love spot I'd forgotten
since last I was with you…

This extract from "Cor Úr" (A Fresh Dimension), by the Ulster poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh, depicts the mountains of his native Donegal as an old lover whom he has not seen for some time and with whom he is now renewing his acquaintance.[3] It illustrates what is a prominent theme in Irish literature – be it in the Irish language or in English – the attachment to one's native place.

The attachment to place inspires interest in the names by which places are known and from what circumstances these names derive. Indeed as far as medieval Irish literature is concerned, dinnseanchas or "the lore of famous places" was one of the subjects which formed part of the professional poet's studies in the eighth year of his training.

The majority of placenames which are familiar to us are of Irish origin and survived the decline of the Irish language because they were an integral part of the administrative system by which the country was governed. This system historically consisted of provinces which were subdivided into counties, baronies, civil parishes and finally townlands, the smallest unit of administration. The boundaries of these division had been fixed, for the most part, by the beginning of the 17th century and their names were retained by the native Irish and the Ulster settler alike, in spite of at least some measure of official hostility as indicated by the following pronouncement from the King, Charles II, in the year 1664:[4]

His Majestie… taking notice of the barbarous and uncouth names by which most of the townes and places in his Kingdom of Ireland are called, which… are very troublesome in the use thereof, and much retards the reformacíon of that Kingdome… it be enacted that the Lord Lieutenant and Councell shall… have new and proper names more suitable to the English tongue… for all Townes, Lands, and places… which new names shall thenceforth bee the only names to be used.

Any attempt to systematically replace the names of Irish origin with new names coined in English was, of course, entirely impractical in view of the sheer numbers involved (there are approximately 62,000 townland names in the whole of Ireland) and the amount of documentation which that would have entailed. However, the fact

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[3] Reproduced by kind permission of the author, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, from his 1997 collection *An Bealach 'na Bhaile* (Inverin: Cló Iar-Chonnacht).
[4] Cited in James Hardiman (1831), *Irish minstrelsy, or Bardic remains of Ireland*, Vol. II, London: Joseph Robins, p.132.

that English was the language of government, together with the gradual shift in popular usage from Irish to English, meant that placenames which originated in the Irish language were now adopted into English and assumed an Anglicised dress. Spellings of names in English often varied considerably from source to source and we have many examples of townland names being spelt differently, by landlords and clergy for example, in a particular locality. This situation obtained until the 1830s

when the first complete survey of Irish townlands was carried out by the Ordnance Survey which at that time was preparing its first edition of 6-inch maps.

Prior to this there had been no official standardised spellings of our names. It was decided, therefore, that the services of an Irish language scholar were required to standardise the Anglicised spellings of names, with due consideration to both the forms of names current in the locality and the Anglicisation of similar names in other parts of Ireland. The man appointed was John O'Donovan, from Kilkenny, later to become the first Professor of Celtic Studies in the Queen's University of Belfast. O'Donovan walked much of Ireland in the course of the survey, consulting the local people as to the various spellings of names

in their districts and where possible, recording the current Gaelic forms of the names in a bid to Anglicise the various Irish elements which constituted those names in a similar fashion over the whole of the country. Thus the Irish element cnoc, "a hill", was almost always Anglicised "knock" by O'Donovan even though the word was variously pronounced "croc" and "cnoc" in the northern and southern halves of Ireland. The results of O'Donovan's labours were never published other than his standardised spellings of names, which appeared on the first edition of the 6" maps and which, for the most part, are the spellings of placenames which are still in use today.

The earliest documentary evidence for Irish placenames is Ptolemy's *Geography of Ireland* which dates to the 2nd century AD. Ptolemy records approximately 50 names,

largely the names of tribes and rivers. Of particular interest to us is the form Voluntii, believed to be a corruption of the name of the tribe know to early Christian Ireland as the Ulaid. In the course of time the name Ulaid came to be applied to the area populated by them. This is not unusual in an Irish context; Larne derives from the Irish Latharna which is also a tribe name, as is Fermanagh, in Irish Fir Manach, "the men of the tribe Manaig", who are also represented on Ptolemy's map in the form Manapii, although located much further south.
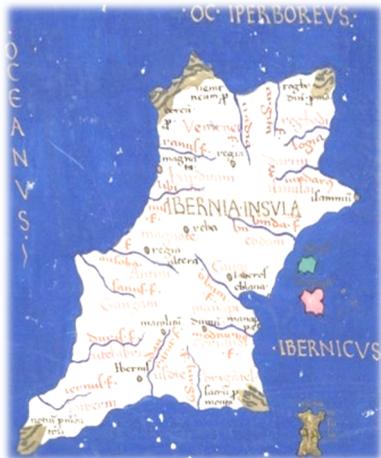
The Ulster Cycle, that body of tales centred around the personage of Cú Chulainn, reflects to some extent Irish society in the centuries preceding the coming of Patrick and here the Ulaid held sway over an area bounded to the south-west by the River Drowse, which separates modern Leitrim from Donegal, and to the south-east by the Boyne. The name Ulaid was adopted by the Norse as Uladstir and subsequently borrowed by the Normans as Uluestere, from which the modern form Ulster derives.

Four centuries elapse before we encounter the earliest documentation which survives in the Irish language, but few of our modern names are recorded either in the late 6th or succeeding centuries. This is largely due to the type of material that survives, for there is no pre-Norman documentation such as grants of lands, rentals, surveys, etc. which were to become increasingly common after the Norman invasion. Only names of military, strategic, geographical, political or cultural importance are recorded, such as Lough Neagh (Loch nEachach – "Eochu's lough") and Tyrone (Tír Eoghain – "Eoghan's territory"). River names such as the Boyne and the Bann are particularly ancient and are thought to commemorate pagan deities An Bhóinn (earlier Buvinda – "cow-white (goddess)") and An Bhanna (earlier Bandae – "goddess").

Although some of our most important early church sites bear names which have no ecclesiastical significance, Derry (Doire – "oakwood") for example, the advent of Christianity saw the introduction of a new terminology and new names being coined. Domhnach, from Latin dominicum "a church building", is thought to be our oldest ecclesiastical element and is found in names such as Donaghdee in Down and Donaghmore (Domhnach Mór – "great church") in Tyrone. Cill from Latin cella, "church, monastery, graveyard" is by far the commonest ecclesiastical element in Irish placenames. Frequently it refers to an early Irish church or monastery of the

pre-12th century period and Shankhill in Belfast, derived from the Irish Seanchill – "old church", probably dates from this period. Cill is often qualified by the name of the founding saint as in Kilbroney (Cill Bhrónaí – "Bronagh's church"), Co. Down.

Other ecclesiastical elements gained currency from the late 12th century, a period of great reform in the Irish church, particularly teampall, as in Templepatrick, County Antrim and eaglais, as in Eglish in counties Armagh and Tyrone.

We also have a wide range of elements in placenames which are indicative primarily of secular setlement. The elements ráth (rath), dún (doon, dun), lios (lis), cathair (caher) and caiseal (cashel) are undoubtedly our oldest secular placename elements. All can be translated "fort" in English and most of them probably originated in the period c.400-800 AD. What, then, is the difference among them? The elements ráth and lios seem to refer primarily to earthen-banked forts, caiseal and cathair to stone-banked forts and dún, apparently, can be applied to both.

Generally speaking caiseal is found largely in the northwest of Ireland, whereas cathair is more common in Galway and the south western area.

Ráth is most common in Leinster, with significant numbers in Munster and Connacht. There are relatively few examples in Ulster.

Lios on the other hand is least common in Leinster and most common in southern Ulster and Connacht. Notable examples are Lisnaskea (Lios na Sceiche – "fort of the thorn bush") and Lisbellaw (Lios Béal Átha – "fort of the mouth of the ford") in Fermanagh. The element is also present in Lisburn in County Antrim, but, as is the case with Donaghdee above, the second part of the name is of uncertain origin. Dún appears to occur everywhere and is the original Irish form of the name of County Down.

The commonest of all Irish settlement terms is undoubtedly baile, Anglicised "bally", which primarily means "dwelling place" but which in the course of time came to refer to the lands attached to the dwelling unit, the "homestead", the "townland" and eventually "town" itself. Baile appears fairly late on in our placename nomenclature. It is undocumented as an element in the formation of names until the late 12th century after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans and the introduction of the new monastic orders.

The Anglo-Normans coined quite a number of new placenames in Ireland and these generally to the form of Latin villa or English tún "town" qualified by the name of the feudal tenant. There are numerous examples from the Ards peninsula, for example Thurstanstun, Walterstun etc. The Irish element baile was equated with the use of tún in these Norman names and new baile units emerged alongside them. Not only that, but when Gaelic regained the ascendancy in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries, these Anglo-Norman names were Gaelicised and thus we get Baile Trostain and Baile Uailtéir which are Anglicised today as Ballytrustan and Ballywalter.

However, baile is not always qualified by a personal name or surname. It is often found in placenames with qualifications which refer to the situation of the place (e.g. Ballymena, An Baile Meánach – "the middle town") to its shape or to the physical nature of the terrain, or to some prominent natural or man-made feature within the townland (e.g. Ballynahinch, Baile na hInse – "townland of the holm or island"). It should also be stated that baile is found in the other Gaelic speaking lands, the Isle of Man and Scotland, where it is often Anglicised "bal" as in Balmoral, although it is not nearly as common in either of those places.

I have already mentioned places named by the Anglo-Normans; however, the Vikings before them and the later settlers of the Plantation and post-Plantation periods have also left their mark on the Irish placenames landscape. Places named by the Vikings are confined largely to the east coast of Ireland: loughs such as Strangford "fjord of the strong currents" and Carlingford "fjord of the hag-shaped rock", and counties and towns such as Wicklow "meadow of the bay" and Waterford "fjord of the ram", or possibly "of the wind". Names of English or Scots origin are found all over Ulster from the 17th century and the earliest examples are derived from the families who

possessed great landed estates or established plantation towns and villages such as Stewartstown in Tyrone and Charlemont in Armagh, the latter named from Lord Charles Mountjoy, who built a castle there in 1602. A particularly interesting name is Carpenham, the name given to his house in County Down by Henry Hamilton, brother-in-law to the Duke of Wellington, at the beginning of the 19th century and which he named for his wife Caroline Penelope Hamilton.

Houses and housing estates are, of course one aspect of the human landscape which continues to have a productive input into the naming tradition, particularly in the sprawling suburbs of our larger towns and cities. However, it is often the case that where the architects and builders create new developments, they bestow names on them which have little or no connection with their physical setting or with the people who have lived or continue to live there. In this sense, the new placenames are markedly different from the older names of Irish, Anglo-Norman, English and Scots origin, names which I hope, this brief survey has shown to be full of history, relevance and meaning.

Irish and other origins of surnames

Aodán Mac Póilín

Question: Can a surname tell you where your ancestors came from?

Answer: Sometimes.

We could begin by looking at the five most common surnames in Northern Ireland: Wilson, Johnson/Johnston, Campbell, Thomson/Thompson and Kelly. Two of these are definitely Gaelic: Campbell is an old Scottish Gaelic surname (cam-béal = crooked mouth; modern Scottish Gaelic caim beul) and Kelly is an Irish Gaelic name (Ó Ceallaigh). The other three appear to be from England or the lowlands of Scotland and mean the son of William, John and Thomas, although Johnston can also refer to someone who hails from a town called Johnston, or John's town.

It is, however, more complicated than that. In Ulster, Campbell is at least as likely to be of Irish Gaelic origin: most people descended from the Irish family Mac Cathmhaoil (= descendant of the battle chieftain) have used Campbell as the English form of the name rather than the less common MacCawell or MacCamphill or MacCall. The complications do not end there, as the Scottish Campbells claim to have come to Scotland from Ireland in the year 404, and trace their ancestry to Diarmuid Ó Duibhne, the hero of the story of Diarmuid and Gráinne.

The English-seeming names can also disguise a Gaelic origin. In the past, Thompson has been used as a translation of the Scottish Gaelic names Mac Thomais or Mac Thom, which can appear in English as MacTavish, MacComish, MacComb or Holmes. The surname Johnston is even more complicated: it can originate in the Scottish Gaelic names Mac Iain, or Mac Giolla Sheáin, the Irish or Scottish Gaelic Mac Eoin, or the Irish Gaelic MacShane (Mac Seáin), a branch of the O'Neills.

Up to three hundred names from England, Wales and the lowlands of Scotland have been used for Irish Gaelic surnames alone. Some of these are surprising: Abraham, Armstrong, Bird, Bishop, Black, Caldwell, Carpenter, Clarke, Duck, English(!), Farmer, Flood, Foote, Fox, Gray, Green, Graham, Hand, Hood, Ingoldsby, Judge, King, Kirk, Leech, Lord, Martin, Monks, Montague, Owens, Patterson, Rabbitte, Rice, Rodgers, Small, Smith, Waters, White, Woods. No-one has ever tried to calculate the number of Scottish Gaelic surnames which have been disguised, but we

know that some of the above names, such as Black, King, Smith, Patterson and White sometimes have a Scottish Gaelic origin. Other names spring to mind: Archibald, Brown, Cook, Currie, Dunlop, Fullerton, Greer, Harper, Livingstone, Simpson, Walker, Weaver, Wright.

We could perhaps look at one name, Houston, which is normally regarded as deriving from a place called 'Hugh's Town'. In Lanarkshire in Scotland, for example, it can refer to a descendant of the 12th century Norman Hugh de Paduinan, part of whose property became known as Huston, and whose descendants called themselves de Hustone and then Houston. It can also refer to someone from that town that wasn't related to the family. But there are other Scottish Houstons. The French name Hugh also has a pet form 'Hutchin' which was also borrowed into Scottish Gaelic as Uisdean. On the Isle of Skye the descendants of Hugh MacDonald became known as Mac Uisdin, which was sometimes rendered Houston (not to mention Hutchinsons, Hutcheson, Hewson, MacCutcheon, MacQuiston, MacWhisten, MacQuestion, Kitchen, Kitson and MacHugh). To complicate them further, Houston is also used for a Donegal Gaelic family, Mac an tSeachlainn. Sometimes this became MacTaghlin in English, but some members of the family thought it came from teach, the Irish word for 'house' which was pronounced 'hoose' by their Ulster Scots speaking neighbours, so they mistranslated the name as Houston.

