Language Planning and the Irish language (an Ghaeilge) in Ireland

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SL 362 – Language and Society
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Background and History

- Irish (Gaelic) is a Celtic language
  - Indo-European, but not “Standard Average European”
  - Has many (seemingly) “exotic” features
    - VSO word order like Classical Arabic and Hebrew
      - Ceannaíonn an gearrchaile an nuachtán.
        - buys (V) the young girl (S) the newspaper (O)
        - ‘The young girl buys the newspaper’
    - Initial consonant mutations
      - a cat [k] ‘her cat’, a chat [x] ‘his cat’, a gcat [g] ‘their cat’
When did early Goidelic come to Ireland?
- Not sure. Sometimes claimed 2000BC or before (doubtful), 600BC? 300BC?
  - Cf. English language coming to England 5th and 6th centuries AD
- Irish is claimed to have the oldest vernacular literature in Europe (after Greek and Latin)
Importance of Irish

- Link to history and culture
- Link to landscape – example: placenames
Muckanagherdauhaulia (in Co. Galway)
- (alternate spellings: Mwickanagherderrauhaulia & Muckenaghe Ederdahalye (1596))
- Can any one pronounce this or make sense of this? I certainly cannot!

But in it has meaning in Irish:

*Muiceanach idir Dhá Sháile*

[mʷɪkʲənˠəx ɛdʲəɾʲ̣ yaː həːljə]
“piggery between two briny (sea–water) places”
Carricknagalliaghduff (Co. Mayo)
Carraig na gCailleach Dubh
“Rock of the black(-haired) hags/witches/old women/nuns”
- Cormorant Rock (Co. Galway)
- Carraig na gCailleach Dubh
- Cailleach Dhubh (or broigheall) are Irish names for the Cormorant /Shag
- Cailleach (Dhubh), Cailleach Bhéara - also connected to Celtic goddess (divine hag) of winter??

Devilsmother
(old name: Magarlieandoon; mountain in Co. Galway)
Magairlí an Deamhain
“Testicles of the demon”
Másairli an Deamhain
Personal Names & Surnames

- **Bláthnайд** ‘little flower’
- **Caoimhín** ‘gentle birth/child’ (Kevin)
- **Niamh** ‘bright, radiant’
- **Lasairfhíona** ‘flame of wine’
- **Conchúr, Oí Conchobhar** ‘hound–lover’ (Con(n)or)
- **Ruairí** ‘red–haired king’ (Rory)

- **Mac Con Raoi** (Conroy) ‘son of the hound of the (battle) plain ~ son of the roaring hound’?
- **Ó Súilleabháin** (O’Sullivan)  *súil* + *dubh* + án
  ‘grandson of the little dark–eyed one’
- **Ó Caoimh** (O’Keefe) ‘grandson of the gentle one’
  - female (maiden name) form **Ní Chaoimh**
Current Status of Irish

- 2011 census (26 Counties)
  - 1.77 million claim to speak *(some!)* Irish. (41.4%!)
  - *(nonsense!...only small percentage are competent speakers)*
  - c. 77,000 daily speakers (outside of education system) (1.8%)
    - We count these as “active speakers”
      - But could you speak one of your handful of words/phrases every single day and count yourself a daily speaker?
      - True active users of Irish much lower – 35,000???
      - 10,000–15,000 true daily speakers (as primary language)???
  - 110,000 “weekly speakers”
  - Population of Official Gaeltacht c. 100,000
    - (includes many areas where Irish has been dead as a community language for couple of generations)
  - 23,175 daily speakers in the Gaeltacht (ie. c. 24% daily speakers vs. 68.5% who *can* speak Irish...)
From 2006 census: strength of Irish speaking community in the Gaeltacht

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category – % daily Irish speakers</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of total population of Official Gaeltacht</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 67%+</td>
<td>17,199</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 44% – 66%</td>
<td>9,780</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 30% – 43%</td>
<td>16,871</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 30%</td>
<td>51,653</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95,503</td>
<td>100%</td>
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• adapted from Donncha Ó hÉallaithe; [http://anghaeltacht.net/ctg/080323foinse.html](http://anghaeltacht.net/ctg/080323foinse.html)
How the English language came to Ireland:

- Anglo-Normans invasion in 1169
- Following the growth of Protestantism in England, Henry VIII began the Tudor Reconquest of Ireland in 16th century (1530s)
  - Goal to impose English law, language, culture and religion on the Irish
  - War, some ethnic cleansing, land confiscations, “plantations” (i.e. colonies) brought more English speakers to Ireland
Last of the native Gaelic aristocracy defeated, killed or exiled by early 1600s. Irish language and Gaelic culture were mostly confined to the lower classes by 1700. “Anglo-Irish” (the so-called “Protestant Ascendancy”) were in power.

