

finding such a representative sample is that the actual population is quite small.

⁷ One can join these lists by sending the following message to listserv@tc.umn.edu sub celtic-t <yourfirstname> <yourlastname>

Replace "celtic-t" with "lctl-t" to subscribe to the more general list. For more current information, see <http://carla.acad.umn.edu/LCTL/LCTL.HTML>

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Constructing a Gaelic Dictionary for Children: some phonological and orthographic considerations

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The substance of this paper was generated by a research project I was commissioned to carry out on behalf of the Primary Review Group on Gaelic Education (PRG), which has powers to disburse specific grants from the Scottish Office Education Department designed to provide for Gaelic in education. The efficiency of this system is the subject of a current research project of mine and will doubtless bear fruit in further papers. In 1994, the PRG viewed my findings on the present level of dictionary provision in Gaelic and then asked me to compile a basic Gaelic-Gaelic dictionary for children to use in their Primary School classrooms. There were many difficulties in this task, some of them foreseen, others unforeseen. I mean to outline two of these difficulties here in the hope that anyone facing the task of writing a monolingual dictionary for a minority language in future may thus be forewarned if not forearmed.

Scottish Gaelic is a minority language which has not always been so, which means that it now has a relatively large demographic spread considering the number of speakers of the language. The 1991 census recorded that there were under sixty six thousand people in Scotland who considered themselves to be Gaelic speakers. There is no need to enter into an analysis of whether the majority of these people are fluent speakers or are people with a prejudiced view of their ability to speak Gaelic or else are people with specific political agendas which involve cultural and linguistic goals. The fact remains that sixty-six

thousand people could easily fit into a fair sized town like Stirling, or else a suburb of Edinburgh, or could be lost entirely in the Glasgow conurbation. But the Gaelic speech community is not nearly so concentrated as this. Only around half of the country's Gaelic speakers live in the area generally associated with them - for the most part, Lewis and the other Hebrides - whereas the rest are spread throughout much of Scotland, especially the central belt.

Most Gaelic speakers living in Glasgow and elsewhere belong to Highland and Island families who have moved to the industrial areas in search of work. The majority of mainland dialects of Gaelic are long dead. In spite of the death of most Gaelic dialects and the moribund state of others, there still exists a rich and complex diversity of accents, diction, syntax and morphology in the various mini speech communities which remain. Indeed, this diversity is so great that mutual comprehension is not always guaranteed between two speakers from different islands, for instance.

There is really no Gaelic equivalent of Received Pronunciation, and so there is no obvious standard of pronunciation suitable for use as a guide in dictionaries and word books. No dialect can be considered as dominant or standard, so the choice of one or another for pronunciation guides is almost totally dependent on the dialect spoken by the writer of the guide.

Rather shortsightedly, children of Primary age in Scotland are not taught to read or produce the International Phonetic Alphabet, so this could not be employed in a pronunciation guide. This leaves the option of some kind of 'layman's phonetics'. These would probably have to be invented by the author and would represent no more than an attempt at the author's own perception of the phonemes. Since these would not necessarily be helpful, and would certainly clutter the entries, it would be hard to recommend their inclusion in children's dictionaries.

One difficulty caused by Gaelic phonology is actually related to Gaelic's distinctive morphology. This difficulty is the phenomenon of initial mutation. Gaelic is unusual

among European languages in having such a fully developed system of initial mutation. Like very many languages, Gaelic also features internal and terminal mutation, both of which can cause lexicographical problems. However, initial mutation is clearly the most problematic of all for the lexicographer: so much so, indeed, that the traditional European convention of alphabetically ordered dictionaries may not be ideal for Gaelic at all. It would not be a waste of effort or resources to assign a research team to investigate this problem of initial mutation and look at ways in which Gaelic dictionaries could be constructed so as to avoid alphabetical order.