Any Houston, then, could be descended from a Norman, a Scottish lowlander, a Scottish Gaelic Mac Uisdin who is really a MacDonald, or an Irish Mac an tSeachlainn from Donegal. As you can see, the entire area of Gaelic surnames and their forms in English is extremely complex. What I'll do now is give a brief – very brief – summary of the development of Gaelic surnames, then try to identify the most important mechanisms in the process of Anglicisation.

The Irish are thought to be among the earliest of peoples in Europe to use hereditary surnames. It is thought that the practice began in the early 11th century. The usual process was to take the name of a significant ancestor, and prefix it with Ó (Ua) or Mac. The literal meaning of Ó is 'grandson', and Mac means 'son', but, through time, both came to mean 'descendant of'. The Ulster O'Neills were named after a High King of Ireland who was killed fighting the Vikings in 919. O'Neills and O'Briens, along with the

O'Clearys, can claim to have the oldest hereditary surnames in Europe.

How did the Anglicisation of Gaelic names come about? For centuries, English has been the language of centralised administration in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, where Gaelic was widely spoken until this century, and often the English version was the only one recognised by law. Sometimes Gaelic surnames were even banned. The MacGregors were so disliked by the Scottish government that a law was passed in 1603 to disperse the clan "by fire and sword", saying:

> They nor nane of thair posteritie suld call thame selffis Gregor or mc Gregoure thairafter vnder payne of deade.

The law lasted for 180 years with a short break of 30 years. A MacGregor signature was not recognised in law, and no agreement entered into with a MacGregor was legal. It was no crime to kill a man of that name. The MacGregors adopted a bewildering number of variant names: Greer, Grierson, Gregg, Gregory, Gregson, Grigson, colours (Black and White, possibly Reid [red]), the names of various other clans, Ramsay, Stewart, Grant, Dougall, Cunninghame, Drummond, Gordon, Graham, Murray, Lecky, Mallagh and Campbell. They took patronymics – MacPeter, MacAdam – and the names of places like Dochart and Comrie. The Mac-an-Righ branch of the MacGregors became Macanee, MacNee, MacAra and by translation, King (rí is king in modern Irish).

Irish Gaelic surnames were actually forbidden by the Statutes of Kilkenny in English-controlled areas as early as 1367:

> ...it is ordained and established, that every Englishman do use the English language, and be named by an English name, leaving off entirely the manner of naming used by the Irish; and that every Englishman use the English custom, fashion, mode of riding and apparel, according to his estate; and if any English, or Irish living amongst the English, use the Irish language... his lands and tenements... shall be seized...

In the following centuries, Irish became increasingly marginalised, and, by the 18th and 19th centuries, had lost all its status and a great deal of its traditional learning. Gradually, and then with increasing momentum, the English language began to define, influence, and eventually control all things Irish. The Irish form of a name

was not recognised by law, and in the end the English form became the norm against which the original form was measured.

It is necessary therefore to say something about the difficulties of transcribing Gaelic names into English orthography. Many sounds in Gaelic quite simply cannot be reproduced in English spelling. Although a number of English versions of Irish surnames come quite close to the original (O'Docherty, Cameron), they are more often than not a distortion of the original, and it can sometimes be quite difficult to identify the original Gaelic root of the surname. As one Scottish commentator puts it, non-Gaelic-speakers "fell upon the Highlanders by lip and pen until they hardly know their own address". This haphazard process yielded some strange results. There are 35 versions of the name MacEnaney, including, by mistranslation, Bird.

The English forms of the surnames then took on a life and dynamic of their own as the language lost its social status. The name Mac Taidhg (son of Teague) has up to 14 forms, including MacKeague and MacTague. In Tyrone, upwardly mobile MacTagues (written M'Tague) adopted the Norman and aristocratic-looking Montague by a slight change in spelling and a major change in pronunciations. If they had been aware that they were actually a branch of the O'Neills of Tyrone, one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in Europe, they might have kept the original MacTague.

The next stage involved simplifying the names. Longer names tended to become shorter. Prefixes and suffixes were dropped. The most common strategy here was to drop the Os and Macs from surnames. Other bits were then lopped off or mangled so that the original version is not always easy to restore. A name like Downey could come from either Mac Giolla Domhnaigh (MacIldowney) or Ó Maoldomhnaigh (Muldowney). Another adaptation often involved finding and English name with a similar sound, and using that as the official name. In this way Ó Coileáin became Collins, Ó hUiginn became Higgens, Ó Baoill became Boyle, Ó hUid became Hood, and Ó Gnímh bcame Agnew.

Sometimes the English form of the name can be quite different from the Gaelic. There is no particular reason why Ó Brollacháin is usually Bradley in Ireland and Brodie in Scotland. The particular form that a Gaelic surname takes often appears to be quite arbitrary. It is impossible to know for example why in County Down some of the MacGiverns changed to Montgomery or Biggar, or why Mulcreevy (Ó Maolchraoibhe) became Rice.

A single Gaelic name can have a large number of English forms. Take the name Mac an Bhreitheamhan, which was found throughout the Gaelic-speaking world. The last word means 'judge' and if you say it quickly enough, sounds a bit like 'brehon',

as in the Brehon laws. It became Brown, MacBrayne and MacBrew in Scotland, Bree and Breen on the Isle of Man and in Ireland it was sometimes translated to Judge or was written Brohoon or Brehony. An earlier spelling in Ireland was MacAbrehon, which was copied as MacAbraham and finally Abraham.

On the other hand, a whole plethora of Gaelic names can coagulate into a single English version. Leonard is one version of names which also can be Anglicised as Lennon (Ó Leannáin, Ó Luinín), Linnane or Linneen (Ó Linneáin, Ó Lionnáin), Lunny (Ó Luinigh), Gilsenan (Mac Giolla Seanáin), MacAlindon (Mac Giolla Fhiondáin) and Nannany (Mac Conaonaigh). This, of course, complicates any attempt to restore the original form of the surname. Basically you can enter this maze at any point and find that you can spend the rest of your life tracing the variations, permutations, crossovers and complications involved, not least of which is the fact that some names that look as if they are from England or lowland Scotland actually do come from England or lowland Scotland.

I'll try to show just how complex this can be by taking a common surname at random. In the last region-wide Northern Ireland telephone directory there were about 60 entries for the name 'Goodwin' which derives from Old English and means 'good friend'. In Mayo it can come from Ó Goidín, which sounds similar, or from Ó Dea by mistranslation. In Tyrone it can be derived from Mac Ualghairg (MacGoldrick, which can also become Golden or Goulding). In Tyrone Goodwin can also be derived from Mac Uiginn, which is usually MacGuigan, but can also be Anglicised as MacGuckian (which can also derive from a different name entirely – Mac Eochaidín), or MacGoogan, MacGookin, MacQuiggan, MacWiggin, or as Goodfellow or Goodman. In Monaghan, Mac Uiginn can also become Fidgeon or Pidgeon.

Some translations are fairly accurate. You can be fairly sure that someone called Rabbitte is descended from someone called Mac Coinín. The MacEnookerys of County Down all call themselves Fullers now: Mac an Úcaire means the son of the fuller, or waulker, a trade involving the use of stale urine to thicken cloth. That name has other variants in Scotland, where many of the Macnucators translated themselves as

Walker (there must have been even more pressure on the MacFuctors to call themselves Walker once they had learned English). The MacGirrs of south Armagh often called themselves Short by translating the word gearr.

In parts of Fermanagh, some MacAteers accurately translated their name as Wright, as the name Mac an tSaoir means son of the saor or craftsman, and in other places it became Carpenter. However, the word saor also means 'free', and in the past some MacAteers have called themselves Freeman. Many other translations are, like 'Freeman', completely off the beam. O'Loan has been mistranslated Lambe because the word for lamb is uan. The Gaelic word lámh (the 'mh' is pronounced as a v or a w) means 'hand' or 'arm'. A branch of the family usually Anglicised as Lowry or Lavery (Ó Tréan-Labhraidh = the strong O'Lowrys) called itself Armstrong, and some of the MacGlaves, Glavins and Lavins call themselves Hand.

The rare surname Gallogly (Ó Gallóglaigh = descendant of the foreign – or Viking – warrior) refers to the gallowglasses, Gaelicised Norsemen from the Western isles of Scotland who were hired as mercenaries by the MacDonnells of Antrim.

When the Antrim Galloglys came to translate their name, they picked one which disguises an ancestry that is ultimately Scandinavian, spent several centuries in Scotland, and came to Ireland in the 13th century. They based their translation of the name on the word gall, which by that time meant a person from England rather than a foreigner or a Viking, and called themselves English.

To summarise, there are four mechanisms of distortion at work here:

1. A rough transcription into English of the sound of a Gaelic name. This is often followed by a further distortion.

2. Sometimes an English equivalent is sought based on sound, sometimes involving further distortion.

3. Sometimes a name is translated into English to disguise its Gaelic origin.

4. Sometimes a name is badly translated.

The most dramatic multiple example I have come across of an English surname showing all these processes is Green(e). There are two words for green in Irish: glas and uaithne. By translation, we get the name Greene from the surnames Ó hUaithnín and Ó hUaithne, and in Ulster Mac Glasáin and Ó Glaisnigh. The Glasses of

Roscommon also translated their name, while the MacAleshers of Fermanagh mistranslated theirs. Because they sound roughly like "green", we have Mac Grianna from Donegal, Ó Grianáin from Sligo and Cavan, Ó Gréine in Meath and the (French Huguenot) Guerins in Athlone all becoming Greene. The oddest pseudo-translation is from the surname Fahy. The origin of the name Ó Fathaigh is obscure, but it certainly does not come from faiche which means a lawn or green. Some Fahys decided that it did, and called themselves Green.

The problem here, of course, is that the range of options is so wide, and the evidence often so scanty, that it is often impossible to identify which form is authentic. The process is complicated by the fact that so many Ulster names are Gaelic names from Scotland and their derivatives, which are just as confusing as those of Ireland. At this stage, it may be as well to stop. What I tried to do here was give you some notions of the complexity of the subject, as well as an insight into how enriching the study of surnames we have inherited can be. I hope I have had some success.

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The Protestant Gaelic tradition in Ulster

Peter Collins

The widely held belief that there are 'two nations' in Ireland, or more specifically in Ulster, is increasingly difficult to sustain. The Catholic and Protestant communities both have Gaelic and British antecedents. The Ulster Protestant Gaelic tradition originates with Scottish settlers who arrived in the 17th century. Many of them spoke Gaelic or were of Gaelic extraction. The Gaelicisation of Scotland began around 500 AD, when Fergus Mór mac Ere extended his kingdom of Dál Riada (see map) from northeast Ulster to the west of Scotland.

Another powerful Gaelic influence was Colm Cille, who at the end of the 6th century converted most of Scotland to the Celtic form of Christianity. Cináed mac Ailpín (Kenneth McAlpine) established a united Gaelic Kingdom of Scotland in the 9th century. By the 11th century, a cultural and linguistic continuum stretched from Kerry to the north of Scotland. Medieval, cultural, religious and political links between the two kingdoms were maintained and the bardic circuit encompassed both. The written form of the language was identical in both countries.

The Protestant Gael in 17th century Ulster

Gaelic remained dominant in the 17th century, north of Glasgow and Edinburgh. The success of the Protestant reformation among the Gaels in Scotland was in marked contrast to its failure in Ireland.

Most Scottish Gaels became adherents of the Calvinism of John Knox. This did not lead to a linguistic break. In fact Knox's *Book of Common Order* 1567 was translated into Gaelic, the foreword inscribed "For the men of Scotland and Ireland". The Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* was also translated into Gaelic in the same year by Séon Carsuel, as *Foirm na nUrrnuidheadh*. The arrival of so many Scottish Gaelic speakers meant that Ulster in the 17th
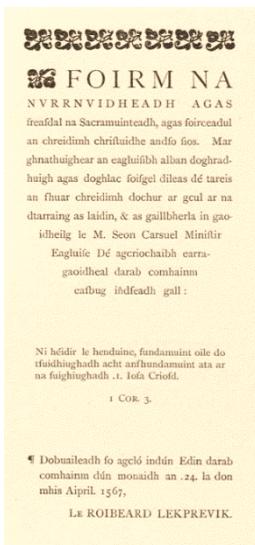
century continued to be the most Gaelic of the provinces. The Presbyterian Gaelic speakers of course needed ministers who conducted worship in their own tongue, which is well illustrated in the contemporary account from 1711:

> *I met many of the Inhabitants, especially of the Barronies of Glenarm, Dunluce and Killconaway, who could not speak the English tongue; and asking them in Irish what religion they profess'd, they answered they were Presbyterians, upon which I asked them further how they could understand their Minister Preaching; to that they answer'd, he always Preach'd in Irish.*[5]
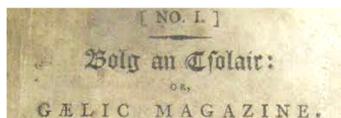
The Presbyterian Synod of Ulster ensured that its students for the ministry learned Irish. Significant numbers of native Irish were converted to Protestantism and many English or Scots-speakers learned Irish, the day-to-day language of their new homeland. Add the factors of intermarriage and the Anglicisation of Gaelic surnames and one wonders what tiny fraction of the Protestant population of Ulster has no Gaelic background. The Gaelic-speaking Presbyterians in Ulster held on to their language until well into the 18th century.

Presbyterian Belfast and the Irish language

Many middle-class Presbyterians in late 18th century Belfast, the 'Athens of the North', were very interested in Irish culture, music and language. The 1792 Belfast Harpers' Festival was a pivotal event bringing together an active Protestant Gaelic group.

The United Irishmen saw the language as part of their separatist programme and their paper, *The Northern Star*, published a one-off Gaelic magazine *Bolg an tSolár*. Prominent among the Belfast Irish enthusiasts was Dr James MacDonnell, originally from Cushendall, who was involved in every aspect of the cultural and intellectual life of the town. He was also the

National Music of Ireland.