- Penal Laws
- English spreading in towns and in the East. Irish still the language of rural areas, peasants and the western half of Ireland.
How the English viewed Irish:

“The words are the image of the minde, so as they proceeding from the minde, the minde must needes be affected with the words. So that the speach being Irish, the heart must needes bee Irish: for out of the abundance of the heart the tongue speaketh.”

“..it hath ever beeene the use of the Conquerour, to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all meanes to learne his”.
– Edmund Spenser, A View of the Present State of Ireland, 1633 (written c. 1596)

“we may conceive and hope that the next generation will in tongue and heart and every way else become English; so as there will be no difference or distinction but the Irish sea betwixt us.”
– Sir John Davies, 'A Discovery of the True Causes Why Ireland Was Never Entirely Subdued', 1612
Gaelic view of language shift

“Gan gáire fá ghníomhradh leinbh, cosc ar cheol, glas ar Ghaoidheilg”

“There is no laughter at children's doings, Music is prohibited, the Irish language is in chains”

(Trans: Tomás Ó Fiaich) – Aindrias Mac Marcais, *Talamh Bánaithe* (The Deserted Land) c. 1610

_Na mílte dínn...A ngoid san uíche do–níd na méirlig...Lódáil chobhlaig...mar sglábhuíocht díola...mar eallach chum tobac do dhéanamh._

(Thousands of us, the thieves (ie. soldiers) steal in the night...The loading of the fleet... like slavery sold...like livestock for the making of tobacco)

_“Mo lá leóin go deó go ñ–éagad” (=My day of sorrow until the day I die) by Éamonn (mac Donnchadha) an Dúna, (Co. Cork) c. 1658_
- Failed Irish rebellion in 1798
  - Act of Union in 1801 “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland”
  - “National schools” in 1831 (English only of course)
    - Often blamed for language shift to English (but the causes are much more complex than just this).
    - *Bata scoir* – children punished for speaking Irish.
- Increased role of government
  - English language necessary for attention from or any civic participation w/ English authorities.
Irish language in 1800
(reconstructed from literary sources and later census data)
Thomas Davis (1814–1845)

- At present the middle classes think it a sign of vulgarity to speak Irish—-the children are everywhere taught English and English alone in schools—-and, what is worse, they are urged by rewards and punishments to speak it at home, for English is the language of their masters… Will they meanly sacrifice the language which names their hills, and towns, and music, to the tongue of the stranger?
Famine & Immigration

- Irish still spoken by majority of population of Ireland (& was dominant in the West) until the Great Famine (An Drochshaol ‘the bad times’) 1845–1852
  - 20–25% population drop c. 1 million died & 1 million emigrated between 1845–52.
  - Population decline continued until 1960/70s
    - Population of Ireland 8.5–9 million on the brink of the “Famine” down to almost 4 million in 1930.
    - 6.4 million today? (the whole island)
  - It was the Irish–speaking West that suffered the greatest population loss.
Effect the Famine on Irish

- English needed to advance within English controlled/dominated Ireland as well as in the countries to which the Irish immigrated
  - Language shift began to gain momentum (even in West)
  - L1 Irish parents began to speak (broken) L2 English to their children
    - Irish became to be regarded as a sign of poverty and backwardness, ie. the Irish internalized the prejudices of the colonizers.
    - Cf. post–colonial Africa
Percentage of Irish speakers in 1871
Revival efforts

- Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (1876)
- *Conradh na Gaeilge* ~ The Gaelic League (1893)
- Irish language was an important part of Irish nationalism and the independence movement
  - Gaelic Revival (cultural movement)
  - An Ireland “Free and Gaelic” (*saor agus Gaelach*)
- 26 (of 32) Counties of Ireland gained independence from Britain in 1922 – Irish Civil War directly ensued.
  - b/c not happy about partition and less then complete separation from England.
Bunreacht na hÉireann – Constitution of Ireland (1937)

- 8.1 The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.
- 8.2 The English language is recognised as a second official language.

Irish taught in school system

- Required subject
- Naively thought that this was all that was needed to reverse the language shift and create an Irish-speaking Ireland/or bilingual Ireland...
  - Thought the education system could save everything (since English schools blamed for loss of Irish in the first place).
Fishman’s conclusion about the results of Irish in the schools:

- “Ireland has achieved most of what schools can be expected to achieve – an intergenerationally transmitted second language primarily associated with late adolescence – and that achievement seems to have been fairly successfully stabilized” (Fishman 1991: 144).

  - Too great a burden placed on the educational system alone, without other support, thus RLS did not occur.
Percentage of Irish speakers (ability) according to 1926 census
Irish did not spread—lost in the Breac–Ghaeltacht, stable in Fíor–Ghaeltacht (cf. red areas on that map) until 1960s/1970s.