The Gaelic alphabet follows the same order as that of English, except that in Gaelic there is no **j, k, q, v, w, x, y, z**. The letter **h** does not begin any indigenous Gaelic words, but it is used extensively to indicate lenition (or aspiration) of the consonants **b, c, d, f, g, m, p, s,** and **t**. This lenition causes a radical alteration in the pronunciation of the said consonants. This alteration is, of course, easily learnt and remembered. It could cause problems, though, when a child attempts to look up a word beginning with a lenited consonant. In the first instance, this could be troublesome, because the child might tend to look for words beginning with **h** as their second letter. The word *bòrd* (nominative singular), for example, becomes *bhòrd* in the dative singular. The child, having heard *bhòrd*, may initially look for it under **bho-**, rather than under **bo-**. It should not be a serious difficulty to eradicate this particular problem by the use of work books and specific exercises in the class: after all the entire language is affected by this phenomenon, and so it is serious enough and widespread enough to warrant a considerable amount of classroom time. However, a greater problem arises due to the homophonous nature of lenited consonants. When **b** is lenited, it sounds like a lenited **m**; when **d** is lenited, it sounds like a lenited **g**; when **s** is lenited, it sounds like a lenited **t**; indeed, a lenited **c** is not altogether unlike the lenited **s** and **t** in some dialects; and, a lenited **p** sounds like an unlenited **f**, while a lenited **f**

is silent, apart from where it appears in a certain three words in the language, at which junctures it sounds like lenited *s* or *t*. So, even when the child learns not to look for *h* as the second letter, there is still a problem concerning which section of the dictionary to look up. If I hear /v/, do I look up **bh-** or **mh-**?

There is a similar problem to this with regard to verbs which begin with a vowel or the letter *f*. In the past tense, these verbs are preceded by **dh** which means that they sound just like words beginning with either **dh** or **gh**. This generally leads children to look up these words under **d** rather than under the initial letter of the stem of the verb. Thus, this problem is a secondary development encountered after children have begun to master the idea of lenition and the way it can affect the sound of a word. Nothing innovative has been attempted to combat this problem in adult Gaelic dictionaries, in spite of the large proportion of learners of the language and in spite of the widespread illiteracy and lack of reading competence among native speakers. The Acair publication Na Facail has dealt with the problem simply by adding an extra letter section: **dh'**-. This section comes after **d-** and before **e-**, and the handful of words which are normally thought to start with **dh** are listed, along with a few verbs in their past tense. There is, of course, no reason why double letters should not be considered as a single sound and given a section of their own in a dictionary. Spanish, for instance, treats **ch**, **ll**, and **rr** as separate letters, with **ch** and **ll** being afforded their own letter sections in Spanish dictionaries (there are no words beginning with **rr**, or else they would receive the same treatment). Gaelic has been furnished with dictionaries for centuries, but, because of the limited number and uninspired nature of these books, there is no reason why a practice such as this could not be adopted universally in the future. Such a gap has opened between the publication of the last major dictionary in the language and any future major dictionary that Gaelic could thus be given a fresh start without leading to general confusion. In

the meantime, children's dictionaries and other alphabetically ordered reference books must find a way to overcome the problem. In Mo Chiad Fhaclair, I have chosen to follow the example of Na Facail fairly closely. For the time being, there is no reason why all words beginning with **dh-** should not be found under **d** rather than in a separate section. This should help to alleviate confusion. Verbs which form their past tense by adding **dh'** can be listed with a cross reference to their stem word, giving the child a usage example under the headword and the opportunity to look up the definition under the 'master' headword. Although this is not an ideal solution, it would surely become a most straightforward pattern to use after a few attempts, and instruction in the method could be reinforced by exercises from work books or normal classroom reading material.

The fact that Gaelic has never had a standard spelling system is another lexicographical problem. Widespread illiteracy and the large distances between Gaelic speech communities have meant that a number of different ways of spelling have continued to be in use up to the present day. In this age of global telecommunications, however, failure to provide and adopt a standard universally can only be due to narrow minded conservatism and inter-dialectal prejudice. However, these biases are shifting and this fact is partly a consequence of the Scottish Examination Board's report on Gaelic spelling which was published more than a decade ago. This report was undertaken when it became patent that exam candidates'

...standard of spelling fell far below the requisite levels on both the Ordinary and Higher grades (Scottish Education Department 1984, p. 3).