A Respectable Body of the Inhabitants of Belfast having published a plan for reviving the antient Music of this country, and the project having met with such support and approbation as must insure success to the undertaking. PERFORMERS ON THE IRISH HARP are requested to assemble in this town on the tenth day of July next, when a confiderable sum will be distributed in Premiums, in proportion to their respective merits.

It being the intention of the Committee that every Performer shall receive some Premium, it is hoped that no Harper will decline attending on account of his having been unsuccessful on any former occasion.

ROBERT BRADSHAW,
Belfast, Secretary and Treasurer.
26th April, 1792.

founder of several hospitals. In 1808, he established the Irish Harp Society to tutor blind pupils in the art. He shied away from the radical Belfast politics of his day. The Reverend William Neilson, from outside Crossgar, had served the Irish-speaking Presbyterians of Ballymascanlon near Dundalk. In 1805, during a tour of Ulster, preaching in Irish, he gave one such

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[5] Letter dated 18 May 1711 from J. Maguire, cited in John Richardson (1711), *A Proposal for the Conversion of the Popish Natives of Ireland to the Establish'd Religion*, Dublin: E. Waters, p.16.

sermon in Donegal Street Meeting House 'to a numerous and respectable audience.' The following year he was elected Moderator of the General Ulster Synod. In 1808 he published *An Introduction to the Irish Language*, dedicated to the Lord Lieutenant. He was appointed Professor of Irish, Greek, Hebrew and Oriental Languages in Belfast Academical Institution in 1818. He taught Irish at the school until his death in 1821. The surgeon Samuel Bryson was a writer and collector of Irish manuscripts. His father, James, and brother, Andrew, were Irish-speaking Presbyterian ministers, both having served in Ballymascanlon before Neilson.

Robert Shipboy McAdam, an industrialist, was a leading member of the many cultural societies in Belfast. He spoke fourteen languages but his abiding passion was Irish language, music and archaeology. McAdam lived from 1808–1895 and made a huge contribution to the industrial and cultural life of the fast-expanding city. On his business journeys around Ireland, he systematically collected stories, songs, proverbs and folklore. He gathered a huge collection of Irish manuscripts, employing scribes including the poet Hugh McDonnell. With him, McAdam compiled a large English-Irish dictionary which, however, was never published. Ultimately, McAdam's business failed as did many of his ideas and schemes for the propagation of the Irish language.

McAdam plastered Belfast with signs with the motto Céad Míle Fáilte during the visit of Queen Victoria in 1849, which she herself noted in her diary. This showed that Irish was not only acceptable but fashionable in a town that was by then strongly unionist; rather less surprise was expressed than when Victoria's successor, Queen Elizabeth II, ventured a few words of Irish in her address to a state dinner in Dublin in May 2011.

The Ulster Gaelic Society – Cuideachta Ghaeilge Uladh

Set up in 1830, the Society became the focus of the work of the Belfast Protestant Irish enthusiasts. Dr MacDonnell was chairman and, aged 22, McAdam became Joint Secretary with Dr Bryce, a noted teacher of Irish. The Marquess of Downshire, an avid collector of manuscripts, was its President. His brother was fluent in Irish, as were his children and agents. The Society engaged in organising Irish classes, collecting manuscripts, employing scribes, lobbying and publishing. A student at the Society's Irish classes was Sir Samuel Ferguson. Later, as Deputy Keeper of the Public

Records Office, he insisted on Irish as a qualification for his staff. His Gaelic scholarship and translations contributed to the Irish literary revival. Among many other Ulster Protestant language enthusiasts were John McCambridge, the last Gaelic poet in the Glens and an ancestor of James Chichester-Clarke; James McKnight, the Ulster Tenants' Rights Movement leader from Rathfriland and editor in turn of the *Belfast Newsletter* and the *Derry Standard*; Bishop William Reeves, antiquarian, church historian and founder of Ballymena Academy, and the Reverend Robert King, its first and long-time headmaster and the author of a number of books in Irish.

By the middle of the 19th century, the Irish language was in serious decline due to its banishment from the National School system and the Famine and subsequent emigration, which hit Irish-speaking areas hardest. The Gaeltacht areas in east Ulster were contracting out of existence. In Belfast, the work of the early pioneers was passing into memory with the demise of the Ulster Gaelic Society around 1843 and the ending of Irish classes in 'Inst' in 1849. The appointment by Queen's University of the noted Gaelic scholar John O'Donovan as its first Professor of Irish in 1849 was not a success as he had few students. After his death in 1862, the chair was left vacant; Irish was not resumed until 1909. Another reason for the decline of Irish among Protestants in Belfast was the industrialisation of the city and the concomitant polarisation as the century progressed.

Unionism and Irish

Nevertheless the language survived in Belfast in a civic sense on the chain of office of the Lord Mayor, on the foundation stone of what is now the Royal Victoria Hospital, and on the arches of the fruit and vegetable markets.
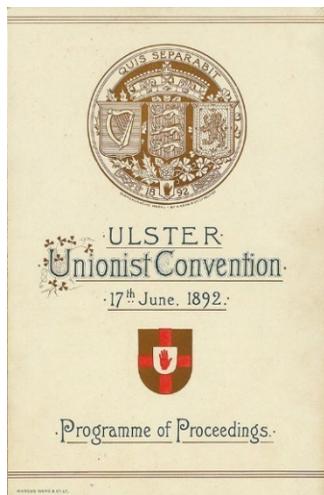
Even political unionism used Irish. On 12 July 1867, Orangemen marching from Bangor to Newtownards, in defiance of the law and led by William Johnson, were greeted with Céad Míle Fáilte. The entrance to the great anti-Home Rule convention in Botanic Gardens, Belfast in 1892 bore the motto 'Erin go Bragh – Ireland Forever' beside Loyalist slogans.

The Gaelic League – **Conradh na Gaeilge**

In 1893, the Gaelic League was founded by Douglas Hyde, the son of a rector from Roscommon, and a Catholic Glensman, Eoin Mac Néill, to halt the decline in Irish. The League first attracted a new generation in Ulster, many of whom

were Protestants. The first branch in the city grew out of the language classes of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club with which McAdam had long been associated. This was in 1895, the year of his death. The first president of the League in Belfast was a Presbyterian Orangeman, Dr St Clair Boyd. Dr R.R. Kane, who as Master of a Lodge is said to have signed its minutes in Irish, supported the League, as did the Grand Master of the Independent Orange Order, Lindsay Crawford.

Francis Joseph Bigger, the Presbyterian lawyer and antiquarian, became patron of the Belfast regional executive. His house, 'Ardrigh,' on the Antrim Road in Belfast, was a great meeting-place for those involved in the Gaelic revival. Here would gather, among many others, the novelist George A. Birmingham (Canon Hannay) a member of the League Executive; the Henry brothers, Paul the artist and Robert, the Queen's professor, who persuaded the University to resume Irish in 1909; the journalist Robert Lynd; Alice Milligan, the poet from Omagh and her friend and fellow editor of the *Shan Van Vocht*, Anna Johnston (Ethna Carbery). The League in Belfast soon had nine branches although Ulster lagged behind the other provinces in terms of overall membership.

Women of the Glens

The mainly Catholic Gaeltacht in the Glens of Antrim was virtually eradicated by the end of the 19th century. This decline began in the 1840s when, as a result of the use of Irish by proselytising Presbyterians, the Catholic clergy encouraged their flock to switch to English. Against this sorry backdrop, a group of Protestant ladies from solidly unionist, middle-class backgrounds got involved in the Gaelic League and more particularly from 1904, in organising a cultural festival, Feis na nGleann.

Rose Maud Young (Róis Ní Ógáin) of Galgorm House outside Ballymena was the daughter of the Chief Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant for County Antrim. The present Lady Brookeborough is her great-niece. Róis attended Irish classes in Coláiste Chomghaill in the lower Falls in Belfast. She published *Duanaire Gaedhilge*, a collection of songs in the Irish language tradition.

The father of Margaret Dobbs was a High Sheriff of Carrickfergus and County Louth

as well as a Justice of the Peace. While her brother, James, was heavily involved in the Larne gun-running, Margaret was a friend of Roger Casement. Ada MacNeill was a cousin of Lord Cushendun and had to come to Irish through F.J. Bigger.

Margaret Hutton, the wife of a Belfast industrialist, was a close friend of Patrick Pearse. Her house on the Malone Road was, like Bigger's, a centre of cultural activity.

These ladies provided a force of great influence for the language in the Glens and beyond. They were connected with Coláiste Uladh, set up in Gort an Choirce in County Donegal in 1906, which brought together all classes, creeds and political affiliations. They remained true to the ideals of the Gaelic League and Feis na nGleann to the end of their lives. They were able to reconcile participation in the Irish language movement with Protestant and unionist family backgrounds.

Modern attitudes

With each successive phase of the conflict in Ireland, however, the majority of Ulster Protestants has come to regard Irish as the preserve of the nationalist community. Some see speaking Irish as something approaching treason, or, in the case of some of our politicians, as a subject for parody and ridicule.

Nevertheless, Protestant interest in the language has survived. Canon Cosslett Quinn (1907-95), the son of an Orangeman, from Derriaghy near Belfast, was President of Oireachtas na Gaeilge and published his translation of the New Testament in 1970. Loyalist paramilitaries, including the late Gusty Spence, studied Irish, and Linda Ervine, who writes below, has been a very effective promoter of the language in East Belfast and other Loyalist communities. In 2014 Judith Gillespie, who had risen through the ranks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and ended her career as Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, was one of 200 PSNI staff who took part in the Líofa 2015 campaign, funded by the Department of Culture, Arts

and Leisure and aiming to make at least another 1,000 people fluent Irish. Chris McGimpsey of the Ulster Unionist Party, was as he writes below an early supporter of the ULTACH Trust which, until the withdrawal of its funding in 2014, worked to promote Irish among Protestants.

For them, Irish is as much a part of the heritage of Ulster Protestants as it is of their Catholic neighbours.

Our land, our language

Linda Ervine

Although I am a Protestant I didn't grow up in a traditional unionist family. My family were socialists, trade unionists; they stood against the tide of religious paranoia and hatred which swept through Northern Ireland in the late '60s and early '70s. They taught me to reject and to challenge sectarianism and racism and to be proud of my working class background. I thank God for their influence on my life as it equipped me for the job that I do today. My role is Irish language development officer, working in the heart of loyalist East Belfast.

When I tell people what I do they often ask how on earth we came to be teaching Irish on the Newtownards Road. Well, the project began through a six-week introduction to Gaelic and Ulster Scots with East Belfast Mission and Short Strand cross community women's group. After the taster course myself and a friend enrolled on a beginners class in An Droichead, an Irish cultural centre on the Ormeau Road.

At the first class we must have made it obvious that we were two Prods as during the break the teacher, a lovely girl called Áine Máire, to put us at ease, told us that all sorts of people attended the classes and in fact they had a learner who was from East Belfast: "And you'll never believe it but he's a member of the PUP."

"Oh Áine Máire," I replied, "My husband is the leader of the PUP."

And really that was the start. We continued to go along to a weekly class until a local journalist got the hold of the story and it ended up in a couple of newspapers. In an interview I mentioned East Belfast Mission and they were approached by local people who wanted to join the Irish class. Well of course no class existed at that time because

it had only been a six-week taster but because of the interest expressed, East Belfast Mission decided with the help of An Droichead to start a beginners class and they asked me to facilitate it. On the first night of the class back in November 2011, over 20 people turned up.

That one class has now developed into Turas, an Irish language centre which provides weekly classes for all ages and abilities as well as dance and music lessons. The word Turas means journey in Gaelic and for me it is not only a journey into a language but also a journey of healing and reconciliation.

Our existence and growth has certainly raised a few eyebrows and unfortunately sometimes worse – but the reality is that when we discover the many, many links between Gaelic culture and the Protestant tradition really we should be more shocked that so few people are aware of the facts. For example in 1833 the Presbyterian General Assembly termed the Irish language 'our sweet and memorable mother tongue'. Ten years later they made it a requirement for all of their trainee ministers to have a knowledge of the language because so many of their congregations couldn't speak English.

If we're looking for the largest Gaelic speaking region in the British Isles we don't find it in Ireland but in Scotland where 80% of speakers are from the Protestant tradition. I met some of them on a recent trip to Scotland where I attended Gaelic services in the local churches and heard the Psalms sung in Gaelic by the Presbyterian congregations. I even visited the local Rangers club and was presented with a Rangers pendant and an official Rangers club t-shirt, with the motto of Rangers written in Gaelic – "Sinne na daoine", "We are the people".
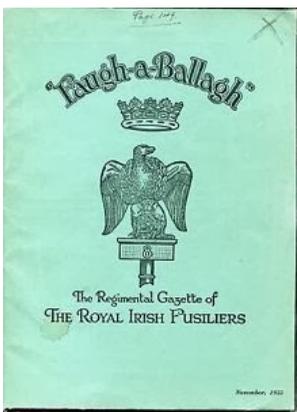
If we look at the murals in loyalist areas we see written on the walls "Lámh dearg abú", "victory to the red hand" – the old Ulster slogan, pictured above in a floor mosaic in a (Catholic) school in Ballymena, which was adopted as the motto of the Red Hand Commando. If we look at the flags we see "Faugh a ballagh", an Anglisation of the Gaelic "Fág an bealach" – which means "clear the way", and is the motto of the Royal Irish Regiment and some of its predecessors. I could go and on, yet because of what I call the "Tiocfaidh ár lá" syndrome many

"Faugh-a-Ballagh"

The Regimental Gazette of
THE ROYAL IRISH FUSILIERS

people from within the unionist community dimiss the language as Republican.

