Irish Language (historical linguistic overview)

David Stifter
Maynooth University
david.stifter@nuim.ie

Words: 5560

The Irish language has been the main, but never the sole means of communication on the island of Ireland from the dawn of history until the beginning of the modern period when it began to be superseded by English. Over the more than 1.500 years of its written attestation, it has undergone substantial changes in its grammatical and lexical aspects, partly reflecting its changing sociolinguistic and cultural role.

1. Linguistic characteristics

Irish is a Celtic language that, via Proto-Celtic (*c*. 1.000 B.C.), can be derived from the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European language that was spoken in the Neolithic *c*. 6.000 years ago. Through this ancestry, Irish is very distantly related to most European languages and to many more in the Near and Middle East. This relationship not only means that linguistic features and many lexical items of Irish were inherited from the ancestral speech group, but it also entails the possibility that items of cultural and spiritual significance go back to this origin. Within the Indo-European supergroup, Irish belongs to the Celtic subbranch which today occupies the western fringes of Europe, but which in antiquity extended much further to the East into Central Europe. The closely related varieties of Gaelic languages outside of Ireland – Scottish Gaelic, historically spoken in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and Manx, an extinct, but now revitalised language on the Isle of Man – ultimately form a dialect continuum especially with the northern varieties of Irish. The separation of these languages happened as late as the early middle ages when colonists from Ireland crossed the Irish Sea and established permanent settlements in Northern Britain and adjacent islands. Similar colonies from southern Ireland in southern parts of Britain, esp. in Wales, did not survive into recorded history. The British Celtic languages (Welsh, Cornish, Breton) and the extinct ancient languages of the Continent (especially Gaulish, Lepontic, Celtiberian) are more distantly related, but provide essential information for the diachronic elucidation of Irish.

The periods of attested Irish are traditionally divided into Proto-Goidelic pre-4th century A.D., Primitive Irish c. 4th–6th centuries, Archaic Irish (or Early Old Irish) c. 7th century, Old Irish c. 8th–9th centuries, Middle Irish c. 10th–12th centuries, and Modern Irish from 1200 onwards, the latter in turn divided into Classical (or Early) Modern Irish pre-1650, and dialectally differentiated Modern Irish since the middle of the 17th century. For the entirety of attested linguistic stages up to Middle Irish the cover term Early Irish is conveniently used.

The authoritative description of Old Irish (for the history see Russell 2005 and Ó Dochartaigh 2000) is Thurneysen (1946). Pedersen (1909–13), McCone (1994) and Stifter (2009) provide supplementary information. The main lexicographic work for the language from Old Irish up to Classical Modern Irish (early 17th century) is the *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, in its revised electronic version (eDIL; online at: edil.qub.ac.uk/). The main etymological resource is *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien* (LEIA), unfinished as of yet. The prehistory of the Irish sound system and its transformations in the historic period are discussed in McCone (1996). Any linguistic trait that deviates from the Old Irish standard but does not yet conform to the Classical Modern Irish standard, is regarded as Middle Irish (*c*. 900–1200), irrespective of whether it is a genuine innovation or a hypercorrect aberration, as not infrequently happens. Because of its transitional character and the concomitant uncertainty about the authenticity vs. artificiality of many forms, the grammatical description of Middle

Irish lags behind that of its ancestor and successor stages. Breatnach (1993) is the most extensive description, besides a concise overview in McCone (2005: 173–217), and a study devoted to the changes in the verbal system in McCone (1997: 163–241).

After the Middle Irish re-structurings and simplifications, Classical Modern Irish (*c.* 1200–1650) emerges, a learned written standard language again, meticulously safeguarded against the natural transformations of the spoken language by a professional class of scholars and poets. A succinct description of it is McManus (1994). Its history is treated by Doyle (2015); primary sources for the language history, from the Statutes of Kilkenny 1366 onwards, are edited by Crowley (2000). Ultimately, this register of the language had to give way to the dialectally differentiated variants of Modern Irish (*c.* 1650–present) when the social fabric, which had held the Gaelic World and its autochthonous educational system together, was forcefully removed in conflicts with the English Crown in the 17th century. The modern spoken form of Irish has three distinct dialects (Munster, Connacht, Ulster) and one superimposed official standard (*An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*).