Overall: Irish little used as L2
- School–Irish did not become family/home–Irish.

1970s government (Fine Gael) started scaling back support for the language.

Little done in the Gaeltacht
- Hypocrisy & tokenism
  - Many gov’t officials were still using English...
  - Currently 8/9 Garda in Gaoth Dobhair can’t conduct their business in Irish (but are paid more b/c they supposedly can?)
- Poverty, emigration, unemployment, little chance for further education (Irish education not available)
Changes in economic situation (government sponsored development) brought émigrés back to the Gaeltacht (with their English-speaking spouses and children) and attracted English-speakers from nearby parts of rural Ireland.

English interference in acquisition of Irish starting 1960–70s in core areas.

Incomplete acquisition of Irish especially since 1990s. (More about this later)

- Monoglot Eng speakers in Gaeltacht social/family networks
**Gaelscoileanna: Irish-medium education outside of Gaeltacht**

- 174 primary schools & 40 secondary schools in 32 Counties
- c. 40,000 students attending *Gaelscoils* (fully Irish/immersion Irish-medium education)
  - 32,551 students in primary schools; 8,620 in secondary schools
  - In 26 Counties (“RoI”) 5.9% of primary school students attending a *Gaelscoil* and 2.2% of secondary school students
    - Majority have no Irish at home.
Fás ar líon na ndaltaí ag freastal ar scoileanna lán–Ghaeilge sa Ghalltacht / The increase in the number of pupils attending Irish–medium schools outside the Gaeltacht 1990–2010
Sounds good, **but:**

- Evidence shows that there has been little long-term benefit of Irish-medium education to the Irish language
  - Very few *Gaelscoil* graduates are raising children in Irish; but do send their children to *Gaelscoileanna*
  - Thus, no progress – perpetually starting over from the beginning (L2 learning)
  - English usually the social language of the pupils.
Is there any hope for Irish in the Galltacht?

- *Carn Tochair* (near *Machaire Rátha*) in Co. Derry
  - Majority of area’s children in Irish-medium education
  - Serious about changing the community’s language back to Irish (last native speakers died c. 100 years ago)?
  - “Northern Ireland” – more support b/c it is a way to demonstrate ethnic identity and push back against dominant Unionist (ie. “Protestant”, pro-British) majority.
Is Irish “flourishing” or is it “dead”?

- Not dead, but dying/declining.
  - Unlikely to die as L2 in the near future – but in danger as L1/community language.

- Flourishing?
  - Would a flourishing language need a 20–year strategy, a language commissioner (to ensure that government organizations fulfil their linguistic obligations/ protect language rights), a special language act? Special language assistants in Gaeltacht schools? ...
Back to the Gaeltacht
Current officially recognized Gaeltacht areas
Percentage of Irish speakers (ability) over 3 years old in Gaeltacht areas in 1971
Percentage of active (daily) Irish speakers (usage) & Gaeltacht categories from 2007 study

Cat A: 67% + daily speakers
Cat B: 44–67% daily speakers
Cat C: < 44% daily speakers
Use of Irish by Gaeltacht youth (SCT)

- Category A (67%+ active Irish speakers)
  - 53% of young people raised totally/mostly in Irish
    - (80% of fathers and 71% of mothers have fluent Irish)
  - 91% say they speak fluent or good Irish
    - ie. Many are depending on education system
  - 94% claim they are strongly or quite in favor of Irish
  - 24% of young people usually speak Irish with their peers/friends (% falls to 9% if whole Gaeltacht is taken into account) = 25% effective transmission rate?
  - They do not think their current linguistic habits will impact the future:
    - 89% would raise their children with Irish
    - But active support of Irish? Only 35% claim to be willing to always speak Irish with their boyfriend/girlfriend...
Everyone acquires same level of English, not so in the case of Irish. L1 Irish speakers heavily influenced by L2 Irish speakers.
  ◦ Small number of Eng dominant has big impact

Identity defined by language contact & bilingualism:
  ◦ “Are you glad you were raised in Irish?” “Yeah, it’s nice to have a choice.” “Yeah, you have a second/another language.” Response from native speakers? = Ethnic displacement.
  ◦ Legitimacy of being ‘Xmen via Yish’ (à la Fishman)

Q: what percentage of (Gaeltacht) children will be raised with/through Irish in the next generation?
In response to *The Comprehensive Linguistic Study of Irish use in Gaeltacht* (2007) that concluded that the Gaeltacht only had 15–20 years left as an Irish speaking community.

Goal: increase daily speakers from c. 75,000 to 250,000 (!)

But focuses more on L2 learners of Irish from English-speaking Ireland, than on the Gaeltacht (where the linguistic crisis is).