Recently we had an open day and of course there I was with my stall of information about the Irish language and our new classes starting the following week. Now, there was a mixed reaction, I got some funny looks and a few people had to walk past twice to make sure that what they were seeing was real but there was also a healthy level of interest from people who inquired about times of classes etc. However there was one man (I suppose you always get one), a man in his late 60s or early 70s, who after pacing past a few times came over for a closer look.
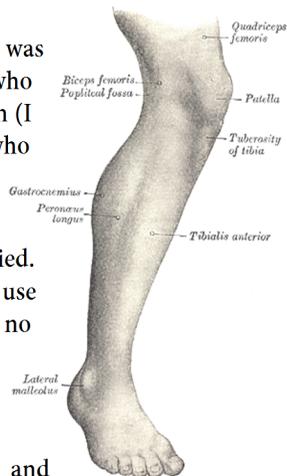
After flicking through some of the information he proceeded to tell me "That's a *Fenian* language isn't it?" "I'm sorry?" I replied. "It's a *Fenian* language." I smiled. "We're a church, we don't use the word Fenians." "Aye, well it's a *Catholic* language." "Well no actually, it isn't…" and I pointed out some of the information about our shared linguistic heritage. "I don't want to hear that. I'm not here to talk, *I've got a sore leg*," and off he went.

I personally believe that the majority of people are rational and reasonable and open to debate; unfortunately some people when you confront them with the facts are unable or unwilling to accept the truth. They are unable to move beyond their long held belief that the other community is the enemy and I suppose it's hardly surprising that this type of attitude prevails in many parts of Northern Ireland when our schools, our housing and our system of government compounds the 'us' and 'them' mentality.

I believe that the people of Northern Ireland have a rich cultural identity, a mixture of native Irish and of the many peoples such as the English and Scots, the Manx Gael and the French Huguenot who made Ireland their home. This rich ancestry influenced our surnames, our place names and our everyday language. Our vernacular of Hiberno-English reflects this mixed identity. We are native English speakers whose English is littered with beautiful Scots and Gaelic words. The syntax of our speech reflects that of Gaelic – only in this part of the world can you be *sitting in the middle of your dinner* or be *after going out*.

As a people we are culturally rich yet instead of embracing that wonderful cultural mix, we separate it into narrow divisive boxes and deny ourselves access to very things that make us who we are.

For me it is not the Ulster Scot *or* Gael, I believe that we can draw on both. For thousands of years Gaelic speakers crossed back and forth between Scotland and the north of Ireland; the kingdom of Dál Riada which came about in the 6th century

symbolises the unity between the two countries – that is our heritage. During the plantation in Ireland both lowland Scot and highland Gael settled in Ireland – that is our heritage.

For those who wish to use the identity of the Gael as a political symbol of division and separatism I would challenge that by saying being a Gael transcends religion and politics. For those who wish to use Ulster Scots as an identity which excludes Gaelic culture – well Ulster Scots is full of Gaelic words and if we look at the symbolism used to represent Ulster Scots, the tartan, the kilt, the highland dancing, etc., well of course it is all Gaelic.

My role is about promoting our shared heritage and creating reconciliation within communities. We have been very successful in what we do and have captured the imagination of both the public and the media yet we get very little support or acknowledgement from unionist politicians. For me unionism appears to be more about a denial of a shared identity. Protestantism which by its very nature is rich and diverse has become linked with a brand of unionism which is narrow and inward looking. My brother-in-law David once said, "I can never forgive the unionist leaders because the way they behaved was not for the good of this community but for themselves." I wonder if anything has changed.

Millions of pounds have been poured into shared projects within the community yet Stormont is segregated. It is like a school playground where people are threatening to take their ball home when the games not going their way, who rather than making decisions for the greater good of all, are seen to play up to their own side of the community. No wonder the electorate is disillusioned with politics.

There are signs that people here are beginning to look for alternatives. People want their politicians to be discussing education, employment and welfare; we are tired of the time and money wasted on parades and protests. Politicians need to start demonstrating some integrity by having the courage to work with those they were elected to share a mandate with, despite their political differences, for the good of all the people of Northern Ireland. Agreement on full recognition and statutory protection for the Irish language, which is our common heritage, would be a strong signal of a more mature political age.

Music and "the two traditions"

Brian Mullen

There has been much talk in recent years about "the two traditions" in Ireland, but when it comes to music, there is no such concept as two traditions. The music of Ireland belongs to everyone – it comes out of the roots of the country.

We are very fortunate, particularly in the North, that we have a very strong musical heritage and it comprises basically three strands: the native Irish music, along with the music of England and the music of Scotland brought either by Plantation or by travel between the two islands.

The music itself – traditional, sean-nós or old-time – has no intrinsic political, religious, or party affiliations. It is only when words are put to it that it takes on a colouring – orange or green, Prod or Taig, nationalist or unionist. The music can become associated with a particular 'side of the house' (it's always difficult to know what words to use about it as some can be pejorative, e.g. *Taig* and *Prod*, but these terms can also be used lightly and with affection, as here). Basically, however, the music belongs to everybody. It lives or dies because it is good or bad, not because of what team it supports.

Singers and musicians can take a tune from any source and make it work within their own context. A tune can cross religious and political divides (if, in music, we can talk about any such divisions), boundaries of language and even national boundaries.

An example of this is the American Civil War

song "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" written in 1864 to highlight the plight of Union soldiers in Confederate Prisoner-of-War camps. The chorus goes:

Tramp, tramp, tramp the boys are marching,
Cheer up comrades, they will come.
And beneath the starry flag,
We shall breathe the air again
Of the free land in our own beloved home.

The tune proved so popular everywhere, particularly in Ireland, that in 1867, a song called "God Save Ireland", in memory of a group of executed Fenians known as 'The Manchester Martyrs', used the same tune:

'God Save Ireland!' said the heroes.
'God Save Ireland!' said they all.
Whether on the scaffold high
Or the battlefield we die,
Oh, no matter when for Erin dear we fall!

Somewhere along the line, however, the tune acquired a number of sets of 'Orange' words. Here is a verse given to me by a reverend friend who heard it sung on the Twelfth:

No Pope, priest or Holy Water,
No Home Rule for Ireland.
And if I had a gun,
I would shoot them every one
For walking on the King's Highway.

'Queen' of course may be substituted for 'King' to accommodate the gender of the current monarch and so keep the song up to date. A good rule for a national anthem…

Another tune which has not only crossed party lines but is available with Irish and English texts is one variously called "Rosc Catha na Mumhan" (Munster's Battle Cry) or "The Boyne Water". As

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well as these two songs, the air carries the words of a fine Twelfth Day marching song "The Bold Orange Heroes of Comber", whose chorus goes:

> *As we walked up and down*
> *On the road to Portadown*
> *Our drums we did rattle like the thunder.*
> *And as the day drew near*
> *Filled each Fenian heart with fear*
> *For we're the bold Orange heroes of Comber.*

That particular song probably dates from the middle of the 19th century, but early in the 20th century the 'rebels' made use of the same tune to deride the activities of the Black and Tans in Ireland:

> *Come out, you Black and Tans,*
> *Come out and fight me like a man.*
> *Show your wife how you won medals down in Flanders.*
> *Tell them how the IRA*
> *Made you run like hell away*
> *From the green and grassy lanes of Killeshandra.*

You might think from those examples that the tune was an Irish one. It has certainly been well-naturalised and proved useful in getting varied messages across. But if you look closely, you can see very strong echoed of the English tune "Greensleeves". This was allegedly written by Henry VIII, though he may have just composed a set of words to his own interpretation of an older tune. This would date the tune to at least the 16th century and it could have been on the go long before that, far pre-dating Bonnie Prince Charlie's attempt to seize the British throne in the 18th century, which was the subject of "Rosc Catha na Mumhan" or the 17th century Battle of the Boyne, commemorated in "The Boyne Water".

Probably the best-known of Orange songs is "The Sash My Father Wore", sung

widely on the Twelfth and throughout the year by both Taigs and Prods – at least the chorus is, and it would seem that not many (irrespective of what foot they kick with) know more than the famous chorus:

> *It was old but it was beautiful*
> *And the colours they are fine.*
> *It was worn at Derry, Aughrim*
> *Enniskillen and the Boyne.*
> *My father wore it as a youth*
> *In the bygone days of yore.*
> *And it's on the Twelfth I love to wear*
> *The Sash my father wore.*

If you think about the tune of "The Sash" you probably think of it as a vehicle for these words and as an instrument for 'rising the blood' (or perhaps the hackles) and rarely, if ever, as music. It is part of the atmosphere, the ether of Ireland and as such, probably carries the musical credibility of theme of *Coronation Street* – it is functional. It is just 'there'!

I had occasion to reassess "The Sash" as music when I came across a love song to the same air by the County Down singer and radio presenter Tommy Sands, called "Irish Molly-O". Tommy came across this song in a book published in Philadelphia in 1830 and it tells of the thwarted love of a Scotsman for an Irish girl in America. Sung slower than would be normal for "The Sash" to accommodate the baleful tale, in his version the chorus goes:

> *She is young and she is beautiful*
> *And her likes I've never known.*
> *She's the lily of old Ireland*
> *And the primrose of Tyrone.*
> *She's the lily of old Ireland*
> *And no matter where I go,*
> *My heart will always hunger for*
> *My Irish Molly-O.*

It gives a completely new slant to the air.
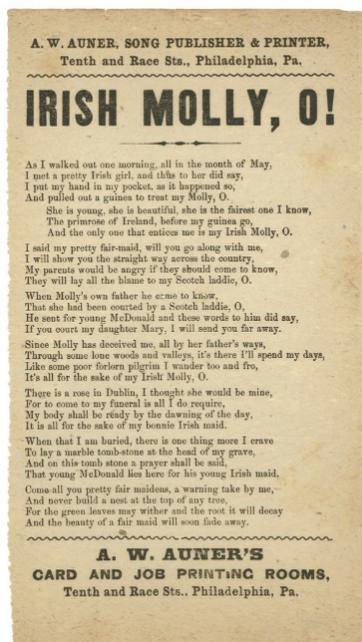
One of the most beautiful songs ever to come out of Ireland is "The Orange Maid of Sligo". It has grown out of a long tradition of what is known in Gaelic as aisling poetry, in which the poet or singer roves out on a May morning and meets a beautiful girl or aisling (literally 'a vision'). He asks her who she is and she replies that she is Caitlín Ní Uallacháin or Róisín Dubh or a daughter of Daniel O'Connell, who has been wronged by the Saxon foe and must be avenged. The songs are allegoric, in which the girl is Ireland and the boy the supporter of the cause who must come to save her.

So it is in "The Orange Maid of Sligo" except that this time the maid represents the loyalist cause of Ireland (remember that the other colour on the flag is orange) and the singer or poet espouses her cause to such an extent that he marries her – which could be seen as a remnant of the pagan belief that the king must marry the land.

The Gaelic influence is so strong in this song that the writer has even incorporated the assonance of ancient Irish poetry in his English text:

> On Benbulben's high and lofty height,
> The evening sun was setting bright.
> It cast a ray of golden light
> Around the Bay of Sligo.

Such a lovely air could not be left for Orangemen alone so Dominic Behan (brother of the writer Brendan Behan) used a variant of the tune for his song in praise of Charles Stewart Parnell, the Protestant landowner from Avondale, County Wicklow, who agitated for Home Rule for Ireland in the late 19th century, almost proving successful until he fell foul of the church and the authorities after a liaison with a married woman.

Although the song is of recent composition, it has entered into the mouths of the people and at many's the 'nationalist' gathering, the faithful have the opportunity to join in the chorus of "Avondale":

> Oh have you been to Avondale
> And lingered in its lovely vale,
> Where tall trees whisper, love a tale,
> Of Avondale's proud eagle?

Many other songs have grown from a common root and given forth both orange and

green blossoms: "Mo Ghile Mear" and "The Sons of Levi"; "An Chrúbach" and "The Aghalee Heroes"; and "Ólaim Puins" and "Lurgan Town", to mention only a few.

These songs are sung by both Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists, orange and green and it is not unusual to find a singer from one 'side' singing a song from the other 'side'. A singer will sing a song because he likes it and (always being careful of what company he is in) will normally get an appreciative response from his audience for a 'good' song well sung. As long as there are singers in Ireland, fine songs will be sung, no matter what their colour!

Web resources

The following songs, mentioned above, have been recorded by the author, Brian Mullen, and can be downloaded or listened to at www.gael-linn.net/shared-heritage: God Save Ireland; No Pope, Priest, or Holy Water; The Bold Orange Heroes of Comber; Come Out Ye Black and Tans; The Sash; My Irish Molly-O; The Orange Maid of Sligo; Avondale; Ólaim Puins; Lurgan Town.

Hiberno-English, or English as spoken in Ireland

Art Hughes MA, MèsL, PhD

When any two languages come into contact with each other, the result is very rarely a 'pure' form of either one or the other and the most common result is an admixture of the two. Linguists describe the incoming language as the superstratum (or 'overlayer') and the resident language as the substratum (or 'underlayer'). When people, for whatever social or political reasons, stop speaking one language and take up another, they usually carry across certain words (lexical items) and phrases from their native language into the incoming language – not to mention certain phonetic features and elements of word order (or 'syntax') etc. Contact between the languages may be of an occasional or fairly incidental nature. Take for example, in more recent times, borrowings into English from European languages such as spaghetti, from Italian (based on spago – 'chord'); chaise longue – a 'chair with support for the legs,' from French (literally 'long chair'), or even the dubious toreador – 'bull-fighter', a word invented by the French composer Bizet in lieu of the Spanish term torero.

If we look at the Celtic languages we can see how Welsh, being in contact with English, has borrowed for 'mother-in-law' mam yn ghyfraith (a literal translation of the English), while Welsh's sister language, Breton, which is in contact with French in Brittany, has the term mam gaer, literally 'beautiful mother' from French belle mère. These, then, are fine examples of how English and French have left their respective marks on Welsh and Breton. In the remainder of this short article, it is intended to examine some of the traces which Irish has left on English as spoken in Ireland, or what linguists mostly now term 'Hiberno-English'.

Background of Hiberno-English

In the case of English in Ireland, one can detect various waves of language contact. The earliest form of English introduced into Ireland was during the Anglo-Norman invasion of the 12th century. In fact up until the middle of the 19th century, a dialect of this first wave of English spoken in Ireland survived in the south-east of the country in County Wexford, in the baronies of Forth and Bargy. By and large, however, the main upsurge of English as an administrative language 'beyond the Pale' in Ireland occurred as a result of events in the late 16th century under the Tudor conquest, and the ensuing Plantations of Ulster and Munster during the 17th century.