While the prehistoric Goidelic can be reconstructed with the features of a typical Indo-European inflectional language, similar in structure and behaviour to Latin or Ancient Greek, or to its less well attested sister-idiom Gaulish, massive phonological changes (esp. lenition, apocope, syncope of every second internal syllable, palatalisation; cf. McCone 1996) around the middle of the 1st millennium A.D., coinciding roughly with comparable transformations in other languages on the British Isles and in Western Europe, caused a major shake-up of the morphology and morphosyntax that seriously affected the typological character of the language. As a consequence, Old Irish stands out with an exceptionally intricate sound system that was only partially simplified in Middle and Modern Irish. Morphologically, Old Irish can be characterised as an overspecifying language which encodes grammatical information that has no communicative and semantic significance, while adding at the same time to the morphological complexity. It is almost prototypical for a language whose behaviour cannot be described adequately by synchronic rules alone. Its notoriously complex surface allomorphies, especially in the inflectional morphology of verbs, but also in derivation, often receive elucidation only on the level of the quite dissimilar underlying forms viewed from a diachronic perspective. In practice, what this means, is that during their first-language acquisition native speakers of Old Irish had to memorise a vast number of seemingly aberrant inflectional forms, lacking straightforward synchronic rules to generate all of them. Naturally, such a disparity between underlying forms and surface representations must have exerted pressure on the speakers towards the simplification of the system.

Irish shares grammatical characteristics with the British Celtic languages that set it apart from most European languages. The most conspicuous are:

1. Initial mutations: the initial sounds of words, especially consonants, undergo systematic changes that are triggered by grammatical properties of the preceding words or, occasionally, by specific syntactic contexts.

2. Nominal and, to a slightly lesser degree, verbal inflection is frequently expressed or accompanied by changes of stem-internal vowels and/or by alternations of internal consonants. This behaviour places the language in an areal context with other north-west and north European languages. Over time, the amount of inflectional alternations has been reduced on a broad scale, but even in Modern Irish traces of this behaviour remain.

3. Syntactically, Old Irish is a strict head-initial language, as illustrated by its verb-subject-object word order, or by the fact that nominal attributes regularly follow their head nouns.

4. A double set of endings in the inflection of verbs, creating a distinction between so-called absolute forms when verbs occur unmodified, and conjunct forms when they are preceded by sentential or lexical particles. This feature was largely lost in the modern language. Despite traces of such a system in the British languages, it had been largely abandoned there already by the beginning of their written attestation.

5. Systematic cliticisation of pronouns after verbs, preverbal particles, and prepositions that led to a large-scale absence of stressed pronouns. This trend was reversed after the Old Irish period when new independent pronouns arose, but clitic pronouns remain a notable feature in various grammatical environments.

6. A strict morphosyntactic distinction between a stressed existantial verb 'to be' (the so-called substantive verb) and an unstressed copula.

7. Communicative emphasis on sentential constituents is achieved by processes of movement and displacement, not by accentual means.

In the centuries after the completion of the massive transformations that led to the creation of Old Irish, the rate of language change slowed down, but it continued on the same trajectory, e.g. reductions of unstressed syllables and the concomitant weakening of phonological oppositions. While the phonological changes during the historic period are moderate, compared to the prehistoric changes, their knock-on effect on the morphology nevertheless transformed the language decisively. Consequently, over the past two millennia, Irish has been moving from a synthetic to a more analytic type of language, in the recent past under the clear influence from English and through phenomena of language contact, especially through the transference of structural features by non-native speakers. This development can be observed for instance in the slow demise of noun inflection, the replacement of nominal compounding by nominal phrases with dependent genitives, and the re-introduction of personal pronouns that reduce the functional load on verbal endings. Old Irish is so far removed from Modern Irish as Spanish or French are from Latin.

Despite its marginal position in Western Europe, Irish was in constant contact with other languages. The extent to which submerged prehistoric languages of the British Isles influenced Irish is disputed. However, it is likely that some placenames and a portion of the lexicon that is not amenable to Indo-European etymology was borrowed from such substrate sources, e.g., words for specific items of the insular fauna and flora, such as ModIr. *partán* 'crab', or *giomach/gliomach* 'lobster'. It is probably also legitimate to attribute some unanalysable placenames to precursor languages, such as OIr. *Liphe* 'the area around the river Liffey' and *Temair* 'Tara'. Because of the phonetic properties of some of the loans it has been suggested that at least one such pre-Celtic language survived at least into the 6th century (Schrijver 2014: 82–83; Schrijver 2015).

During its recorded history, Irish had contact mainly with the Early British Celtic languages, speakers of which seem to have settled in South-East Ireland in the early medieval period, Latin, Old Norse, Normanno-French, and Middle and Modern English. These adstratal and superstratal languages make themselves felt most notably in lexical borrowings, but occasionally left their imprint on the structure of Irish, for instance in word-formation, e.g., the agentive suffixes *-aire* and *-(th)óir* from Lat. *-arius* and *-tor*. The Latin language contributed not only words in well-defined semantic fields relating to education (reading, writing) and to the church, but it also introduced a sound into the Irish language which had been absent until the 5th century: *p*. Any word containing a *p* is either a loan from a foreign language or arose after the 6th century when the sound had established itself. A most curious loan from Old Welsh is the name of the Irish language itself. For phonetic reasons, the loan of OIr. *Goídelc* 'Irish language' and *Goídel* 'Irishman' from Welsh *gwyddel* 'wild', replacing *Féni* as the autochthonous name for the inhabitants of Ireland, cannot have taken place much earlier than the 7th century. Unlike Scottish Gaelic and Manx, where Norse influence makes itself profoundly felt even in phonology, the traces left by the Vikings are largely restricted to loanwords in specific semantic fields, especially sea-faring and commerce. While the impact of Old English was limited to a few loan-words, since the Norman invasion Irish has been subjected to extensive influence first from French and then much more strongly from English. This is evident not only in the lexicon, but also in the syntax and in idiomatic expressions.

2. Sources

No written evidence remains from the Proto-Goidelic period. Except for a few placenames in Ptolemy's Geography, the language of that time is only accessible through linguistic reconstruction. The first written remains of Irish are the Ogham stones of the Primitive Irish period (OIr. *ogum*; edited by Macalister 1945; on the script cf. McManus 1991), the main body of which is traditionally, but without secure criteria, assigned to the 4th–6th centuries A.D. Ogham inscriptions consist chiefly of names in the genitive singular and reveal no further textual or historical information. The earliest Oghams preserve a very archaic form of the language; e.g., the Ogham name LUGUDECCA corresponds to OIr. *Luigdech*. Although the use of Ogham on wood for writing purposes occurs as a narrative motif in early sagas, and finds support in the very nature of the script (encarved notches on the edge of objects), no such objects have been discovered so far.

The first language that was systematically written on vellum in Ireland was Latin. While names and stray Irish words were included in the Latin, especially in annalistic records, the earliest writers on the island occasionally expressed – possibly conventional – discomfort about writing their own barbarous native tongue. Having to learn Latin from scratch in school forced Irish scholars to engage with grammatical theory, which ultimately shaped their attitude towards their own mother tongue. A paradigm shift occurred during the 7th century when finally literacy in the native language took off. Some scattered pieces of Irish poetry and prose survive that are attributed to authors from the beginning of this or possibly even from the end of the preceding century (Dallán Forgaill, Colmán mac Lénéni, Colmán moccu Béognae). However, these texts need not necessarily have been committed to writing so early. But by the second half of the century, the evidence for written works is undeniable, and by the beginning of the 8th century, the literary production in narrative and expository prose and in poetry was flourishing, thus making Irish the earliest vernacular, i.e. non-classical language to be routinely committed to writing in Europe. The late 7th century saw also the codification of Irish law with collections such as *Senchas Már* 'The Great Tradition'. Amazingly, no tradition of using Irish for monumental public inscriptions apart from Ogham ever developed before the modern period. To what extent there continued to exist an oral tradition beside the written one can only be speculated.

Literacy in the Latin alphabet was introduced by Christian missionaries who had received their education in Britain. The reduced version of the alphabet adopted for writing Irish is particularly unsuited for the sounds of the language. 18 letters, plus a diacritic symbol called *fada* to indicate vowel length (e.g. *á*), have to represent the 57 phonemes of Old Irish (or 79, if labialised consonants are recognised as a separate phonemic series). No matter how the sounds are counted, any letter of the alphabet could stand for four or more sounds of the language. Depending on the dialect, post-Old Irish changes slightly reduced the number of phonemes, but even in modern spelling there is still a glaring mismatch between phonemes and graphemes. Some of the orthographic peculiarities of Old Irish, e.g. the non-indication of some mutational effects, the different sound values of consonants depending on their word-initial or word-internal position, etc., are due to the British transmission of literacy. Others, such as indicating palatalisation by giving graphic expression to subphonemic glides, must have been developed by Irish scholars themselves in a long process of experimentation. The orthographic practices are fundamentally identical in the Gaelic of Scotland, but for Manx, whose written documentation did not start before the early 17th century, a very different approach is used, an orthography that is chiefly based on English spelling conventions.

The precise circumstances under which writing in Irish established itself are, however, clouded in historical darkness. Writing education and writing practice were firmly connected with Christian learning in early medieval Ireland. Some indications, partly legendary, partly linguistic and literary, point to monastic centres in the north-eastern part of the island, between Armagh and Bangor, as the cradle of vernacular literacy. Despite the production of large amounts of literature already soon after its beginnings, no literary manuscripts from the early period remain, including, for instance, the pioneer collection of saga literature in the now lost manuscript called *Cín Dromma Snechtai* 'The Book of Druimm Snechtai'. The only large contemporary witnesses of Old Irish are three Latin manuscripts

from the 8th and 9th centuries (Würzburg, Milan, St. Gall; edited in *Thes.*) that contain very extensive Old Irish interlinear glosses. In the wake of Irish missionary activities, these manuscripts were brought to the Continent where they are now preserved. These glosses, to which can be added a number of other short texts and marginalia in manuscripts, form the basis of every modern grammatical description of classical Old Irish; the "Old-Irishness" of texts in later manuscripts is commonly measured against this linguistic standard.

Although a fair number of texts from Early Old Irish survive, and abundantly from Old and Middle Irish, almost all of them are preserved only in much later manuscripts, sometimes a thousand years younger than the texts themselves. The earliest extant manuscripts that contain more than glosses are *Lebor na hUidre* 'The Book of the Dun Cow' (c. 1100), the *Book of Leinster* (c. 1160), and *Rawlinson B502* (c. 1100). They are very extensive collections of narrative literature, poetry, translations and historical writing. After a gap of approximately two centuries, a gap which is partly due to the political and, consequently, cultural instability in the wake of the Norman invasion of Ireland, manuscripts start to appear in ever greater numbers from the 14th century onwards. The tradition of writing and copying manuscripts, originally on the medium of vellum, but on paper in the modern period, runs right up into the 19th century, longer than in most other European countries. The number of extant manuscripts in the Irish language is huge, over 3.000. Most contain Modern Irish texts; manuscripts with Early Irish material amount to a few hundred.

The first printed book in the Irish language was produced in the reign of Elizabeth I who personally donated the font for the printing press. The typeface was modelled on the local, insular script and thus meant a conscious deviation from the European trend. This typeface remained in use for publications in the Irish language until the middle of 20th century, although the practice of using Roman fonts to print Old Irish texts for scholarly purposes had already been adopted in the 19th century. However, while in most European countries printing soon became a central factor in imparting regional languages with prestige, thus anchoring them in their societies, it remained a rare commodity in the case of Irish texts, due to the fact that until the 18th century only one printer had the royal patent to operate in Ireland.

The long duration of the literary tradition makes it a unique source for the investigation into language change over time, but its value is hampered by two issues: 1. With few exceptions, Early Irish literature has been transmitted without reliable or precise information about its chronological and geographical origin. 2. What linguistic variation can be found, is usually attributed to chronological differences. Having often gone through multiple stages of copying and re-editing, the extant texts are typically preserved in an almost inextricable mix of older and more progressive linguistic features.

