LATIN IRISH: SIMPLY INDICATING SOUNDS

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Abstract

There are at least two general approaches to symbolic representation of the sounds of Irish using broad transcriptions. One commonly used representation is some variation of the International Phonetic Alphabet, effectively respelling a word ‘phonetically’. Other forms of respelling the words of the language, using combinations of the letters of the alphabet of that language or some other language, are commonly used. In this paper, a simple respelling mechanism, based on the Latin alphabet and which can be easily mapped to the IPA or into other respelling systems, is suggested for Irish.

Introduction

There are at least two general approaches to symbolic representation of the sounds of Irish using broad transcriptions. One commonly used representation is some variation of the International Phonetic Association’s alphabet - known as IPA (2011) - effectively respelling a word ‘phonetically’. Other
forms of respelling the words of the language, using combinations of the letters of the alphabet of that language or some other language are commonly used. There are also variants of the IPA, such as X-Sampa and Kirshenbaum (Wikipedia), to facilitate keyboard entry. In this paper, a respelling mechanism, which can be easily mapped to the IPA or into other respelling systems, is suggested for Irish.

IPA and Respelling Systems

The IPA is commonly used in the symbolic representation of sounds for languages. However, modifications to the IPA are commonly used by Irish linguists, such as, Ó Baoill in Foclóir Póca (1986) and Ó Sé in Gaeilge Chorca Dhuibhne (2000). Lars Braesike gives a list of common variations in a chapter on phonology in Gramadach na Gaeilge (2003). One such common modification is in the representation of slender (palatal) consonants. The slender consonant is shown with ‘’ following it, for example, slender ch is shown as [ç] in the IPA alphabet and as [x’] by (some) Irish linguists.

There are many respelling representations used, particularly by authors of texts written for learners. Respelling systems are used by Ua Duinnín in the Irish-English Dictionary (1927) and by An Seabhac in Learner’s Irish-English Pronouncing Dictionary (1959). Ua Duinnín and An Seabhac give general guidelines based on the English as spoken in Ireland with, on occasions, details for particular words. The following are suggestions on the pronunciation of ‘broad’ d:

D  broad as in dòigh like though and [something] like d in dough
Ua Duinnín  hope, expectation
D, dd (br) as in: dáil, dó, dún, daoine (ddin) (not in English).
(tongue tip flat and firmly against upper front teeth)

An Seabhac  meeting, to him, sbut, people

Callan, in Irish Phrasebook (2004), respells each phrase with the respelling based on English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dúnta</td>
<td>doonta</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freastal</td>
<td>frastal</td>
<td>attendance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proposed System

The proposed system is set out below, the phonetic representation used being based on Lárchanúint den Ghaeilge (1986). There is a close correspondence between the proposed system and with the IPA symbols necessary for a broad transcription. Whether using the IPA system or a respelling system, there is time needed for the user to get to know which sound is associated with which symbol. The IPA has an apparent advantage in that it does not require relearning for each text in which it is used. Those who prefer respelling may feel the IPA is too complex.

The Symbols Of The Proposed System

A slender consonant is represented by a capital letter of the Latin alphabet. The IPA symbol is shown first, then the symbol use in Foclóir Póca (1986) and then the proposed symbol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Ó Néill</th>
<th>An Seabhac</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b'</td>
<td>b'</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>k'</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k'</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d'</td>
<td>d'</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f'</td>
<td>f'</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g'</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l'</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m'</td>
<td>m'</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n'</td>
<td>n'</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p'</td>
<td>p'</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r'</td>
<td>r'</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s'</td>
<td>s'</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t'</td>
<td>t'</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The broad consonants are represented by lowercase letters of the Latin alphabet

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
 b & b & k & k \\
 f & f & g & g \\
 m & m & n & n \\
 r & r & s & s \\
\end{array}
\]

Other consonant sounds – slender
(bh, mh, dh and gh are part of several graphemes giving various sounds and sometimes no sound. Below is a simple grapheme-phoneme relationship, giving sounds which correspond to two letter graphemes.)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{bh, mh} & v^i & v' & V \\
\text{ch} & \varsigma & x' & X \\
\text{dh, gh} & j & y' & J \\
\text{ph} & \text{as for slender f} \\
\text{sh, th} & \text{as for h} \\
\text{ng} & \eta & \eta' & Q \\
\end{array}
\]

Other consonant sounds – broad

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ch} & x & x & x \\
\text{dh, gh} & y & y & j \\
\text{bh, mh} & w & v & v \\
\text{ph} & \text{as for broad f} \\
\text{sh, th} & \text{as for h} \\
\text{ng, nn} & \eta & \eta' & \eta \\
\end{array}
\]

Long vowel sounds are shown as capital letters
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
 a: & A \\
 e: & E \\
 i: & I \\
 o: & O \\
 u: & U \\
\end{array}
\]

The short vowel sounds are shown as lower case.
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
 a & a & a \\
 e & e & e \\
 i & i & i \\
 o & o & o \\
 u & u & u \\
\end{array}
\]

The neutral vowel is shown as the underscore
\[
\_ \_ 
\]

The diphthongs are shown as single letters.
(See Ó Sé, for diphthongs of Corca Dhuibhne and their IPA representation pp. 24, 25)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{ai} & ai & y & iə & iə & Y & uə & au & w \\
\text{ua} & W \\
\end{array}
\]

J is used to represent pronunciation of slender gh, dh and so, j is used for broad dh, gh dhún /ɣu:n/ would be shown as /jUn/

A few examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orthographic Form</th>
<th>IPA Symbols</th>
<th>Foclóir Póca Symbols</th>
<th>Proposed Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bang</td>
<td>/bˠan/</td>
<td>/ban/</td>
<td>/baq/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>/kat/</td>
<td>/kat/</td>
<td>/kat/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leabhar</td>
<td>/lˠaur/</td>
<td>/laur/</td>
<td>/lwr/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhún</td>
<td>/ɣu:n/</td>
<td>/ɣu:n/</td>
<td>/jUn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhíol</td>
<td>/ɣi:l/</td>
<td>/ɣi:l/</td>
<td>/JIl/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slua</td>
<td>/sˠluə/</td>
<td>/slu/</td>
<td>/slW/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saghad</td>
<td>/said/</td>
<td>/said/</td>
<td>/syd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The system is being tested in the on-line version of the Irish–English dictionary by Ua Duinnín for searching for words containing certain sounds (Ó Néill).

The symbols can be put into correspondence with a (simple) respelling system. For example, a common respelling of á is aw, and c is often changed to k:

 cá - kaw - /kA/

Other sounds:
- J of jab: [c] [ʃ]; job
- X of xileafón: [Z]; xileafón
- W of wigwam: [\]; wigwam
- Z of zú: [z]; zoo

Conclusion

In this paper is detailed a respelling set of symbols for use in broad transcriptions of Irish. The symbols can be mapped to the IPA or other systems. It could also be used for entering Irish text.

References:


May 19, 2011, from: http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/