In other words, even candidates for national exams, who had been coached at the highest levels in schools, could not satisfy the examiners with regard to spelling. The Board's Gaelic Panel

...indicated its belief that the lack of an authoritative set of published orthographic conventions to which reference might be made by teachers and candidates, both native speakers and learners alike, was an important factor leading to this situation (Scottish Education Department 1984, p. 3).

A Sub-Committee of educated Gaelic speakers was gathered for the production of this set of conventions and the Scottish Examination Board began to use the conventions in 1985.

Although the primary purpose of the orthographic conventions seems to have been to introduce a nationally acceptable standard of spelling for use in education and examination situations, the existence of such a standard is of wider importance.

It is hoped that the principles set out in this document will go some way towards removing the inconsistencies, indecisions and minor irritations that arise from the absence of a firmly defined standard, and that in doing so they will help teachers and learners (and indeed all writers of Gaelic) to write the language more confidently (Scottish Education Department 1984, p. 3).

The fact that a standard has been drawn up is a far more significant matter than simply one of 'removing the inconsistencies, indecisions and minor irritations' that would otherwise exist; a standard spelling convention is a positive step towards official status for the language.

The report concentrates on ways of dealing with some matters which have been the cause of contention in the past: consonant quality; consonant groups and the simplification of these; vowel representations; word stress; the article, abbreviation and the use of apostrophes; borrowed words; irregular verbs; and prepositional phrases and prepositional pronouns. The report includes a word list which illustrates the usage of some of the recommendations. It was always considered essential that

Mo Chiad Fhaclair should incorporate these spelling conventions.

The problem is that people simply do not abide by the conventions as they are set out. Many people adhere religiously to archaic forms because they insist that these are more correct or historically more accurate for Gaelic (sic.). Others use their own personal spelling system or else follow one of the renegade modern systems, such as that employed by Ronald Black in *The Scotsman* newspaper. Most people who write the Gaelic language, however, are not even as consistent as this. They use a hotch-potch of all systems and non-systems, with the result that it is not unusual to read a document written by the same person featuring more than one spelling form for the same word. While this can happen on occasion in English, it is not something which we would consider to be a normal feature of the written language.

Due to certain ambiguities in the official orthographic conventions, there are areas where personal interpretation is required. Generally, these areas of interpretation are accorded far greater importance than they objectively merit. Should a word be spelled with a *d* or a *t*; should there be a grave accent over a certain vowel or is it unnecessary; should there be an *e* at the end of a word where some people would voice one and others wouldn't? As a matter of policy, it is desirable to demonstrate consistency when addressing questions like these. However, given the authority vested in dictionaries (Ilson 1985), some L1 speakers will be concerned to see that their favoured interpretation of a particular ambiguity is being overlooked; they may, indeed, feel threatened. The need for compromise arises. And, at that point, the whole question of consistency and standardisation breaks down once more.

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Teaching Forum

Cutting, Pasting, and Learning Irish:
Poetry as Pedagogy

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Stimulated by a presentation given by Dr. Mary Ann Julian on using literature to teach language¹, I decided to experiment with one of the techniques she suggested. Dr. Julian had given participants, teamed in pairs, strips of paper each containing one line of the poem "The Oxen" by Thomas Hardy. The object was to work together and assemble the poem in correct order, using such clues as rhyme scheme, word order, discourse sequence and narrative continuity. Even as one of few present for whom English was the first language, I found the project challenging and rewarding and decided I would eventually try it with my Irish classes at the University of Pennsylvania.

Upon examining several poetry anthologies, I found that selecting an appropriate poem would be a challenge. I considered some selections by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill since I knew the media attention she has received was of interest to my students. On closer examination, however, I decided the rhyme schemes were too irregular or too fluid for this purpose although they might be suitable for a more advanced class. I then turned to older traditional material and was reminded of the complications which would arise from the concatenations of internal rhyme characteristic of Irish poetry; the works may be very metrical but the rhyme may not be carried by the final word. Conceivably one could have students reconstruct internal rhyme schemes on a phrase by phrase basis, but I did not want to have too many tiny slips of paper! I also eliminated other selections with too much use the same final vowel which made end-rhyme useless as a clue and would make the project harder than necessary.

I finally settled on the ever popular "Mise Raifteirí,"² short but tightly constructed, and the more contemporary

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