3. A Social History

Next to nothing is known about what was spoken in Ireland before Irish became the dominant means of communication. It is likewise obscure when the ancestor of the Irish language was brought to the island. Its presence cannot be earlier than the 1st mill. B.C., but dates as late as the 1st century A.D. have been proposed. While archaeologists reject the notion of large-scale immigrations of speakers of Proto-Goidelic with reference to the absence of archaeological traces of such an event, the linguistic facts make it inevitable to operate with the intrusion of Celtic-speaking people into the island, notwithstanding the difficulty of determining the number of people necessary for initiating the language shift. Comparison with linguistic expansions in better documented periods suggests that the migrating speech community need not have been large, if its members succeeded in displacing the elite of the conquered country (cf. the sociolinguistic model in Mallory 2013: 243–286).

Arguments for the comparatively late introduction of Irish are: 1. the presence in the vocabulary of several inherited words for items of the natural world that are foreign to Ireland, such as *nathair* 'snake' < PIE **n̥h₁trih₂*- 'id.' (cf. Lat. *natrix*), or *art* 'bear' < **h₂r̥tḱo*- 'id.' (cf. Greek *árktos*). If the language had existed sufficiently long on the island, it is likely that these words, which had no real life

referents there, had either been lost through natural obsolescence, or their reference would had shifted to other items. 2. The rapid and drastic phonetic changes in Late Antiquity could be indicative of an abrupt language shift across a large population. 3. Most placenames in medieval Ireland are transparent in their formation and meaning, the corrollary being that large parts of the land had only been settled relatively shortly before the historic period when the language was already similar to attested Old Irish. 4. This ties in with the fact that the attested Old Irish, and not some shady dialect of it, is actually the common linguistic ancestor of all known Gaelic languages, including the colonial variants in Scotland and Man. 5. The fact that early medieval Irish, as evidenced in the extant sources, is an astonishingly uniform language could also point to its recent spread across the island.

Evidently, texts from centres of learning across the whole country have survived, yet it has not been possible so far to identify unambiguous dialectally differentiating traits in them (O'Rahilly 1932). There also appear to be no literary references to non-standard regional varieties of the language, such as unusual accents. Occasional instances of lower registers in narrative texts, by virtue of being embedded within regular prose, already went through the filter of literary speech. Less than an unembellished reflection of authentic spoken style, these passages may rather contain a kind of stage spoken Irish. Several explanations have been proposed for the uniform appearance of the language. The received view is that Old Irish was an educated standard language that was taught in monastic schools, the lack of dialectal differences in the written record therefore being a function of the linguistic uniformity of the intellectual caste who produced the literature. While the crucial role of monastic learned centres in spreading and maintaining a standard across the island cannot be doubted, it is hard to believe that, parallel to the deep political fragmentation of the island in the early middle ages, there should have existed a supraregional network of intellectuals that should have been so tightly knit that its, to all extents and purposes uniform, linguistic training was authoritative to all practitioners of the art, from South to North, and West and East of the Irish Sea. Even if aspiring poets had to acquire a standard idiom, some regional facets would be expected to shine through their language usage if diverse enough dialects co-existed. Especially at the beginning of the written tradition, regional variation resulting from local experimentation would naturally be expected to have left traces in the extent texts. A linguistically more plausible account for the early homogeneity of Irish is that it be attributed to its being a 'colonial language', i.e. that it had spread across its territory only within the last generations before the onset of the written tradition, thus allowing not enough time to have elapsed for significant dialectal differences to be reflected in the written record.

From the dawn of history, with the letters of St. Patrick, Irish is encountered as the dominant language in Ireland. It was used for everyday communication, as well as for formal, political, and religious speech, and for a large variety of cultural and scientific purposes. In the early medieval period, Latin rivalled Irish in prestige as a scriptural language, but whether Latin was ever spoken to any notable degree is doubtful. The very fact that key Latin manuscripts are accompanied by glossing in Irish is a tell-tale sign that even in the context of Latin learning the medium of instruction was the native idiom. Until the early modern period, the language carried a high social prestige. Poets and other men of learning had to undergo years of sophisticated training in the native grammar, as can be gauged from texts like the Old Irish *Auraicept na nÉces* 'The Primer of the Scholars' or the Early Modern Irish *Bardic Grammatical Tracts*. Such a system of schooling created a standardising environment, albeit, as outlined above, perhaps not one that could have excluded all sorts of dialectal influence. The cultural respect afforded to the language is illustrated by ideological statements such as the one in *Auraicept na nÉces* that Irish had been created in a deliberate intellectual effort, by picking what was best of each of the 72 languages that God had created at the dispersal of the nations at the Tower of Babel. The inherent claim of Irish being, if not identical with the language of Paradise, then at least equivalent to a paradisiacal linguistic state will find little commendation among modern students struggling with the complexities of Old Irish.

Interventions of, politically and linguistically, foreign powers with their immediate effects on the social fabric naturally also had repercussions on the language of Ireland. The first major intrusion of a new spoken language, Norse, into the island in the historical period happened with the arrival of the Vikings in 795. Their permanent establishments from the early 9th century onwards eventually led to the growth of the first towns in Ireland, such as Dublin, Wexford or Limerick. This set a pattern that in the long run turned out to be one detrimental factor for the social position of Irish, because it spawned a sociolinguistic dichotomy between an Irish-speaking countryside and the towns which, being the foundations of foreigners, held large proportions of non-Irish population, speaking Norse or, in the later middle ages, French or English. In unison with universal tendencies, the towns became the economic hubs of the country. With the gradual urbanisation of societies on their way into modernity, this contributed to the social perception of Irish. It is conceivable that attacks by Vikings, but also by rival Irish bands, on monasteries and centres of learning had an impact on the standard language. No major changes are discernible in the early Viking years, although it is tempting to attribute some of the transformations from Old towards Middle Irish to the long-term effects on the educational infrastructure. The Battle of Clontarf 1014 is seen as a turning point in the political role of Vikings in Ireland, even though their Norse language may conceivably have survived in centres like Dublin until the 13th centuries, when it had to succumb to pressure from English.

In the Middle Irish period, the gap between the written standard and the spoken language gradually widened, and the school system was not strong enough to bridge it. The concomitant conflict of grammars is deducible from the increase of aberrant forms in the written record, especially in the verbal system where the complex morphology of Old Irish had very early started on a slope towards simplification, although one should be careful not to map all instances of normal synchronic variation indiscriminately onto the diachronic trajectory. In any case, beneath the bewildering mix of old vs. progressive, hypercorrect and artificial forms that can be encountered in Middle Irish texts, the general pull towards the grammatical principles of Modern Irish is recognisable. The emergence of the latter as a new linguistic standard, which put literary production on a strictly regulated basis again, coincides roughly with the arrival of the Normans in 1169 and the consolidation of their power in the ensuing decades.

With the intensification of international communication in the high middle ages, the system of political and ecclesiastical organisation in Ireland was brought more into line with the rest of Europe. The reform of monasticism after the model of European orders was of particular importance for the further course of development of the native language. The Anglo-Norman reformers were not only unsympathetic towards the native system of ecclesiastic organisation, but they also objected to the use of Irish among the higher clergy (Ó Fiaich 1969: 101–102). When the new, big monastic houses detached themselves from the native learned tradition, Irish literary and legal scholarship and the transmission of manuscripts moved into the sphere of hereditary lay families who continued to foster this tradition until the end of vernacular Gaelic culture in the 17th century. Under the patronage of the remaining native aristocracy, the literary production by this newly emerging class of bardic poets flourished. Monopolising the cultivation of the native language, they codified a conservative high-register standard language across Ireland and Scotland that for the next four centuries effectively eclipses in the extant sources the natural developments in the spoken language.

Despite being an invasion undertaken by a Norman nobility, the presence of French in Ireland proved to be of a transient nature. When Normanno-French ceased to be the administrative language of England, Ireland followed suit, and French disappeared as a living language, leaving behind only numerous borrowed lexical items in Irish. More consequential in the long term was the influx, in the wake of the Norman conquest, of English-speaking commoners into the economically crucial towns. In the short term, however, the influence of English extended no further than the Pale, a district encircling Dublin. This situation remained fairly stable for the remainder of the high middle ages. The very fact that decrees such as the statutes of Kilkenny of 1366, which banned the display of Irish cultural

items for people of English descent, had to be enacted by the Anglo-Irish government gives evidence of how much English had to struggle to hold out against the encroaching Irish language in the centuries after the Norman invasion. At the same time, it gives expression to an active desire on the part of the suzerain to suppress Irish and Irishness in certain public domains, and it highlights the persistance of tensions through this entire period. Finally, in the wake of the 16th-century reformation, the confessional difference between the English and the Irish cultural spheres was added as yet another dimension to the already existing divides in Ireland. The resulting religious conflict provided the stimulus that ultimately tipped the balance in the linguistic struggle on the island of Ireland. The Flight of the Earls in the early 17th century, after the Battle of Kinsale 1601, was the ultimate demonstration of the downfall of the once powerful Gaelic elite in the face of English dominance. With it, the institutional support for the Irish language vanished, and the language entered on an ever accelerating social decline. From that time onwards, there could be no doubt that social, cultural and intellectual ascent in Ireland was tied to English.

SEE ALSO: ???

References:
Breatnach, Liam. 1994. "An Mheán-Ghaeilge." In McCone et al. 1994, 221–333. [Italian translation by Roma, Elisa. 2013. *Il medioirlandese/Middle Irish*. Lewiston – Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.]
Crowley, Tony. 2000. *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366–1922. A Sourcebook*. London – New York: Routledge.
Doyle, Aidan. 2015. A History of the Irish Language from the Norman Invasion to Independence. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
LEIA = Vendryes Joseph et al. 1959–. *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Sttudies.
Macalister, Robert A.S. 1945. *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
Mac Giolla Chríost, Diarmait. 2004. *The Irish Language in Ireland: From Goidel to Globalisation*. London – New York: Routledge.
Mallory, James. 2013. *The Origins of the Irish*. London: Thames & Hudson.
McCone, Kim et al. (eds.). 1994. *Stair na Gaeilge in ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta*. Maigh Nuad: An Sagart.
McCone, Kim. 1996. *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Changes*. Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish.
McCone, Kim. 1997. *The Early Irish Verb*. 2nd ed. Maynooth: An Sagart.
McCone, Kim. 2005. *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader. Including an Introduction to Middle Irish*. Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish.
McManus, Damian. 1991. *A Guide to Ogam*. Maynooth: An Sagart.
McManus, Damian. 1994. "An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach." In McCone et al. 1993, 335–445.
Nic Pháidín, Caoilfhionn, and Ó Cearnach, Seán (eds). 2008. *A New View of the Irish Language*. Dublin: Cois Life.
Ó Dochartaigh, Cathair. 2000. "The Irish Language." In *Languages in Britain and Ireland*. Edited by Glanville Price, Oxford 2000, 6–36.
Ó Fiaich, Tomás. 1969. "The Language and Political History." In A View of the Irish Language. Edited by Brian Ó Cuív, 101–111. Dublin: Stationery Office.
O'Rahilly, Thomas F. 1932. *Irish Dialects Past and Present*. Dublin: Dublin University Press.
Russel, Paul. 2005. "'What was best of every language': the early history of the Irish language." In *A New History of Ireland I. Prehistoric and Early Ireland*. Edited by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 405–450. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schrijver, Peter. 2014. *Language Contact and the Origins of the Germanic Languages*. Abingdon – New York: Routledge.

Schrijver, Peter. 2015. "Pruners and trainers of the Celtic family tree: The rise and development of Celtic in the light of language contact." In *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Celtic Studies Maynooth 2011*. Edited by Liam Breatnach et al., 191–219. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Stifter, David. 2009. "Early Irish." In *The Celtic Languages*. 2nd edition. Edited by Martin Ball and Nicole Müller. Abingdon – New York: Routledge.

Thes. = Stokes, Whitley and Strachan, John. 1901–3. *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus. A collection of Old-Irish glosses scholia prose and verse*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres.

Thurneysen, Rudolf. 1946. *A Grammar of Old Irish*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.