Nevertheless, despite the dominant position of English in the large towns and in the legal and political administration of the new regime, Irish, or Gaelic, continued to be spoken as the majority language in rural Ireland until the onset of the Great Famine in the 1840s. Of eight million people who lived in Ireland before the onset of the Famine, it can be stated that half of them, at the very least, spoke Irish as their native tongue. With the combined factors of starvation and emigration, not to mention the continued stigmatisation of the Irish language, the percentage of Irish speakers fell to 14% by the end of the 19th century.

The language shift from Irish to English in Ireland can be viewed as having been set in motion administratively in the 17th century, with a further two centuries or so before it took widespread effect in most rural areas. For example, while Donegal is the only modern county of Ulster where a traditional Gaeltacht ('Irish-speaking area', see map) still survives today, there were native speakers of Irish in Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Monaghan and Tyrone in the first half of the 20th century.

Although native Irish has sadly died out in these areas, not forgetting counties Down and Fermanagh, the influence which Irish was to have on Hiberno-English was considerable in all parts of Ulster and the island of Ireland as a whole. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, the majority of the placenames of Ulster go back to Irish originals, as in Belfast (Béal Feirste – 'approach to the sand-bar'), Bangor (Beannchar

– 'cliffy area'), Carrickfergus (Carraig Fheargusa – 'Fergus' rock'), Derry (Doire – 'oak grove'), Coleraine (Cúl Raithin – 'ferny corner'), Ballymena (An Baile Méanach – 'the middle town'), Portadown (Port an Dúnáin – 'the port of the little fort') etc.

While the majority of these forms have been Anglicised (i.e. where the Irish name is written down in an approximate spelling in English), some names have been translated from Irish into English, such as Whitehead (County Antrim, a translation of Irish Ceann Bán), Saintfield (County Down, from the Irish Tamhnach Naomh), Bloody Foreland (County Donegal, from the Irish Cnoc Fola) etc.

Placenames form an archaic portion of most languages (the onomasticon) and the placename elements often remain obscure to modern speakers of the language – just

ask the average Londoner what *West Ham* means and he/she will not be able to tell you that the second element Ham is Old English, which nowadays means 'home' in ordinary English or 'hame' in Scots. The store of words that make the ordinary spoken language (or the lexicon) are usually all understood by speakers of any given language, and even though we shall see below that many Irish words from the ordinary spoken language have been passed untranslated into English (such as *banshee*, *shamrock* etc.), one will also see that the element of translation of Irish turns of phrase into Hiberno-English has been much more prevalent in the everyday language than for the more specialised items of placenames.

The Gaelic languages of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man

In using the term Gaelic to describe 'the Irish language', it should be pointed out that Gaeilge is used by speakers of Irish Gaelic to describe what English-speakers would commonly call 'Irish'. However, Gaelic is by no means confined to Ireland, as this language spread into Scotland and the Isle of Man between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD, where the Gaelic languages of these regions are still known to their speakers as Gàidhlig ('Scottish Gaelic') and Gaelg ('Manx'). Gaelic influence on the English language of Scotland was also quite marked, as may be seen from the Scots or Scottish English term Sassenach 'Englishman' (borrowed from Scottish Gaelic Sasanach 'a Saxon'). It is noteworthy that the Irish Gaelic term for Englishman is also Sasanach, and given the similarity of Irish and Scottish Gaelic (remembering that both shared the same literary language up until the end of the 17th century), there is often difficulty in determining whether the Irish or Scottish variety of Gaelic is the source of a loanword in English, e.g. *whisky*, *whiskey*, which may be Irish uisce beatha or Scottish Gaelic uisge beatha – both meaning 'water of life'.

In Ulster, the problem in determining if Irish or Scottish Gaelic is the source of a Gaelic loanword in local English is further compounded by the fact that a lot of Ulster dialects of English have been introduced from the Scottish lowlands (especially in parts of counties Antrim, Down, Derry and Donegal; the dialects of those areas are

nowadays often called Ulster Scots, with the other main varieties being Mid-Ulster English and South Ulster English). Thus, for example, the dialect word *partan* for "crab" could either represent a borrowing from the Ulster Irish word for crab, partán (Standard Irish portán), or Lowlands Scots partan which is borrowed from Scottish Gaelic partan; both the modern Irish portán and Scottish Gaelic partán go back to the Old Irish partán. Similarly *clabber*, "mud", can be from Irish Gaelic

clábar, or it could be from Scots clabber which has borrowed the word from Scottish Gaelic clabar. The word *lough* or *loch* in Ulster English for "lake" can represent Irish loch "lake" or Scots loch (via Scottish Gaelic loch), where both Gaelic words go back to a common Irish source.

Goedelic / Old Irish

| Irish Gaelic | Scottish Gaelic | Manx |
| Gaeilge | Gàidhlig | Gaelg |

Gaelic influence on Hiberno-English

A fine example of Hiberno-English can be seen in the works of John Millington Synge (1871–1909), for while some have maligned this author for his "stage Irishness" in *The Playboy of the Western World* and his other plays, there can be no doubt that much of the language in the works of Synge reflects the variety of English as spoken in the Ireland of their time – indeed, many of the sentences woven together in these plays were meticulously noted down by Synge from everyday conversation he heard in late 19th century rural Ireland.

Although the Irish language has been largely replaced by English in Ireland, Gaelic influence on Hiberno-English can be seen in many aspects of the dialects we use. For example instead of Standard English *"How old are you?"* in Ireland, one often hears *"What age are you?"* (which in most cases, appears to be based on underlying Irish Cá haois thú?).

Another strong influence of Hiberno-English is the underlying verbal aspect of Gaelic. In Standard English one hears:

He is there every Tuesday.

Whereas in Hiberno-English, one often hears;

He bes there every Tuesday or *He does be there every Tuesday.*

The reason for the Hiberno-English form *"he bes, does be"* in the example above is that there are two types of present in Irish:

  (i) bíonn, a "continuous present" (for actions habitually carried out, such as being there every Tuesday on a regular basis) and

  (ii) tá, an "actual" or "stative present" for being there, "here and now" as it were.

Irish "continuous present": Bíonn sé ansin gach Máirt. *He bes here every Tuesday.*

Irish "actual present": Tá sé anseo anois. *He is here now.*

Another common feature of Hiberno-English is what some linguists describe as a "hot press perfect", which would be expressed in Standard English as "I have just missed the bus"; or "he has just come in". In Hiberno-English this is expressed as *"I'm after missing the bus"* and *"He is after coming in"*. These latter constructions are "calqued" or based upon the underlying Irish structure:

Standard English: *I have just missed the bus.*
Hiberno-English: *I'm after missing the bus.*
from the Irish: Tá mé tar éis an bus a chailleadh *or* Tá mé i ndiaidh an bus a chailleadh.

He has just come in.
He is after coming in.
Tá sé i ndiaidh teacht isteach *or* Tá sé tar éis teacht isteach.

Instead of Standard English *I went out to buy bread*, in Hiberno-English one often hears: *I went out for to buy bread*. This latter construction may reflect Irish Chuaigh mé amach fá coinne arán a cheannach. Further examples of underlying Irish influence on constructions in Hiberno-English are cited below:

I have written the letter.	*Don't laugh!*
I have the letter written.	*Don't be laughing!*
Tá an litir scríofa agam.	Ná bí ag gáire!
He has finished the work.	*I think it will rain.*
He has the work finished.	*I am thinking it will rain.*
Tá an obair críochnaithe aige.	Tá mé ag smaoinitiú go gcuirfidh sé.

He went out despite suffering from a heavy cold.
He went out and him dying with the cold.
Chuaigh sé amach agus é ag fáil bháis leis an tslaghdán.

It is best not to say anything.
You are better off not opening your mouth.
B'fhearr duit gan do bhéal a oscailt.

He spoke to me as he was coming in.
He spoke to me and him coming in.
Labhair sé liom is é ag teacht isteach.

Very often prepositions are used in Hiberno-English in the same way they are used in Irish showing once again, that many people quite often translated a phrase they

used in their native Irish directly into English.

Standard English: *Have you brought your coat?*
Hiberno-English: *Have you your coat with you?*
Irish: An bhfuil do chóta leat?

He roared.
He let a roar out of him.
Lig sé béic amach as.

Did you forget anything?
Did you leave anything after you?
Ar fhág tú rud ar bith i do dhiaidh?

I am extremely thirsty.
I have a wild drooth on me.
Tá tart mór orm.

A man built like a bull / A foolish boy
A bull of a man / A fool of a boy
Tarbh d'fhear / Amadán de bhuachaill.

Have you caught a cold?
Have you the cold on you?
An bhfuil an slaghdán ort?

He is homesick.
The longin' is on him.
Tá cumha air.

It was very windy.
There were a big wind in it.
Bhí gaoth mhór ann.

He broke her window.
He broke the window on her.
Bhris sé an fhuinneog uirthi.

How many of you are there?
How many of you are there in it?
Cá mhéad agaibh atá ann?

He lost my money.
He lost the money on me.
Chaill sé an t-airgead orm.

When he reached the house…
When he came as far as the house… / When he came the length of the house…
Nuair a tháinig sé a fhad leis an teach...

He pretended that he didn't hear me.
He let on he never heard me.
Lig sé air nár chuala sé mé.

She has been living here since her marriage.
She is living here from she was married.
Tá sí ina cónaí anseo ó pósadh í.

I can no longer receive the picture (on television).
The picture is gone on me.
Tá an pictiúr ar shiúl orm.

Many other Hiberno-English phrases are of Gaelic origin, such as:

Widower	*Mixed up, confused*
Widow man	Throughother
Baintreach fir	Fríd a chéile
He'll put manners on them.	*Man of the house/woman of the house.*
Cuirfidh sé múineadh orthu.	Fear an tí, bean an tí.

You couldn't hold a foot to that.
Ní fhiocfadh leat cos a choinneáil leis sin.

He never asked me if I had a mouth on me.
(= Standard English …*if I was hungry*).
Níor fhiafraigh sé díom an raibh béal orm.

He is on the pig's back.
Tá sé ar mhuin na muice.

…as the man says.
…mar a deir an fear.

Likewise one often hears proverbs in Hiberno-English which are direct translations from the Gaelic.

She won't let her bone with the dog.
Ní ligfidh sí a cnámh leis an mhadadh.

If you have the name of early rising you can lie to dinner time.
Má bhíonn clú an mhochéirí ort, thig leat luí go meán lae.

It is hard to whistle and chew meal.
(Meaning *It is difficult to do too much at once.*)
Is doiligh bheith ag feadalaigh agus ag ithe mine.

Many words have also passed from Irish into English, such as the widely used "poteen" (poitín), "banshee" (bean sí, woman of the fairy mound), "shamrock" (seamróg, literally "little clover", seamar + óg) etc. The degree of borrowing from Irish into English was much more marked in rural areas where many names for animals, insects, fish, plants, etc. were transferred from Gaelic directly into local

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English: "moiley" a hornless cow (maola, from maol bald, hornless); "garron" a gelding (gearrán); "deel" a type of beetle (daol), "gillaroo" a type of trout (giolla rua, red fellow); "glasan" a (young) coal fish (glasán), "boochalawn bwee" ragwort (buachalán buí); "bockenbarra" a toadstool (beacán bearraigh); "skeagh" a hawthorn bush (sceach), and so on.

Another area where words were borrowed is that of tool and utensils, such as "coghel" a long bag-shaped fishing net (cochall, a hood); "slane" a turf-spade (sleán); "soogawn", straw rope (súgán).

 The phrase *"he has a face on him like a lurgan spade"* (Standard English *"he looks disgruntled"*), has often been interpreted as a Lurgan spade, referring to the County Armagh town of Lurgan. There is no record of Lurgan as a centre of spade production and Lurgan spade, in actual fact, is a Hiberno-English borrowing from Irish, lorgán spáide "shaft of a spade" and the phrase originally meant "He has a face on him as long as a spade shaft".

Terms of endearment from Irish also abound in Hiberno-English (especially in songs of the 19th and 20th centuries), and examples include *"astore"* (a stór, oh treasure), also *"astoreen"* (a stóirín or little treasure); *"a vourneen"* (a mhúirnín, oh darling); *"aroon"* (a rún "oh secret"); *"gra mochree"* (a ghrá mo chroí, oh love of my heart); *"acushla mochree"* (a chuisle mo chroí,* oh vein of my heart).

Although a comprehensive account of the many influences that the Irish language has on Hiberno-English could not be undertaken here, it is hoped that some broad indication has been provided of the ways in which Irish has left its traces on the dialects of English as spoken in Ireland over the course of recent centuries.

Ulster Scots: bad English, good Scots or Protestant Irish?

Laura Spence

21st century Ulster is a melting pot for various ethnic and cultural groups from all over the world: these 'minority' cultures have arrived here over the decades and made their homes alongside British, Irish and Ulster Scots folk; and they have brought with them their language, food and traditions, contributing to the diversity and richness of Northern Irish culture: but what exactly is that culture?

Now, you know when you go on holiday to, say, Spain? You want to hear Spanish music, enjoy the Spanish weather, sample traditional Spanish food and drink, and hear the people speaking their own language. The Spanish have flamenco dancing, they take siestas, they make great paella and they say "Hola" and "Adios". These are the things we expect to see, feel, taste and hear when we go to Spain – it lets us see that we're in a different country, experiencing a different culture. It's the same if we're in France or Italy or Germany: we want to hear the different accents, pick up a few words of the language and have a real holiday experience.

It's just the same when tourists come to Northern Ireland: they want to get to know our country, to hear how we speak, to taste different foods and enjoy our culture – so what have we got to offer them? Well, our warm welcomes and friendliness to visitors are renowned the world over. In terms of music, we have the haunting Uilleann pipes, the fiddle and harp, the tin whistle, the bodhrán and Lambeg drums. Our food and drink are recognised internationally from Irish stew to the Ulster fry, champ, colcannon, traditional Irish breads – and now, craft beers and Armagh ciders are winning market share from the brewing giants. Our scenery is breathtaking, and our weather – well, let's not dwell on that.

But what about our language? This is where we've really got to up our game. If tourists just wanted to hear English, there are plenty of places they could go, but they've come to Northern Ireland so let's make sure they hear some of the diversity of the words we use here. Almost all of us, whether we do it consciously or not, pepper our 'English' conversations with Irish and Ulster Scots words almost every day and we mix and match without knowing it…

Gin ye got a quare gunk (Irish gonc), ye'd be scunnered (scanraigh).
If you got a big disappointment, you'd be fed up.

Thon carnaptious gulpin (guilpín) aye be's slabberin (slabar): he's hard tae thole.
That disagreeable lout is always mouthing: it's hard to put up with him.

He guldert (goldar): "Mine yersel, thon coggly (guagánach) creepie's gaun tae coup (caitheamh)".
He shouted: "Watch out, that unsteady stool is going to throw you over".

There's gaun tae be a plump (plimp), ye'll get drookit; pit yer gansy (geansaí) on ye or ye'll be cauldrife".

There's going to be a downpour – you'll get soaked. Put on your jumper or you'll be really cold.

The auld pachle (pachall) landit in the sheugh (seoch), up tae his oxters in glar (glár)!
The awkward old fellow fell into the ditch, up to his armpits in wet mud!

So – let's go back a bit and look at what's going on here in terms of Irish and Ulster Scots identity and language.

In the broadest terms, people claiming an *Irish* identity tend to be Roman Catholic. They value their culture – Irish dancing and music, GAA, their church, good traditional cooking and the Ireland rugby team. In equally broad terms, many *Ulster Scots* folk are Protestant, chiefly Presbyterian; and they value *their* culture: Scottish Highland and Country Dancing and music, the bagpipes, their church (often known as 'kirk' or 'meetin' hoose'), good traditional cooking and the Ireland rugby team.

Irish people, although they don't all speak it, respect the Irish language and most know a few words; while Ulster Scots folk, in just the same way, recognise there are many Scottish words in their own vocabulary, which they may or may not use. And then, because this is Northern Ireland and things are never simple, there are a lot of Catholic people who live in Ulster Scots speaking areas and use Scottish words; and there are a lot of Protestant people who love the Irish language and can speak it fluently. People do not fit in neat boxes, and language and culture pay very little attention to religion and politics.

To look at the Irish language firstly: it has come a long way over the past few decades. It has experienced a significant revival and Irish language classes are thriving right across the country, attended by Protestants and Catholics. It is valued and respected – a beautiful and distinctive language in poetry, prose and song – and it has advanced academically with uniform spelling standards, an agreed vocabulary, dictionaries and grammars, and international recognition.

But many people are still a bit scared of Irish! Maybe it's because it sounds very different, or maybe it's because it looks so different. What's with all those long, long words and 'spare' letters? Why is 'Niamh' pronounced 'Neeve' when it should, phonetically, be 'Ni-am' (and what's that 'h' doing there?) And what about Caoimhe. How can that possibly be pronounced Keeva? But despite its complex structures, Irish is an expressive and sensitive language, and though some words are pronounced differently from county to county across Ireland, native speakers can make themselves understood and they're delighted to meet up with fellow Irish linguists. It's the historic language of this island: and it's one of the languages that tourists and visitors love to hear and to see written down, especially in old Celtic script.

Now, what about Ulster Scots? Without going too much into the history, the people of Scotland, four centuries ago, spoke a distinct language called Scots (apart from those areas where Gaelic survived). Scots was not English, it was not French, not Norse or German – though it had elements of all of these. It was the official language of the Scottish courts and of the Scottish king and of the Scottish people. But then

King James VI also became the King of England (as James I). Rather than rule two kingdoms speaking two languages, he published a new English language bible (the King James Bible) and it was decreed that English would now be the official language of both countries.
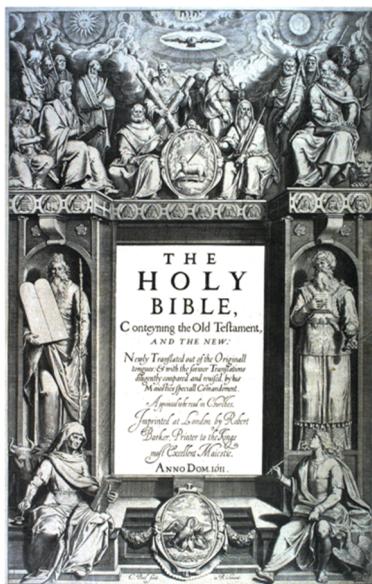
Around this same time, King James granted land in Ulster to tens of thousands of Scottish people who moved across to settle here during what was called 'the Plantation of Ulster'. These people were still speaking Scots and they brought their language with them. Imagine you and everyone in your town moved to a new country tomorrow: you'd still speak the way you do today, and so the Scottish who came to Ulster still spoke Scots. In Ulster they met people who spoke

Irish and they met people who spoke English. They started picking up some of these words - and the people who lived in Ulster started using some of the Scottish words. Time went on and the original Scottish settlers began to consider themselves Ulster folk. Their vocabulary had now bedded in, some words staying the same, some words disappearing, some changing in spelling or meaning – so that the Scots of Scotland was now the Scots of Ulster: 'Ulster Scots'.

As the centuries passed, in the same way that Irish became less commonly spoken, Ulster Scots also started to die away. Improved standards of reading and writing in English, better education, printing, industrialisation and cultural developments meant that new vocabulary was introduced and many of the old Scottish words were no longer needed. However, in rural areas, particularly the coastal counties from Down to Donegal, you could still find people using Scottish words and phrases.

In 1992, recognising that the Scottish vocabulary was beautiful, colourful and increasingly rare, a group of language enthusiasts established the Ulster Scots Language Society to record and preserve the vocabulary and, if possible, revive it as a valuable part of our history and heritage. They set about recording native speakers and writing down as many of the words as possible. This work was still ongoing when, following the 1998 Northern Ireland peace agreement, a Cross-Border Language Body was established between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Shortly afterwards, in March 2001, the UK government recognised Scots and Ulster Scots together as a language for the purposes of Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This obliged the government to promote and safeguard Ulster Scots, facilitate teaching and learning, and foster mutual understanding with users of other languages. As Irish was at the same time granted more extensive recognition under Part III of the Charter, this meant that for the first time, both Irish and Ulster Scots were acknowledged as two of the languages of this country and were protected as part of our shared linguistic and cultural heritage.

EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

GIVING REGIONAL AND MINORITY LANGUAGES A SAY!

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
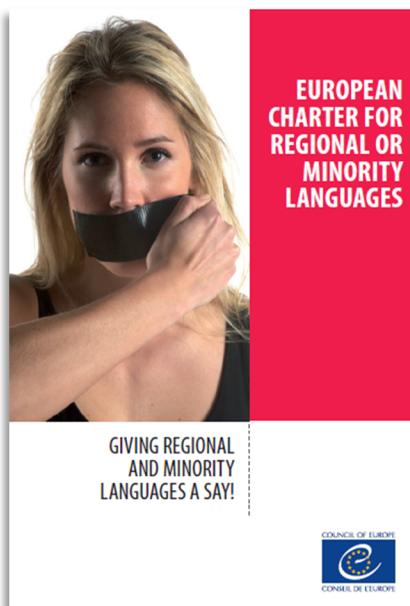
And then it all began to get a bit complicated. Politics crept in, as so often happens in this country. The Irish language had for decades been associated with the nationalist movement and so the accusation was levelled at Ulster Scots that it was a made-up language for Protestants. People jeered at the revival movement and rather than recognising the language as good Scots, they derided it as bad English. The activists started introducing vocabulary to demonstrate the versatility of modern Ulster-Scots but these new words or 'neologisms' attracted ridicule, and an unfriendly press mocked the movement in cartoons and editorials.

Meanwhile, because of the politics, the native Ulster Scots speakers, both Catholic and Protestant, distanced themselves from the entire thing; while some people, sensing an opportunity to make a name for themselves, set themselves up as so-called experts and brought Ulster Scots to an embarrassing low point.
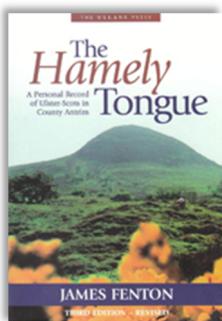
But all the while, in the background, the real enthusiasts kept plodding away. One man, James Fenton, spent 30 years researching the Scots vocabulary of north Antrim and published a book called *The Hamely Tongue* which remains the most useful guide yet written to the Scottish vocabulary still in use in present day Ulster. A grammar was compiled and academics continued to unearth authentic texts written by Ulster Scots weavers and artisans from the 17th to the 20th centuries, full of the genuine Scottish vocabulary used by the ordinary people of Ulster: this work is ongoing.

More Ulster Scots organisations were established and educational materials were prepared – and again, these continue to be developed as the Ulster Scots language movement works to gain respect and recognition.

Today, we have a new generation of poets and writers starting to write in Ulster Scots again. The following humorous verses by Dervock poet, Charlie Gillen (from one of his best-known poems, "Tha Wizard's Quill"), tell of his experience at a dance…

I surveyed the hall an occupants wi' a very casual glance;
They wur hurkled up in corners: "Weel", says I, "I'm here tae dance."
Oh as nice a bunch o lassies as ye'd ever hope tae meet,
But the ainly yin that wud dance wi me, haed pirfa size o feet.
She wus six fit three an' sixteen stone, wi shoothers lake a horse –
The ainly thing that helped her wus her freen wus even worse
Fur she haed legs lake horses' hems an' her ja's wus clappit in,
Her hair wus lake a sookit rine, an' Lord but she wus thin!
The big yin riz an' I lukked up at the stibbles on her chin –

An' the hair alow her oxters wud hae minded ye on whins…
Weel the ban' it stairtit pleyin' an' she let oot the clutch:
Naw anither sowl got on the flure, she wus spalterin' that much.
She lukked tae hae some freckles, hir legs wuz mazled wae the fire –
But thon freckles wusnae freckles: she'd bin brushin oot the byre!

A Wheen O Wurds

AN ULSTER-SCOTS POETRY AND
SHORT STORY RESOURCE FOR
KEY STAGES 3 & 4
PART 1
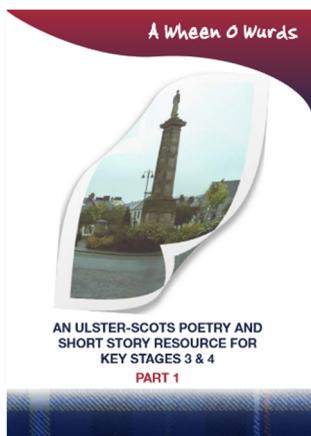
So, as time passes, the Ulster Scots language is continuing to prosper, watching closely the development and progress of its sister language, Irish, which continues to blaze the trail. From broadcasting to educational resourcing, from spelling standardisation and a dictionary to curricular materials and multi-media representation, Irish leads the way and Ulster Scots watches, admires, learns and follows.

The greatest advocates and supporters of the Ulster Scots movement are often the Irish language activists who have faced all the same hurdles – from legislative and bureaucratic wrangling to internal disagreements.

But as linguists, we all share the same love of words: we have a deep-seated loyalty to our linguistic and cultural heritage, and a determination to preserve and protect the language of our forefathers. Both movements are attempting to give people a sense of identity, community and connection with the past. They are salvaging what makes us unique – so we can present it to the rest of the world with pride.

Our languages all have a place on this shared island so let's learn them, speak them and share them.

Thank you, aa the best, go raibh maith agat.
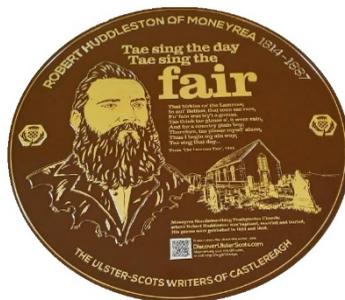
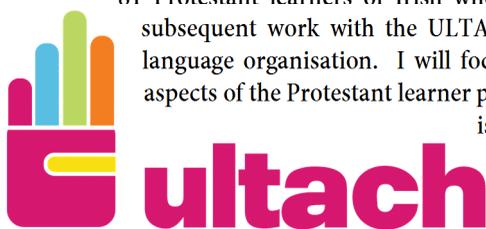# Experiences of Protestant Learners of Irish

Gordon McCoy

As the Irish language revival developed in Northern Ireland, a large number of Protestants became aware of the language for the first time. While many Protestants resented what they perceived to be a resurgence of cultural nationalism, others made attempts to learn Irish and associate the language with their own distinctive outlooks.

In this article I will summarise the findings of research on 81 Protestant learners of Irish whom I studied in the 1990s and my subsequent work with the ULTACH Trust, a cross-community Irish language organisation. I will focus on two inter-related but distinct aspects of the Protestant learner phenomenon. I will deal with identity issues first of all, before examining the more practical issues such as how the learners find suitable classes in which to learn the language.

Some Protestant learners of Irish are nationalist, associating their interest in the language with their wish for a united Ireland. By learning Irish they hope to develop a secular culture which both Irish Protestants and Catholics could share. They believe that the association of the Irish language with Irish nationalism is natural and commonsensical. Thus Protestant Irish speakers who are nationalist can find it difficult to conceive how unionists take an interest in the language and retain their allegiance to Britain:

> GMcC: *"Can someone who learns Irish be a unionist and an Irish speaker?"*

> Learner: *"Well, I don't think you could be… But it's the beginning if they show an interest in Irish. It's something like, a wee bit like the thin end of the wedge. In a way they'll come to conclude, 'Well, Irish isn't too bad at all and the Irish aren't too bad.' People who learn Irish have a leaning towards nationalism."*

> *"If you get into the Irish language and that sort of thing, to a large extent that brings you closer to the Catholic people on this island. I think it brings you closer to them in a certain way and it encourages you to think in a more sort of Irish way and a more sort of all-island – it give you an all-Ireland perspective on things…"*

The assertion that some Protestants learn Irish because they are nationalist has some validity. Only 2% of Protestants favour a united Ireland (*NI Life and Times Survey 2012*). However, 31% of the learners I met said they were nationalist in outlook. Therefore the percentage of nationalists among the group I studied was higher than that among the Protestant population as a whole. The assertion that all, or most Protestants learn Irish because they are nationalist is invalid; 46% of the learners I studied told me that they were unionist in outlook. The number of unionist learners of Irish has risen as more opportunities to learn the language became available.

Unionist learners of Irish do not feel that they must choose between two mutually opposed British and Irish cultures. They often create cultural identities which draw upon elements of both:

"I feel quite privileged now because, I mean, you feel the best of both worlds. You extract from both sides what you like best, you know. I'm happy to British-Irish or Irish-British or whatever. You can take pleasure from both. I mean, I take great pleasure in looking at the Changing of the Guard or something like that there. It doesn't mean to say that I can take no pleasure in things that I took pleasure in before. I mean, when they play "Land of Hope and Glory" or something, it doesn't mean to say that I shouldn't. I feel quite happy to associate with that, and I've no problems about it. I'd say that the Irish culture would certainly be part of me now. Yes, sure, and I'm a better person for it."
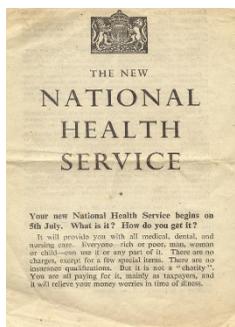
"I've no difficulty in saying I'm Irish. I don't have a great deal of difficulty with saying I'm British either because many aspects of my life would have been very different if it hadn't been for Britishness, like straight teeth – things like the National Health and university education which my family would have been far too poor to afford. And it's not just gratitude, but I can identify with things like the British Labour movement which also moulded me to a degree."

"I would come from the unionist tradition, and I could actually use my knowledge of Irish at the moment to defend the unionist position an awful lot better than most of the unionists... the absurdity of Ireland as a sort of Gaelic, Catholic nation and the idea that because the sea is round it that makes it a nation. The language links us with Scotland and with Wales and with Cornwall, and actually England too. England is as Celtic a nation as we are. So I would see the Irish language as linking us with the other

Celtic peoples, and I think it's a blind spot, this obsession with England as an enemy. The English are the same people as we are, so it seems to me that Irish language is something which holds the British Isles together. I mean the very word 'British' speaks to me of a Celtic language, you know, and not of English. Old Shakespeare with his England and her sister nations bound together by the triumph of sea. I see the sea as binding nations together. The sea has always bound Kintyre and County Antrim, and for these absurd people to draw a line down there and say, 'This is Ireland and that is Scotland' – that's rubbish."
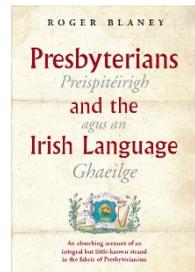
Many unionist learners of Irish are reticent to express their political beliefs in Irish language circles which are mostly nationalist in terms of participation and orientation. This leads to cultural mismatches between unionists and nationalist Irish speakers. For example, during a cross-community Irish language class a teacher handed out a photocopied song that is very popular among Irish speakers. The song ("Óró Sé Do Bheatha 'Bhaile") includes a line which refers to driving na Gaill ('the foreigners') out of Ireland. One unionist learner reacted in this way:

"That song that we did, I didn't feel too happy about singing it. I must admit, I really didn't. You see, I think that's from her (the teacher's) *background, you know. It's acceptable, but it does feel odd. And funny enough, there was a week's lapse, and Cathal gave me a lift home, and he actually brought it up that he didn't feel right in singing it either. He felt it was out of place in a mixed group and I appreciated that someone from a Roman Catholic background who had differing opinions or whatever, would feel the same about it."*

Although this Protestant objected to the song, she kept her feelings to herself. She was both surprised and relieved when a Catholic learner shared her opinions. In recent years more Catholic Irish-speakers are showing an increased sensitivity to the implications of a cross-community ethos at language classes and events. There is an increasing realisation that Protestants who learn Irish may not be nationalist, after all.

Protestants who learn Irish can often link the Irish language to their religious identities, as the following quotations illustrate:

"I think there's a very strong feeling in the Church that the Church is the Church which comes through from the beginning of Christianity. I suspect we have a much stronger relationship to the Church of Saint Patrick. You can see far more, a lot of Church of Ireland clergy give their children Irish names, a lot of 'Patricks' and 'Brigids'. And of course part of it can be that Church of Ireland clergy are educated in the south, their divinity school's in Dublin."

"I began to think if the Irish language applied to our tradition or the Protestant tradition, and I thought that maybe it did, you know, being Presbyterian, realising that Presbyterians as a tradition, as a denomination, were at various times persecuted as well by the Established Church, and reading somewhere that Presbyterian ministers spoke Irish very fluently, up to a certain point, and the whole notion of dissent within Presbyterianism, of breaking away from the mould."

Protestant Irish speakers regularly meet one another at a Presbyterian worship group An Tor ar Lasadh ('the Burning Bush') which holds services in Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in Belfast. Services in Irish are also held regularly at St George's Church of Ireland in Belfast. The Church of Ireland's Irish language guild, Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise, has been very active in publishing religious works in Irish, including Irish language versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *New Testament*.

Many Protestants begin to learn Irish from Irish language sites on the internet and self-instruction courses, but the time comes when they feel the need to find a suitable class. At present most Irish language classes in Northern Ireland are in nationalist districts. Some Protestant learners may be reluctant to go into these areas as they are frightened by political flags, murals and graffiti, and they may fear feeling out of place in the classroom.

Neutral venues in which Irish is taught are very popular. A class in the Linen Hall Library, in the neutral centre of Belfast, has been attended by learners from as far away as Larne and Coleraine. Nevertheless, more Protestants are willing to cross the boundary lines between the two communities as the peace process deepens. For example, the Irish language centre An Droichead ('The Bridge') is located in a nationalist working-class part of Belfast, but its classes are attended by many Protestants.

In Belfast there is a series of classes in the Protestant east of the city, run by East Belfast Mission. Linda Ervine, the Mission's Irish language officer (who writes above), says that the learners give a public face to Protestant Irish speakers; "there have always been plenty of Protestants learning Irish quietly. We're just making it

visible" (*Irish Times*, 6 April 2013). The Mission organises events related to the Irish language culture, including trips to the Gaeltacht and Gaelic Scotland, thus providing a combination of learning opportunities and social activities for Protestant learners of Irish. The classes are very popular and have been welcomed by the local community, with no opposition from loyalist paramilitary groups.

Many Protestant learners like to go to the Gaeltacht to learn Irish as they feel more comfortable there. The holiday atmosphere of summer courses in the Republic,

combined with their physical and psychological distance from the problems of Northern Ireland, creates an atmosphere in which Protestant learners feel very relaxed:

> "It's quite clear to me that the language is far more important than political issues to them. Certainly of any of the other teachers that I've come across there haven't been any with a real interest in the politics of Northern Ireland anyway."

> "Whenever you go over the border, you just sort of – it's so – you know, you just feel this cloud lifting like you've shed this burden or something, you know, and it's so relaxed and people don't have the same problems."

An increasing number of Irish speakers are becoming involved in reconciliation work and bringing the language to Protestants in their own areas; in particular, there are projects which introduce Protestant schoolchildren to the language. I have taught an hour-long course in Irish to many pupils in Regent House School, in Newtownards, and the evaluations have been very interesting. Asked "What did you think of the

Irish language before today?" typical responses were: "dead language"; "weird"; "I didn't know anything" and "it was difficult to learn". When asked after the course "How have your opinions changed?" many had more positive attitudes such as: "it is awesome"; "I think it's class" and "it is easy to pronounce, hard to spell". When asked "Who speaks Irish?" the most popular answer was "Irish people" or "the Irish".

The number of Protestants showing an interest in the Irish language has risen rapidly. Publishers, journalists and civil servants have become more curious about the language as they encounter it in their daily work. Favourable reports about Irish speakers have appeared in unionist newspapers. More unionists accept the Irish language as part of Northern Ireland's culture, and some have made the decision to learn the language. For their part, many Catholic Irish speakers are becoming involved in reconciliation work involving the language. Young people, unaffected by the 'troubles', are far more open to meeting people of different backgrounds to explore Irish language issues.

Where does the Irish language stand?

Janet Muller

Irish belongs to the Celtic family of languages (along with Gaelic in Scotland, Manx on the Isle of Man, Welsh, Breton and Cornish). It is one of the oldest languages in Europe and has since 1922 been recognised in successive constitutions of the south of Ireland as the "national language" and "first official language".

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 represented an historic departure for the language. For the first time in the North, certain written commitments were made in respect of Irish. These appeared in the section of the document called, Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity, under Economic, Social and Cultural Issues. The GFA commitments are as follows:

4. In the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it:

- *take resolute action to promote the language;*

- *facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;*

- *seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;*

- *make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;*

- *place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with current provision for integrated education;*

- *explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifís na Gaeilige in Northern Ireland;*
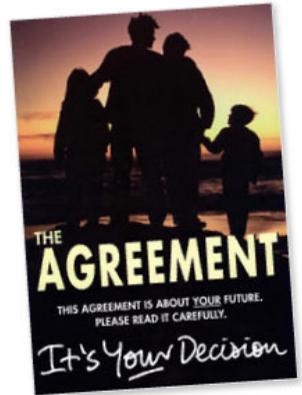
- *seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland; and*

- *encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.*

(This is the text as it appears in the official English language versions of the Agreement. Two of the three words in Irish in the text have been misspelled, including the word 'Gaeilge', the name of the language itself.)

The number of people in the North who speak Irish has also been on the increase according to each Census since 1991, when questions about Irish were included. The 2011 Census showed that people with knowledge of Irish made up 10.65% of the overall population: there were 184,898 people who had some ability in the language, an increase of over 17,000 in a decade. Importantly, the increase in the number of Irish speakers was not simply due to an increase in the overall population. In the ten years between the last two censuses, there was a fall of 1.92% in the section of the population aged 3-24 years (from 542,228 in 2001, to 531,805 in 2011). In spite of this reduction, in the same ten years the number of young people in that age range who understand spoken Irish increased by 75%, from 11,125 to 19,467. There are in 2014 80 Irish-medium schools in the North providing education for some 5,000 children.

Society in the North has changed a great deal in recent years. The Irish language now is stronger and subject to greater recognition than ever before, not only under the Good Friday Agreement and the Agreement at St Andrews (2006), both of which were treaties between the British and Irish governments, and by multilateral instruments such as the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and its Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, to which Britain is a party.

However, Irish is still the only primary indigenous language in these islands that is not subject to specific domestic legislative protection. Welsh has been protected by the Welsh Language Act since 1993, and this legal structure has been further developed by the Welsh Language Measure 2011. Gàidhlig is now subject to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The Irish language is of course the subject of constitutional protections and the Official Languages Act 2003 in the south of Ireland, and has been adopted as an official language of the European Union.

These are positive indications of the vitality of Irish, but international experience and research shows that the speakers of minoritised languages need to be able to use their language very frequently and in all walks of life so that the language itself continues to develop naturally. It is also important that the users of these languages feel valued and respected. So where does Irish in stand in this part of the world?

Looking back at the Good Friday Agreement

In March 2013, fifteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), the Irish language umbrella advocacy group POBAL did some research on community opinions of how effective the provisions of the Agreement had been for

Irish. The research showed high levels of dissatisfaction regarding the progress being made, with a range of community voices, including veteran activists, journalists, academics, teachers and parents flagging up failings at the level of legislation, services, funding and political leadership.

Education is a major factor in successful language revival and restoration, and the Good Friday Agreement makes specific reference to it. Today, Irish-medium education is one of the strongest of the Irish language sectors in the North. POBAL's research included a short survey of the attitudes and opinions of 140 people involved in Irish-medium education, or training as IM teachers, on the state of the language and of IM education fifteen years after the GFA. Respondents were asked to comment on their level of satisfaction as to the fulfilment of each of the commitments as they appeared in the Good Friday Agreement. Three questions were put regarding the level of importance which the respondents placed on legislative, policy and strategic approaches in relation to the development of the language and of Irish-medium education.

Some interesting patterns emerge in the 140 responses collected in relation to attitudes,[6] and some of the additional comments which respondents wrote on their survey forms. It may be significant to note that already, the passage of time and the age of respondents may have an influence on how matters are viewed. Amongst the comments noted on the forms, some related to age, with respondents saying they were 'ro-óg' / 'too young' at the time of the signing of the Agreement to remember clearly what the situation was for Irish beforehand. This shows the importance of rapid and effective implementation of change for young people. In the perceived

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[6] The full research report can be found on the POBAL website.

absence of this, there were general comments including 'Barraíocht de dhíth go fóill' / 'Too much still needed'; 'Na gealltanas ó Chill Rímhin agus ón Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta a chur i bhfeidhm ANOIS!' / Implement the GFA and St Andrews promises NOW!'; 'Níl go leor dul chun cinn déanta' / 'Not enough progress has been made'; and 'Tá sé in am Acht na Gaeilge a bheith againn' / 'It is time we had an Irish Language Act'.

The survey then goes on to ask three questions relating to legislation, policy and strategy development. The first asked what importance a comprehensive, rights-based Irish Language Act has to the development of the language and to Irish-medium education. 90.7% of respondents said that it was 'vital', 'very important' or 'important'. Of these categories, more than six times more people said the Irish language Act was 'vital' rather than 'important'.
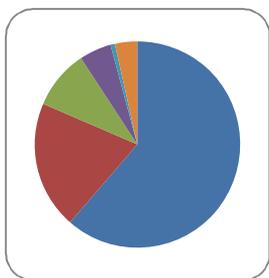
- Riachtanach/vital – 86 (61.4 %)
- Iontach tábhachtach/Very important – 28 (20%)
- Tábhachtach/Important – 13 (9.3%)
- Ní fios/Don't know – 7 (5%)
- Níl tábhacht leis/Not important – 1 (0.71%)
- Gan freagair/No answer given – 5 (3.6%)

The second of these questions asked what importance '*a comprehensive policy and more developed understanding of Irish-medium education within the Department of Education*' would have for the development of Irish and IM education. 93.56 % said it was 'vital', 'very important' or 'important'. Twice as many respondents felt this was 'vital' rather than 'very important'. 4.28 % did not answer the question.
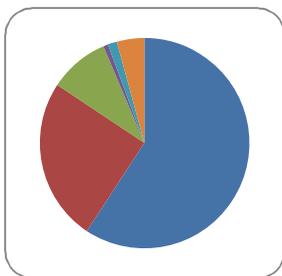
- Riachtanach/vital – 83 (59.3%)
- Iontach tábhachtach/Very important – 35 (25%)
- Tábhachtach/Important – 13 (9.3%)
- Ní fios/Don't know – 1 (0.7%)
- Níl tábhacht leis/Not important – 2 (1.4%)
- Gan freagair/No answer given – 6 (4.3%)

It is clear from POBAL's short survey that there was disappointment and a high level of dissatisfaction amongst respondents as to the progress being made in relation to

the development and promotion of Irish and IM Education and the perceived failure of government to act according to promises made. The longer this sense of feeling let down continues, the greater the danger that new generations will experience a sense of frustration and disappointment that, in spite of their own determination and hard work, obstacles and disadvantages remain an everyday reality.

Legislation

The language is protected in domestic legislation only in one clause in the Education Order 2000, and the need for comprehensive, appropriate domestic legislation for the Irish language in the north is one that has been clear to our community for many years. It has been a consistent demand from Irish speakers for over 30 years.

In February 2006, following intense work and with support and advice from internationally renowned experts in language legislation, POBAL ran a community consultation and published agreed proposals in the document *The Irish Language Act, NI* which was then updated in 2012. POBAL has called for rights-based legislation which would make Irish an Official Language and create a wide range of guaranteed rights for the use of the language in the media, in the courts, in education, in the political institutions, and in service delivery. The proposals are aimed at clarifying for civil servants and others to understand what they need to do, and at making it easier for Irish speakers to understand and use their rights. However, in spite of a clear commitment by the British government in the 2006 St Andrews Agreement to introduce an Irish language Act, no such legislation has yet been enacted.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The Charter is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages. The UK Government ratified the Charter on 27 March 2001. The Charter came into force on 1 July 2001. It is binding upon each of the ratifying states. Thus it has implications for all Northern Ireland departments and associated bodies, for Whitehall departments operating in Northern Ireland and for district councils. In Northern Ireland the general provisions of Part II of the Charter apply to Irish and Ulster-Scots. Part III of the Charter, which creates a number of specific obligations applies to Irish alone.

This point is made clear in a government circular:[7]

Should I make exactly the same provision for Irish and Ulster-Scots?

No. Both languages are different and your actions should reflect this. Whereas both Irish and Ulster-Scots are covered by the Objectives and Principles set out in Part II of the Charter – objectives and principles that entail definite obligations (see para. 11) – the Government has in addition ratified certain paragraphs and sub-paragraphs in Part III [Measures to promote the use of regional or minority languages in public life] and has agreed to apply them to Irish.

The UK Government must provide periodic reports to the Council of Europe Committee of Experts (COMEX) which reports on each state's compliance with its

Charter obligations. In addition to detailed commentary, the report notes whether, in the view of the Experts' the specific obligations of Part III have been fulfilled. In its third report on the application of the Charter, issued in 2010, the COMEX took the unprecedented step of changing a number of previous findings in respect of measures being taken for Irish, to 'unfulfilled'. This is a clear sign that the progressive implementation of the Charter is not being met. In relation to local Council services, the report comments,

The COMEX has been informed of several instances, especially within local councils where it was decided not to promote or use the Irish language within their services on the grounds that it would contravene Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, which states that public authorities should take due regard of the need to promote equality of opportunity, among others between persons of different religious belief or political opinion. The Committee of Experts emphasises that this undertaking states that the adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting

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[7] *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Guidance on Meeting UK Government Commitments in Respect of Irish and Ulster Scots* (Version 2), August 2005, Inter-Departmental Group on the Implementation of the Charter.

equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages.[8]

The COMEX published its 4th report in January 2014. In it, it states that the information provided by the UK on the application of the Charter was both late and incomplete, lacking information about the situation in Northern Ireland. The report notes that "The delay has hampered the process of timely and effective application of charter provisions throughout the UK" (para 2).

The report notes that a "persisting hostile climate" exists for the Irish language at the Assembly level. In addition, it states (paragraph 14):

The Committee of Experts strongly urges the authorities to provide an appropriate legislative base for the protection and promotion of Irish in Northern Ireland.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The Framework Convention was ratified by the UK in 1995. Its broad aims are to ensure that the signatory states respect the rights of national minorities, undertaking to combat discrimination, promote equality, preserve and develop the culture and identity of national minorities, guarantee certain freedoms in relation to access to the media, minority languages and education and encourage the participation of national minorities in public life.

In 2011 in its report on the application of the Framework Convention, the Council of Europe Advisory Committee focuses on the issue of provision for Irish speakers in the North, reinforcing the findings of the COMEX, above. The Committee states:

The Advisory Committee regrets that, in addition to a lack of clear legal guarantees for the use of the Irish language, there is a lack of promotion of the Irish language and culture. It understands that, in practice, very little is done to promote the use of Irish in the

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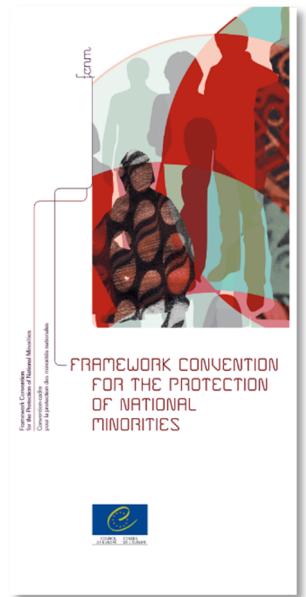
[8] ECRML (2010)4, Strasbourg 21 April 2010, *Application of the Charter in the UK, 3rd Monitoring Cycle,* p. 19, para. 123.

public sphere and that, although some Irish language officers have been appointed in a few municipalities, the possibilities to use this language in relations with local administrative authorities remain limited. It is also concerned that the overall climate in Northern Ireland does not encourage Irish speakers to use and develop their language freely. The Advisory Committee was disconcerted to hear that some representatives of the authorities consider that promoting the use of the Irish language is discriminating against persons belonging to the majority population. Such statements are not in line with the principles of the Framework Convention, and in particular with the provisions of Article 10. It also reiterates that, in line with Article 4.2 and Article 4.3 of the Framework Convention, implementation of minority rights protected under the Framework Convention are not be considered as discriminating against other persons…[9]

In relation to local Councils and signage, the Advisory Committee goes on to make the following points:

In Northern Ireland, the Advisory Committee regrets that only limited progress has been made regarding the erection of bilingual signposting and topographical indications, particularly road signs, despite the fact that there is, reportedly, a demand for this in a number of municipalities. Additionally, it finds it problematic that the official policy is to limit the erection of such signs to certain areas where the issue would not raise controversies.

Referring to a decision by Belfast City Council to reject in March 2011 a proposal to erect bilingual signs, the Advisory Committee states that it

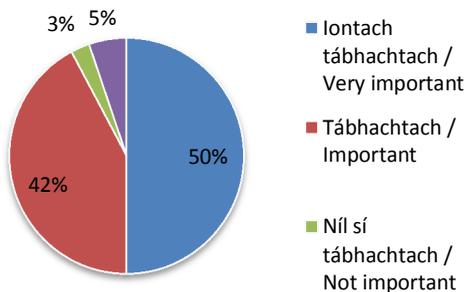*[...] is concerned that this approach is not in line with the spirit of the Framework Convention and, in particular, the provisions of Article 11, the aim of which is to value the use of minority languages, including through the setting up of bilingual signposting, with a view to promoting more tolerance and intercultural dialogue in society.*

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[9] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Strasbourg, 22 December 2011, *Third Opinion on the United Kingdom adopted on 30 June 2011*, ACFC/OP/III(2011)006, para. 147.

What do young Irish speakers think?

Services for Irish speakers have long been recognised as an important building block in society. In 2014, POBAL carried out an attitude and needs survey of 772 young Irish speakers throughout the north, aged between 11-24. Among the key points to note, are that 92.2% of respondents said that the Irish language was either 'very important' or 'important' to them.

An bhfuil an Ghaeilge tábhachtach duit? / Is the Irish language important to you?

- Iontach tábhachtach / Very important
- Tábhachtach / Important
- Níl sí tábhachtach / Not important

3% 5% 50% 42%

The results also show the major differences in English language provision for young people compared with Irish language provision. Only 35.4% of respondents said there was a good range of activities through Irish in their area, compared with 82.8% who responded positively for English language activities. Once more, the survey highlights the perception that provision should be underpinned by rights-based legislation. 95% of respondents said that language rights were important to them, and 94% responded 'yes' that an Irish language act is needed.

Conclusions

The Celtic languages are amongst some of the oldest written languages in the world. They include a unique collection of stories, music, sayings, place and personal names and ways of looking at and describing the world. In Scotland, Wales and the south of Ireland, there is recognition that these languages add to our shared wealth and heritage. In the North, positive interest in the Irish language continues to grow and there are an ever increasing number of creative, energetic Irish language projects and groups as well as new generations of young people who have been educated through the Irish language or learnt the language at school. Irish stands in a different place now than it did in previous generations, but much more can be done to bring about linguistic equality. Everyone can have a role to play in valuing the language and making greater space for Irish in our society, as has happened already for Welsh in Wales and as is happening for Gaelic in Scotland.

Living at a confluence of languages

Dr Chris McGimpsey

Favouring the Irish language was not exactly a big vote getter on the Shankill Road, but I represented that area on Belfast City Council from 1993 to 2005.

In a way, a Shankill profile was not altogether a bad thing in terms of insulating me from those in the unionist community, and they are still around, who are hostile towards all things Irish. For a wishy-washy middle-class liberal, an interest in our native tongue could be regarded as proof that you were soft on the Union. But being connected to an area with such a political pedigree would undoubtedly be helpful.

My interest in our native language, even though I speak barely a word, arose from my involvement in the Federation for Ulster Local Studies' campaign to save our townland names. In Irish your townland address can amount to a brief description of the area: Brockaghbuoy, brocach buí, yellow place of badgers; Edenderry, éadán doire, hill-face of the oak-grove; Dunamuggy, dún na mbógaigh, fort of the bogs. Proposals by Royal Mail to do away with the ancient descriptions of our local places was opposed, and in so doing a recognition of the role of Irish as a living language was enhanced.

As a child, growing up in that most Unionist of towns, Newtownards, we had our own dialect and accent – the outsider (usually townies from Belfast) stood out. One test word was the pronounciation of the name of the next village – Comber. Locals never pronounced the 'b'. It was always Cummer. Years later I discovered that the Irish word comar meant confluence of rivers, and this describes where the first settlement arose around the junction of Enler and Inver rivers. Thousands of years after that settlement was founded
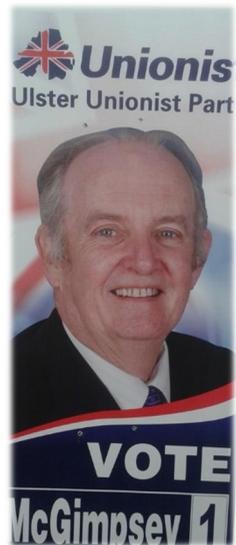
and it took the name it did, six miles away we still used the ancient name. Of course, progress and Belfast overspill long ago did for such echoes.

Looking back all those years when I worked as a member of ULTACH Trust to promote the Irish language I found my way to various parts of the island. But it was the reaction in Unionist areas of Northern Ireland that is of interest. Letters to the headmasters of the four principal grammar schools about getting Irish onto their curriculum brought different responses. I would happily name them here – but Gael Linn was happier that I didn't; two were broadly sympathetic, one showed no interest and the last headmaster's reply was both snooty and snotty.

The reaction in the Shankill was certainly more open than that of many in the Unionist communitiy. An early language class failed because two ladies had their shifts as cleaners in Belfast's offices changed, whereas the one male attendee was arrested and remanded in custody for certain scheduled offences. But the community in Glencairn, where the classes took place, showed no opposition. And after initial surprise at my advocacy of the Irish language, it ceased to be an issue. At that time the government appeared to some of us to have decided to "give the Prods a language to counterbalance Irish", and perhaps potential opponents were otherwise engaged setting up an Ulster Scots infrastructure.

Although still a non-speaker, my interest in the language has never faltered. It is an integral and living part of our cultural heritage and one which would leave us all the poorer if it were allowed to disappear.

Notes on Contributors

Micheál Ó Máirtín, a senior lecturer in Irish in St Mary's University College, is involved in Gaeltacht summer schools and is on the board of the literary magazine *An tUltach*.

Mícheál Ó Mainnín, a Professor in the School of Modern Languages at Queen's University Belfast, is Director of the Northern Ireland Placenames Project.

Aodán Mac Póilín is the Director of the ULTACH Trust, an organisation for the promotion of the Irish language on a cross-community basis.

Dr Peter Collins, a history lecturer in St Mary's University College, was one of the founders of *History Ireland* magazine and is an expert on the 1798 rebellion.

Linda Ervine is Irish language development officer with Turas, a project of East Belfast Mission.

Brian Mullen is a well-known presenter in the BBC's Irish language output, and is a highly respected traditional singer.

Dr Art Hughes, Reader in Irish at the University of Ulster, was formerly a lecturer at Queen's University Belfast and Armagh.

Laura Spence, formerly a producer with BBC Northern Ireland specialising in Ulster Scots, is the principal of Stone Circle Consulting working in cultural heritage, tourism and research.

Gordon McCoy, who worked with the ULTACH Trust from 1997 to 2015, completed his doctoral thesis on Protestant learners of the Irish language.

Janet Muller is chief executive of the Belfast-based Irish language umbrella organisation, POBAL.

Chris McGimpsey is an Ulster Unionist Party councillor, formerly in the Court district electoral area of Belfast, more recently in Castlereagh Borough, and from 2015 in the Lisnasharragh ward of Belfast City Council.