- Mixes/confuses needs of L1 and L2 speakers and does little to address needs of L1 speakers.
Still no school curriculum appropriate for L1 speakers of Irish (!!)
  ◦ Same standards in “bilingual” country
    • =L1 English, L2 Irish (yet again focusing on the Anglicized majority)

20 Year Strategy hinges L2 acquisition and use of Irish on the better teaching of Irish as L2
In order to teach Irish better, teachers will be sent to spend more time in the Gaeltacht....
but the Strategy does little to ensure that any part of the Gaeltacht remains Irish–speaking....
Incomplete Acquisition of Irish

- L1 Irish now influenced pervasively (& exponentially) by English at all levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, idioms, extensive code-switching, limited Irish vocabulary, narrow range of register in Irish, “learner grammar” in speech of native speakers
- Gaeltacht education system acting as agent of English-language socialization
  - Language use with peers has more influence than home-language.
Examples of *Gaeilge laghdaithe* “reduced/deficient Irish”

- *Tá sí kind of annoyed.* (feelings expressed in Eng.)
- *Tá muid totally screwed.* (from American TV?)

- English influence on syntax: *Ag déanamh é* instead of *dха dhéanamh* ‘making it’
- Random use of gender marking/mutation: *an bean* (*an bhean*) ‘the woman’ *an athrú* (*an t–athrú*) ‘the change’
Idioms

- *Inseoidh an *t–am* ‘time will tell’ (calque) vs. traditional *Is maith an scéalaí an aimsir* (lit. “time is a good storyteller”)
  - = cannot understand Irish w/out knowing English.

- Not enough (quality) input in order to acquire the language fluently, interference from English.
- Many young speakers only have code–switching Irish (ie. Cannot not code–switch)
  - Code–switching, like bilingualism, in unidirectional (only in Irish, never in English)
Can grandparents and grandchildren understand each other?

*Rá*(faidh) tú le mo mhamaí....?

- (something like [rəː tuː l̂ɛ mə waːmʷiː])
- *Rá* (verbal noun) being inflected like a finite verb
  - (‘Will you say to my Mommy’)
- Instead of the future tense of the verb: *an ndéarfaidh tú* or *an abróidh tú*
- This also displays this young speaker’s reduced vocabulary; (s)he wants to say “will you ask my Mommy” (=*An bhfiafróidh tú de mo mhamaí*...?)
- Traditional speakers interpret *Rá tú le mo mhamaí* as *An raibh tú le mo mhamaí* [(ən) rə (~ro~rau) tuː l̂ɛ mə waːmʷiː:] “were you with my Mommy?”
  - (sample from Ó Curnáin 2009: 115)
“Aoife” (female, from Gaoth Dobhair, born 1992):

- So, yeah. So nuair a, like nuair a deirim iad i mBéarla, tá siad like, caithfidh mé smaoineamh ar mo focla, ‘cause caithfidh mé just déanamh cinnte go bhfuil mé ag, ag ráit iad mar is ceart.

- So yeah. So when, like when I say them [stories] in English, they are like, I have to think on my words, ‘cause I have to just make sure that I am saying them properly.
"If the productive use of Irish cannot be established on a broader basis than within certain family and limited neighbourhood networks, and if the Gaeltacht education system is unable to establish an Irish language-centred socialisation process within its schools, this study will have unfortunately documented the dynamics presaging the final stages in the lifecycle of the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking community."

– Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, Conchúr Ó Giollagáin & Seosamh Mac Donnacha, Acadamh Na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, NUI Galway, 2007 (27)

"But language shift is indicative of a culture’s inability to control or significantly influence the rate and direction of change"

(Fishman 1989: 400–1, Conclusions, ‘Endangered Languages’).
Hannah Ní Bhaoill from *Rann na Feirste* in Co. Donegal, in NW Ireland.

- 22 years old, native Irish speaker, a very traditional/conservative speaker for her age.
- *Rann na Feirste* = “promontory of the tidal ford/ridge of sand in tidal waters”
  - Townland of 300–400(?) people, renowned for story-telling tradition, song, and richness of Irish (+2 famous authors)
Conclusion

- Do any of you have any suggestions?
- What do you think could be done to help the Irish language? Any ideas?
Suggestions from some Irish and Welsh sociolinguists (focusing on indigenous minority language communities)

- Postponed bilingualism/early minority language monolingualism for Irish-speaking families in the Gaeltacht
- Accelerated bilingualism/Productive L2 bilingualism for English-speakers in the Gaeltacht
- Ensure that socialization of youth takes place in Irish
  - No English speakers allowed in Gaeltacht schools until they know enough of the language to function? Special acquisition schools for English speakers in the Gaeltacht?
  - Resistance to this and anything that “separates/divides” people. Too challenging.
- New *Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge*