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Gaelic dialects present and past:
a study of modern and medieval dialect relationships in the Gaelic
languages

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the historical development of dialectal variation in the Gaelic languages with special reference to Irish. As a point of departure, competing scholarly theories concerning the historical relationships between Goidelic dialects are laid out. Next, these theories are tested using dialectometric methods of linguistic analysis. Dialectometry clearly suggests the Irish of Ulster is the most linguistically distinctive of Irish dialects. This perspective on the modern dialects is utilised in subsequent chapters to clarify our understanding of the history of Gaelic dialectal variation, especially during the Old Irish period (AD 600–900).

Theoretical and methodological frameworks that have been used in the study of the historical dialectology of Gaelic are next outlined. It is argued that these frameworks may not be the most appropriate for investigating dialectal variation during the Old Irish period. For the first time, principles from historical sociolinguistics are here applied in investigating the language of the Old Irish period. In particular, the social and institutional structures which supported the stability of Old Irish as a text language during the 8th and 9th centuries are scrutinised from this perspective. The role of the ecclesiastical and political centre of Armagh as the principal and central actor in the relevant network structures is highlighted.

Focus then shifts to the processes through which ‘standard’ languages emerge, with special reference to Old Irish. The evidence of a small number of texts upon which modern understandings of Old Irish was based is assessed; it is argued that these texts most likely emerged from monasteries in the northeast of Ireland and the southwest of Scotland. Secondly, the processes through which the standard of the Old Irish period is likely to have come about are investigated. It is concluded that the standard language of the period arose primarily through the agency of monastic schools in the northeast of Ireland, particularly Armagh and Bangor. It is argued that this fact, and the subsequent prominence of Armagh as a stable and supremely prestigious centre of learning throughout the period, offers a sociolinguistically robust explanation for the apparent lack of dialectal variation in the language.

Finally, the socio-political situation of the Old Irish period is discussed. Models of new-dialect formation are applied to historical evidence, and combined with later linguistic evidence, in an attempt to enunciate dialectal divisions which may have existed during the period.

Signed declaration:

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that this work is my own. None of this work has been submitted for any degree or professional qualification other than this degree.

Peadar Ó Muircheartaigh

Linguistics today has so many and so divergent branches that it risks fragmentation. Yet Celtic studies have one great thing to contribute to linguistics as a whole: the very real unifying concern for the Celtic languages as *the* central object of inquiry.

— Calvert Watkins

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Mo thaing dhuibh uile!

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|--|
| <i>AI</i> | <i>Annals of Inisfallen</i> (Mac Airt 1951) |
| <i>AU</i> | <i>Annals of Ulster</i> (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983) |
| <i>BN</i> | <i>Bretha Nemed</i> |
| <i>BST</i> | <i>Bardic Syntactical Tracts</i> (McKenna 1944) |
| <i>CDS</i> | <i>Cín Dromma Snechtai</i> |
| <i>CG</i> | <i>Common Gaelic</i> (Jackson 1951) |
| <i>CGH</i> | <i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> (O'Brien 1962) |
| <i>CIH</i> | <i>Corpus Iuris Hibernici</i> (Binchy 1978) |
| <i>Corpas</i> | <i>Corpas na Gaeilge</i> (Uí Bheirn 2004) |
| <i>DIAS</i> | Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies |
| <i>DIL</i> | <i>Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials</i> (compact edn Quin 1983) |
| <i>GOI</i> | <i>Grammar of Old Irish</i> (Thurneysen 1946) |
| <i>IDISD</i> | <i>Irish Dialects and Irish-speaking Districts</i> (Ó Cuív 1951) |
| <i>IDPP</i> | <i>Irish Dialects Past and Present</i> (O'Rahilly 1932) |
| <i>IGT</i> | <i>Irish Grammatical Tracts</i> (Bergin 1916; 1921–3; 1926–8; 1946; 1955) |
| <i>LASID</i> | <i>Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects</i> (Wagner 1958–69) |
| <i>LF</i> | <i>Lucerna Fidelium</i> (Ó Súilleabháin 1962) |
| <i>LHEB</i> | <i>Language and History in Early Britain</i> (Jackson 1953) |
| <i>LD</i> | Levenshtein Distance |
| <i>LU</i> | <i>Lebor na hUidre</i> (Best and Bergin 1929) |
| <i>ODNB</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| <i>RIA</i> | Royal Irish Academy |
| <i>SGDS</i> | <i>Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland</i> (Ó Dochartaigh 1994–7) |
| <i>SM</i> | <i>Senchas Már</i> |
| <i>Thes.</i> | <i>Thesaurus Palaeo-Hibernicus</i> (Stokes and Strachan 1987 [1901]) |
| <i>VC</i> | <i>Adomnan's Life of Columba</i> (Anderson and Anderson 1961) |

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the historical development of dialectal variation in the Gaelic languages, with special reference to Irish. It seeks, for the first time, to apply innovative methods from both dialectology and sociolinguistics to Gaelic material in a way which elucidates our understanding of dialect relationships in Gaelic and the historical development of these relationships. It applies dialectometric methods of analysis to the modern Gaelic dialects while using theoretical frameworks from historical sociolinguistics to examine the linguistic situation during the early medieval period. While dialectologists and historical linguists dealing with other languages have moved away from the linear model of language evolution associated with Neogrammarianism, Gaelic scholarship has continued to draw primarily on this framework. This thesis therefore endeavours to reassess the historical development of the Gaelic languages from a new perspective.

The Gaelic languages

The modern Gaelic languages are classified as belonging to the Celtic language family of Indo-European and are further sub-classified, along with the Brittonic languages (Welsh, Breton, Cornish), as Insular Celtic (McCone 1994: 64).¹ The Gaelic languages, in a contemporary context, are spoken as community languages in relatively small pockets along the west coast of Ireland (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 21–9), and in areas in the west of Scotland, primarily in the Western Isles, with smaller numbers of speakers in the Inner Hebrides and along the west coast of mainland Scotland (MacAulay 1992: 146). As a community language, Manx, the Gaelic language of the Isle of Man, died in the early part of the twentieth century.² At different (earlier) stages in history, the Gaelic languages were spoken in a much broader area covering the whole of Ireland, the Isle of Man and almost all of Scotland.

¹ The term ‘Goidelic’ is also used as an umbrella term to describe the Gaelic languages, often in opposition to Brittonic, and usually in application to the prehistoric phase of Gaelic.

² The last native speaker of Manx died in 1974 but a number of competent second language learners learnt Manx from the last of the native speakers so that there is a degree of continuity between the native speakers and Manx revivalists (Thomson 1992: 101–2).

Chronology

Typically the chronological classification for the Gaelic languages is given as follows, although it should be noted that these are not watertight chronological boundaries: Old Irish 600–900; Middle Irish 900–1200; Early Modern Irish 1200–*circa* 1650 (see Stifter 2009: 55; L. Breatnach 1994: 222; Mac Eoin 1993: 102).³ When treated together, the language of the Old and Middle Irish periods is known collectively as Early Irish (Stifter 2009: 55). Similarly, the period of Early Modern Irish is often referred to as the Classical Irish period (McManus 1994: 335–7). It is in the period after the Early Modern Irish period, known also as the post-Classical period, following the disintegration of the old Gaelic learned orders, that a clearly distinguished vernacular Scottish form of Gaelic most unequivocally emerges from the written record (cf. Gillies 2011); although there are flickers of light in the written record before this, they are largely masked by the common written language (Ó Maolalaigh 1998). The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are also the period in which we see the clearest evidence yet for the existence of dialects in Irish (Williams 1994a: 447). The case of Manx is somewhat different. The Isle of Man’s isolation from the rest of the Gaelic world, and most especially from Gaelic literate culture, means that the earliest texts in Manx, dating from the seventeenth century, are written in a script entirely independent of that of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland (Williams 1994b: 703). The clearly differentiated dialects of the post-Classical period can be contrasted with the Early Irish period, in which significantly less dialectal variation appears to have existed. In fact, such is the dearth of evidence for dialectal variation in Old Irish (*GOI*: 12; Ahlqvist 1988) that historians, historical linguists, and dialectologists alike, have continually remarked upon its almost unique apparent homogeneity in the context of medieval Europe (Charles-Edwards 2000: 512; Schrijver 2009: 205; O’Rahilly 1932).

Focus

The focus of the present thesis is the history of dialectal variation in Gaelic, in the broadest sense, although the most detailed analysis, especially in the chapters

³ The use of the term ‘Irish’, in preference to ‘Gaelic’ will be discussed in greater detail below.

concerned with diachrony, will relate to Ireland. Scottish and Manx material is included in the initial chapters which are concerned with synchrony as any synchronic classification of Irish dialects without reference to Scottish Gaelic and Manx would be fundamentally flawed (MacAulay 1992: 151).

However, at this point there are significant obstacles (of the type outlined in Winter 1998) to a fuller discussion of sociolinguistics of Scottish Gaelic and Manx in the medieval period. Quite aside from the paucity of historical evidence from Scotland and Man (at least in comparison to Ireland) in the early medieval period, the novel nature of many of the methodologies applied in this thesis mean that it is appropriate, in the first instance, to test their application to Irish. Irish presents us with an available set of linguistic data to be analysed (*LASID*) and better evidence with which to construct a clearer historical picture. In this sense, the focus of this thesis is the provision of a model which can advance scholarly understanding of the historical development of dialectal variation in the Gaelic languages as a whole.

Approach

Although this thesis is at its core a linguistic one, the approach taken is explicitly interdisciplinary. Methods from a variety of disciplines are incorporated: computational and historical linguistics, dialectology and sociolinguistics, as well as history and sociology. The approach taken in this thesis combines quantitative dialectometric data from twentieth-century dialects with sociohistorical evidence from earlier periods to investigate the degree to which the former can shed light on the latter. It takes as its starting point the idea, articulated in Labov (1974a), that some long standing problems of historical linguistics can only be solved by recourse to principles of sociolinguistics, and from another principle outlined in the same paper, that reference to the linguistic present is often the best way of explaining the linguistic past.

Recently developed and developing academic disciplines play a prominent role in this thesis, setting it apart from earlier investigations of the historical dialectology of the Gaelic languages. The quantitative elements of this thesis draw principally on dialectometric methodologies. While the method of presenting this data was

originally borrowed from phylogenetics, it has become increasingly used by those interested in dialectometry. Sociolinguistic elements of the thesis draw on a number of different sociolinguistic approaches. Insights are drawn from the ‘acts of identity model’ advocated by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), as well as from recent developments in the understanding of dialect contact and new-dialect formation (Trudgill 1986; 2004). Other useful models of analysis, such as Henrich and Gil-White’s (2001) notion of prestige as ‘freely conferred deference’, are drawn from sociology and evolutionary biology.

Like many historical sociolinguistic investigations, this thesis begins with a historical-sociolinguistic puzzle which I will attempt to solve, based on the evidence available (cf. Trudgill 2010: xii). In doing so it follows the safest route of scholarship, as outlined by F. J. Byrne, the eminent historian of medieval Ireland, ‘to proceed from the known to the unknown’ (Byrne 1969: 10). Out of necessity, a critical approach has been taken to the writings of earlier scholars, most notably Jackson (1951) and O’Rahilly (1932), who made landmark contributions to Gaelic historical linguistics in the first half of the last century. In taking this critical approach, however, it must be acknowledged that a study of this type would have been impossible without the important intellectual and methodological rigour which both O’Rahilly and Jackson brought to bear on the discipline throughout much of the twentieth century.

Aims, objectives and research questions

The broad objectives of this thesis are to investigate the nature of dialectal variation in Gaelic, particularly the relationship of the Gaelic languages to one another and the relative proximity of their modern dialects to each other. In doing this, the dialectal relationships of the twentieth century are reassessed on a firmly quantitative basis, but informed by more traditional analysis. The thesis then seeks to explain the historical development of these relationships by recourse to fundamental sociolinguistic principles relating to dialect and language contact and new-dialect formation. The thesis centres on two research questions. The first is synchronic and is largely dealt with at the start of the thesis:

What are the synchronic relationships of modern Gaelic dialects to one another?

The second research question is the historical sociolinguistic puzzle for which I attempt to formulate a solution and is the primary concern of the latter chapters of this thesis. It can only be adequately addressed once the earlier question has been answered:

What was the nature of dialectal variation in the Old Irish period, and why is it not apparent in the written record?

Sources

Due to the broad chronological focus of this thesis, two principal sets of sources can be outlined. The first are sources for twentieth-century dialects. The most important source in this regard is *LASID*, the linguistic atlas of Irish dialects completed almost single-handedly by Heinrich Wagner. Despite its faults (on which see Ó Murchú 1967), *LASID* has greater geographic coverage than *SGDS*, and because of its coverage of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, it allows for a comparative perspective. Another distinct advantage of the use of *LASID* over *SGDS* is that *LASID* has already been subjected to dialectometric analysis.⁴ This evidence, on occasion, is supplemented by reference to the various published monographs on individual Gaelic dialects, and other academic commentary on particular features or dialects.

The medieval aspect of this thesis draws heavily on the primary evidence of legal material and the annals, particularly the Annals of Ulster. Relevant secondary sources, such as Charles-Edwards's (2000) synthesis of the history of early Christian Ireland, are also used throughout. The sociolinguistic focus of this thesis means, however, that my underlying aims are often at odds with those of the historians upon whose work this thesis draws. This has required, on occasion, a reframing or criticism of their terminology and sometimes approach to the subject. This in no way takes away from my indebtedness to that scholarship. It has, however, proved

⁴ For further discussion see chapter 2.

necessary to refocus much of the secondary historical material in order to facilitate the framing of a sociolinguistic argument, as opposed to an historical one.

One further aspect of the sources employed in this thesis must be noted here. Between the modern and medieval period there is a significant chronological gap. Further, the coverage of modern sources (i.e. *LASID*) is not as full as one might like in geographic terms. Little is known of the linguistic features of the Irish dialects spoken in the greater part of modern Leinster during the eighteenth century, when Irish was last widely spoken there, for instance. In order to bridge this gap, it has proved necessary to draw on other sources, namely relevant early modern texts and, more often, onomastic evidence. This is not an ideal situation; it would be preferable to have complete coverage of Ireland in *LASID*. Similarly, this research would benefit from the availability of a *LALME*-type atlas of post-Classical Irish,⁵ which could feasibly be based on eighteenth-century manuscript evidence. Unfortunately, no such resource is available, nor is one likely to be available in the short to medium term. If Gaelic dialectology held the attention of a large number of scholars, as is the case for the historical dialectology of English, this intellectual problem would not arise. The fact is that Gaelic historical dialectology is a small field in which many of the basic sources taken for granted in English dialectology are not available. I have endeavoured throughout to follow that central precept of historical linguistics, as outlined by Labov (1994: 11), ‘to make the best of bad data’.

Layout and structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter outlines the main dialectal divisions within the Gaelic languages and offers a brief sketch of the synchronic and diachronic dialectology of the Gaelic languages as currently understood. The varying theories as to the relationships of Gaelic languages and dialects to one another, in both synchronic and diachronic contexts, are presented. The second chapter asks how these contested dialect relationships might be tested and to what extent a control is desirable to test the varying hypotheses. Such controls are indeed found in dialectometry. The history of dialectometric applications to the Gaelic languages is

⁵ The Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English (*LALME*) project set to map linguistic variation in Middle English manuscripts. For further details see Benskin et al. (2013).

described in this chapter and the most sophisticated of the results are presented and discussed. Although these results do not yield unquestionable truths, they do offer the most objective perspective on the inter-relationships of the Gaelic languages and their dialects to date. These inter-relationships form the basis for subsequent historical sociolinguistic discussion.

The third chapter reviews the literature on variation in Early Irish, outlining the history of external and internal commentary on variation during the Early Irish period. Finally some of the competing methodologies applied to Early Irish are outlined and discussed and a small number of case studies presented which highlight various methodological or theoretical problems with the discussion of early medieval Gaelic dialects to date. The fourth chapter offers something of a new departure in terms of early medieval Gaelic language studies in that it starts from an explicitly sociolinguistic basis, arguing for the distinctiveness of Old Irish as a ‘text language’, and emphasising its reliance on a stable network structure for norm maintenance and enforcement. The chapter investigates this network structure by examining the primary annalistic sources, which give us an insight into the learned networks of the early medieval Gaelic world. From this analysis emerges a distinctive network structure which is likely to have driven this norm maintenance. The fifth chapter examines both the processes by which Old Irish came to be codified by philologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the evidence for the codification process at the start of the Old Irish period. In doing so, a re-examination of the sources used in this codification is offered, namely the sources which have previously been investigated for dialect features. Subsequently, the processes by which standard languages generally emerge are treated and the social circumstances in which an Old Irish standard is likely to have come about is outlined.

The final chapter, chapter six, starts from the hypothesis developed in the previous chapters, that the text language of Old Irish is a standard which can only have emerged in the socio-cultural stability of the hegemony of the Uí Néill, a fact which highlights its limited usefulness in examining earlier stages of dialectal variation throughout the Gaelic world. As such, an alternative hypothesis is proposed by which scholarship may start to move towards a fuller understanding of variation in the early

medieval Gaelic world. This chapter relies on the combination of principles of dialect contact and new-dialect formation with early medieval patterns of social expansion and an enhanced understanding of twentieth-century dialectal relationships. In bridging the chronological and geographic gaps in the data, onomastic and textual evidence not previously invoked in the thesis is also presented. These correspondences are presented as a robust hypothesis, which offers a chance to advance scholarship on the history of dialectal variation in Gaelic.

This discussion is followed by a conclusion which draws a number of the relevant strands together in order to chart a tentative outline of the historical dialect geography of Irish. In doing so it provides a model of how dialectal variation in Scottish Gaelic may be usefully analysed in the future, as well as possible avenues for treating the historical development of Manx. Other possible avenues for future research are also outlined.

This thesis outlines in detail, for the first time, the synchronic relationship of twentieth-century Gaelic dialects to one another in a way which is both accessible to language scholars and dialectometrically robust. Further, it offers a sociolinguistically viable explanation for the apparent homogeneity of the text language of Old Irish which is informed by the most recent scholarship on the role of social networks in norm-formation and norm-maintenance, while at the same time, drawing attention to the sociolinguistic evidence for the existence of dialectal variation during the Old Irish period.

Terminology

In dealing with a wide chronological range, across more than one language, questions of terminology can be an obstacle to the presentation of a clear argument.

Gaelic, unless otherwise qualified, refers to the Gaelic languages in their entirety: Scottish, Irish, and Manx, in their medieval or modern manifestations. The question of what one calls earlier stages of these languages is complex. Previous scholarship accepted the validity of the terms ‘Old Irish’, ‘Middle Irish’ etc. Recently, however, another set of terms has come to be preferred by some scholars: ‘Old Gaelic’ and

‘Middle Gaelic’ (Clancy 2010: 351, n. 7; Ó Maolalaigh 2013: 42, n. 2). It is my opinion that the latter is, ultimately, more appropriate when discussing a language which was written and spoken, not only in Ireland, but also in Scotland and the Isle of Man. Be that as it may, throughout this thesis reference is made to works whose titular focus is ‘Old Irish’ etc.; therefore, it has been decided to apply the more traditional terminology to earlier stage of the languages.

There are, for obvious reasons, discrepancies between the modern and medieval place names used in this thesis. As a general rule, chronologically appropriate forms of names are used throughout. Spelling conventions for Old, Middle and Modern stages of the Gaelic languages are followed according to the period in question. Where Anglicised forms of place names are better known than their original forms, the former are used, e.g. Armagh is used throughout in preference to Ard Macha. Similarly, Irish forms which are better known than their Anglicised forms are used, e.g. Corca Dhuibhne is used throughout in preference to Corkaguiney. Place names that refer to points from *LASID* are invariably given in the form in which they appear in *LASID*, usually in English. This is done for the sake of clarity and for ease of reference.

1. Survey of Gaelic dialects

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major dialectal divisions within the Gaelic languages – Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx – and to review the various hypotheses on the relationship of these languages and their dialects to one another, from both synchronic ⁶ and diachronic perspectives. The theoretical and methodological foundations upon which this traditional understanding of dialectal variation in Gaelic is built will be discussed and recent criticisms and developments outlined. Finally, the competing hypotheses on the relationship of Irish dialects to each other will be laid out.

1.1 Dialectal divisions

1.1.1 Irish

Scholars are clear as to the main dialectal divisions within Irish:

[T]here are three quite distinctive dialect areas still existing – those of Munster, Connacht and Ulster (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 30).

The work primarily concerns itself with what have been intuitively and traditionally regarded as the major dialects of modern Irish: Donegal [Ulster], Connacht and Munster (Ó Siadhail 1989: 2).

While these broad dialect distinctions do not by any means equate to three homogeneous varieties, the distinctions outlined above are well recognised in the academic commentary and are quite useful in the broadest sense. This tripartite division is implicit in Ó Siadhail and Wigger (1976) and in the decision to publish the results of *LASID* in three separate volumes: Connacht, Munster and Ulster. Similarly, the fullest account of the history of the Gaelic languages, a multi-authored volume published in Irish under the title *Stair na Gaeilge* (McCone et al. 1994), treats the Irish dialects of Connacht, Munster and Ulster in three separate chapters. These provincial divisions are further facilitated by the current non-contiguous scattering of traditional Irish language communities, or what Ó Murchú (1996: 147–8) has termed ‘the retreat of traditional spoken Irish to disconnected and

⁶ The term synchronic in this thesis, unless otherwise clarified, pertains to the language of the generations of linguistic informants who provided material for *LASID* during the mid-twentieth century.

linguistically discrete districts located well within provincial and county boundaries'. However, the geographic fragmentation referred to by Ó Murchú is relatively recent. At the time the fieldwork for *LASID* was carried out, during the middle of the last century, Irish speakers covered a more contiguous geographic area (see Figure 1) and so fragmentation of communities and linguistic isolation of recent centuries alone cannot account for this degree of differentiation, or for the patterns of differentiation.

Furthermore, within these 'provincial' dialects of Ulster, Connacht and Munster, much diatopic (i.e. regional-based) variation exists and further broad divisions are recognisable, although these are less often referred to in the literature on Irish dialects. Ulster is usually spoken of in terms of East Ulster Irish and West Ulster Irish (A. J. Hughes 1994: 613; D. Ó Baoill 1996b: 33), Connacht is typically divided into North Connacht Irish and South Connacht Irish (Ó Curnáin 2007: 51). Munster, similarly, can be spoken of in terms of East Munster Irish and West Munster Irish. As with any such set of linguistic labels, one must remain aware that these are not watertight distinctions (cf. Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 10, 192).

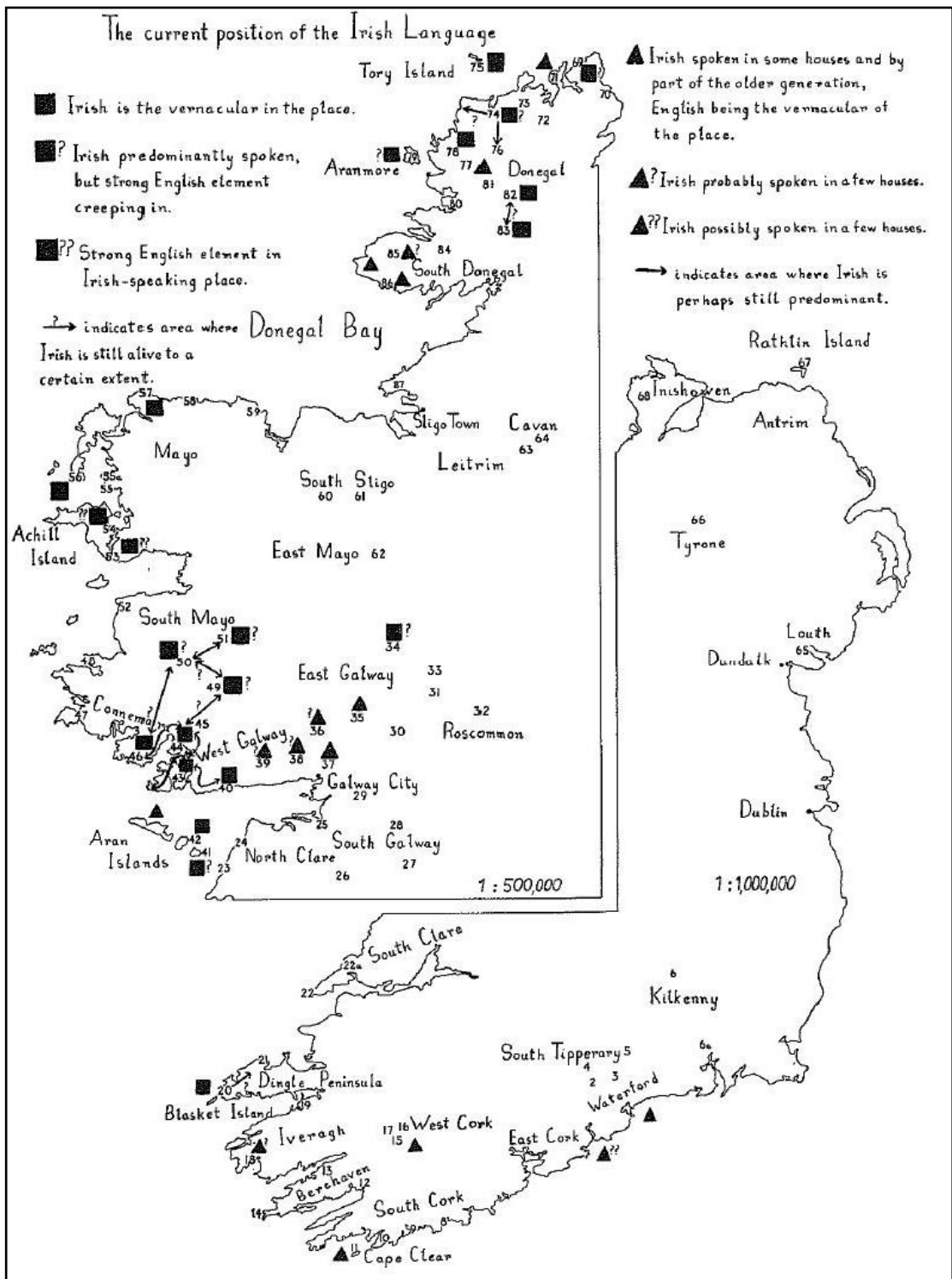


Figure 1 The current position of the Irish language' 1958 (LASID i: xxvii)

1.1.2 Scottish Gaelic

Traditionally, variation between Scottish Gaelic dialects has not been perceived to be as great as the degree of variation between Irish dialects (O’Rahilly 1932: 122). This perception is partially due to ‘a shift in gravity’; the emergence of a relatively homogeneous linguistic area as the sole surviving stronghold of Scottish Gaelic in this and the last century, as the area associated with Gaelic-speaking communities has contracted (cf. Gillies 2009: 298; Watson 2010: 108, see Figure 2). It is generally accepted (Lamb 2003: 6) that the language of the Outer Hebrides, Skye and the adjacent mainland areas, as well as being relatively homogeneous,⁷ is fairly conservative and differs substantially from the ‘peripheral’ dialects of Perthshire, East Sutherland, and Kintyre, areas from which Scottish Gaelic has disappeared in the last fifty years. As noted in Watson (2010: 108), in contrast with the dialects of the west, those of the eastern Highlands are progressive in nature and ‘are marked in the various categories by a number of features of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon which are largely unfamiliar on the west coast and in the isles’.

Writing at a time when native speakers of Scottish Gaelic were spread over a much larger geographic area than at present, Jackson outlined the following geographic distinction between these two dialect areas:

[I]t is possible to say in very broad terms [...] [that] the central dialect covers the Hebrides as far south as Mull and sometimes further, Ross exclusive of the north-east corner, Assynt, Inverness-shire, western Perthshire, and mainland Argyll roughly north of Loch Awe; while the peripheral dialects comprise Caithness and Sutherland exclusive of Assynt, the north-east corner of Ross, Braemar, eastern Perthshire, the rest of mainland Argyll with Kintyre, and Arran. Moray and the adjacent lower region of the Spey, the wide valley of Strathspey from Rothiemurchus to the Moray border, may go with the peripheral dialects, linking up with Braemar and east Perth (Jackson 1968: 67–8).

These broad distinctions are, generally speaking, confirmed by reference to recent investigations of the *SGDS* phonological data in Ó Maolalaigh (2001; 2008). These distinctions notwithstanding, it seems fair to say that Scottish Gaelic dialects present a degree of unity and cohesion not seen between the dialects of Irish.

⁷ Even within this relative homogeneity, authors recognise that a fair degree of diatopic variation exists (Lamb 2008: 42; Borgstrøm 1940: 8–9).

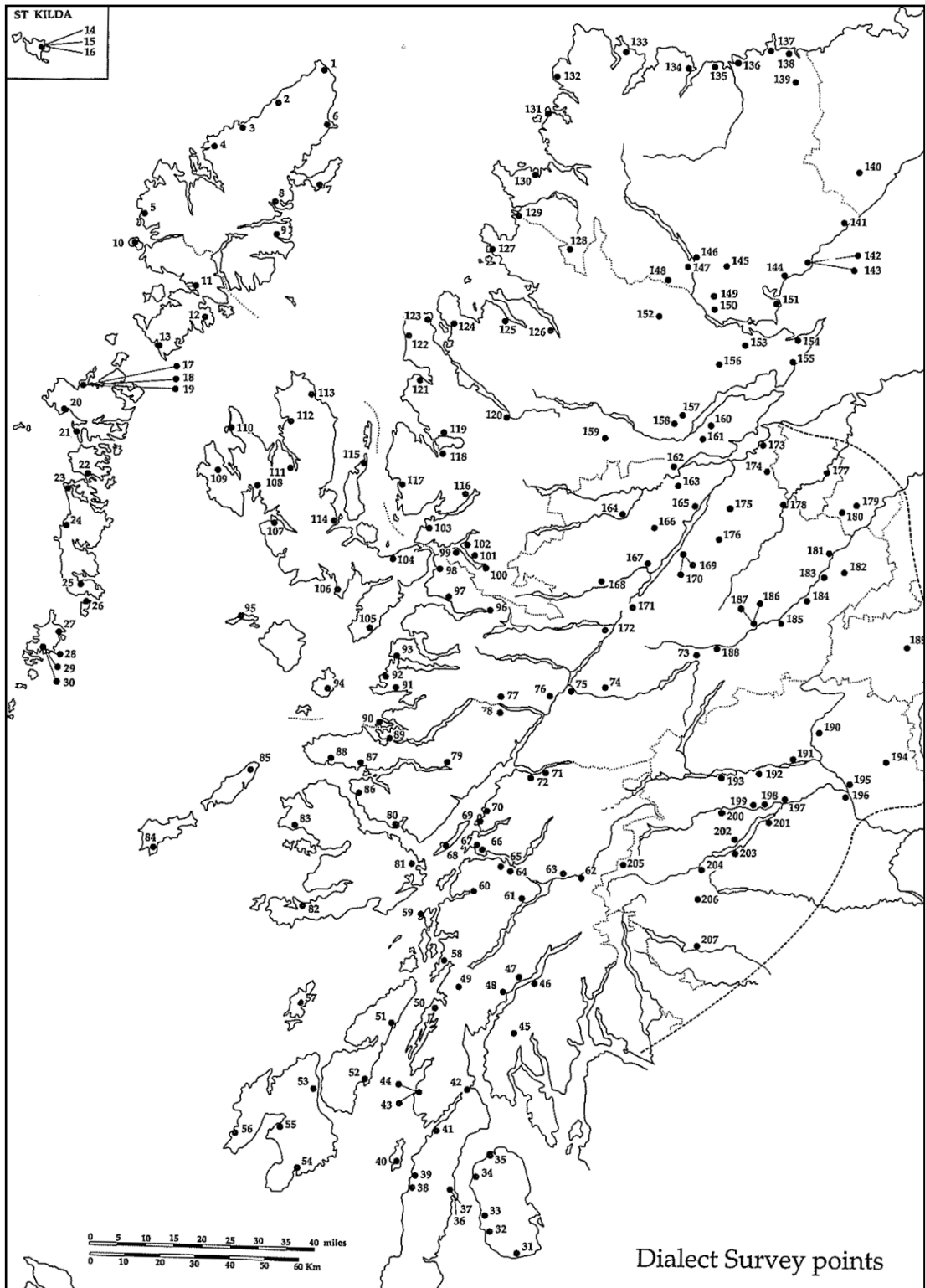


Figure 2 Dialects surveyed in SGDS

1.1.3 *Manx*

Perhaps surprisingly given the small size of the speech area, a discernible dialectal distinction between northern and southern dialects existed in Manx (Broderick 1984, i: 160). In its later stages as a community language, Manx was mainly spoken at the north-eastern and south-western extremities of the island and, therefore, the speech community did not cover a contiguous area. The dialectal distinction between these two dialects, however, is described by Broderick (2009: 353) as ‘not great’. It is interesting and perhaps counterintuitive that in the opinion of Broderick (cited in Wagner 1982: 116), the southern end of the island exhibited stronger affinities towards Scottish Gaelic than the northern one.

1.2 Dialectal relationships

While it is relatively unproblematic for scholars to identify particular ‘dialect areas’ with reference to the Gaelic languages, the question of dialectal relationships between these areas is much more problematic. The question of how modern dialects of Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx are related to one another has never been adequately addressed, either on a pan-Gaelic, or on a smaller scale. To what extent is the dialectal relationship of East Ulster to Donegal comparable with the relationship between North Connacht and South Connacht? What is the relationship of Connacht Irish as a whole to its neighbouring dialects to the north and south? Is the proximity of the dialect of Islay to the dialect of Lewis comparable to Islay’s proximity to the Irish of East Ulster? There has been little or no satisfactory investigation of these questions. When the question of synchronic relationships is addressed, it invariably becomes bogged down by diachronic concerns:

The study of dialect geography (as opposed to the relatively watertight consideration of a fairly homogeneous dialect as exemplified in works such as Quiggin’s [1906] or Sommerfelt’s [1922]) has been one which has fallen rather uncomfortably between the stools of the synchronic and the diachronic descriptive paradigms (Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 13–4).

Yet the question of the historical relationships of Gaelic varieties has not been adequately addressed either, primarily because so much of the synchronic situation is either unclear or apparently contradictory. In those discussions which avoid getting

bogged down by diachronic concerns, the focus has inevitably been on assessing the ‘Irishness’, ‘Scottishness’, ‘Ulsterness’ etc. of a particular variety (cf. E. Evans 1969). The liminal position of Rathlin (referred to above) is a case in point:

In the island of Rathlin Scottish Gaelic gained a complete ascendancy, and has survived till to-day (O’Rahilly 1932: 164).

If it is to be admitted that this is a characteristic specimen of Gaelic of the Scottish type, it must not, however, be thought that the difference between the Rathlin dialect and, for instance, that of Kintyre or Arran is approximately the same as between the latter and that of Islay or Skye. Though the distance between Rathlin and the Mull of Kintyre is only about a tenth of the distance between the latter and Skye the (linguistic) differences are far greater. And, though historically the Rathlin dialect shows closer affinities with Scottish than with Irish Gaelic, the external similarities with the neighbouring Irish dialects are more prominent (Holmer 1942: 132).

Wagner (*LASID* i: 31), somewhat more bluntly than Holmer, classifies Rathlin as ‘essentially a Scottish Gaelic dialect, containing strong Irish elements’. Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 188–9), however, avoids drawing any conclusions as to the historical relationship of the Rathlin dialect to its neighbouring dialects on either side of the Sea of Moyle (cf. Ó Cuív 1951: 36).

The failure of Gaelic linguists and dialectologists to develop ways of accurately measuring dialect similarity in a way which would allow for the aggregate appreciation of inter-dialectal proximity and difference means that any broad treatment of synchronic dialect relationships will be inherently vague. In consequence, such treatments can do little to inform our understanding of earlier stages of large-scale dialectal variation. In short, it is impossible to effectively chart the historical development of Gaelic dialects without first knowing much more than we currently do about synchronic dialect relationships.

1.3 Historical development

The first serious attempt to map the historic development of dialectal divisions in Gaelic was O’Rahilly’s landmark *Irish Dialects Past and Present (IDPP)*. O’Rahilly’s theory on the inter-relationships between the contemporary dialects has been hugely influential and could be said to have formed the foundation stone on

which subsequent historical (and synchronic) dialectology in Irish, and Gaelic more generally, was to be set:

A perusal of the following pages will lead to the conclusion that historically there were but two main dialects in Irish, a Northern [the dialects of Ulster, Connacht, and part of north Leinster] and a Southern [Munster and South Leinster], and that each of these (but especially the Northern) was divided into two lesser dialects, which themselves (especially in later times) were not free from minor internal differences (O’Rahilly 1932: 17–8).

A thorough perusal of O’Rahilly’s thesis also serves to highlight his firm belief in what would now be termed linguistic Darwinism (on which see Alter 1999; McMahon 1994: 314–25). The nineteenth-century concept of Darwinism, postulating that species or groups competed with one another for survival, was readily adopted by O’Rahilly and other historical linguists of his generation. Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 219–32) has analysed the influence of Darwinian thought on O’Rahilly’s treatment of Gaelic dialects in detail. O’Rahilly’s views, also held by many of his contemporaries, are contradicted by much of what we now know about dialect development but some of the conclusions which they produced have not subsequently been questioned or revised. In a statement on the nature of Connacht Irish, highlighting the sort of inter-species competition for survival that O’Rahilly envisaged as taking place between discrete and distinct dialects, he asserts:

[Connacht] was apparently waiting passively to be overrun by one or other of its rivals [i.e. the dialects of Ulster or Munster], or to be partitioned between them, The two protagonists had themselves come to close quarters in the north of Leinster [...] The linguistic battle was [...] never fought to a finish, for it was terminated by the triumph of the common enemy, English (O’Rahilly 1932: 264).

This passage clearly highlights the sort of view O’Rahilly took of the evolution of dialects. It is easy to recognise the ridiculousness of these analogies now, with the benefit of decades of sociolinguistic investigation, but these analogies were accepted as valid by his contemporaries. It is perhaps O’Rahilly’s treatment of Ulster Irish, however, which is most problematic, displaying an unsettling degree of subjectivity.⁸ O’Rahilly’s contribution also set the scene for later scholars to develop his ideas

⁸ For further discussion see Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 210–4) and below.

further. Building on conclusions of O’Rahilly’s, Jackson’s theory of ‘Common Gaelic’ suggested that dialectal divisions between the Gaelic languages must have arisen in the period after the thirteenth century. Jackson sums up his theory concisely:

First, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that the Gaelic of Ireland, Scotland, and Man differed in any respect before the tenth century; and on the contrary, there is a body of decisive positive evidence tending to show that so far as we can tell they were identical. Second, Eastern [Scottish Gaelic; Manx] and Western [Irish] Gaelic continued to be one language, sharing many new developments in common, from the tenth until the thirteenth century; but at the same time there are one or two significant indications, the oldest belonging to the tenth century, which point to the beginnings of the divergence between them. Third, the final break between East and West in the spoken tongue came in the thirteenth century, after which neither shared new creations with the other except by independent coincidence [Footnote 1: And in Northern Ireland by the subsequent Scottish Gaelic influence already mentioned]. Fourth, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and possibly later, Scottish Gaelic and Manx continued for the most part to grow as one single language; but probably by the fifteenth century and demonstrably by the sixteenth century they had become separated.

The result is, then, that Common Gaelic lasted as a living tongue until the thirteenth century, and that modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic are dialects of it which replaced it, and separated from each other in the main during the late Middle Irish period (Jackson 1951: 91–2).⁹

Jackson went even further than O’Rahilly in applying the genealogical analogy to the development of Gaelic dialects from a single homogeneous root. The notion of a variation-free natural language is recognised as a linguistic impossibility by contemporary linguists (Weinreich et al. 1968; McMahon and McMahon 2005: 15). It is after the supposedly dialect-free Old and Middle Irish period, a total of six centuries from AD 600–1200, however, that Jackson envisaged the fundamental division between ‘East’ (i.e. Scottish Gaelic and Manx) and ‘West’ (i.e. Irish) Gaelic taking place. The status of Old Irish as a language free from dialectal variation will be examined in detail in later chapters.

⁹ Gillies (1994), Ó Buachalla (2002), Ó Maolalaigh (1995–6; 2008) all seek to reassess Jackson’s understanding of Common Gaelic; these and others will be discussed in greater detail below.

O’Rahilly’s bipartite division of Irish into two historical dialects, after Irish and Scottish Gaelic had separated from one another, was outwith Jackson’s focus but was adhered to until very recently without question, even, surprisingly, by Ó Dochartaigh:

Overall, a fundamental distinction can be made between northern and southern Irish, with Connacht and Ulster falling into the first grouping and Munster Irish into the latter (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 30).¹⁰

Before moving on to discuss the more recent theories on the relationships between Irish dialects, it is important to outline a number of methodological problems with the various analyses which have been discussed above. Each of the following will be treated in turn:

1. Confusion between diachronic identities and genetic relationships
2. The selection of features for analysis
3. An over-dependence on phonological data

1.4 Criticisms of the inherited consensus

1.4.1 Diachronic identities versus genetic relationships

In reference to the mid-twentieth century monograph studies of individual modern Irish dialects published by the DIAS, Ó Buachalla (1985: 1) has pointed out that ‘the strong hand and fertile mind behind the series as a whole were those of T. F. O’Rahilly’. This brings us to the theoretical problem posed for the historical development of Gaelic dialects envisaged by both O’Rahilly and Jackson. The assumption inherent in O’Rahilly’s (and even more obviously so in Jackson’s) thesis is that we are dealing with a situation of direct genetic descent from Old Irish, through Middle Irish and Early Modern Irish to the contemporary dialects of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. In dialectological terms, this has been expressed most clearly by Jackson in his treatment of Manx phonology as follows:

¹⁰ That Ó Dochartaigh should accept the division presented by O’Rahilly is remarkable because Ó Dochartaigh (1976; 1987), alongside Ó Buachalla (1977), was instrumental in deconstructing the notion of ‘Scottish influence’ on Ulster Irish, another manifestation of the linguistic Darwinism to which O’Rahilly subscribed.

[I]nterest is concentrated on answering the question, ‘How did such-and-such a sound develop in the Manx branch?’ For this purpose I start from ‘Common Gaelic’, i.e. that stage of the Goedelic branch of the Celtic languages immediately preceding its break-up into Irish, Scottish, and Manx Gaelic, while they were still one undifferentiated speech; which as I have shown elsewhere, is to be dated in the main to about the thirteenth century (Jackson 1955: 7).

Ó Buachalla (1985: 9) notes that the assumption in many of the twentieth century dialect studies published by DIAS was ‘that all Modern Irish dialectal forms derive directly and genetically from the earlier literary form – ideally from the Classical norm if that were available’. This was the theoretical framework imposed by O’Rahilly in his capacity as senior professor at the School of Celtic Studies, DIAS, the publisher of these dialect monographs. This theoretical framework endured long after O’Rahilly’s death in 1953.¹¹ All of the dialect monographs produced during this period contained a section dealing with ‘Historical Development’ of the dialect in question, many authors acknowledging the role played by O’Rahilly in the formulation of their ideas:

In the second [part] an attempt has been made to show how the sounds of Early Modern Irish have developed in the dialect [...] In the second part of the work a special interest has been taken by Dr. T. F. O’Rahilly, whose advice and expert knowledge have been available from the start (Ó Cuív 1944: x–xi).

Part II is an attempt to outline the development in Ring Irish of the type of speech represented by Early Modern Irish spelling [...] (R. B. Breatnach 1947: 116).

In part II the historical spelling is taken as basis and later developments in pronunciation are often shown by adoption of a simplified form of historical spelling (Mhac an Fhailigh 1968: 134).

The first explicit departure from this framework within the series is that of de Búrca (1970: 112), who observed ‘that [there] doubtless[ly] existed at all previous periods

¹¹ Note that it is not felt so strongly in the DIAS-produced monographs on Scottish Gaelic dialects. These were produced later than many of the Irish dialect descriptions and were for the most part written by non-Irish scholars.

in the history of a language just as many different ways of pronouncing as there are now, if not more'.¹²

Despite the obvious theoretical and practical difficulties, the notion that all modern dialects of Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx are the direct genetic descendants of the earlier attested literary varieties of Gaelic (the view espoused by O'Rahilly (1932) and Jackson (1951)) has endured in Gaelic linguistic and dialectological debate. In a paper treating the occurrence of loan words in the Gaelic languages as a whole, Watson asserts:

They [i.e. the modern Gaelic languages] descend in common from the OI stage of the language (8th – 10th centuries of our era) with major isoglosses (O'Rahilly 1972[=1932]: 113–60) distinguishing the branch to which Scottish Gaelic and Manx belong from that of Irish – and, indeed, the various dialects of the two main languages themselves. These isoglosses date to the centuries immediately after this time (the MI period and commencement of the EMI period (Jackson 1951)) (Watson 1997: 428).

Similarly, and more recently, in his description of the origins of Manx, Broderick claims:

Manx is one of the three Celtic languages belonging to the Goidelic group. It is a descendant of Old and Middle Irish and departs, along with Scottish Gaelic, from Irish in the Early Modern period (thirteenth century) and parts company with Scottish Gaelic itself in the fifteenth century (Broderick 2009: 305).

Inherent in these and other discussions is the assumption that the development of regional variation within Ireland and Scotland must post-date the divergence of an 'Irish' and 'Scottish' type of Gaelic. In other words, the developments are akin to discrete branching nodes of the type often used to facilitate the appreciation of dialectal relationships but which are obviously considerable simplifications. Implicit in the comments of Watson (1997) and Broderick (2009), but most obviously in those of Jackson (1951: 91–2; 1955: 7), is the belief that these representations are not 'simplifications', useful for descriptive purposes. Instead, they are presented as

¹² O'Rahilly's foundation is not followed in the most recent (and most comprehensive) dialect study published by the DIAS (Ó Curnáin 2007: 67).

linguistic fact. The theoretical difficulty with this model was outlined succinctly by Ó Buachalla, over three decades ago:

There is also a danger (and Irish scholars are particularly prone to this) that we assume that the chronological demarcations we have set up – from Old Irish to Middle Irish to Classical Irish to Modern Irish – that [*sic*] these constitute a direct genetic line of descent. This is not so: Modern Irish *cloisim* ‘I hear’ cannot be derived directly from Old Irish *ro-cluiniur* ‘I hear’; *cloisim* is rather a reflex of several restructurings of the verbal system as a whole [...] Although we are dealing with diachronic identities, the process is not one of genetic descent (Ó Buachalla 1982: 429).

Ó Buachalla advocated an approach which takes cognisance of the variation which exists in the modern language and recognises that sound change alone cannot account for the development of variation in any language. In a similar fashion, Ó Maolalaigh has noted that the acceptance of what Hamp (1953: 517) refers to as the ‘conventional orthographic fiction of Early Modern Irish’ as the genetic ancestor of Gaelic dialects can lead to some impossible derivations, based on the ‘implicit hypothesis that the only changes which had taken place between C[ommon] G[aelic] and the local modern form were phonological ones’ (Ó Maolalaigh 1997: 4).

It seems likely that Jackson’s and O’Rahilly’s understanding of the diversification of the Gaelic languages was informed by the understanding of the diversification of Latin as commonly accepted up to the middle of the last century (cf. Jackson 1953: 107; Muller 1945). Jackson’s understanding was that a relatively uniform *lingua franca* was in existence throughout Europe until after the seventh century (cf. Jackson 1953: 107; McManus 1984: 160). This is, of course, a highly unlikely, if not impossible, linguistic situation, but this assumption was widely prevalent in the early and mid-twentieth century. Subsequently, Romance scholars have traced dialectal variation in Latin, through reconstruction, back to the period before Christ, at least (McManus 1984: 160; Wright 1982) and thus highlight the point that Proto-Romance is a postulate, just like Proto-Indo-European, rather than any ‘stage’ or local manifestation of the language.

McMahon and McMahon (2005: 15) note that although no known language is dialect free, ‘we reconstruct to an apex, a single node at each stage, giving the impression of

a uniform system'. While this tendency exists throughout historical linguistics, it appears to be particularly pronounced in Gaelic scholarship (cf. Ó Buachalla 1982: 429). Traditional Gaelic scholarship (*IDPP*; *CG*) has held the Classical Old Irish of the Glosses (on which see *GOI*: 4–6) up as being representative of this single node, from which all later manifestations of the Gaelic languages derive. The fact that little or no discernible diatopic variation has been shown to exist in Old Irish, however, means that 'the impression of a uniform system' is even more pronounced than it might be, for instance, in the case of English, a language whose literature exhibits clearly discernible diatopic variation, even in its earliest phases (Hogg 2006). The status of Old Irish as a 'dialect free' language has never been fully investigated. Nor has any sociolinguistic theory accounting for the apparent homogeneity of Old Irish been forwarded. As such, it is perhaps most accurate to say that a suitable paradigm within which to analyse diatopic variation during the Old Irish period has never been developed. This has, no doubt, been hindered by the lack of clarity with which we understand synchronic dialect relationships in Gaelic.

While the evidence offered by the highly developed literary registers of Old Irish is of huge importance in gaining any insight into the history of the Gaelic languages, we are reminded at this point of 'the inherent methodological flaw in assuming that a literary norm or any one linguistic register is synonymous with "the language" of any specific era' (Ó Buachalla 1997: 180). If the only example of Old English at our disposal was the *Leiden glossary*, written primarily in the Mercian dialect *circa* 800, it would be inappropriate to assume that all modern English dialects are the direct genetic descendants of this variety. Similar assumptions, however, are still made about the relationship between the Old Irish Glosses and modern Gaelic dialects (cf. Watson 1994; 1997; Broderick 2009).

The methodological framework developed by O'Rahilly and Jackson has hindered not only our understanding of the potential for variation in Gaelic during the medieval period but also our understanding of more recent diatopic variation. The Gaelic situation was confounded, historically, by a lack of recognition on the part of Jackson (1951) (and perhaps to a lesser extent by O'Rahilly (1932)) that the literary

language could not have been fully representative of the Gaelic speech during the medieval period.¹³

The development of our understanding of the nature of linguistic variation since the investigations of Weinreich et al. (1968) is one founded on the need for recognising heterogeneity as an innate part of any linguistic system as well as taking into account the role of social factors in explaining that heterogeneity. Writing almost three decades ago, Ó Buachalla (1985: 32) was able to state that ‘in recent years Irish scholars have slowly begun to realise that the literary data – for any period – do not represent linguistic totality’. Many of the basic dialectological assumptions based on this profoundly flawed theory, however, remain unquestioned.

1.4.2 Which features are relevant?

The difficulty of deciding which linguistic features are relevant in assessing the relatedness of language varieties or dialects to one another is not particular to Gaelic. Rather, as Anttila has pointed out, it permeates historical linguistics and historical dialectology generally:

There is one unfortunate gap in the procedure of converting a map [of isoglosses] into a tree. There is no single way of deciding which isogloss is basic. That is why so much controversy arises. Linguists go basically by their feelings or intuitions [...] (Anttila 1972: 309).

The inference from this is that in defining dialectal divisions every feature is of equal importance, provisionally at least. The application of this theoretical isoglossic equality, however, is not compatible with traditional methods because of the infinite number of isoglosses to be found in a linguistic community. As such, some isoglosses, because of their diagnostic qualities, are deemed more fundamental than others.¹⁴ The features represented by isoglosses, however, are by definition

¹³ It is important to stress that later in his life Jackson (1983: 2, 6) appears to have recognised this linguistic fact.

¹⁴ Ó Buachalla (2002: 7) acknowledged that ‘all isoglosses are of equal importance’ but goes on to say that for ‘defining purposes some [isoglosses] must be regarded as more fundamental than others. Relics of former stages of the language are deemed to be particularly significant; they may represent divisions in the protolanguage’. While this may indeed be the case in diachronic surveys of the emergence of dialects, it is hard to see how it is justified in cases which focus on synchronic similarities without reference to earlier stages of the language. This provides a good example of

differentiating features. As such, these investigations run the risk, by virtue of the nature of the features chosen, of over-stating or underplaying the difference of one dialect to another (Maguire and McMahon 2011: 97–101).

This leaves a scholar's personal predilections, or an imperfect command of the evidence, uncontrolled; a scholar may tend to see that which is most obvious to him/her. Ó Dochartaigh's (1987: 205–18) examination of the rhetoric employed by O'Rahilly (1932: 161–92) in his description of Ulster Irish highlights this potential problem:

The fact that O'Rahilly was a speaker of Munster Irish would also appear to have influenced some of his attitudes towards dialects of the northern half of the Gaelic world [...] In contrast to these views on the northern Gaelic dialects, O'Rahilly never applies such emotive terminology to his assessment of Munster Irish developments. In place of adjectives such as 'remarkable' and 'peculiar', he speaks of 'interesting' [usages in Munster] (Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 208).¹⁵

Another apparent blind spot in O'Rahilly's knowledge of Irish dialects, a more surprising one perhaps, relates to the dialects of Clare. He appears to have been unaware of important features such as the raising of /o:/ → /u:/ in proximity to a nasal (cf. O'Rahilly 1932: 195; *LASID* i: 65, 151, 234) and the lexically conditioned realisation of <-th> as /x/ in Clare (O'Rahilly 1926: 195, compare *LASID* i: 223). Further, he underestimated the extent to which <cn> was realised as /kr/ in south Clare (O'Rahilly 1932: 22, compare *LASID* i: 132; Ó Cíobháin 1968–9: 40, *et passim*).¹⁶ This raises serious questions about O'Rahilly's familiarity with the speech of Clare. Further, this lack of familiarity with the dialects of Clare may have influenced his perception of the difference between Munster and Connacht as being greater than that between Connacht and Ulster.

Philology, by its very nature, is reliant 'on an individual linguist's knowledge of a particular language group, but this makes [their results] [...] subject, at least potentially, to interference from individual linguists' opinions' (McMahon and

dialect geography falling 'rather uncomfortably between the stools of the synchronic and the diachronic descriptive paradigms', discussed in Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 13–4).

¹⁵ McCone (1981: 30, n. 9) makes reference to a 'predisposition among some scholars to regard the situation in Munster dialects as the most archaic, in absence of clear evidence to the contrary'.

¹⁶ See chapter 6 for a more detailed treatment of these and other features of Clare Irish.

McMahon 2005: 27). Irrespective of this potential for ‘interference’, the traditional comparative method is limited in the number of features it can analyse. Traditional methods have not been able to provide classifications based on aggregates of many linguistic features. Séguy (1971: 335) has noted that the problematic nature of assessing the total linguistic similarity (*totalité linguistique*) between two areas becomes even more problematic when more features are taken into account.¹⁷ While the *totalité linguistique* to which Séguy refers is perhaps unattainable, that is not to say that methods of testing linguistic relationships using quantitative techniques are impossible. They have been used with varying degrees of success for other languages and will be discussed in chapter 2.

Whereas the traditional comparative method is successful in grouping languages into large families with a certain measure of confidence, sub-grouping remains problematic for traditional methods because it does not allow for an accurate quantification of degrees of relatedness (McMahon and McMahon 2005: 27; cf. Penny 2000: 22). This is precisely the challenge we face when examining synchronic Gaelic dialects in the pan-Gaelic context, as recommended by MacAulay (1992: 151).

Grand (2000) is one Gaelic survey which attempts to ‘weight’ linguistic features in order to quantify degrees of similarity between one dialect (the Gaelic of Islay) and its neighbouring dialects. The rationale behind the selection of particular features, however, is not adequately explained; neither is the differentiation between what constitutes a ‘minor’ or ‘major’ feature adequately explained.¹⁸ In another of his publications, Grant [= Grand] (2004: 70) refers to ‘the following eleven features, which are characteristic of the Gaelic of Islay, [which] would tend to be regarded in this way by most Scottish Gaelic speakers’. This methodology requires not only making judgements about Islay Gaelic but also judgements about the perceptions of speakers of other dialects. An impartial selection of more than eleven features, differentiating and non-differentiating, chosen on suitably randomised grounds, would be more useful in assessing the position of this dialect in relation to its

¹⁷ The original reads: ‘Quand on cherche à comparer deux aires en visant la linguistique, les difficultés apparaissent et croissent suivant le nombre de faits rassemblés’ (Séguy 1971: 335).

¹⁸ See Ó Maolalaigh (2003) for a critical review of this work.

neighbours. The use of differentiating features alone serves to exaggerate differences (Maguire and McMahon 2011: 97–101); any attempt to quantify proximity using such features is, therefore, inherently flawed.

To this end, other language specialists have made use of quantitative dialectology, or dialectometry (as first developed in Séguy 1971; Goebel 1982; 1985 etc.),¹⁹ in order to counterbalance these problems, or at least to act as scientific controls on them, bringing us substantially closer to the ultimately unattainable *totalité linguistique* than traditional methods ever could. These methods have not been much utilised by Gaelic linguists assessing the inter-relationships of synchronic Gaelic varieties so their implications for the historical development of Gaelic dialects remain unknown.

1.4.3 A dependence on phonological material

It is fair to say that phonological evidence has been very much to the fore in the investigation of Gaelic dialects, in both synchronic and diachronic contexts (cf. O’Rahilly 1932, Hickey 2011). The phonological focus of the dialect monographs of the DIAS has already been mentioned, but this emphasis extends much further throughout the literature. This preoccupation with phonology has its origins in the systematic nature of phonological developments and their general usefulness for the reconstruction of a proto-language. *IDPP*, for instance, is almost entirely devoted to matters of phonology, giving a mere six pages (O’Rahilly 1932: 240–5) to matters of lexis proper. Syntax and morphology fare better in *IDPP*, but come nowhere near the prominence of phonology. The following assessment of Gaelic dialect studies is undoubtedly still true:

The amount of systematic information easily available about vocabulary differences is limited. Most studies are phonologically oriented and what lexical information we get tends to be incidental (MacAulay 1992: 151).

The relegation of lexis to the linguistic side-lines has deprived Gaelic of the multifaceted linguistic analysis which other languages take for granted. In spite of O’Rahilly’s (1932: 16) insistence that a full description of any dialect would include

¹⁹ See chapter 2 for further discussion of dialectometry and its application to Gaelic languages and dialects.

the investigation of morphology, syntax and lexis, the low priority assigned to the study of Gaelic lexis can be traced back to O’Rahilly’s stern warning that:

It is easy enough to say that a particular word is in use today in a particular area: but to say that such and such a word is not in use in a particular district may well be risky, in view of the fact that the vocabulary of most districts has as yet been imperfectly explored (O’Rahilly 1932: 244).

It has become a matter of course to start any Gaelic lexical investigation by citing this caveat (cf. Ó Baoill 1978: ix; Stockman 1996: 361). These and other contributions on a smaller scale (Grand 1996; 1995–6), however, have not contributed to the establishment of a framework within which Gaelic lexis could contribute to our understanding of the synchronic and diachronic situation of Gaelic dialects on a basis comparable with phonological or morphological material.²⁰ Indeed, doubt still lingers as to what it is exactly lexis can possibly tell us about dialectal differentiation in the Gaelic languages. Russell (1995: 71) suggests that it is ‘most easy to demonstrate dialect differentiation at the superficial level of lexical items but [that] the differences run much more deeply’. This assessment of lexis as somehow shallow or superficial is one which is commonly accepted in the literature, although rarely with any substantial justification. Ó Curnáin (2007: 57), for instance, claims that the diagnostic power of lexical distributions is generally weaker, in contrast with phonological isoglosses, although the extent to which this proposition has ever been tested is not clear.²¹

Nowhere is the phonological focus of Gaelic dialectology to be felt more strongly than in *SGDS*. The architect of the Gaelic Linguistic Survey of Scotland was Kenneth Jackson, the scholar whose formulation of the theory of Common Gaelic has been discussed above:

²⁰ Lexical material is regarded as a central and important area of investigation for other languages, however. See, for instance, McIntosh (1961) for the focus on lexical geography in *The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*, Scots section and the theoretical base which lay behind this survey. Also of relevance in this context is the *Atlas Linguarum Europae*, on which see Viereck (2005).

²¹ The attitude of earlier linguists towards speakers and informants may be of relevance here: the latter were deemed to be more ‘in control’ of lexical data, and therefore more able to distort things. This contrasted with pronunciation which was thought to be much less susceptible to affectation or pretension.

Linguistically the Questionnaire is organized into two major parts, phonological [the published material] and morphophonological [the unpublished material], with two words included on the last page for the purpose of word geography (*SGDS* i: 54).²²

The lexical element, although probably the most understudied, is not the only non-phonological aspect of the Gaelic languages to have been superseded by phonology. Syntax has traditionally not formed a central tool in the examination of Gaelic dialects. Examples of syntactic studies in the modern Gaelic languages were rare before the investigations of Irish in McCluskey (1998), Ó Sé (1992; 2004) and Hansson (2004), but even less has been published on Scottish Gaelic, Adger and Ramchand (2006) being a very rare example.²³

1.5 Deconstructing ‘Common Gaelic’

There are essentially two distinct but related elements to the consensus which emerged in the wake of O’Rahilly’s (1932) and Jackson’s (1951; 1955; 1972) writings. The first element, which is most closely treated by O’Rahilly, is the synchronic relationships of Gaelic languages and dialects to one another. The second element, which was most clearly articulated by Jackson, pertains to the supposed historical unity and uniformity of Gaelic until the thirteenth century. While both elements are distinct, they are not necessarily independent of one another and are not easily separated.

²² The inclusion of a mere two lexical items, ‘for the purpose of word geography’, betrays Jackson’s lack of faith in lexis as a diagnostic tool for the dialectologist, but more especially for the historical dialectologist. Further, the selection of ‘snowflake’ and ‘sleeve’, two problematic examples of lexical variation, for inclusion may be interpreted as a reaction against the emphasis on lexical data in the Scots section of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland. A short discussion of lexical variation in *SGDS* can be found in Ó Maolalaigh (2010) and the subject also receives mention in Gillies (1992: 321). The approach of Jackson in this regard contrasts with that of Wagner in the execution of *LASID*; Wagner’s focus, inspired by the Swiss-German model (cf. *LASID* i: ix), was much more on traditional vocabulary. The phonological complexity of Scottish Gaelic, of course, warranted an approach which took cognisance of that same complexity (see *SGDS* i: 12), but other factors, both sociolinguistic and practical, may have been at play. It would appear that early trials of postal lexical questionnaires for the Gaelic section of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland had been filled in by some informants using a dictionary and that this had further discouraged Jackson from making use of word geography in the survey (see also *SGDS* i: 11–12). I am grateful to Prof. Gillies for having shared his unique knowledge of the history and development of the Gaelic section of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland with me over the last number of years.

²³ Adger’s (2010) short general survey of Scottish Gaelic syntax does not make reference to dialectal variation.

Recent scholarship, most especially that of Ó Maolalaigh, has started to deconstruct both the theoretical and philological foundation upon which the second of these elements, ‘Common Gaelic’ as understood by Jackson, was built. Ó Maolalaigh (1995–6: 168) has outlined at least one fundamental structural difference between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, relating to the development of eclipsis, which appears to be as old as the Old Irish period (600–900), casting serious philological doubt on the viability of the historical unity espoused by Jackson, at this linguistic level. Other philological analyses have also pointed to similar early distinctions in the morphology (Ó Buachalla 1988; 2002; A. J. Hughes 1997; Ó Maolalaigh 2008) and phonology (Ó Sé 1989; Gillies 2004) of Early Irish. In light of the doubts as to the validity of Jackson’s theory raised by these and other philological analyses, not to mention the weaknesses of O’Rahilly’s own treatment, it is pertinent to re-examine O’Rahilly’s hypothesis on the inter-relatedness of Gaelic dialects, the hypothesis upon which Jackson’s argument is based.

1.5.1 Williams and Galeonic Irish

O’Rahilly’s (1932) outline of the synchronic relationship of Gaelic dialects to one another has, on the whole, been subjected to very little scrutiny since it was first articulated. The first real challenge to O’Rahilly’s outline of the inter-relationships of Irish dialects known to me is that of Williams:

Is ar éigin is fíor don Rathileach é nuair a deir sé nach raibh ach dhá mhórlimistéar canúna Gaeilge in Éirinn. Is fearr a réiteodh sé leis an bhfianaise dá n-áiteofaí gur trí mhórchanúint a bhí sa tír. In iarthar agus oirthear Uladh agus in Oiriaila chomh fada ó dheas le gleann na Bóinne is í Gaeilge an tuaiscirt a bhí á labhairt. I gCúige Mumhan agus Osraí (Cill Chainnigh agus deisceart Laoise) Gaeilge an deiscirt a labhraítí. Idir an dá limistéar sin bhí achar fairsing ó iarthar Chonnacht soir go hInbhear Life agus ó dheas go Loch Garman. Creidimse gur aon chanúint amháin a labhraítí sa limistéar sin, cé go raibh an-éagsúlacht idir na fochanúintí (Williams 1994a: 471).²⁴

²⁴ My own translation: ‘O’Rahilly is hardly correct when he states that there were but two primary dialectal areas for Gaelic in Ireland. The evidence would be better served by arguing for three distinct dialect areas in the country. In west and east Ulster and in Oriel as far south as the Boyne valley Northern Irish was spoken. In Munster and Ossory (Kilkenny and southern Laois) Southern Irish was spoken. Between these two areas was a wide area from west Connacht east to the mouth of the Liffey and south as far as Wexford. I believe a single dialect was spoken in this area, although there was a good deal of variation between the subdialects’.

This statement seems to indicate that Williams sees the differences between the three ‘provincial’ dialects of Irish as being of similar or equal importance, or at least he does not envisage any particular relationship between any of these dialects to the exclusion of another (see Figure 3). In classifying the Irish once spoken in Wexford and the Irish of Mayo as ‘subdialects’ of a dialect common to Connacht and vast swathes of modern Leinster, Williams (1994a) offers no sociolinguistic scenario which might account for this remarkable situation.²⁵ The entire basis for the classification is questionable; it is based on a very small selection of features, some of which are invalid for this purpose.²⁶ In this sense, although Williams (1994a) offers an alternative theory,²⁷ it does little to advance scholarship in either methodological or theoretical terms.

Williams (1994a: 471) suggests that the tripartite division with which we are familiar is an accurate indication of both synchronic and diachronic dialectal variation. He does not indicate that he sees any division of isogloss bundles in Irish into those of primary and secondary importance. This implies that Williams sees the isogloss bundle between Munster and Connacht as being of equal importance to that isogloss bundle which separates Connacht from Ulster (see Figure 3). In a diachronic context, Williams includes the majority of modern Leinster in the same dialect area as Connacht. These dividing lines are only roughly drawn; the relevant isoglosses are not marked, and the classification of the dialect of Longford in this ‘Galeonic’ dialect area is at variance with Williams’s (1972: 97, 114) own earlier comments on the dialect features of Longford observable in eighteenth-century manuscripts. Indeed there is essentially just one isogloss used in the classification of ‘Galeonic’ Irish, based on differing stress patterns, which is hardly a sufficient criterion for the classification of a dialect. Again, one runs into problems with the quantification of dialect relationships; while for the purposes of description these linguistic labels are

²⁵ This would not be remarkable were it not for the fact that Williams (1994b: 740–1) advances an historical sociolinguistic explanation for certain similarities between the dialects of Munster and the Isle of Man; he argues that these shared features may be the result of Viking-period contacts between the two areas.

²⁶ Besides the stress patterns apparently shared by some of the dialects once spoken in parts of modern Leinster with those of Connacht, the only feature treated in detail by Williams (1994a: 471–2) is the realisation of <cn> as /kr/. It is claimed that the isogloss in question distinguishes between the Irish of Leinster and Connacht on the one hand, and the dialects of Munster on the other. This is a highly problematic claim, however (cf. Holmer 1962a: 43; Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 490; Hickey 2011: 364–5).

²⁷ For re-statements of this theory see Williams (1998; 2012)

necessary and useful, we are not dealing with homogeneous varieties which can be assessed without reference to neighbouring varieties.

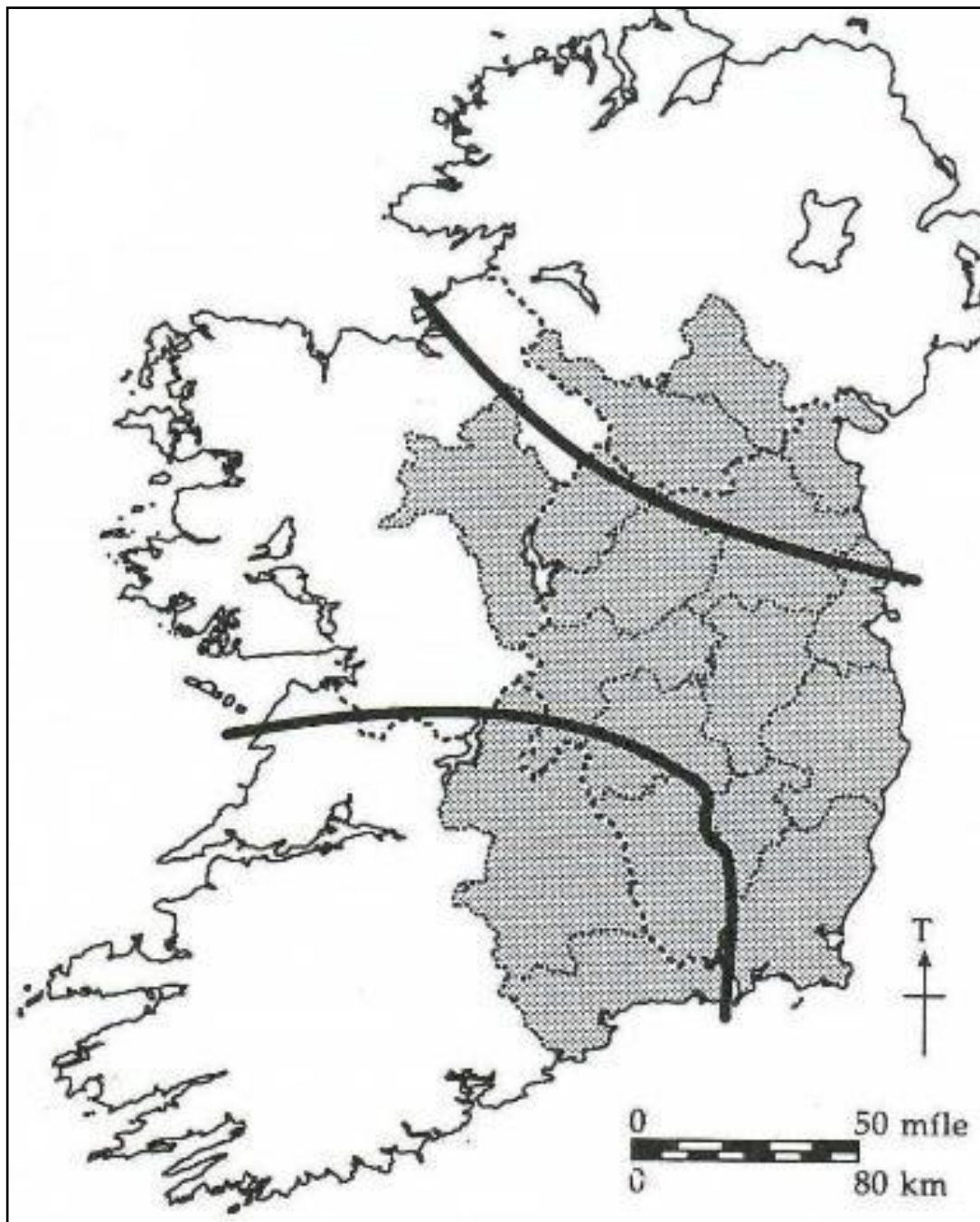


Figure 3 The three major dialects of Irish, according to Williams (1994a: 446)

1.5.2 Ó Buachalla: Northern and Southern Gaelic

The fullest outline to date of the empirical evidence against the O’Rahilly hypothesis is Ó Buachalla (2002). As was the case with Williams (1994a), there is an unhelpful ambiguity between the synchronic and diachronic elements of the argument. Ó Buachalla (2002: 7–8) notes that it is only north of the Boyne that the following features are found:

- (i) retention of initial stress and reduction of long unstressed vowels;
- (ii) retention of verbal ending *-idh* (3rd p. sing. pres. ind.);
- (iii) retention/development of 3rd person subject pronouns without *s-* (*é, í, iad*);
- (iv) retention of neg. particle *cha*;
- (v) retention/development of plural marker *-an*;²⁸
- (vi) retention/development of verbal adj. formant *-ighte*;
- (vii) retention of a ternary system of vibrants (R, r, r’);
- (viii) retention of /e/ in -C, as in *beag, cead, deas, leathan*;
- (ix) retention and lengthening of /e/ in -R, as in *fearr, ceard, fearna*;
- (x) retention and lengthening of /e/ in -dh/gh, as in *feidhm, feum, leadhb, meadhg, leigheas*;
- (xi) the lack of palatalised labials;
- (xii) augmentation of the inherited 5-vowel system;
- (xiii) realization of *ao* as /k:/ or /y:/ as in *caol, daol, fraoch*;
- (xiv) vocalization of medial *bh* and realization of sequence /ev/ as /o:/ as in *leabhar, meabhair, treabhadh, seabhac*;
- (xv) vocalization of medial *dh, gh* and realization of sequence *a(i)dh/gh* as /e:/ or /k:/ as in *adharc, ladhran, gaghar, maighdean, saidhbhir, saighead*;
- (xvi) vocalization of *ng* in stressed syllables, as in *aingéal, daingean, ceangal, luing, peighinn*;²⁹
- (xvii) first person singular pres. ind. and imp. *-am*;
- (xviii) comparative particle *nas*;³⁰
- (xix) possessive *nar*;
- (xx) the conjunction *na ’n (dá)*;
- (xxi) lenition after prep. + singular article;³¹
- (xxii) lenited forms of *téid (théid)* and *tig (thig)*;
- (xxiii) the prep. forms *anna (i n-)*; and *eadar (idir)*

²⁸ This linguistic feature in Ulster is for the most part limited to East Ulster only (cf. Ó Buachalla 1988; Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 173).

²⁹ In fact this feature is found, sporadically, as far south as the Mayo/Galway border, cf. Ballindine < Baile an Daingin, for discussion see D. Ó Baoill (2001).

³⁰ This feature in Irish is limited to East Ulster (Ó Dochartaigh 1983; R. A. Breatnach 1997).

³¹ This is also the practice in the dialects of Ring, county Waterford, however, where combinations of certain prepositions with the article cause lenition of a following noun, e.g. *ón pharóiste* etc. (R. B. Breatnach 1958–61: 220).

After outlining the evidence, Ó Buachalla comes to the following conclusion:

The features I have enumerated are found, with few exceptions, only in Ulster Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx, and they constitute a far stronger bundle of isoglosses than that bundle which divides East [Scotland and the Isle of Man] from West [Ireland]. They seem to suggest that we are dealing here with the primary division in Irish dialectology, one which may represent a historic division in the protolanguage (Ó Buachalla 2002: 8).

Ó Buachalla's outline is somewhat unrefined, however. He claims that these features form an isogloss bundle separating Ulster from the rest of Ireland, but fails to note that some of the isogloss patterns he outlines actually separate the whole of Ireland from Scotland, others separate East Ulster from more westerly Ulster dialects, and others still extend down to parts of Connacht. The position of Manx is not adequately addressed. His implication that the isogloss bundle separating Ulster, Scotland and the Isle of Man from Connacht and Munster constitutes a 'stronger' isogloss bundle than that which distinguishes Ireland from Scotland is similarly problematic, especially in light of what Gillies (2009: 300) has called 'the bulk and embeddedness of features which distinguish Scottish Gaelic from Irish', and the early differentiation between Irish and Scottish varieties (cf. Ó Maolalaigh 1995–6).

While Ó Buachalla (2001) makes a strong case for the unity and validity of 'Northern Gaelic' (consisting of Ulster Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx) as a linguistic reality, no such argument is made for the existence of a 'Southern Gaelic' and no unifying or defining features for this linguistic variety are presented or discussed. No evidence is provided which would suggest that any greater degree of linguistic cohesion exists between the dialects of Connacht and Munster than between those of any other two Gaelic dialects. While the features presented are undoubtedly perceived as being diagnostic of a dialect division of some significance, it would be possible to present a similar number of features which would show a correspondence between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, or even between Munster and Ulster, or, as in the case of Ó hÚrdail (1983), a comparison of the non-contiguous Irish dialect of West Munster Irish with the Scottish dialects of the Western Isles.

Weaknesses of the argument notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that these ‘more prominent phonological and morphological features for which empirical evidence is readily available’ constitute a compelling argument against O’Rahilly’s binary division of Irish into a Munster-based variety and a Connacht/Ulster-based variety. Certainly, they form a more robust argument than that forwarded in Williams (1994a; 1998). The evidence outlined in Ó Buachalla (2002) would suggest that the isogloss bundle dividing Ulster from the rest of Ireland is of primary importance in an Irish context. That is to say, of all the isogloss bundles to be found in Irish dialects, those which separate Ulster from the rest of Ireland are the most profound. His claim that this divergence is also of primary importance in Gaelic as a whole may well prove accurate for historical stages of the Gaelic languages but cannot seriously be applied to the dialect situation of the twentieth century.

Three distinct hypotheses have been forwarded for the relationships of Irish dialects to one another. The first, espoused by O’Rahilly (1932), suggests that the primary division is one which divides Munster from the rest of Ireland, with a secondary isogloss bundle further dividing the dialects of Connacht and Ulster from one another. The second of these hypotheses, advocated by Williams (1994a), would suggest that we are dealing, historically, with a tripartite distinction along the lines of contemporary dialects, but little specific evidence for this theory is supplied. The third, as outlined by Ó Buachalla (2002) and summarized above, claims that the primary and fundamental division in Irish dialects is one which separates Ulster from its southern neighbours.³²

The most relevant point to be elucidated in what follows is the inter-relationship of Irish dialects to one another in a synchronic context, i.e. the extent to which there is one ‘primary’ dialectal division within Irish dialects, a view espoused by both O’Rahilly and Ó Buachalla (although their divisions differ fundamentally). Ó Curnáin’s comments (2007: 51) on the lack of independent innovations found in Connacht might seem to suggest that a primary and secondary isogloss bundle, as suggested by both O’Rahilly and Ó Buachalla, may be the most likely situation.

³² I leave aside for the moment Ó Buachalla’s (2002: 8) comments on the primacy of this isogloss bundle in a pan-Gaelic context, to focus on the Irish context.

There are a number of individual linguistic features (as well as more fundamental structural differences) not outlined by Ó Buachalla (2002)³³ which would seem to be of relevance in assessing a classification of contemporary Irish dialects. It is often the case that individual examinations of discrete linguistic features do not take cognisance of the pan-Hibernian situation, let alone the pan-Gaelic situation and as such few of the features below have been gathered together in order to assess them on a larger scale as part of a set of differentiating dialectal features.³⁴

1.5.3 Other features

Syntax

In his analysis, Ó Buachalla (2002: 8) does not take any account of syntactic features, ‘which have not been much studied hitherto.’ There has certainly been a flurry of output on Gaelic syntax in the last number of years, particularly since the publication of Ó Buachalla’s survey (2002). While accounts of syntactic features are far fewer in number when compared with accounts of phonological features, it is somewhat strange that Ó Buachalla does not make reference to those syntactic studies which had been carried out, some of which in fact supported his hypothesis.

McGonagle (1976a), for instance, draws attention to one such syntactic feature: the generalisation, in the extreme north of Donegal and in Tyrone, of the third person singular masculine pronoun with following lenition for all persons in constructions such as *tá mé ina chodladh* ‘I am asleep’, *tá sí ina shuí* ‘she is sitting’ etc. Incidentally, this syntactic feature is also well established in Manx.³⁵ Ó Dochartaigh (1977), in a much elaborated examination of this syntactic feature, dismisses the possibility that this is merely a symptom of linguistic attrition and notes that based on the evidence of Manx, and in spite of what he believes to be the limited geographic distribution of this feature (north Donegal and Tyrone) in Irish, the origins of ‘this process of pronominal simplification should be placed in the period of Classical Gaelic at least’ (Ó Dochartaigh 1977: 101). Despite Ó Dochartaigh’s claim

³³ In some cases this is because they were published after Ó Buachalla (2002).

³⁴ A notable exception to this general tendency is to be found in the various writings of Ó Maolalaigh, but also in the writing of some earlier scholars, Wagner (1982) and Quin (1966), for example.

³⁵ For examples see Ó Dochartaigh (1977: 95–6).

that this particular feature is limited to Donegal and Tyrone, there is some evidence for its use in Omeath, East Ulster as well.³⁶

A morphosyntactic syntactic feature largely confined to Ulster, and discussed in McGonagle (1988), is the occurrence of an intrusive *n* in the combination of the prepositions *de* ‘of’ *do* ‘to’ and the third person singular and plural possessive adjectives *a* and *ár*. Thus, for instance, where Connacht and Munster have

de / do + a > dá ‘of/to his’

de / do + ár > dár ‘of/to our’

Ulster exhibits mixed usage, using the forms above, as well as the pattern below:

de + a > dena

do + ár > denár

While these might be described as isoglosses of minor importance, Ó Buachalla’s investigation similarly ignores a substantial investigation of the syntactic structure of the perfect in Modern Irish. Ó Sé (1992: 51) notes the cohesion in formation and use of the perfect between Munster and Connacht, in comparison with Ulster (and Manx) which differs structurally and substantially from its southern neighbours in this regard.

In a development of his earlier article (Ó Sé 1992), Ó Sé’s (2004: 181) examination of the ‘after’ perfect and related constructions in Gaelic dialects lists the three most common forms of the periphrastic perfect in Munster and Connacht:

(A) *Tá sé tagtha* ‘He has arrived’

And also with the addition of a prepositional phrase headed by *ag* ‘at’ in the case of transitive verbs:

(B) *Tá sé feicthe ag Máire* ‘Máire has seen it’

³⁶ For an example from Omeath see Ní Bhaoill (2010: 247).

(C) *Tá litir scríofa agam* ‘I have written a letter’

While these examples represent the most common type of periphrastic perfect in Munster and Connacht, Ó Sé has the following to say about Ulster usage:

In Ulster, on the other hand, the use of constructions based on the verbal adjective is quite restricted. The intransitive type [A] is absent, and the transitive type does not include verbal adjectives denoting perception, such as *feicthe* ‘seen’. Ulster therefore has only type [C], and according to Wagner (1959: 117) it has largely stative meaning there. Scottish Gaelic likewise has type [C] only, but it is quite restricted and infrequent³⁷ (Ó Sé 2004: 181).

Ó Sé (2004: 192) goes on to note that current speech in Connacht and Munster uses reflexes of the compound preposition *tar éis* to express the ‘after’ perfect, while Donegal, in Ulster uses *i ndiaidh*.³⁸ Thus, the lexical realization of the ‘after’ perfect, as well the syntactical realization and form of the perfect more generally, presents us with an important syntactic isogloss which distinguishes Ulster from its more southerly neighbours.

The difference between the dialects of Irish can be accounted for by the morphological constraint found only in Ulster dialects where the creation of verbal adjectives from intransitive verbs, and from some irregular verbs, is not tolerated. While the creation of such verbal adjectives is not possible in Ulster dialects, the creation of these verbal adjectives from intransitive and irregular verbs is extremely common in both Connacht and Munster dialects (D. Ó Baoill 2009: 193). In this regard Ulster Irish not only follows Old Irish practice, but also agrees with Scottish Gaelic and Manx (D. Ó Baoill 2009: 209; Williams 1994b: 727).

Hansson (2004) has carried out corpus-based analysis of certain syntactic structures in Irish. Analysing two verbal constructions, the autonomous (e.g. *cuireadh litreacha chun bealaigh*, ‘letters were dispatched’) and the passive progressive (e.g. *bhí m’athair á leigheas acu*, ‘my father was being cured by them’) in a corpus of twentieth-century Irish, noting the following results:

³⁷ Ó Sé makes no further comment on where these restricted and infrequent constructions are found.

³⁸ This does not form a single clear-cut pan-Gaelic isogloss, however; Scottish Gaelic uses a variety of forms, including *air*, *an dèidh* and *an (d)èis* to express the ‘after’ perfect.

In sum, there is considerable variation among the dialects as regards the relative frequency of the autonomous and the passive progressive. This variation is illustrated by the autonomous to passive progressive. In Connacht it is 11/1, Munster 2/1, and Ulster 48/1 (Hansson 2004: 108).

The high number of passive progressives in Munster may be explained by the fact that Munster has, to a large extent, replaced the active progressive with the passive progressive (on which see Greene 1979). She continues:

When it comes to clause type [...] there is dialectal variation in particular between, on the one hand, Connacht and Munster and, on the other hand, Ulster. In Connacht and Munster a slight minority of the instances of the autonomous occur in main clauses, 40% and 43% respectively, while in Ulster the majority of the instances of the autonomous are found in main clauses, 56% (Hansson 2004: 110).

While this is a significant finding, there is a substantial weakness in Hansson's quantitative analysis which ought to be pointed out. All Connacht texts are analysed and described *en masse*, as are those of Munster and Ulster. This requires a significant simplification and loss of clarity in the presentation of the data. It does not allow, for instance, for the comparison of Seán Ó Ruadháin, a Connacht writer from north Mayo, with Ulster writers. Instead, Ó Ruadháin, Ó Cadhain (Cois Fharráige, Conamara) and other Connacht writers are compared *en masse* to either the Ulster or Munster corpus and vice versa. As such, it does not allow for testing the relationships between the Irish of north Connacht and Ulster, or more generally, for the analysis of more subtle inter-dialectal variation.³⁹

Stress

While an analysis of contemporary dialects of Irish would suggest a very clear dialectal distinction in terms of word stress patterns distinguishing between the initial stress of Ulster and Connacht as compared with the non-initial stress of Munster (cf. Hickey 2011: 306–7), this would be an oversimplification, at least in diachronic terms. In the early twentieth century the matter of stress in Irish dialects presented a

³⁹ A more subtle analysis of the Mayo portion of the corpus would have been of particular interest given its geographic location between the Irish-speaking areas of Donegal and Conamara. The rest of the Connacht corpus is from a relatively linguistic homogeneous geographic area. Similarly the Ulster corpus is comprised of writers from northwest Donegal (including a number of texts from the Mac/Ó Grianna brothers). Munster texts used are a similarly geographically narrow selection.

much more complex picture. East Connacht dialects, most notably East Mayo, show a type of stress pattern which is not dissimilar to that known from Munster (cf. Ó Máille 1927: 109; Hickey 2011: 314–7). This is also not uncommon in parts of East Galway down into Clare. Ó Sé (1989) suggests that ‘[i]t is possible that stress shifting to the extent outlined [...] was in fact a feature of the Shannon basin and that the north-east Connacht area of stress shifting was not an accentual island, being linked to north Tipperary and perhaps to part of Longford’.⁴⁰ If the situation postulated by Ó Sé (1989) is to be accepted it accounts for a shared development in Munster and parts of Connacht which could not occur in Ulster due to the shortening of historically long vowels in unstressed position.

Intonation

Writing specifically on the prosody of intonation in Irish, Dalton and Ní Chasaide (2003: 1), over a decade ago, stated that ‘[t]he area of prosody present[ed] a striking gap in our knowledge of the linguistic structure of Irish’. This gap has now been at least partially filled; the most thorough analysis of intonational variation in Irish being found in Dalton (2008). Unfortunately, there is no comparable study of the intonation of Scottish Gaelic. Dalton investigated the intonation of several Irish dialects: Gaoth Dobhair (Donegal); Iorras (Mayo); Conamara and Inis Meáin (South Connacht) and Corca Dhuibhne (Kerry). The results of these investigations are outlined below.

The labelling of tones followed that of used in IViE (Intonational Variation in English), on which see Grabe et al. 2004:

| Label | Commonly observed implementation |
|--------------|---|
| H*L | High target on prominent syllable followed by low target |
| H* | High target, common in initial position |
| !H*L | Downstepped high target, low target |
| L*HL | Low target on prominent syllable, high target on next syllable followed by low target |
| L*H | Low target on prominent syllable, high target on next syllable followed by low target |
| L* | Low target |
| H*LH | High target on strong syllable, low, high |

⁴⁰ See chapter 6 for discussion of the Shannon basin as a potential dialect area.

Thus, L*+H indicates a tonal rise-plateau, L*+H H% indicates a rise-plateau-rise, H*+L H% indicates a fall-plateau-rise and so forth. The relevant tones were analysed for pitch accents, boundary tones, and peak timing. The most important results of the study, for our purposes, are presented in the following graphs.

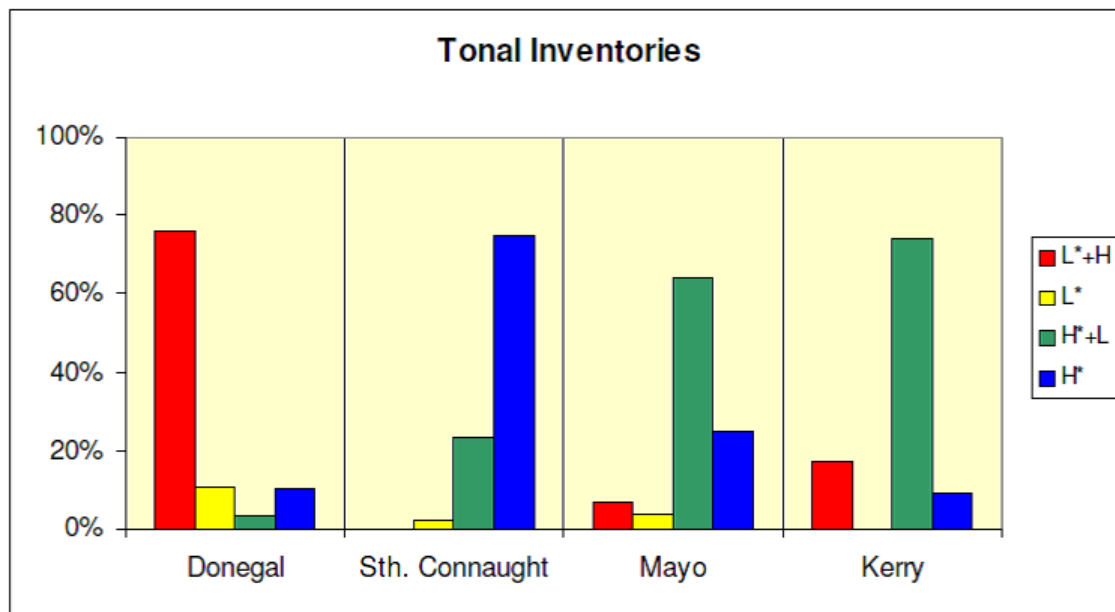


Figure 4 Tonal inventories of Donegal, South Connacht, Erris and Kerry (Dalton 2008: 245)

The tonal inventory of the dialects surveyed indicates clearly that Donegal has a unique intonation system. In the Irish of Donegal the most predominant accent, and most distinguishing feature, across each of the sentence types investigated was a rising accent, labelled L*+H. As to the relationship of South Connacht to the other dialects surveyed Dalton (2008: 246) notes that ‘[w]hile phonetically the dialects of South Connaught differ from the dialects of Mayo and Kerry, the underlying phonological structure of these three dialects is essentially the same’. The graphs of the prenuclear and nuclear inventories are reproduced below:

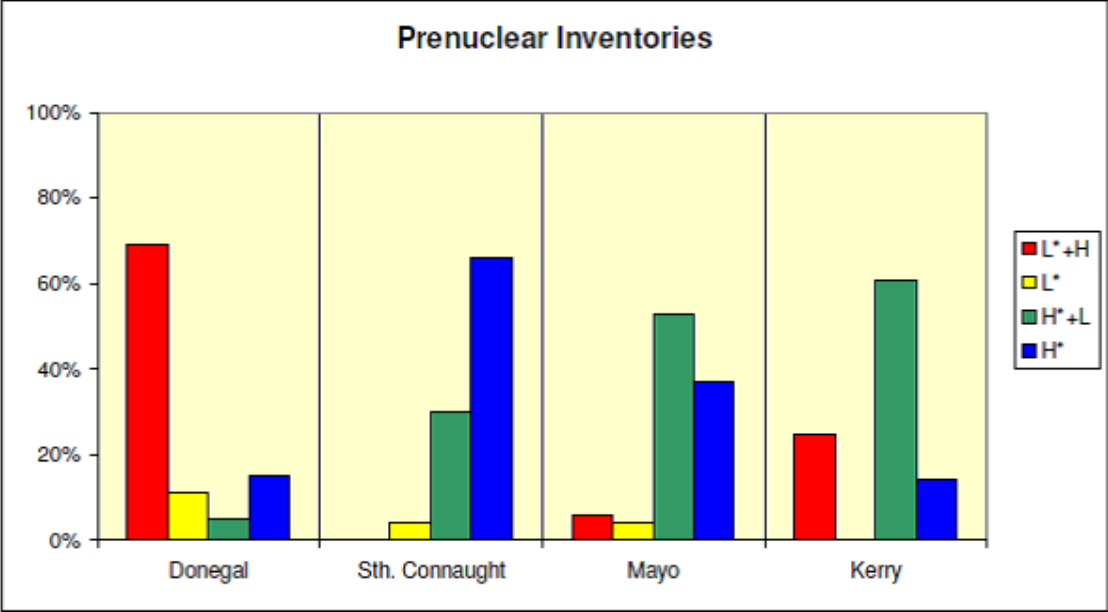


Figure 5 Prenuclear tonal inventories Donegal, South Connacht, Erris and Kerry (Dalton 2008: 246)

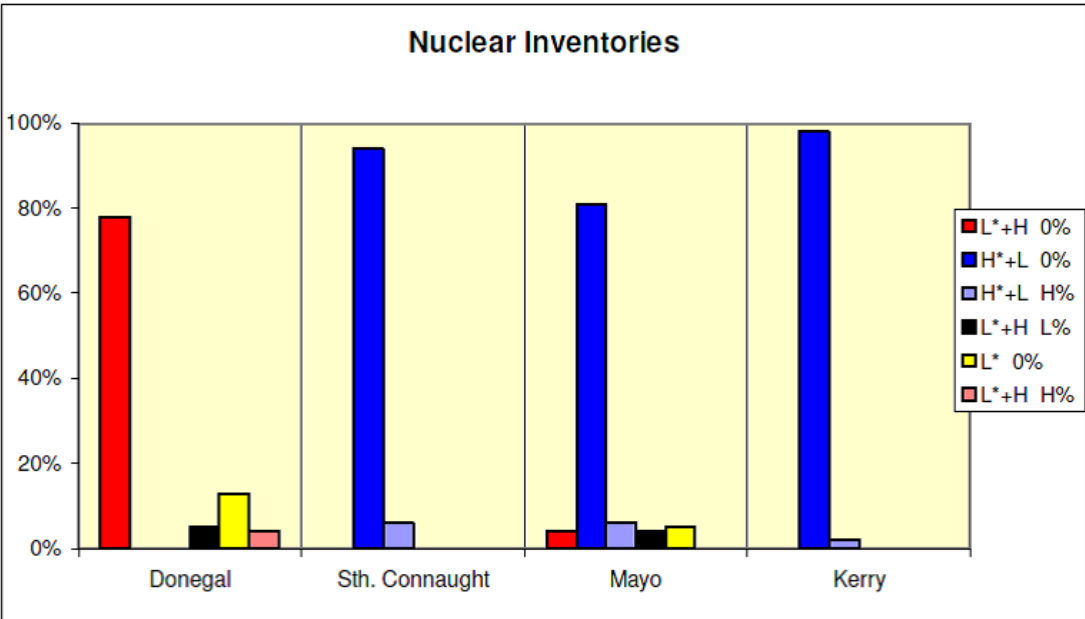


Figure 6 Nuclear tonal inventories of Donegal, South Connacht, Erris and Kerry (Dalton 2008: 247)

The strong North-South divide, indicated by the ‘unique intonation system’ of Donegal as compared to other Irish dialects, is of great synchronic significance. Furthermore, the synchronic variation described in Dalton (2008) is one which is likely to have diachronic importance. Investigation based on the realignment hypothesis sought to establish whether the differences between Donegal and other Irish dialects were simply differences in surface realisations of the same fundamental categories. The evidence indicated, however, that the best treatment of the tonal variation was in terms of ‘different underlying categories’ (Dalton and Ní Chasaide 2005: 461; Dalton 2008: 240). This suggests two historically distinct types of intonation within Irish, an Ulster-based variety, and one to which contemporary dialects of Mayo, Galway and Kerry belong. It is unfortunate that no Scottish Gaelic dialect was analysed as a point of comparison.

Inter-dialectal perception and ‘standard’ Irish

In assessing the proximity of dialects to one another, it is usually useful to note the perceptions of dialect speakers themselves. Perceptual dialectology is a relatively new linguistic discipline (developed in Preston 1988), a main purpose of which is to assess the perceived difference or similarity between dialects by non-linguists. The position of Irish is perhaps unusual because its dialects do not cover a continuous geographic area, as is the case with British English, but there would seem to be a significant body of anecdotal evidence which supports a perceptual divide between the Irish of Ulster and more southern varieties (cf. McLeod 2008: 98). A large-scale perceptual investigation of all living Irish dialects remains to be carried out, however.

Highlighting this gap in our knowledge, Hindley’s (1990: 63) anecdotal comments offer a rare insight into the attitude of Irish speakers to dialects other than their own. He reports that many Irish speakers tend to turn off the radio when dialects other than their own are being broadcast, with ‘discrimination being most common against Donegal (Ulster) Irish, which is very distinctive’. It has often been claimed that the standard language⁴¹ draws heavily on the dialects of Munster and Connacht and

⁴¹ *Gramadach na Gaeilge agus Litríú na Gaeilge* [The Grammar and Spelling of Irish] (1958) set out the ‘standard’, i.e. Department of Education-approved grammar and spelling of Irish. The literary

discriminates, to a point, against the Irish of Ulster (for recent examples of these claims see Ó Duibhín 2004, Höglund 2004). I have noted the apparent attitude of T. F. O’Rahilly towards the dialects of Ulster, in this context it is pertinent to note how Brian Ó Cuív understood the process by which *Gramadach na Gaeilge agus Litriú na Gaeilge* came about, as cited by Ó Siadhail:

I [Ó Siadhail] am informed by Professor Brian Ó Cuív that Professor T. F. O’Rahilly, following the break-up in the early forties of a committee to investigate the question of standardization, send [*sic*] his personal recommendations to the then Taoiseach Éamon de Valera. It is Professor Ó Cuív’s [*sic*] impression de Valera approved of these recommendations⁴² and passed them to Tomas [*sic*] Page of the Oireachtas Translation Staff and that they were ultimately to form the basis of Official Standard Irish (Ó Siadhail 1981: 75, n. 1).⁴³

Greene, a successor of O’Rahilly’s as a senior professor in the DIAS, has also drawn attention to the fact that O’Rahilly, upon the foundation of the Free State:

felt it was only a question of time before one dialect would by general consent have earned the right to be regarded as the standard one, making it clear that he believed that that dialect would be [Fr. Peter] O’Leary’s West Munster’ (Greene 1972: 26).

Thus the origins of the government (and department of education) endorsed ‘standard’ language are to be found in the dialect furthest removed, both linguistically and geographically, from Ulster.

While the evidence cited above is largely anecdotal, it is not insignificant, drawing attention to the need in Irish for some sort of inter-dialectal perceptual survey which would allow for an assessment of how speakers view divergent dialects in relation to their own. The comparison of the results of such a survey with purely linguistic evidence ought to be of interest. What does stand out, however, is that perceptually

canon of Modern Irish has been hugely influenced by Munster Irish. The precedence attributed to Munster Irish within the education system is highlighted by the fact that Munster Irish was typically the dialect learned by L2 speakers of Irish and was the most commonly taught in schools (for further information see D. P. Ó Baoill 1988: esp. 111).

⁴² Ó Cuív was certainly in a position to have been aware of the correspondence between the two men; he had been a student of O’Rahilly’s during the early forties (cf. Ó Cuív 1944: xi) and subsequently married De Valera’s daughter (< <http://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=1658>>).

⁴³ See S. Ó Riain (1994: 63–76) for further discussion of the processes involved.

Ulster Irish seems to be the most distinctive dialect of Irish, and in terms of ‘standard’ Irish it appears as a divergent and problematic form (McLeod 2008: 98).

1.6 Assessment

While the difficulty posed by the first problem outlined above (genetic descent) has been overcome in recent work, most notably through the work of Ó Buachalla and Ó Maolalaigh, there still remains for Gaelic, as for other languages, the problem of the choice of features to be examined, their relative importance in distinguishing dialects, and, especially for Gaelic, an over-reliance on phonological material in defining dialectal distinctions, and more specifically a lack of due attention to lexis.⁴⁴

While Ó Buachalla’s (2002) features are likely to be significant, it would not be difficult to find twenty-three linguistic features linking any two parts of the Gaelic-speaking world.⁴⁵ The subjectivity in the selection of ‘important features’ when we have no qualifying data ought to be a cause for concern. This is perhaps evidenced in Ó Buachalla’s classification of Scottish Gaelic and Manx as sub-dialects of Eastern Gaelic. Ó Buachalla, an eminent Irish linguist, was comfortable and familiar with a range of Irish dialects but could not claim a similar degree of expert knowledge of Scottish Gaelic or Manx. The classification of Manx and Scottish Gaelic together is not unproblematic, especially in light of evidence for an early fundamental structural feature (the development of eclipsis) shared by Irish and Manx to the exclusion of Scottish Gaelic (see O’Rahilly 1932: 152–8; Ó Maolalaigh 1995–6; 2013: 83–4) as well as other evidence for commonality between certain dialects of Irish and Manx to the exclusion of Scottish Gaelic in matters of morphology and phonology (Ó Maolalaigh 2001: 32; 2013: 84; Williams 1994b: 740) and syntax (Ahlqvist 1978: 75; Ó Dochartaigh 1977: 101). In short, the tree model seems particularly ill-suited to a description of the position of Manx.

One could argue that Ó Buachalla’s treatment of the Manx and Scottish Gaelic material is reminiscent of O’Rahilly’s treatment of his Ulster (not to mention Manx

⁴⁴ The extent of Hickey’s (2011: 299–301) engagement with lexical variation is a simple word list of 15 lexical items offered without discussion.

⁴⁵ Consider, for instance, Ó hÚrdail’s (1983) comparison of a large selection of phonological and lexical features of south Munster Irish and the Scottish Gaelic of the Western Isles, two of the most geographically distant areas of the Gaelic-speaking world.

and Scottish Gaelic) material. That is to say, Ó Buachalla's intimate knowledge of the differentiating features of Irish dialects may have exaggerated them in the greater Gaelic context. Ó Buachalla's (2002: 8) contention that this isogloss bundle separating southern Irish varieties from Ulster, Scottish Gaelic and Manx is the most significant in the Gaelic-speaking world is challenged by what Ó Maolalaigh (2008: 194) has called 'the growing body of evidence which points towards early divergences between varieties of Gaelic in Ireland and Scotland'. It is unfortunate that quantitative methods of linguistic investigation which could elucidate these matters and go some of the way towards solving this problem for Gaelic dialectology have not been utilised in the debate. These observations aside, however, the central hypothesis that would distinguish between Ulster and all other varieties of Gaelic in an Irish context would seem to remain intact, and indeed, is supported by the empirical evidence presented above.

Ó Buachalla (2002) does not include lexicographical items in his survey, suggesting instead that they have been treated in C. Ó Baoill (1978). This is inaccurate, however. Ó Buachalla seeks to outline *features* which are limited geographically to the area north of the Boyne. Ó Baoill does not presume that any of the lexicographical items he examines are limited to this region, noting that '[n]aturally these include many items which are confined to the area which comprises northern Ireland and southern Scotland; such items, however, are not treated separately here' (C. Ó Baoill 1978: v). Thus, Ó Baoill's lexicographical survey should not be used to support Ó Buachalla's thesis, because despite straddling the Sea of Moyle, it is not a pan-Gaelic survey.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the competing theses as to the relationship of the Gaelic languages to one another, and most especially the relationship of dialects of Irish to one another. Attention has also been drawn in this chapter to the need for something akin to an experimental control for the investigation of inter-relationships between Gaelic dialects. It has also highlighted the extent to which a lack of clarity regarding synchronic dialect relationships has hindered our understanding of their diachronic

development, as well as our understanding of dialectal variation during earlier stages of the development of Gaelic.

The following chapter will address some of these needs. The development of quantitative methods of linguistic analysis generally will be discussed, but with special reference to Celtic languages. I will also discuss more fully the implications that the application of quantitative methods has for the issues raised in this dissertation. These implications have gone unnoticed in Celtic Studies yet have the potential to qualify and act as controls on the investigations of those mentioned above. Both phonetic and lexical material will be used in these investigations, allowing us to qualify and compare the results from various methods using various data sets.

2. Dialectometry: applications and implications

2.1 Introduction

As already outlined, the existence of discernible dialect areas is not problematic for Gaelic scholars. Romance dialectologists, on the other hand, dealing with an expansive and for the most part geographically contiguous language continuum have often shied away from acknowledging the existence of dialects as such, because as entities dialects are subjective in their nature (cf. Bynon 1978: 190); it is the linguist who selects the particular isogloss(es) or features which (s)he considers to be most significant from the mass of conflicting isoglosses (cf. McMahon and McMahon 2005: 93). These concerns are undoubtedly valid. Historically, there has been no generally accepted method for calculating the statistical significance of the connections between related languages or dialects (Kessler 2001: 1). This, of course, leads to problems, especially in diachronic terms where linguists looking at the same data ‘can come up with widely different appraisals as to whether the case for historical connection has been proved or not’ (Kessler 2001: 1). The varying interpretations of what is essentially the same linguistic evidence for Irish by O’Rahilly (1932), Williams (1994a; 1998; 2012), and Ó Buachalla (2002) are a case in point.

The search for methodologies which can assess the relative proximity of closely related linguistic varieties, has often involved the application of mathematical methods to linguistic data. These methods attempt to quantify the connections between synchronic linguistic varieties. By extension, these synchronic data can allow for the extrapolation of diachronic relationships. The attractive possibility presented by these methodologies is to ‘validate and correct insight, or, where insight judgements are in conflict, help to decide between them. In short it increases objectivity, sharpens findings, and sometimes forces new problems’ (Kroeber and Chrétien 1937: 85). The advantage of using mathematical techniques in investigating linguistic relationships is obvious — objectivity. It can avoid the sort of inadvertently prejudiced analysis of dialect material which characterised, for instance, O’Rahilly’s (1932: 161–91) treatment of Ulster Irish (cf. Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 205–31). It also allows scholars to handle large amounts of data, and to do so quickly. Embleton has

summarised the two main goals of mathematical applications to linguistic data since the 1930s:

Since at least the 1930s, linguists have been seriously and practically interested in the development of mathematical techniques for assessing the closeness of the relationship between a pair of languages, using only data from the contemporary languages themselves. Applied pairwise, this leads to the reconstruction of a family tree for a group of genetically related languages, without the use of any actual historical information about the languages or language family. If one can either determine a rate of linguistic change, or calibrate one of the branch lengths of the putative tree against some external information, one can then assign dates to the splits in the family tree (Embleton 2000: 143).

There are two separate elements to be distinguished in these analyses. The rationale of the first, i.e. using synchronic data to assess the relative proximity of synchronic language varieties to one another does not require further explanation and is the foundation on which comparative philology is set (cf. Bynon 1978: 17–21). The second element, however, relates to the establishment of a constant rate of linguistic change and thus to the establishment a chronology of independent development, based exclusively on synchronic evidence. This has not gained acceptance, because a constant rate of change cannot be proven to exist, a fact which has led this application to be described by Embleton (2000: 152) as a ‘blind alley’.

2.2 Glottochronology and lexicostatistics

Of all quantitative methods developed for the comparison of linguistic varieties, Swadesh’s word-list method is amongst the earliest, and the best known, but has become largely synonymous with glottochronology (Embleton 2000: 145; Bynon 1978: 266–7). In the early 1950s, Swadesh (1950; 1953) introduced a model of linguistic change based on a vocabulary turnover process closely analogous to radioactive decay. The emergence of radiocarbon dating in archaeology around the middle of the last century presented historical linguists with an attractive idea. Radiocarbon, also known as Carbon-14 (often shortened to ^{14}C), is radioactive and is present in the atmosphere in a constant ratio relative to non-radioactive Carbon. Plants absorb both radiocarbon and non-radioactive carbon in the same ratio, as in turn do animals. When plants and animals die, however, the radiocarbon trapped

within them decays at a constant rate over time. This allows for the calculation of the passage of time since a piece of organic matter stopped absorbing radiocarbon, i.e. since it died (McMahon and McMahon 2005: 179).

The emergence of radiocarbon dating in archaeology provided the impetus for the application of analogous methodologies to linguistic data. The expectation in Swadesh (1950; 1953) was that the radiocarbon model could yield a similar dating method applicable to linguistic data. Swadesh proposed that a list of meanings can be arrived at which are likely to be found in all cultures and are particularly resistant to borrowing and other cultural (and inter-cultural) influences. This list became known as ‘basic core vocabulary’ or a ‘Swadesh list’. It contains items such as numerals, simple kinship terms, topographical terms, naturally occurring phenomena, personal, demonstrative, and interrogative pronouns, some flora and fauna, and verbs denoting simple ‘basic’ human activities (Embleton 2000: 147–8). The theory which Swadesh sought to prove was that these terms show a constant rate of replacement, similar to the constant rate of decay displayed by radiocarbon. This rate of retention is worked out on the following mathematical basis:

$$t = \frac{\log c}{2 \log r}$$

t = time depth in millennia

c = percentage of cognates

r = ‘glottochronological constant’ = rate of retention⁴⁶

Although the theory of a constant rate of change has largely been repudiated because there is no such constancy (cf. McMahon and McMahon 2005: 183–5), Swadesh’s methodology is important in that, in turn, it provided the motivation for lexical comparisons between many linguistic varieties at the same time. Originally conceived of together as ‘glottochronology’, subsequent scholars have distilled two

⁴⁶ This formula is taken from McMahon and McMahon (2005: 180). For further discussion see Embleton (1986).

separate processes from Swadesh's methodology: glottochronology and lexicostatistics.

[G]lотноchronology is a further step, an application of lexicostatistics. It is true that both methods rely on the notion of basic vocabulary; but glottochronology takes the calculations of lexicostatistics and uses these for a separate purpose, namely dating. It is possible to use lexicostatistics without ever proceeding to do glottochronology; but it is not possible to do glottochronology without first doing lexicostatistics (McMahon and McMahon 2005: 179).

These two distinct approaches have been subject to misunderstandings from specialists and non-specialists alike.⁴⁷ Lexicostatistics should be understood as a method involving quantitative comparison of lexical cognates. Glottochronology should be understood as an attempt to use lexicostatistical results in estimating the length of time since two or more languages diverged from a common proto-language. Historically, lexicostatistics has often tended to be controversial among dialectologists and historical linguists, primarily due to its association with glottochronology.⁴⁸

Academic commentary of the 1950s and 1960s did not draw a distinction between glottochronology and lexicostatistics and Swadesh (1950; 1953; 1955) used the terms indiscriminately. Once some practitioners of quantitative methods dispensed with dating techniques, however, the importance and relevance of lexicostatistics in its own right became apparent. By the 1970s, the distinction between the two approaches to lexical information was clear in the minds of most scholars making use of these quantitative methods (cf. Elsie 1983–4: 117), if not in the minds of all those describing them (cf. Bynon 1978: 266).

In the past, these methods were of more interest to geneticists and computer scientists, but their application to linguistic data has, in recent years, become increasingly important to linguists. This comes on the back of awareness on the part of historical linguists that the inability to test and demonstrate linguistic relationships

⁴⁷ Trask (2000: s.v. lexicostatistics) notes that the terms 'lexicostatistics' and 'glottochronology' have been used interchangeably; he calls this 'poor practice'. For examples of this 'poor practice' see Bynon (1978: 266) and Campbell (1998: 177).

⁴⁸ A recent paper (Blažek 2009), which seeks to locate Gaulish within a larger Celtic framework using glottochronology, is not discussed here as it sheds little light on internal variation within Gaelic.

is a problem for a discipline which posits that all isoglosses are, in theory at least, of equal importance. This type of quantitative dialectology has come to be known under the general term of dialectometry. Lexicostatistics is simply the earliest and perhaps best-known dialectometric method applied to linguistic data.⁴⁹

Dialectometry could be described as an attempt to quantify the statistical significance of linguistic features, often those documented by traditional philological investigation.⁵⁰ It has both synchronic and diachronic applications, ‘the goal being the discernment of meaningful resemblances in the data, which in turn may allow us to identify those languages [or linguistic varieties] which descend from a single common ancestor, and to recover the history which has produced the divergence’ (McMahon and McMahon 2005: 1). One of the primary functions of dialectometric methods then is to assist in the classification of languages and dialects. While such quantitative approaches have been applied to the Celtic languages, they have attracted minimal attention from traditional Celtic scholars. Early attempts at glottochronology received some acknowledgement from at least one eminent Celtic scholar, albeit in passing (cf. Greene 1966: 123–4), but more recent developments in quantitative linguistic methods appear to have gone entirely unnoticed and their implications for pan-Gaelic dialectology and historical linguistics ignored.

2.3 Early investigations of Celtic

The earliest ‘lexicostatistical’ [*leg.* glottochronological] examination of a Celtic language is McNamara (1961), which sought to deduce the rate of lexical change in the development from Old Irish to Modern Irish, along the lines outlined in Swadesh (1955). The study used Swadesh’s 100-item list with Old Irish lexical items being taken from *GOI* and *Thes.* and, therefore, range from 750 to 900. Independently of the Old Irish list, Modern Irish forms were obtained from three scholars of the

⁴⁹ See McMahon and McMahon (2005) for a comprehensive review of quantitative methods in the classification of languages.

⁵⁰ Nerbonne and Kretschmar (2006: 387) define dialectometric techniques as ones which ‘analyse linguistic variation quantitatively, allowing one to aggregate over what are frequently rebarbative geographic patterns of individual linguistic variants, such as which word is used for a particular concept in a language area, or which sounds are used in particular words’. This differs from lexicostatistics (i.e. the statistical comparison of meaning correspondences), one element of dialectometry.

language. The scholars were asked ‘to record for [McNamara] what in their judgement were the most commonly-used modern Irish equivalents for the English words listed’ (McNamara 1961: 23). The analysis is very crude and at least two significant criticisms can be made.⁵¹

The first is one which has been discussed above, i.e. the assumption that the Classical Old Irish we know from the Würzburg and Milan glosses, etc. is the direct genetic ancestor of all dialects of Modern Irish. The most important criticism of McNamara’s attempt, however, is that none of the informants used (James Carney, Dublin; John V. Kelleher, Harvard; Robert T. Meyer, Catholic University) were native speakers of Irish or even scholars with demonstrated expertise in modern dialectology.⁵² This choice gave rise to some startling inaccuracies in the data provided. One informant gives *flaiche* in response to English ‘rain’ and gives *cú* for English ‘dog’. One may contrast this with the responses elicited for the same headwords by Wagner (*LASID* i, 56, 221) from native Irish speakers across all living dialects (cf. *LASID* i, 56, 221).

For these reasons, the results, which cannot possibly represent morphophonemic retention rates, are essentially useless. McNamara (1961: 29) concludes, however, that his analysis ‘appear[s] to indicate additional support for Swadesh’s hypothesis of a fairly uniform rate of change in languages generally’. This is based on a composite rate of change calculated for the period AD 861–1961.⁵³ The notion of a steady rate of linguistic change⁵⁴ for Irish must be at odds with the scholarly consensus which indicates the period preceding the Old Irish period (up to the sixth century), from

⁵¹ The methodology employed, we now know, is fundamentally flawed, but the author refers to the notion ‘[that] the rate of change in basic vocabulary is remarkably similar in different languages’ and ‘a universal rate [of change]’ as a ‘working hypothesis’ (McNamara 1961: 23). It can also be noted that, like others, McNamara failed to distinguish between glottochronology and lexicostatistics.

⁵² While James Carney was undoubtedly extremely competent in the modern language, the selection of native speakers, or at least scholars of contemporary dialects, would have been preferable.

⁵³ McNamara (1961: 23) notes: ‘Texts’ dates range from about 750 to 900 A.D. which permits us for practical computation to assign the approximate date 861 to all [of the Old Irish texts examined]’. The reason for choosing AD 861 is not expressly stated; a more suitable date would surely be 825, the mean of 750 and 900. One must presume that AD 861 was chosen to give the survey a time depth of 1100 years.

⁵⁴ An opposing view of linguistic change which had significant influence was that espoused by Jackson in *LHEB*, i.e. the linkage between social upheaval and an accelerated rate of linguistic change. In certain ways this theory of linguistic change was validated by the work of Milroy and Milroy (1985), although Jackson’s position, fundamentally, did not take cognisance of the difference between written and spoken language.

which McNamara starts off, was one of extreme linguistic upheaval.⁵⁵ This important point is not referred to by McNamara.

As late as 1971, the term glottochronology was inaccurately used to describe an investigation of the relative proximity of the Brittonic languages to one another which made no reference to the absolute dating of divergence (Fowkes 1971: 189). Fowkes's attempt did not seek to date a divergence on the basis of the lexical analyses and as such his own use of the term 'glottochronology' is inaccurate: there is no chronology involved. Rather, Fowkes describes relative proximity or distance for language varieties based on an analysis of one hundred lexical items. He found Welsh and Breton to agree in 71 cases, Welsh and Cornish to agree in 75 cases, and Cornish and Breton to agree in 80 cases. Fowkes notes:

There emerges, then, a certain validity to the findings of glottochronology [*leg.* lexicostatistics] when applied to Brythonic, and, although no new conclusions are drawn from these findings, their concurrence with data known from other branches of study provides confirmation of our theories. Reliability of the method may grow less when languages more remotely connected are compared (Fowkes 1971: 189–94).

Fowkes's survey, however, neglected to give any information on his sources for the lexical items returned. He is correct, nonetheless, in that his results, to a great degree, correspond to Jackson's (1953: 11–2; 1967: 1–2) philology-based assessment of the relationships of Brittonic Celtic languages to one another. A more sophisticated lexicostatistical investigation of the inter-relationships of the Brittonic languages was to follow.

2.4 Elsie's Brittonic survey

Although the study was not without some significant faults (some discussed below), Elsie (1983–4) was very clear about the distinction between glottochronology and lexicostatistics.⁵⁶ Elsie also acknowledged that the application of a Swadesh list to Brittonic results presented a number of problems. One of the main problems is that of

⁵⁵ In the words of Koch (1995: 40) 'the period [367–637] presents evidence for the most rapid and profound series of linguistic changes of any two- to three-century span in the history of the language'.

⁵⁶ Elsie (1983–4: 111) states clearly: 'This paper is therefore confined to a lexicostatistical study, and as such makes no conclusions as to the absolute time depth'.

dialect variation within the individual languages themselves, i.e. in Breton and Welsh:

The problem which appears most evident in this study is that of establishing test equivalents for languages with no complete linguistic unity [i.e. all languages]. Both Welsh and Breton differ from region to region in phonology, lexicon, and to a lesser extent morphology. These lexical differences in the dialects of these two languages play an important part in the basic vocabulary (Elsie 1983–4: 112).

The inclusion of Cornish in this survey is important in terms of understanding Elsie's motivations:

In a glottochronological study, this fact as well as the time difference of the recorded equivalents would rule out a direct comparison [of Late Cornish] with Modern Welsh and Breton. For lexicostatistics, however, the Cornish list is essential in determining a dialect subclassification of Brittonic (Elsie 1983–4: 117).

The aim is clearly not to date divergence in the sense envisaged by Swadesh, but rather to measure synchronic similarity and thus help in the classification of related linguistic varieties. The analysis of the 205 lexical items, along with a short list of 99 lexical items marked by an asterisk,⁵⁷ gives the following results:

| Welsh-Breton cognates | Breton-Cornish cognates | Cornish-Welsh cognates |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 134 (= 65% +/- 1%) | 153 (= 74.6% +/- 1%) | 152 (=74.1% +/- 1%) |
| *73 (= *73.7% +/- 2%) | *83 (= *84.8% +/- 2%) | *78 (= 78.8% +/- 2%) |

The relative proximity of the languages is stable across both lists. Taking the average of both lists, although without explaining why, the following percentages of cognates are presented:

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Welsh-Breton: | 69.6% |
| Breton-Cornish: | 79.7% |
| Cornish-Welsh: | 76.5% |

⁵⁷ Two lists are used in Elsie's (1983–4: 111) survey of Brittonic; the longer one is based on Swadesh (1952), the shorter one is based on Swadesh (1955). The second list is envisaged as a control on the first given that 'over two-thirds of the specific problems encountered in the establishing of Brittonic equivalents for the test list were for those items not found in the shorter list'.

The figures presented above represent the lexical correspondences between each of the three respective languages. Average lexical distance (100% minus percentage of lexical correspondences) for each variety works out as follows in a distance matrix:

| Breton | Cornish | Welsh | Brittonic |
|--------|---------|-------|------------------|
| | 20.3 | 30.4 | Breton |
| | | 23.5 | Cornish |
| | | | Welsh |

This lexical distance matrix above can also be represented in other ways. The image in Figure 7 below, has been generated by the computer program *NeighborNet* (on which see Huson and Bryant 2006), which will be discussed in greater detail below. Here, the length of the line between any two points is what is important, so that the length of the line between Welsh and Breton is greater than that between Breton and Cornish, indicating less similarity than between Cornish and Welsh.

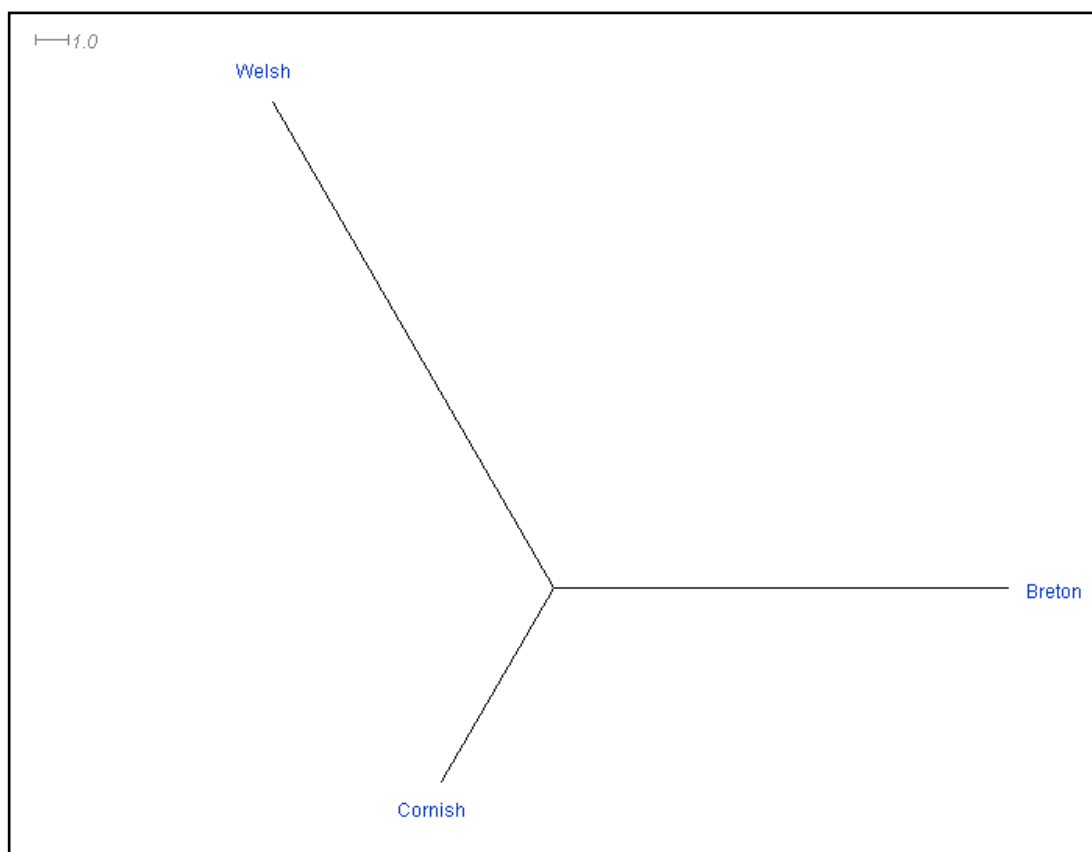


Figure 7 The Neighbor-Net relationship between the Brittonic languages, following Elsie (1983–4)

Elsie’s results (1983–4: 126) support those of Fowkes, indicating that the relationship of Breton to Cornish is closer than the relationship of either of those two languages to Welsh. Elsie (1983–4: 126) comments that the ‘data correspond to what one might call the geographical and historical realities of Brittonic Celtic and give statistical support to the internal relationships of this group, worked out on a phonological level by Jackson (1953)’. The relevant historical relationships set out by Jackson were as follows:

The relationship of Cornish and Breton is one of these problems on which we are by far the best informed; it is also by far the most interesting of them [...] There are numerous ways, both in phonology and morphology, in which Cornish and Breton agree closely with one another and differ from Welsh [...] This means, of course, that Cornish and Breton are especially closely related together and less closely connected with Welsh (Jackson 1953: 11).

In his subsequent analysis of the historical phonology of Breton, Jackson (1967: 846) is even more assured of the historic relationship between Cornish and Breton, and the degree of linguistic unity between them, to the exclusion of Welsh. Jackson goes so far as to give a name to the proto-variety from which both Breton and Cornish are derived, 'Cornu-Breton'. More recently Hamp (1995: 47) has restated those relationships once again.

Elsie's simple investigation of Welsh, Cornish and Breton, therefore, is consonant with, and serves to further reinforce the philological investigations of Jackson (1953; 1967) and Hamp (1995), relying, as they do, on totally different criteria. As such, they are important evidence for any account of the inter-relationship of the Brittonic dialects. This methodology, however, is equally applicable to synchronic dialect classification, and is, therefore, of particular relevance for Gaelic dialectology.

It is fortunate for our purposes that some sophisticated and detailed dialectometric analyses of the Gaelic languages have been carried out. There have been two large-scale dialectometric analyses of Gaelic dialects (Elsie 1986; Kessler 1995), the data from which will form the basis for the quantitative aspect of this thesis. These will now be considered and analysed, and, for the first time, their wider implications discussed.

2.5 Elsie 1986

As noted earlier, one of the criticisms made by Elsie (1983 – 4: 116) in relation to his own work in Brittonic was the lack of allowance made for internal dialect variation in the Brittonic languages. This weakness in Elsie's Brittonic survey was rectified in his subsequent survey of Gaelic, to which I now refer. Elsie (1986) constitutes the most thorough published lexicostatistical analysis of any Celtic language group. Rather than using three lists, one for each of Manx, Scottish Gaelic and Irish, Elsie samples a total of 58 points across a variety of Gaelic dialects from which meaning lists were elicited (see Figure 8). In doing so, he avoided the problems encountered in his analysis of Brittonic. Rather than simply mapping the relationship of languages to one another, this survey allows us to assess the more subtle relationships of

dialects within a pan-Gaelic context, in much the same manner as advocated by MacAulay (1992: 151), noted above.

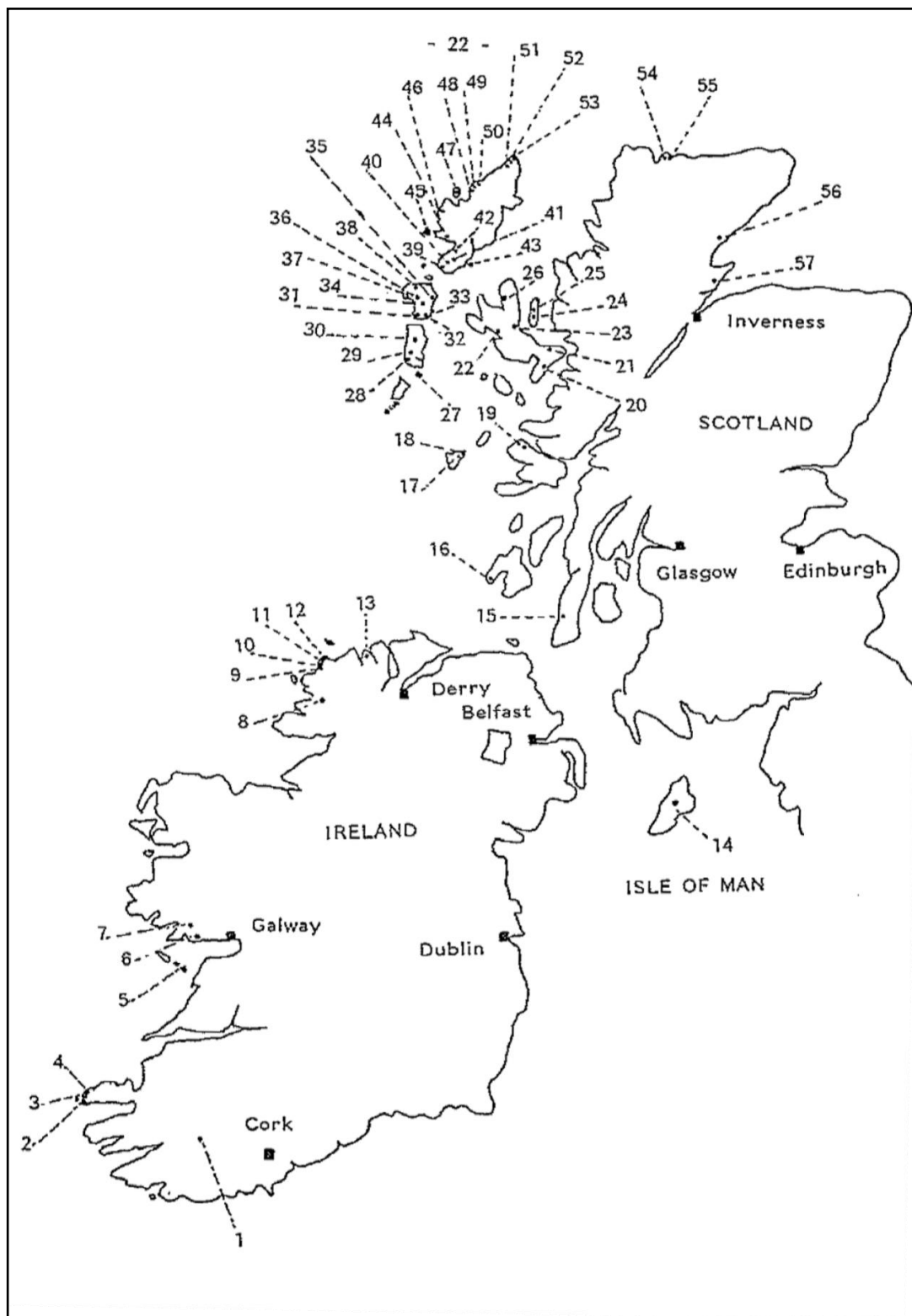


Figure 8 Dialect points surveyed in Elsie (1986)

Lexical questionnaires were completed by linguistically-aware native speakers or by linguistic scholars who had made a special study of certain areas. Many well-known and authoritative informants were used for various points: Nancy Dorian for East Sutherland, Donald Meek for Tíree, Dónall Ó Baoill for Gaoth Dobhair, Diarmuid Ó Sé for Corca Dhuibhne, D. A. Ó Cróinín for West Cork, etc. The list for Manx was completed with the assistance of R. L. Thomson and George Broderick, while Old Irish material was provided by James Carney and David Greene. The data, therefore, are impressively authoritative when the headword itself is not ambiguous,⁵⁸ and as such has many potential applications to Gaelic lexical geography, if used wisely.

The control sampling used in Elsie (1986) is based on the Swadesh test for lexicostatistics, which usually comprises 207; Elsie reduced that number to 184.⁵⁹ Some items were deemed unsuitable, either because the concept itself is unclear or because it crosses into various semantic fields. Examples of this are the English headwords *breast*, where it is unclear whether it refers to the breast of the human chest or a woman's breast, while *fat* is excluded because it is not clear whether this refers to the noun or adjective. While this obviously increases the robustness of the survey, it is not without its faults, two of which are of particular note.

Firstly, in spite of the exclusion of these 23 lexical items, Elsie fell foul of a number of items which should be mentioned, especially given that the book has never been thoroughly reviewed. The inclusion of the item 'two', for instance, is problematic because it does not distinguish between the various types of numeral in Gaelic languages, between the personal numerals (Irish *beirt* and *dís*, Scottish Gaelic *dithis*, etc.), and other non-personal numerals (Irish *a dó*, Scottish Gaelic *a dhà*; Irish *dhá*, Scottish Gaelic *dà*, etc.). Similarly, returns for the numeral 'one' are included although not all of the returned forms are semantically identical; they vary between personal and non-personal numbers. There is no allowance for these discrepancies, which originate in the lexical questionnaire being based on an English-language model. Discrepancies such as this are unlikely to skew the results, however, as the

⁵⁸ Some instances of ambiguity are discussed below.

⁵⁹ The entire list, including those lexical items which were excluded for the reasons already outlined, is given in Appendix 1.

variation between these forms is structural rather than dialectal. In defence of his methodology, Elsie states:

One should thus avoid drawing conclusions such as: mountain is called *cnoc* in Dunquin and *sliabh* in Ballyferriter. Both terms exist of course at both points and indeed throughout Ireland. The validity of the dialect distinctions as under investigation here can be seen essentially through the sum of the differing choices, i.e. the statistical analysis. The idiosyncrasies of the informants will cancel one another out to a great extent (Elsie 1986: 26).⁶⁰

A second criticism concerns dialectal coverage within the survey. While the Gaelic survey with 57 points is much more preferable to Elsie's three-point survey of Brittonic, the lack of dialectal coverage, especially for some dialects of Irish, limits its usefulness in certain contexts. A total of 58 points are surveyed (including an Old Irish 'point'),⁶¹ but only three are taken to represent Connacht Irish while the small Scottish island of North Uist has eight. No dialect point represents the North Connacht dialects of Mayo, or the Irish-speaking area of Ring in Waterford. This is despite the availability of many suitable informants in these and other areas. It seems likely that the lack of geographical coverage is due to the vagaries of data collection and informant participation. In the outline of the methodology Elsie (1986: 18) notes that of the 128 questionnaires made out for native speakers and dialect experts but only 56 completed replies were found satisfactory for inclusion; he notes informants from the Western Isles were especially co-operative.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the survey is informative in general terms and vocabulary associated with universal aspects (at least as far as the Gaelic-speaking world is concerned) of material culture, familial concepts, etc., are optimal for the purposes of a statistical analysis, since we know from the comparative study of Indo-European that there are some words which seem particularly resistant to change

⁶⁰ This is an important point; informants were asked for the most *common* equivalent in their own dialect. This type of discrepancy can be distinguished from the one involving numerals discussed above, the problem with the numerals was that the questionnaire was not sufficiently adapted, in this instance, to the linguistic structure of the Gaelic languages and could have been avoided. Discrepancies such as that between *cnoc/sliabh* are unavoidable, however.

⁶¹ Old Irish is included in order to allow an assessment of 'the relative lexical distance of the modern Goidelic dialect points and groups to Old Irish' (Elsie 1986: 250).

(Beekes 1995: 34–40). Surprisingly, it is also the most comprehensive published survey of lexical variation for Gaelic Scotland.⁶²

McMahon and McMahon (2005: 40) cite Dorian's 'semi-speakers' as potentially problematic for quantitative approaches because of the restricted domains which some languages occupy. This, of course, is a particular concern for the Gaelic languages. It does not seem to have been a problem for Elsie's survey, however, probably because those moribund dialects which would tend to pose the greatest problems to the statistical returns were elicited from linguistic scholars who were experts on local dialects (and many other moribund dialects were simply not included). The exception seems to have been Easter Ross, where almost half of the forms have been left blank for some reason. It cannot have been that the informant, Professor Seosamh Watson, was not aware of them or the dialect did not have them (the lexical item *and* is among those omitted), although we know little about the author's instructions to his informants. The results and implications of Elsie's analysis will be discussed shortly. Before doing so, however, the reception of Elsie's work by Celtic scholars must be addressed.

2.5.1 Reaction to Elsie's lexicostatistics

Neither Elsie's monograph, nor his earlier lexicostatistical investigations of Brittonic (Elsie 1983–4), attracted the attention of review editors of Celtic academic journals. The work seems to have stimulated surprisingly little interest among Celtic scholars. The only review of Elsie's (1986) monograph known to me is A. J. Hughes's (1988: 252–3) in the journal *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*. Hughes makes no comment on the methodology employed by Elsie (perhaps not surprisingly given the non-linguistic nature of the journal in which the review was published); rather, he notes more than once the value of the monograph in terms of the geography of individual lexical items:

The result of the presentation of data in this form means that if one looks at the answers to the normal word for 'dog', it is possible to see *gadhar*

⁶² Compare other studies of lexical variation in Scottish Gaelic such as Ó Dochartaigh (1996) and Grand (1995–6; 1996), which are less ambitious in scale. Elsie (1986) is not mentioned in Breeze (2010), an attempt at a treatment of Scottish Gaelic vocabulary. It is similarly omitted from Watson's (2010: 124) very brief treatment of lexical variation in Scottish Gaelic dialects.

and *madra* are used in Munster, *madra* and *madadh* in Connacht; *madadh* in Donegal (*moddey* in Manx) and *cú* in Scotland (A. J. Hughes 1988: 252).

This reading of Elsie's work vastly underestimates its worth. In fact it is precisely the sort of inference from the data set which Elsie (1986: 26) himself claimed ought to be avoided. Certainly, individual lexical items are of interest, but the main value of the work is in the sum total of all individual instances of lexical variation.

Lambert's (1989: 293) sparse comments on Elsie's earlier article (1983–4) on Brittonic are critical but, it must be said, show a complete failure on the part of the reviewer to distinguish between the two distinct approaches to lexical material outlined above:

A partir d'une liste de 207 termes, étude du vocabulaire de base des idiomes concernés et «glottochronologie» [*sic*], les langues apparentées les plus proches ayant en principe le plus grand nombre d'éléments communs. Les principes théoriques de cette recherche éveillent beaucoup de doutes (Lambert 1989: 293).⁶³

In contrast to Hughes's (1988) underestimation of the importance of Elsie (1986), Lambert's comments betray a fundamental misreading of Elsie (1983–4) and suggest a failure to engage meaningfully with the work under review at any level. As has already been pointed out, at no point does Elsie endorse glottochronology, and he makes no comment as to time-depth. Instead, he specifically seeks to distance his research from glottochronology:

This paper is therefore confined to a lexicostatistical study, and as such makes no conclusions as to absolute time depth. Any attempt at a glottochronological analysis would have to be considered with the greatest scepticism (Elsie 1983–4: 111).

Further, Lambert describes the suggestion that languages which share the greatest amount of common elements are those which are most closely related as raising many doubts. The exact nature of these doubts is not articulated but this position

⁶³ My translation: 'From a list of 207 words, this is a study of basic vocabulary and relevant idioms, 'glottochronology' [*sic*], the languages most closely related in principle having the largest number of common elements. The theoretical principles of this research raise many doubts'.

contradicts all we know about linguistic relationships (Bynon 1978: 21–2; McMahon 1994: 2).

The silence which greeted Elsie's work, especially his ambitiously-titled monograph, is surprising. Not only had he been a scholar at DIAS while he undertook the fieldwork for his monograph, he also drew on the services of many eminent Celticists as linguistic informants. Citations of the work are very rare in Celtic scholarship: Williams (1994b: 740),⁶⁴ who notes the lexical affinity of the Manx and Munster dialects,⁶⁵ and McLeod (2008: 89) are two of the three published references by Celtic scholars, known to me. These references are made in passing and cannot be said to represent awareness on the part of Gaelic linguistic scholarship of the implications of Elsie's study, or even of its existence. It is also cited, again in passing, in Ó Maolalaigh (2003: 265), a review of Grand (2000), but there is no indication of the reviewer's position on the methodology employed by Elsie, or the results. The reason for this silence is not clear but may be connected with the less than ideal presentation of the study's results, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.6 Kessler 1995

In the years since the publication of Elsie's monograph, quantitative methods have made many advances and practitioners have experimented with a variety of new methods, many of which have been borrowed or adapted from genetic and/or mathematical sciences. Kessler (1995: 61), writing of dialectometry up until that point, notes 'a certain bias in favour of working with lexical correspondences, which is understandable, since deciding whether two sites use the same word for the same concept is perhaps one of the easiest linguistic judgements to make'. While Elsie (1983–4; 1986) used aggregated lexical correspondences alone in his surveys, Kessler (1995) sought to move beyond this dependence of dialectometry on lexical

⁶⁴ In another chapter in the same collection, Williams (1994a: 467) inaccurately refers to Elsie's (1986) investigation as 'glotachróneolaíocht', glottochronology. Williams (1998: 546, n. 18) also refers to Elsie (1986) in a paper on the Irish once spoken in Offaly.

⁶⁵ Yet another aspect of the commonality between Munster and Manx raising questions for Ó Buachalla's (2002) classification of Manx discussed above.

data by using two different Gaelic data sets.⁶⁶ The first measures etymon identity, a method which averages the number of times the various sites agree in using words whose stem had the same ultimate derivation. In this respect, it is not markedly different from the methodology used in Elsie (1986).

Kessler's second distance measurement, however, represents a significant innovation; the use of Levenshtein Distance measurement (henceforth LD) between strings of phonetic data. LD is defined as the cost of the least expensive set of insertions, deletions or substitutions that would be needed to transform one string of data into another (Sankoff and Kruskal 1983: 18). Kessler (1995) is credited with the introduction of LD as a tool for measuring dialect distances (Heeringa and Gooskens 2003: 293; McMahon and McMahon 2005: 210). Taking a very simple English orthographic example, the LD between 'kitten' and 'sitting' is 3, since the following three edits change one into the other, and there is no way to do it with fewer than three edits:

- 1 kitten → sitten (substitution of 's' for 'k')
- 2 sitten → sittin (substitution of 'i' for 'e')
- 3 sittin → sitting (insertion of final 'g')

This demonstrates the conversion of strings of orthographic data, thereby measuring the LD between them. Kessler (1995) applied this technique to phonetic transcriptions. The following is the example used by Kessler to illustrate the method:

Thus in comparing the forms [AL:i] and [aLi] *eallaigh* 'cattle' the (minimal) distance was 2, for the substitutions [a]/[A] and [L:]/[L] [...]. A pair of unrelated words like [AL:i] and [khruh] (for *crodh*, another word for 'cattle') would get a much larger score, 5 (Kessler 1995: 62).

⁶⁶ I am extremely grateful to Professor Kessler for allowing me to analyse the unpublished distance matrices associated with his 1995 study.

A more readily accessible example, perhaps, is given in the following:

LASID i, map 4

Point 78: [Rubəl]

Point 79: [rubəl] Substitution [R] → [r]

LD = 1

Point 68: [orəbəl]

Point 71: [rubəl] Deletion [o]; Substitution [ə] → [u]

LD = 2

The result is a more complex, but ultimately more sophisticated measurement technique than that employed by Elsie (1986). Some weaknesses of the LD method as it was subsequently applied by Nerbonne et al. (1996) have been outlined by McMahon and McMahon (2005: 210–14). The main contention of McMahon and McMahon (2005: 211) is that the replacement of one sound with another may be more ‘likely or natural’ than another. While this is undoubtedly true, any alternative approach to the raw data would involve the classification of likely or natural substitutions, such as that found for English in Maguire et al. (2010). The approach adopted in Maguire et al. (2010: 78) ‘prioritizes linguistic accountability over computational simplicity’; no such methodology has been applied to Gaelic. The application of a methodology akin to that used by Maguire et al. (2010) would be premature, by virtue of the fact that the results of Kessler’s (1995) initial investigation of Gaelic have never been subjected to sufficient analysis, or comparison with the results of more traditional methods.

What follows is the first assessment of Kessler’s data set from a linguistic rather than a computational perspective. Use of Kessler’s data set has the advantage of allowing the comparison of two different linguistic data sets (i.e. lexical and phonetic), not only with one another, but also with the traditional philological analyses outlined in chapter 1. Kessler’s data set is taken from *LASID*, the linguistic atlas of Irish dialects

compiled by the Swiss Celtic scholar Heinrich Wagner, which also incorporated data from Scottish and Manx informants. Kessler's (1995) dataset is based on the first 51 concepts plotted in *LASID*. As a source for this type of analysis, *LASID* is particularly suitable for two reasons: (a) optimum geographic coverage, in Ireland at least, is obtained and many now-extinct dialects are surveyed for which we would otherwise have no available data; (b) the phonetic transcription found in the atlas is the work of one person, for the most part (cf. Wagner 1958: 9).

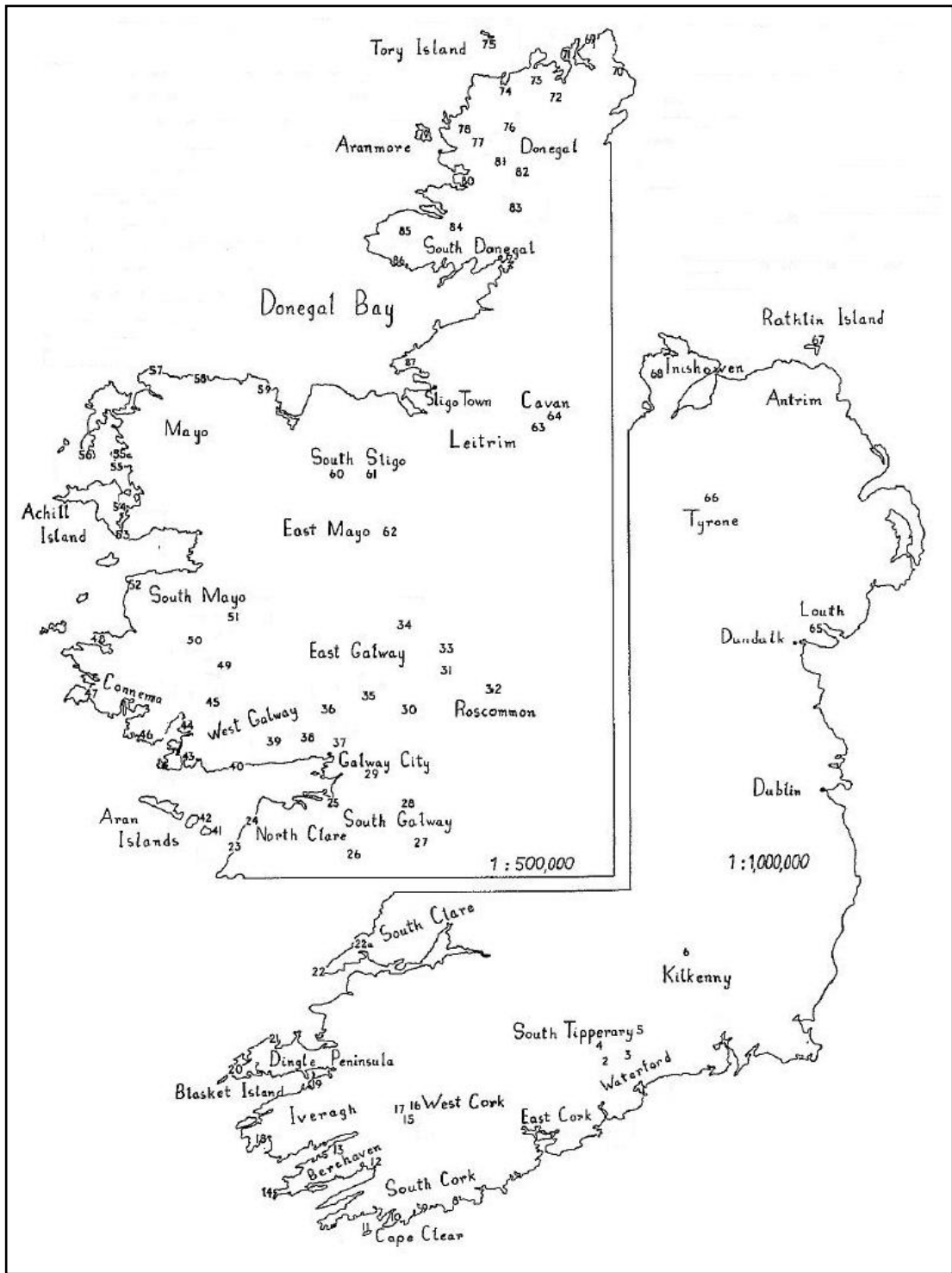


Figure 9 Irish dialect points surveyed in LASID

Despite the reservations of McMahon and McMahon (2005: 210–14), the use of LD to measure dialect difference has enjoyed a level of popularity and continues to be developed and refined. It has been applied to Dutch linguistic varieties (Nerbonne *et al.* 1996; Heeringa 2004), Sardinian dialects (Bolognesi and Heeringa 2002), Norwegian dialects (Heeringa and Gooskens 2003; Gooskens and Heeringa 2004), Catalan (Valls *et al.* 2013), and American English (Shackelton 2005), as well as others. It has also been used to investigate the position of the Frisian language in the Germanic language family (Gooskens and Heeringa 2004). While the publication of Kessler (1995) was the catalyst for very important methodological developments in dialectometry, it appears to have gone entirely unnoticed by Gaelic dialectologists.

2.7 Results of Elsie and Kessler compared

One of the problems in interpreting both Elsie's and Kessler's data sets is undoubtedly related to presentation. Elsie's results are set out in the form of matrices, which consist of many pages of figures. There is no easy way for the philologist or dialectologist to interpret Kessler's (1995) results; this is easily explicable when one considers that the paper does not seem to have been aimed at Gaelic dialectologists. Having been published in the proceedings of a conference on computational linguistics, the paper's primary concern was generic computational methodology rather than linguistic or philological actualities. We are provided with some tantalising trends, outlined by both authors, but are by no means in a position to cast a critical eye on all of the data, yet.

Elsie notes a level of commonality amongst the Irish dialects when compared to the Scottish. Within this all-Ireland grouping, however, he notes that Donegal [Ulster] Irish is no closer to Connemara Irish than it is to Munster Irish:

Connemara's geographical position between Munster and Donegal does not seem to be correlated linguistically by the present analysis. The Donegal group [...] is just as closely related to the Munster group as to the Connemara group (Elsie 1986: 241–2).

He continues:

Contrary to what one might expect, the Donegal group is no more closely related to the Connemara group than to the Munster group [...] [This] contrasts with the closer relationship between Connemara and Munster [...] No Donegal point is more closely related to Scotland than to Ireland, i.e. the Donegal group is distinctly closer to Munster and Connemara than it is to Southern Scottish (Elsie 1986: 243).⁶⁷

Elsie (1986: 250) suggests that by ‘measuring the relative lexical distance of the modern Gaelic dialect points and groups to Old Irish, we have an indication at one level of analysis of how conservative or innovative they are’. This is of more limited use than it may at first sight appear, however, since the genetic relationship of literary Old Irish to the modern Irish dialects has not been sufficiently examined (cf. Ó Buachalla 1982: 429) and therefore it ought not to be described as a question of conservatism or innovation but rather one of relative agreement or disagreement between Old Irish and modern Gaelic dialects. Lexicostatistically, Elsie (1986: 250) finds Old Irish is much closer to the Irish dialect points than to Scottish dialect points. In Ireland the greatest lexical affinity to Old Irish is shown by the Munster group, followed by Donegal and Conamara. Manx appears, in lexical terms, much closer to Old Irish than either Irish or Scottish dialects.

For his part Kessler notes:

Except for Rathlin Island,⁶⁸ both methods [etymon identity and LD] group the Irish sites into one group containing all the sites in Ulster, and another, Southern group, which itself breaks into a group containing all the sites in Connacht and one containing all the sites in Munster. The special status of Ulster contradicts the position of O’Rahilly (1932: 18) that Connacht groups with Ulster to form a Northern dialect over against Munster. But it agrees with Elsie’s finding (1986: 255) that the province [Ulster] is lexicostatistically more remote from Connacht and Munster than those two are from each other (Kessler 1995: 65).

Both Elsie (1986) and Kessler (1995) find the greatest dialectal divergence in Ireland to be between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. This is the information which can be gleaned from the authors’ own words, but this is a rather bland conclusion in light of

⁶⁷ The term ‘Southern Scottish’ is to be understood in terms of the dialect points surveyed in Elsie (1986, see Figure 8 above), it includes Kintyre, Mull, Islay and Tiree.

⁶⁸ Rathlin groups with Scottish dialects against East Ulster.

the sophistication (not to mention the volume) of the data analysed. The difficulty of presentation remains and many of the benefits associated with the use of quantitative analyses are not borne out by the presentation of the data in either Elsie (1986) or Kessler (1995), especially in the case of the latter where no distance matrices are published. We get very little detailed analysis which might allow us, for instance, to test both macro-level and micro-level dialectal variation at once. Neither does it allow us to easily test the robustness of the data against what we already know of dialectal variation in Gaelic from traditional analysis. This problem, however, is one of mere presentation; it is not a problem inherent in the data, and the application of methods first devised in phylogenetics allows us to significantly improve the clarity of the presentation of the data. It also allows us to view variation at micro- and macro-levels simultaneously, with a much greater degree of sophistication than traditional representations of dialect relationships:

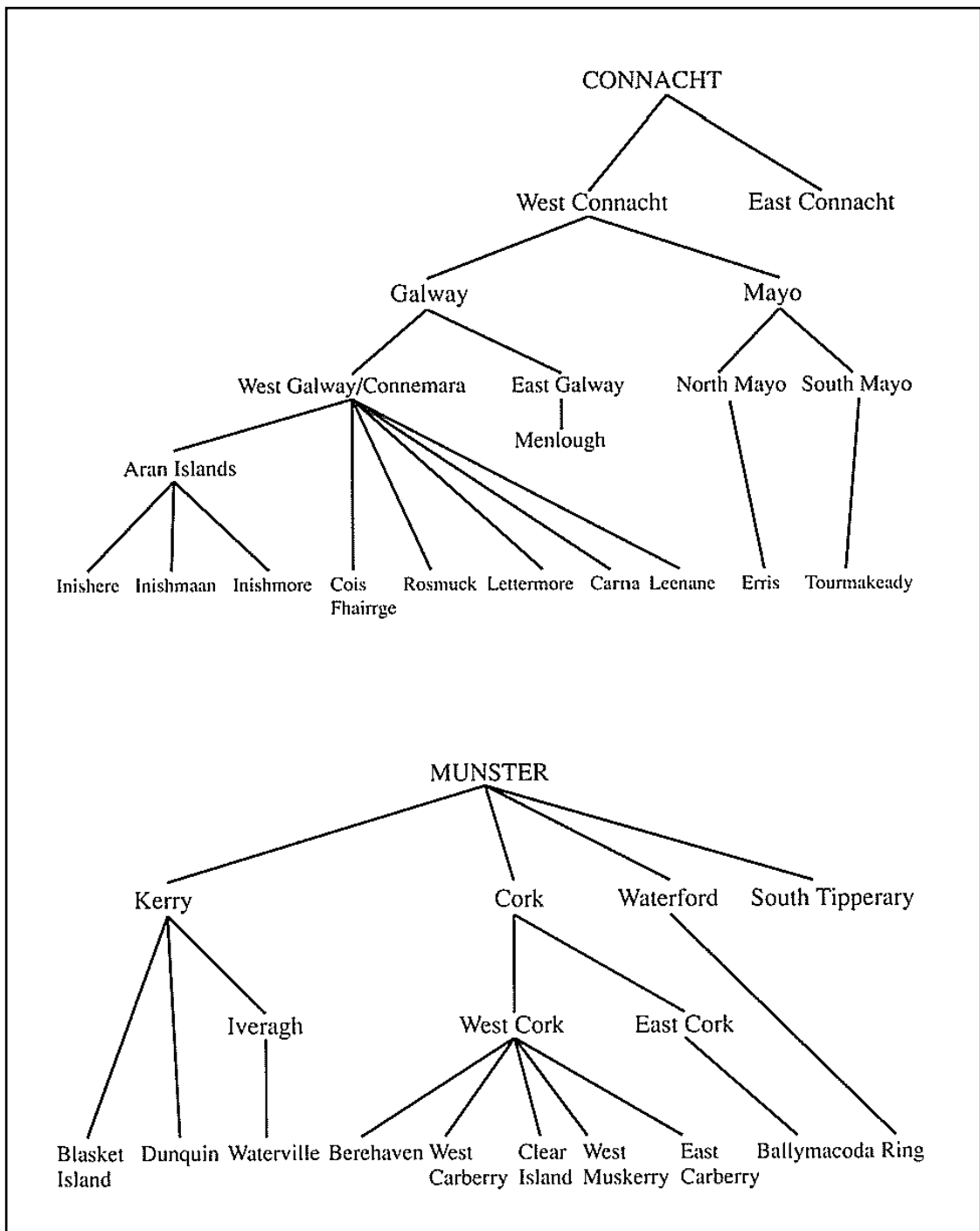


Figure 10 Dialect relationships in Connacht and Munster (Ó Siadhail 1989: 5, cf. Russell 1995)

2.8 Representing relationships

The computational programs first developed for representing genetic relationships were tree-drawing and tree-selection programs (McMahon *et al.* 2007: 127), inspired by the traditional type of representation in Figure 10.⁶⁹ The trees generated by linguistic programs are not random but take the shape that fits the data similarity for the points the best. These trees may be unrooted and branch lengths are meaningful, so that longer branches mean more distance between varieties. As McMahon *et al.* have pointed out, one of the weaknesses of tree-based programs is that they will:

find and recommend the best tree for the data, even where this does not fit all the data [...] For example if a variety shares certain features with one cluster of varieties, and others with a second cluster, the tree may represent it as intermediate. However, it may also appear within one cluster or the other, as the program may prioritise one set of similarities and effectively disregard the other (McMahon *et al.* 2007: 128).

One significant problem with these tree representations is that the binary tree branching structure does not allow for the representation of connections between branches. The relationships between varieties (especially closely related varieties such as dialects of the same language) are multidimensional, and this complexity is lost in two-dimensional representations, allowing distortions to occur. Despite these weaknesses, the advantage of the tree-based representation is clarity of presentation, a facilitation of discussion, and the testing of hypotheses. Even in evolutionary biology, however, it is recognised ‘that more complex evolutionary scenarios are poorly described by such models’ (Huson and Bryant 2006: 254).

Network-based programs on the other hand are better for representing complex data sets. Network-type programs only draw a tree in cases where the material is best represented by a tree, which typically they are not. When the relationship between varieties is complicated with more than one tree they construct a network that features reticulations between varieties. These reticulations form a box rather than a strict tree form (see below).

⁶⁹ McMahon and McMahon (2005) and Maguire and McMahon (2011) provide an introductory discussion of the representation of similarity and difference between linguistic varieties in both tree- and network-based forms.

SplitsTree4 integrates a wide range of phylogenetic networks and phylogenetic tree methods, inference tools, data management utilities, and validation methods (Huson and Bryant 2006: 259). *NeighborNet* is one such network-generating application of the *SplitsTree4* program. Originally conceived of in order to construct phylogenetic networks in biology (cf. Bryant and Moulton 2004), it allows for the graphic representation of potentially inconsistent signals in patterns of similarity. It must be stressed that such a network is a phenetic representation, ‘designed to diagnose signals of similarity, regardless of their origin and significance’; these representations ‘depict similarity, or distance, without prejudice to whether that results from common ancestry, contact or parallel developments’ (McMahon et al. 2007: 131). In other words, their immediate relevance here is synchronic. The network in Figure 11 represents the returns from Elsie’s (1986) lexical distance matrix, using *NeighborNet*.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Unless otherwise stated, all network graphs have been created using *NeighborNet*.

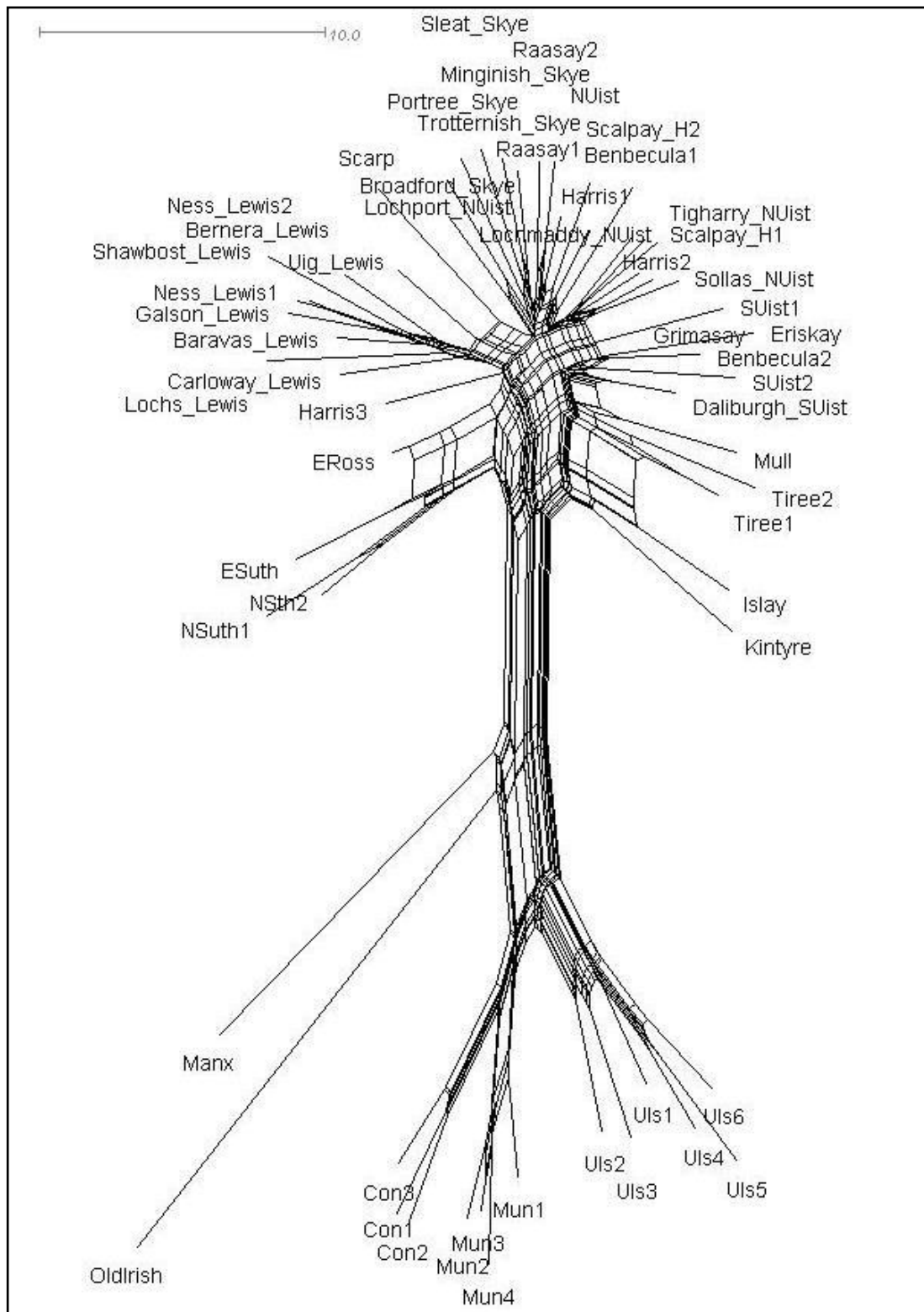


Figure 11 Lexical distance between Irish, Scottish and Manx dialects from Elsie (1986).

In contrast with the earlier network representing the relationship between the Brittonic languages (Figure 7) based on the data presented in Elsie (1983–4), the current network contains more taxa and as such is much more complex. It should be remembered that (despite the inclusion of an Old Irish taxa) these networks are phenograms and simply depict distance between varieties, as inferred from the distance matrices. They do not, therefore, represent any historical relationship in and of themselves. The linguistic distance between any two taxa is represented by ‘the shortest distance along the lines between them’ (Maguire et al. 2010: 89). Thus the network above indicates that the difference between any two Munster varieties is relatively small, as one would expect. The difference between the taxa NSuth1, North Sutherland, and those of Munster, however, is relatively great. In this sense, one can claim that the graph is consonant with the geographic reality of Gaelic-speaking areas.

Reticulations joining separate branches of the network, and thus forming boxes, are reflective of ‘conflicting signals in the data’ (Maguire et al. 2010: 89). This implies varieties are quite similar to each other but nevertheless have different relationships with other varieties within the network. One sees this, for instance, between Islay and the variety labelled as Tiree1. Islay groups most closely with Kintyre, which is unsurprising in geographic terms. Similarly, Mull and both Tiree taxa group together. The reticulation in the network between Islay and Tiree1, however, indicates that regardless of Islay’s grouping with Kintyre it also shares features with the Tiree group. A further reticulation, however, links all Argyllshire points: Kintyre, Islay, Tiree1, Tiree2 and Mull. It is encouraging that the output distinguishes and groups together the various Gaelic languages clearly. The distinction felt on the part of speakers between Irish and Scottish Gaelic is clearly reflected in the data, and Connacht, Ulster, Munster, Lewis, Argyll and the northern Scottish mainland emerge as distinct dialect areas within their respective languages. The distinctiveness of Manx is also obvious.

2.8.1 Representing Elsie's (1986) data

2.8.1.1 Scotland

An analysis of the Scottish material contained in Elsie (1986) alone confirms what other more traditional studies have shown (see Figure 12). The three most salient groupings in the Scottish material, when taken as a whole, are: a northern mainland group of dialects consisting of Sutherland and Easter Ross (with Easter Ross sharing reticulations with dialects of Raasay and Skye); an Argyllshire group, which consists of Tiree, Kintyre, Islay and Mull (with the Islay and Kintyre taxa sharing reticulations with one another to the exclusion of the other Argyllshire dialects surveyed); a Lewis dialect grouping which is not as salient as the other two.⁷¹

⁷¹ This commonality between Islay and Kintyre to the exclusion of the other taxa in the Argyllshire group corresponds to the distinction, outlined in Jackson (1968: 67), between 'central' and 'peripheral' dialects of Scottish Gaelic. The former incorporates the dialects of 'the Hebrides as far south as Mull [...] and mainland Argyll roughly north of Loch Awe'. The latter, on the other hand, includes Islay as well as 'the rest of mainland Argyll with Kintyre [...]'. Jackson's distinction between 'central' and 'peripheral' dialects of Scottish Gaelic is also to be seen in the position of the North Sutherland taxa, in relation to the 'central' dialects of Easter Ross and Skye. It is clear from the positioning of the Islay and Kintyre taxa in relation to the North Sutherland taxa that 'peripheral' dialects, while easily identifiable in opposition to the central dialect area, do not present as a unified, heterogeneous grouping.

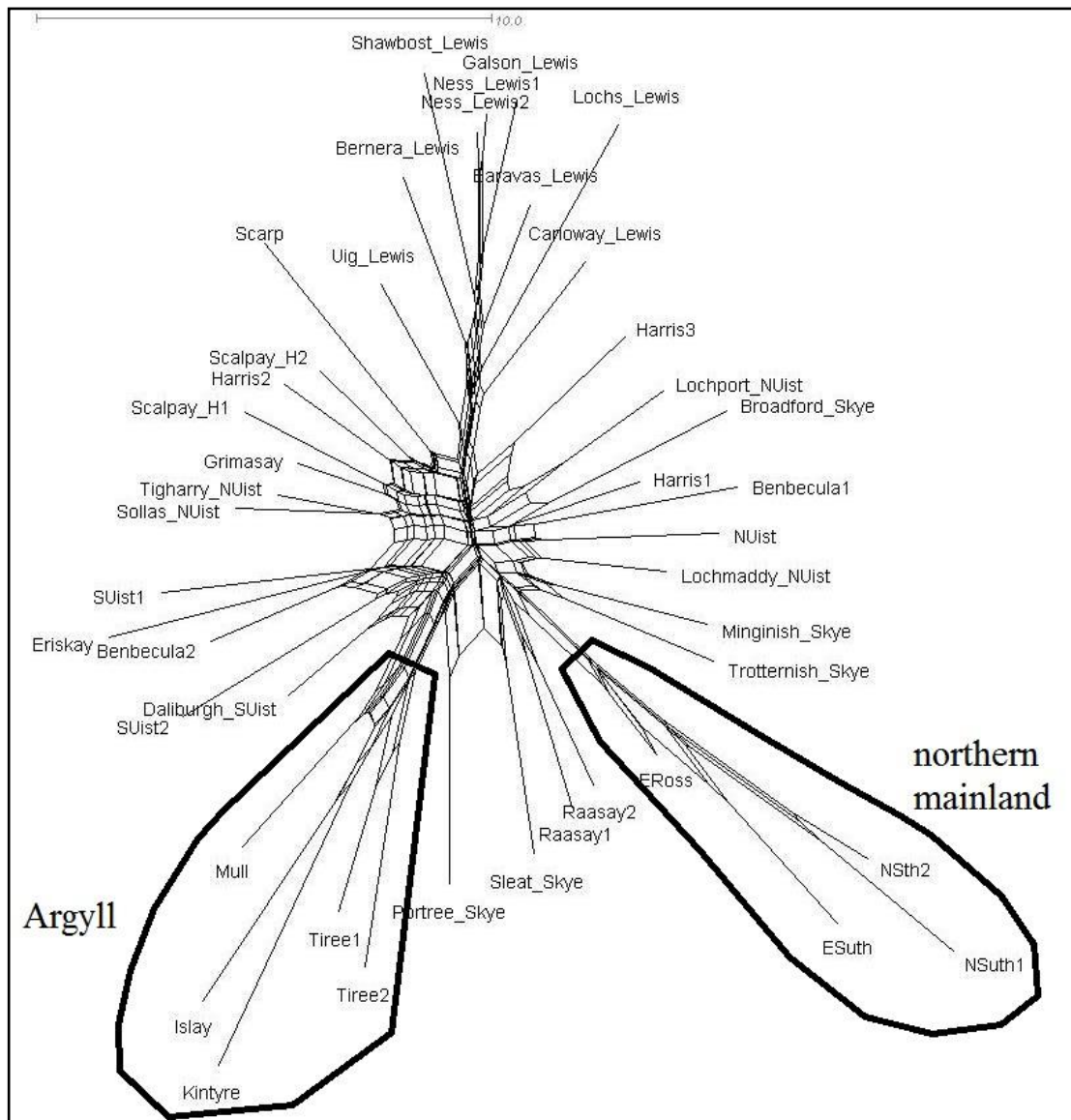


Figure 12 Lexical distance between Scottish dialects from Elsie (1986).

The dialects of Skye and the Western Isles are generally thought of as being fairly homogeneous; the most distinctive dialect of this group is the Gaelic dialect of Lewis, ‘which differs in matters of phonology and intonation patterns’ (Gillies 1993: 221, see also Borgstrøm 1940: 8–9; Grand 1996: 146–7). The dialect of Lewis is also perceived by Scottish Gaelic speakers as being very different from other dialects of Gaelic in the Western Isles (Lamb 2008: 2). Elsie’s lexical analysis supports this distinction between Lewis and the rest of the Western Isles. The dialects of Skye, North Uist and Harris are perhaps most remarkable in that they do not show a tendency to form obvious groups. When the areas currently thought of as the Gaelic

'heartland' (Western Isles) are analysed together (see Figure 13) they present an interesting picture:

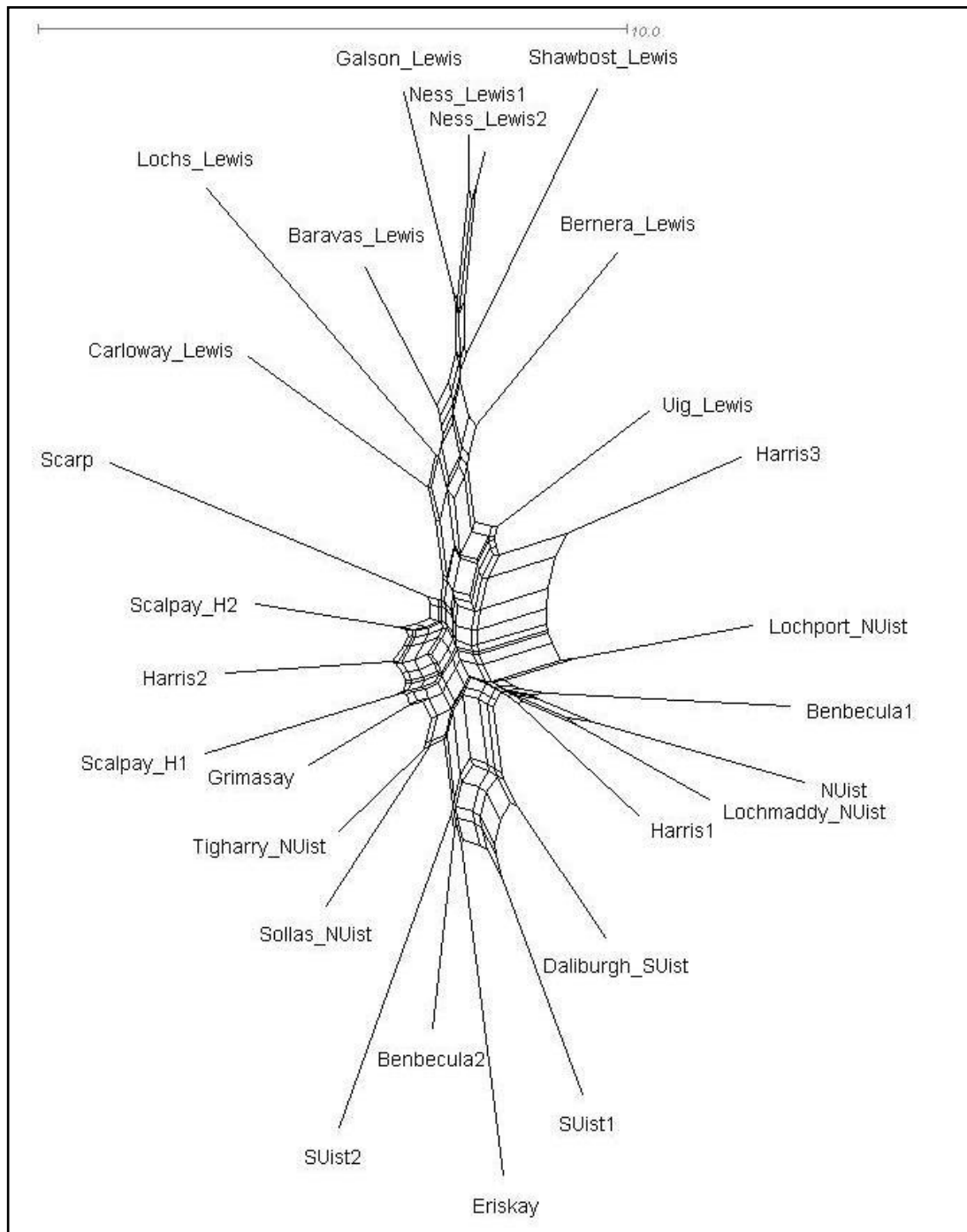


Figure 13 Lexical distances in the Western Isles, based on Elsie (1986)

An analysis of the variation within the Western Isles as illustrated in Figure 13 shows a striking correspondence with the geographic situation of Gaelic dialects in the Western Isles. The greatest linguistic difference corresponds accurately to the greatest geographic distance. The dialects of northern Lewis are the farthest removed from that of Eriskay, the southernmost point for which data was collected. The lexical analysis clearly groups the dialects of Lewis together, as one might expect (cf. Lamb 2008: 42; Borgstrøm 1940: 228).

Aside from the salience of Lewis as a dialect area, the most remarkable feature presented in the analysis of the Western Isles is the degree to which the dialects of predominantly Catholic areas in the Western Isles (SUist; SUist1; Eriskay1; Benbecula2; SUist2) form a cluster of their own. Close correspondence between these areas in terms of lexis, has already been alluded to in Grand (1995–6: 57). That one of the two Benbecula points (Benbecula2) clusters so closely with the more southern points while the other Benbecula (Benbecula1) point clusters with North Uist dialects is a reflection of the island's status as an inter-dialectal zone. Although he did not publish the whole of his lexical investigation, Grand (1995–6: 53) states that his large-scale lexical investigation suggests 'a fair degree of mixed usage in the area which includes Harris, Berneray, North Uist and Grimsay'. The present analysis (see Figure 12) suggests that this area can be extended to Skye.⁷²

2.8.1.2 Ireland

As regards the Irish data published in Elsie (1986), the tripartite dialect distinction referred to earlier is, on the whole, maintained, with a level of commonality between Connacht and Munster dialects to the exclusion of Ulster, as outlined above. In fact, the significant split between Ulster and its more southern neighbours appears to be the most profound in any of the dialects of either language (i.e. Scottish Gaelic or Irish). It should be pointed out, however, that the lack of coverage in Mayo warns against making too much of this.

⁷² It must be noted that, historically, MacLeod of Dunvegan, on the Isle of Skye, also controlled the Isle of Harris (Lawson 2002: 74). Similarly, the Macdonalds of Sleat, on the Isle of Skye, were in possession of North Uist (Lawson 2004: 1–2). This distribution of land between MacLeod of Dunvegan and Macdonald of Sleat occasioned much traffic, and a relatively high degree of mobility, between Harris, Skye and North Uist.

While the sparse geographic coverage limits the extent to which one can comment on dialectal variation at a sub-provincial level, much can still be drawn from the data as presented.⁷³ Within the Munster data there is a clear division between the dialects of the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula (Dunquin; Ballyferriter1; Ballyferriter2), and that of the West Cork point labelled as Ballyvourney. A similar division can be made in the case of the Connacht dialects, with the island dialect of Inisheer showing a marked difference to those of mainland Conamara.

The Ulster material groups three sub-dialects together quite clearly (i.e. those labelled Meenaclady; Cloghaneely; Rosguill). It is noteworthy that all three of these locations are to the east of Cnoc Fola, a known natural dialect boundary (D. Ó Baoill 1996a). The position of two other varieties, Fintown and Teelin,⁷⁴ is commensurate with their geographic location.⁷⁵

⁷³ Elsie (1986) used Anglicised renditions of Irish and Scottish place names; I have retained these as labels throughout.

⁷⁴ The informant labelled as Teelin in the graph presented is not labelled as such in Elsie (1986), where it is labelled Gortahork. The information, however, is that provided by Seán Ó hEochaidh, the renowned folklorist and native of Teelin in the southwest of the county. The proximity of this point to Fintown indicates that the material was by mislabelled by Elsie; it reflect's Seán Ó hEochaidh's personal usage, i.e. that of Teelin, rather than that of Gortahork, the area in which he spent his later life.

⁷⁵ The position of the variety labelled as Gweedore DL is somewhat anomalous. I cannot explain it, although the fact that the informant, Damien Ó Muirí, was not a native of the place but rather a dialect scholar may go some way towards explaining it.

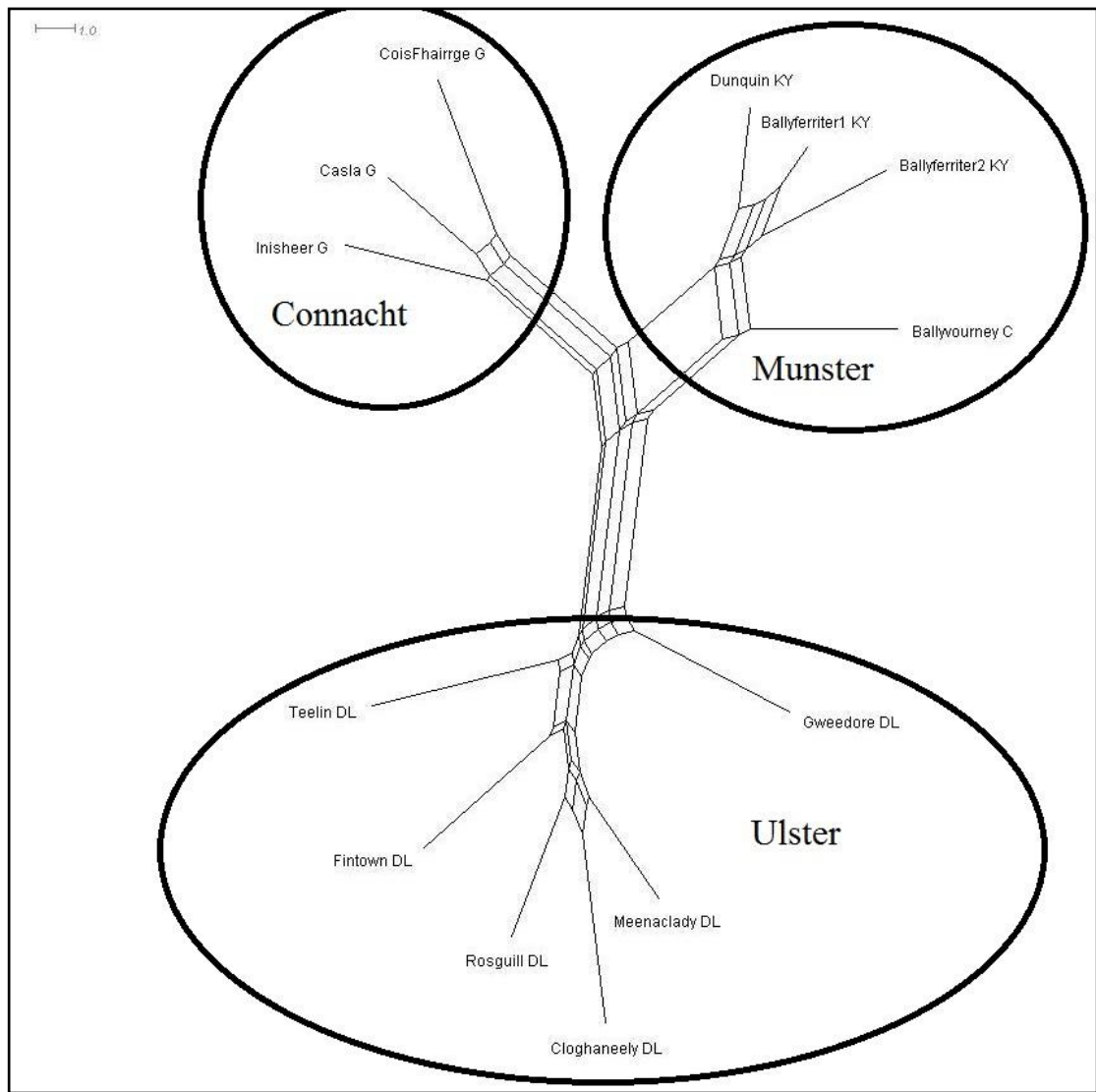


Figure 14 Lexical distance between Irish dialects based on Elsie (1986)

I have already noted that while the methodology employed in Elsie (1986) was limited to that of a lexical survey, Kessler (1995) undertook an etymon identity analysis as well as a phonetic proximity analysis based on LD. Elsie's data, therefore, can be beneficially compared with Kessler's etymon analysis (see Figure 15).

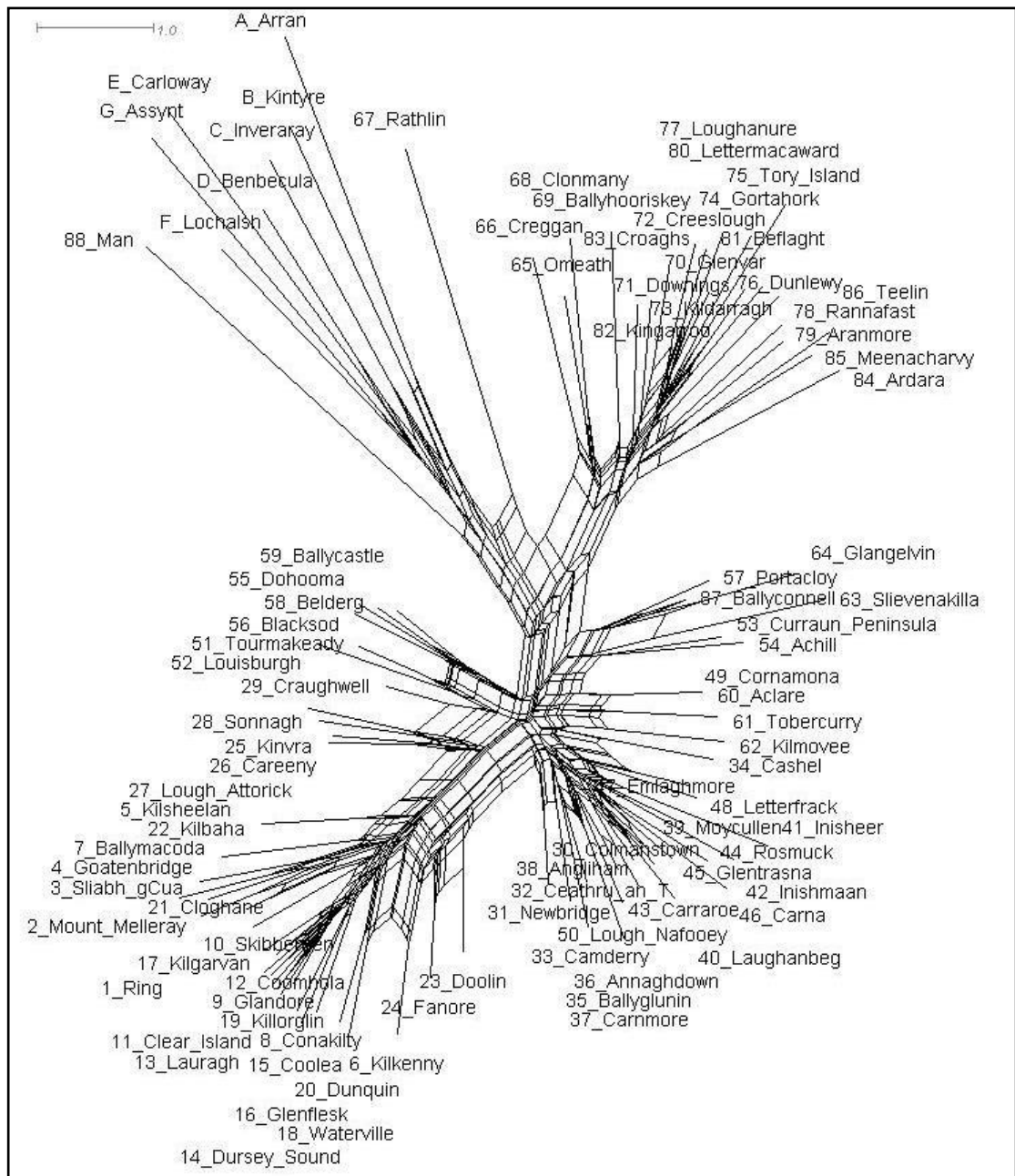


Figure 15 Etymon analysis of LASID based on Kessler (1995)

2.8.2 Irish etymon identity analysis

When *Neighbor-Net* is applied to the Irish data used in Kessler (1995), we see clearly that while the three-way distinction between Ulster, Munster and Connacht is clear, the distinction between Ulster and the rest of Ireland highlighted in Elsie's data is also evident:

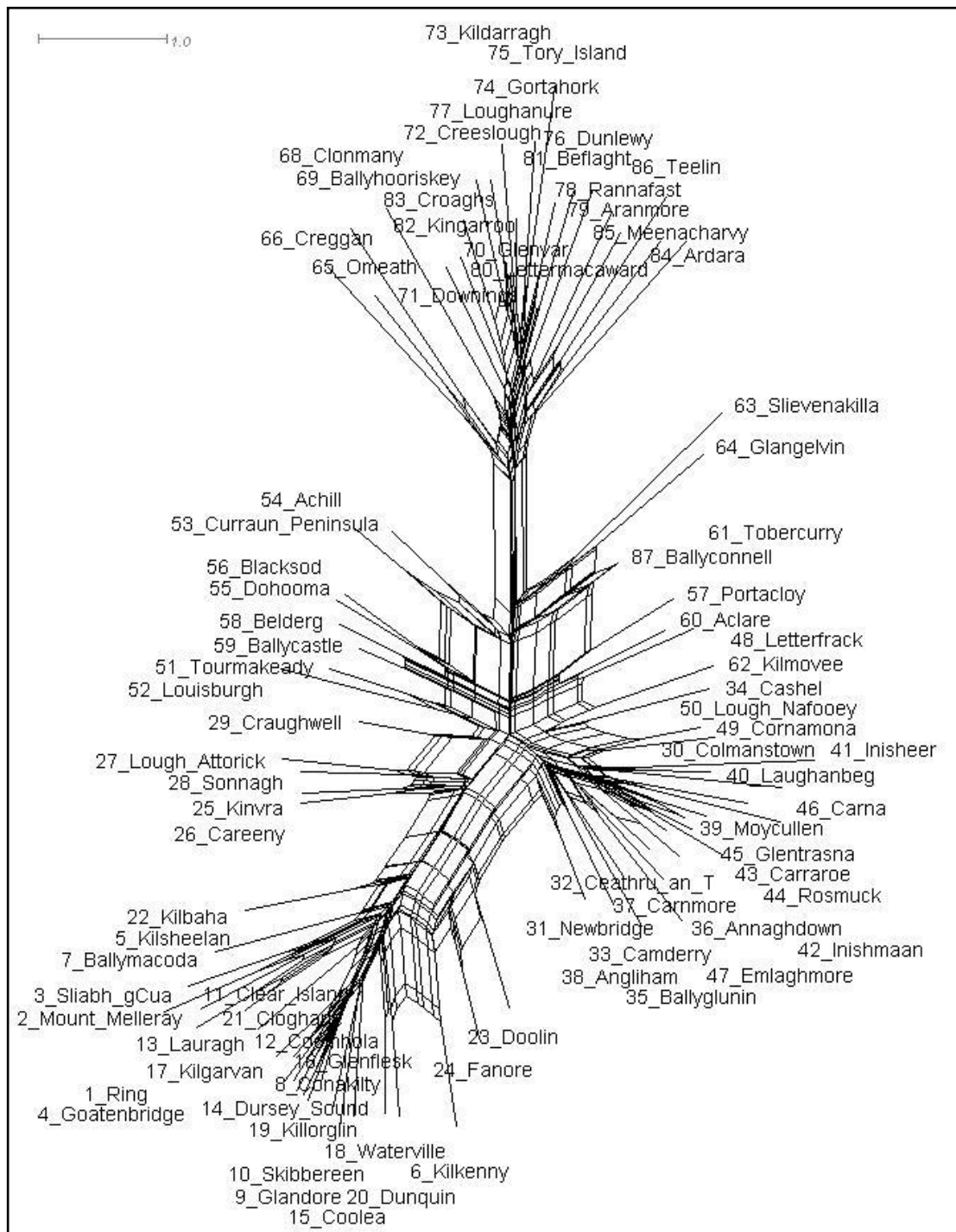


Figure 16 Etymon analysis of Irish LASID points, based on Kessler (1995)

As in Elsie's survey, traditional dialect divisions are maintained; the distinction in Irish between Ulster and more southern dialects being remarkably clear. Importantly, coverage in *LASID* is much better than in Elsie, allowing us to confirm that the divergence between Connacht and Ulster found in Elsie's study is not solely due to the lack of coverage in Mayo. The results are generally consonant with those of Elsie. Thus similar results are obtained from two independent lexical⁷⁶ data sets: Irish dialects are clearly divided into provincial groups with the greatest amount of reticulations, and therefore the closest correlation between Munster and Connacht taxa.

Celtic scholars have traditionally paid little attention to lexical analysis as a basis for drawing dialect distinctions (cf. O'Rahilly 1932: 244–5; Ó Curnáin 2007: 57; Russell 1995: 71). When examined within a suitable framework, however, it would appear that lexical information can be as useful a diagnostic tool as phonological information, at least in terms of dialect classification. The problem, therefore, would seem to have been not with the material but with the methodology applied to the material. This is not to say that lexicostatistics does not present us with methodological challenges to overcome, but it nevertheless suggests that the prospects for extracting worthwhile and robust results from lexical-based investigations of Gaelic may not be as bleak as has been previously suggested.

2.8.3 Levenshtein Distance measurement

While the evidence of the etymon identifications is encouraging, it is useful to compare them with the phonetic distance measurements,⁷⁷ measurements based on LD. On the whole, it can be said that clear distinctions of the type we have already seen are evident in the LD data. Scottish points, along with Rathlin and the Isle of Man, cluster together whereas the Irish points show clearer dialectal divisions. Further reticulations, however, link Rathlin with the dialects of East Ulster as well as Inverary. While the distance between Scottish taxa is comparable to the distance

⁷⁶ A number of the internal relationships from Kessler's Irish etymon data will be discussed in greater detail below.

⁷⁷ In some instances the LD actually encodes lexical difference inasmuch as the LD between *madra rua* and *sionnach* 'fox' is likely to be greater than the LD between any two phonetic realisations of *sionnach*.

between interprovincial Irish taxa, the Scottish taxa do not exhibit the same tendency to make reticulations with one another. This need not indicate that Scottish Gaelic is more homogeneous than Irish, as suggested by (O’Rahilly 1932: 122), but that it does not exhibit the same tendency to form clusters. The difference is that the Irish taxa group together much more closely into immediately obvious dialect groups of Ulster, Munster and Connacht; reticulations between Munster and Connacht are the most obvious, as will be discussed below.⁷⁸

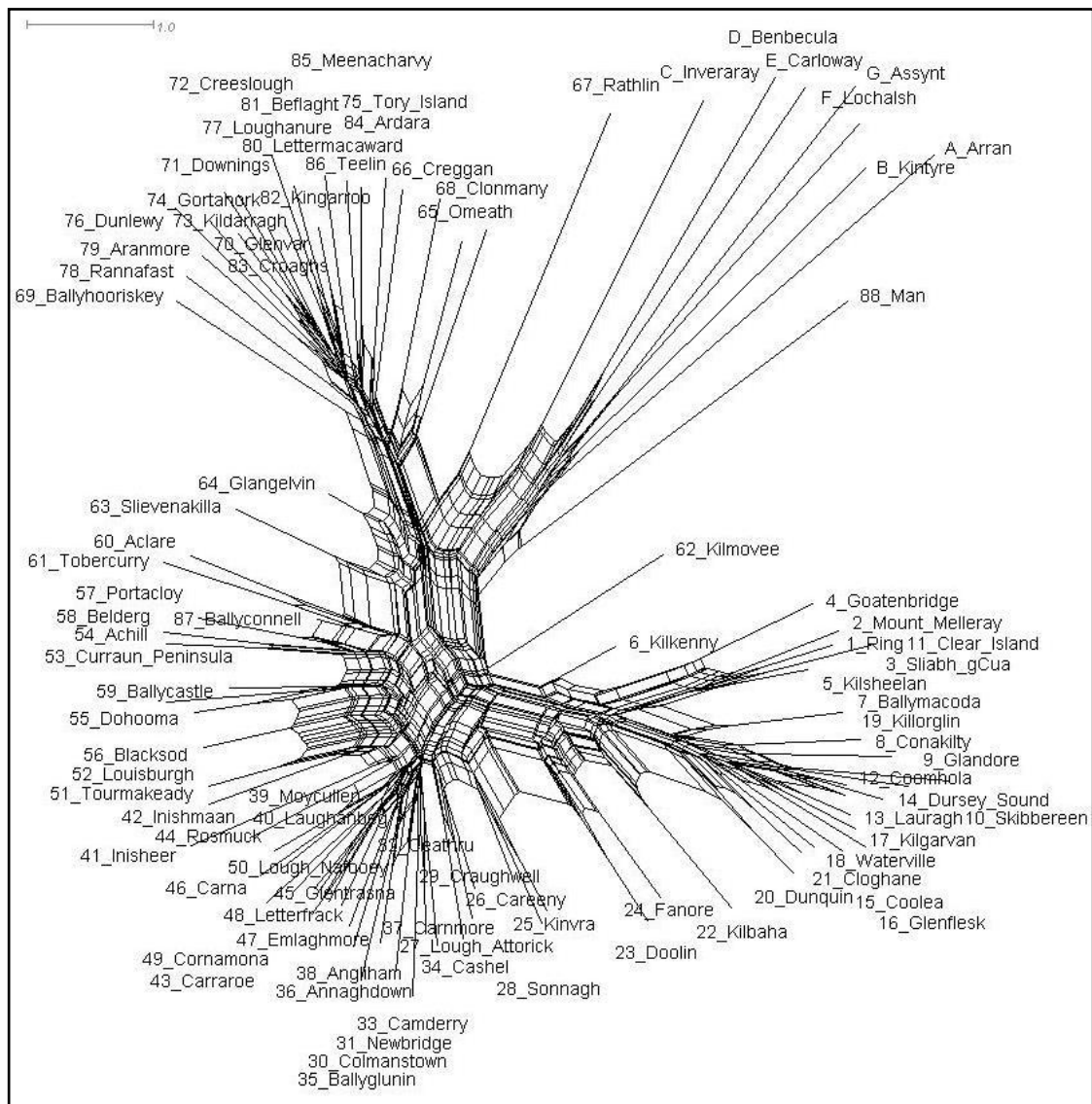


Figure 17 LD analysis of LASID based on Kessler (1995)

⁷⁸ The only way to test this adequately in relation to Scottish Gaelic would be to subject the phonetic returns published in *SGDS* to a similar LD-based analysis.

2.8.3.1 Scotland

When analysed by itself (Figure 18), the Scottish data (including Rathlin, point 67) shows some clear patterns. Rathlin's linguistic proximity to Kintyre (point B), Arran (point A) and Inverary (point C) corresponds, as one might expect, to its geographic location and the present analysis suggests strongly that Rathlin, when compared to other Scottish Gaelic dialects, shares reticulations with these Argyll varieties, while sharing others with East Ulster dialects. Similar agreement between linguistic and geographic proximity are indicated by the reticulations shared by Carloway (point E) and Benbecula (point D), the only two points in the Western Isles surveyed in *LASID*. This is also evident in the case of Assynt (point G), in Sutherland, which shows a degree of similarity with the only other north-mainland point, Lochalsh (point F), and to a lesser degree with Carloway (point E).

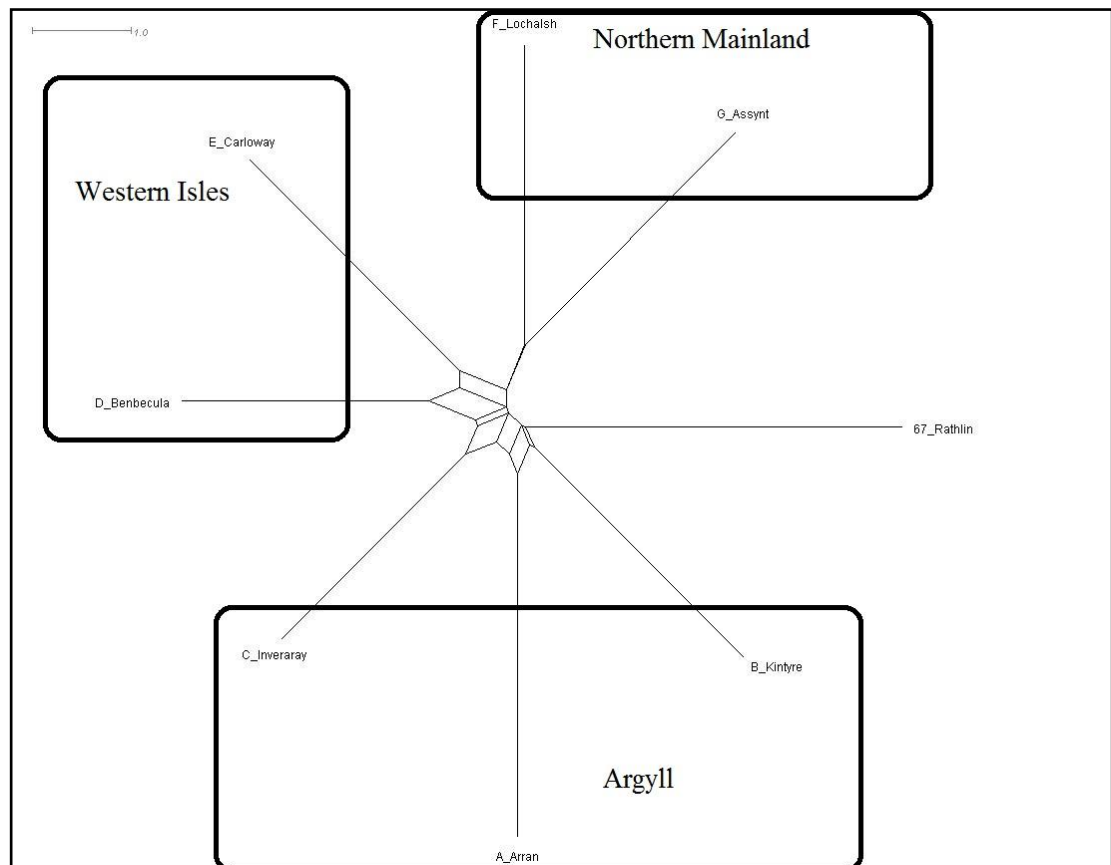


Figure 18 LD analysis of Scottish LASID points, based on Kessler (1995)

2.8.3.2 Ireland

In the case of Ireland, the phonetic distance analysis corroborates the evidence of the previous analyses. It is clear from Figure 19 that all three dialect groupings form distinctive clusters. Even within the larger provincial dialect groupings, however, well-defined sub-provincial dialect groupings are evident. The dialects of East Ulster (points 65, 66, 68) and of the Déise in East Munster (points 1–5), for instance, show a remarkable degree of internal cohesion when compared to the larger provincial dialect areas to which they respectively belong, as has also been suggested by more traditional analyses (cf. A. J. Hughes 1994; Ó Cuív 1951).

The unusual position of the Irish of Achill (points 53, 54) is evident in Figure 19. The Irish of Achill shows a degree of linguistic distance from those varieties closest to it in geographic terms, places such as Blacksod (point 56) and Dohooma (point 55). As outlined by Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 33), many of the inhabitants of this portion of the Achill area were ‘transplanted there from Ulster in the mid seventeenth century as a result of the wars and population movements of that period’. Further, this sense of difference seems to have endured. Writing in 1836, Knight says:

Ballycroy and Achill have been, for an undetermined number of years, inhabited by a colony from the North of Ireland [...] [they] intermarry almost exclusively with one another [...] and still retain the ancient dialect of language used in the North (quoted in O’Rahilly 1932: 189).

An outline of some of the more salient features of Achill Irish which would seem to align it with Ulster dialects is given in Stockman (1974: 351–6), and others are discussed in Ó Dochartaigh (1978). While individual linguistic features clearly indicate that the variety of Irish spoken around Achill is one largely derived from an Ulster dialect, the totality of the phonetic distance analysis clearly does not classify it with Ulster dialects.⁷⁹ Rather, the dialect of Achill (points 53; 54) shows a marked

⁷⁹ While Mayo dialects do share a number of linguistic features with Ulster dialects, it is certainly not the case, as has been recently claimed in Hickey (2011: 124, 441), that Ulster ‘influence’ is to be found throughout the Irish of North Mayo. Stockman (1974: 351–6) clearly states that the influence of Ulster Irish is to be found in certain areas of the greater Achill region and Mhac an Fhailigh states as clearly as possible that ‘[p]honetically and in its accidence Erris Irish is in marked contrast with the Irish of Ballycroy and Achill, where Donegal influence is much in evidence’. It is not the case that some sort of Ulster superstratum is to be found in other dialects of North Mayo as outlined by Hickey.

linguistic distance from the linguistic varieties closest to it in geographic terms. It can, therefore, be said that while Achill (points 53; 54) shows a degree of affinity with both Mayo and Ulster dialects it is marked clearly as a unique linguistic entity in and of itself. This might indicate that the twentieth-century dialect of Achill could be usefully analysed as the product of a seventeenth-century new-dialect formation process, akin to that described in Trudgill (2004).

This has long been acknowledged by both scholars and speakers of Irish: ‘It is well known that the dialect they [the people of Achill] speak is somewhat different from that of the other people of Erris’ (quoted in O’Rahilly 1932: 189). Ó Dochartaigh (1978: 340) notes that the dialect of Achill is ‘anomalous within the region’ an echo of the comments found in Mhac an Fhailigh (1968: xii). A similar observation is made by Wagner himself (*LASID* i: xviii, n. 1): ‘It is well known that the dialect of Achill and Ballycroy, the latter being represented by our Inishbiggle material, shows a most interesting mixture of Ulster and Connaught Irish’. Wagner does not, however, make any such claim about the neighbouring dialects of the Erris peninsula, etc.

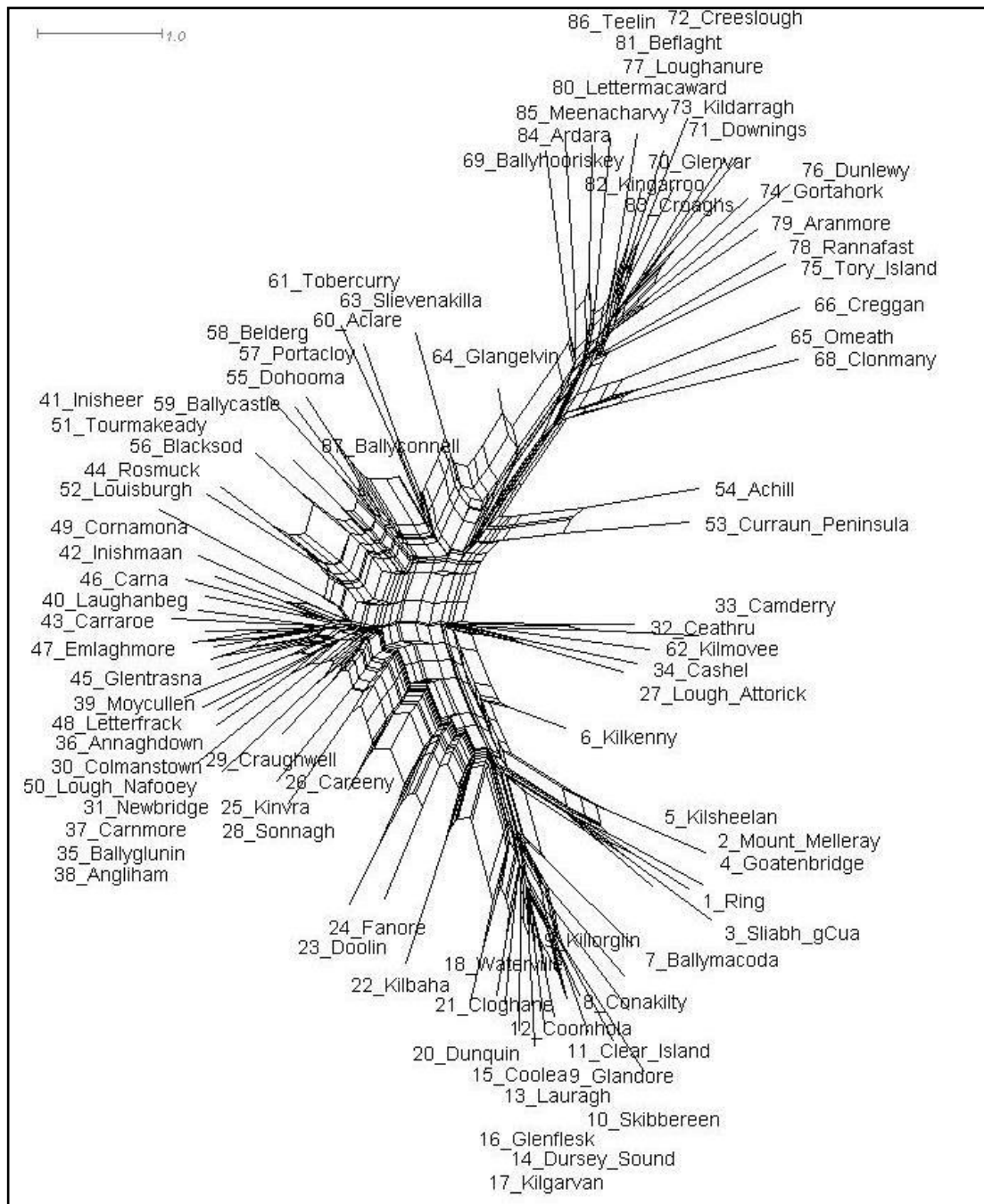


Figure 19 LD analysis of Irish LASID points, based on Kessler (1995)

In Figure 20, a dendrogram, rather than a network, has been generated using Gabmap (see Nerbonne et al. 2011 for discussion). This allows for a classification of dialects which, although not as accurate as presented in the networks above, is easier to visualise. The divisions in Figure 20 can also usefully be represented on a map, see Figure 21.

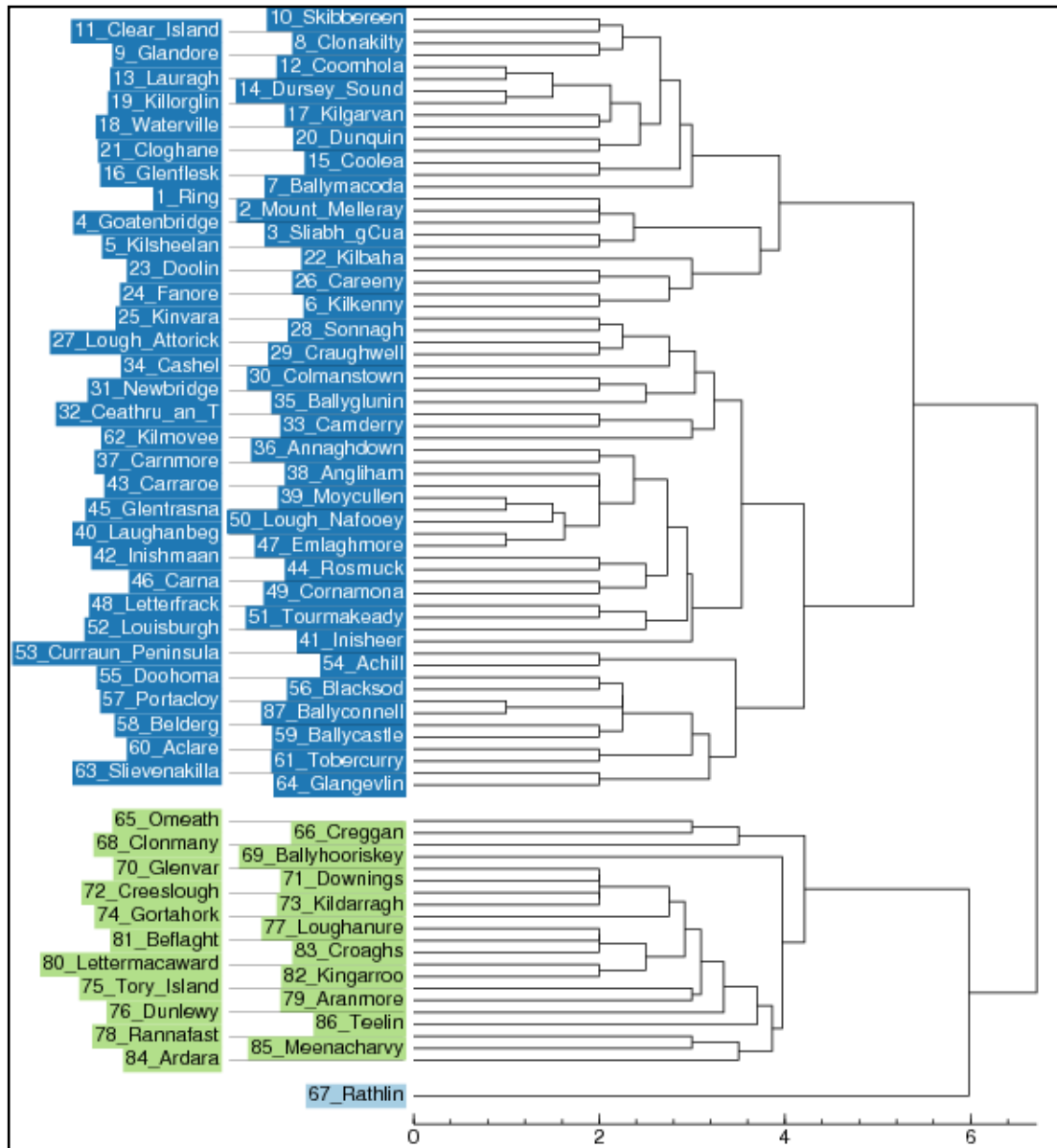


Figure 20 LD analysis of Irish *LASID* points, based on Kessler (1995), graph created in Gabmap

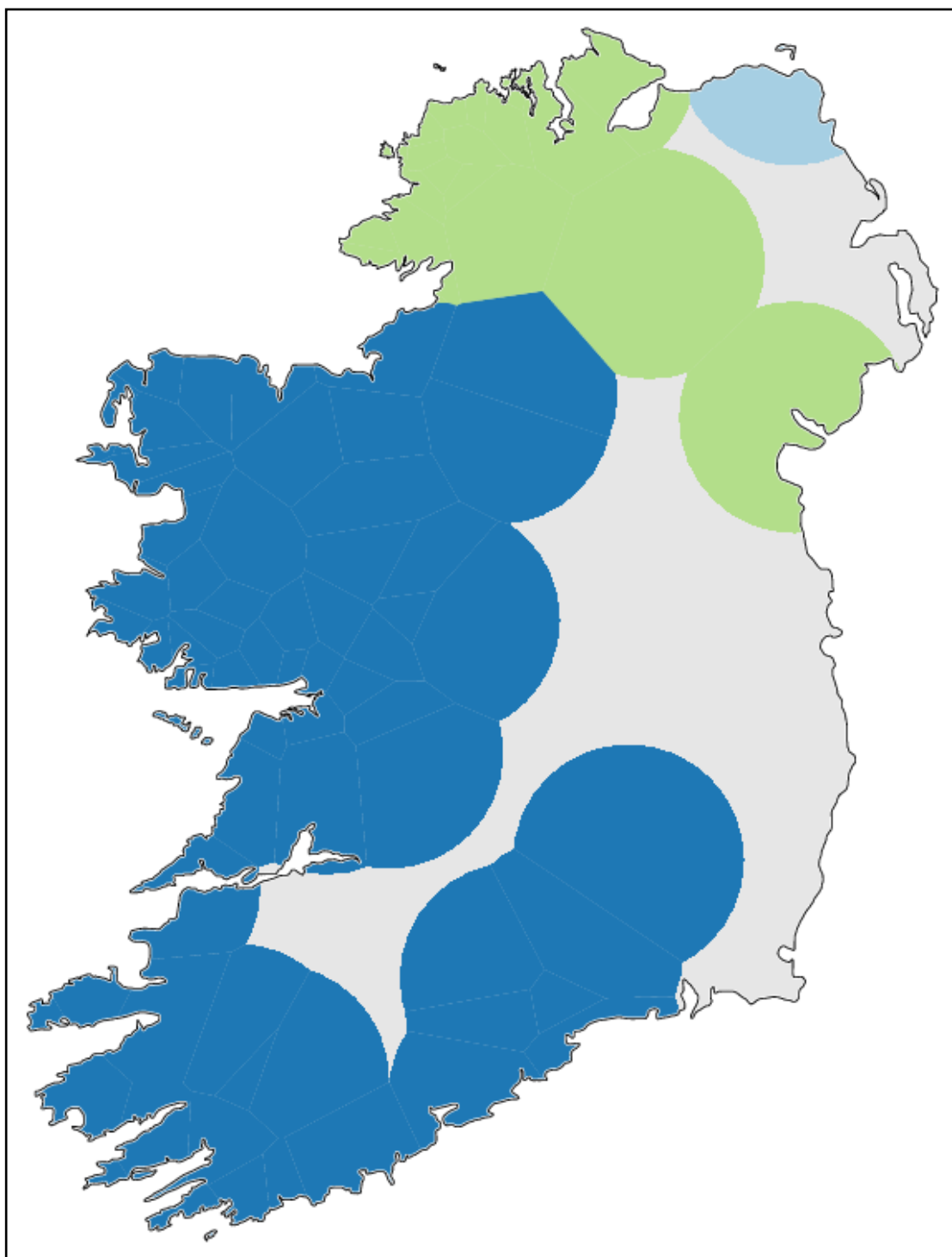


Figure 21 Map of Ireland plotting the dialect classifications found in Figure 20 above

By far the most striking division in Irish terms,⁸⁰ however, is clearly that between Ulster (points 65–85) and the rest of Ireland. As with Kessler’s etymon identity analysis, the phonetic distance analysis points to a sharp distinction between the dialects of Ulster on the one hand, and those of Connacht and Munster on the other. This essentially suggests a bundling of isoglosses along the Ulster border with Connacht which is much tighter than that at the Connacht border with Munster. The fact that the geographically close dialects of Clare (points 22, 23, 24, 26) show very little convergence but instead display a tendency to form reticulations with taxa located to the north and south indicates that the bundling of isoglosses in this area is very loose (see Figure 19), in contrast with the much tighter bundle of isoglosses to be found on the northern border of Connacht with Ulster.⁸¹

2.8.3.3 *Micro-level variation in the phonetic distance data*

The general picture provided by the information above accords well with what is already known about Gaelic dialects on a larger scale: Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic are clearly distinct entities, and within Ireland there is a clear tripartite distinction between dialects of Ulster, Connacht and Munster.⁸² It is necessary, however, in order to test the robustness of the results above, to also investigate the degree to which the data accords with our knowledge of dialectal variation at a more local (i.e. intra-provincial) level. The dialectal features internal to the Irish dialects of Munster have been reasonably well documented (Ó Cuív 1951; Ua Súilleabháin 1994; Ó Sé 2002) and provide a good point at which to start.

⁸⁰ Excluding Rathlin (point 67), because of its unique nature within an Irish context (demonstrated in Figure 20), and its close linguistic affiliation with Scottish Gaelic dialects (demonstrated in Figure 17).

⁸¹ This analysis of the data is supported by the account given by Holmer (1962a: 8).

⁸² Unfortunately, the Scottish coverage in *LASID* is not sufficient for one to draw further conclusions. It has been noted, however, that the lexical data presented in Elsie (1986) displays clear patterns.

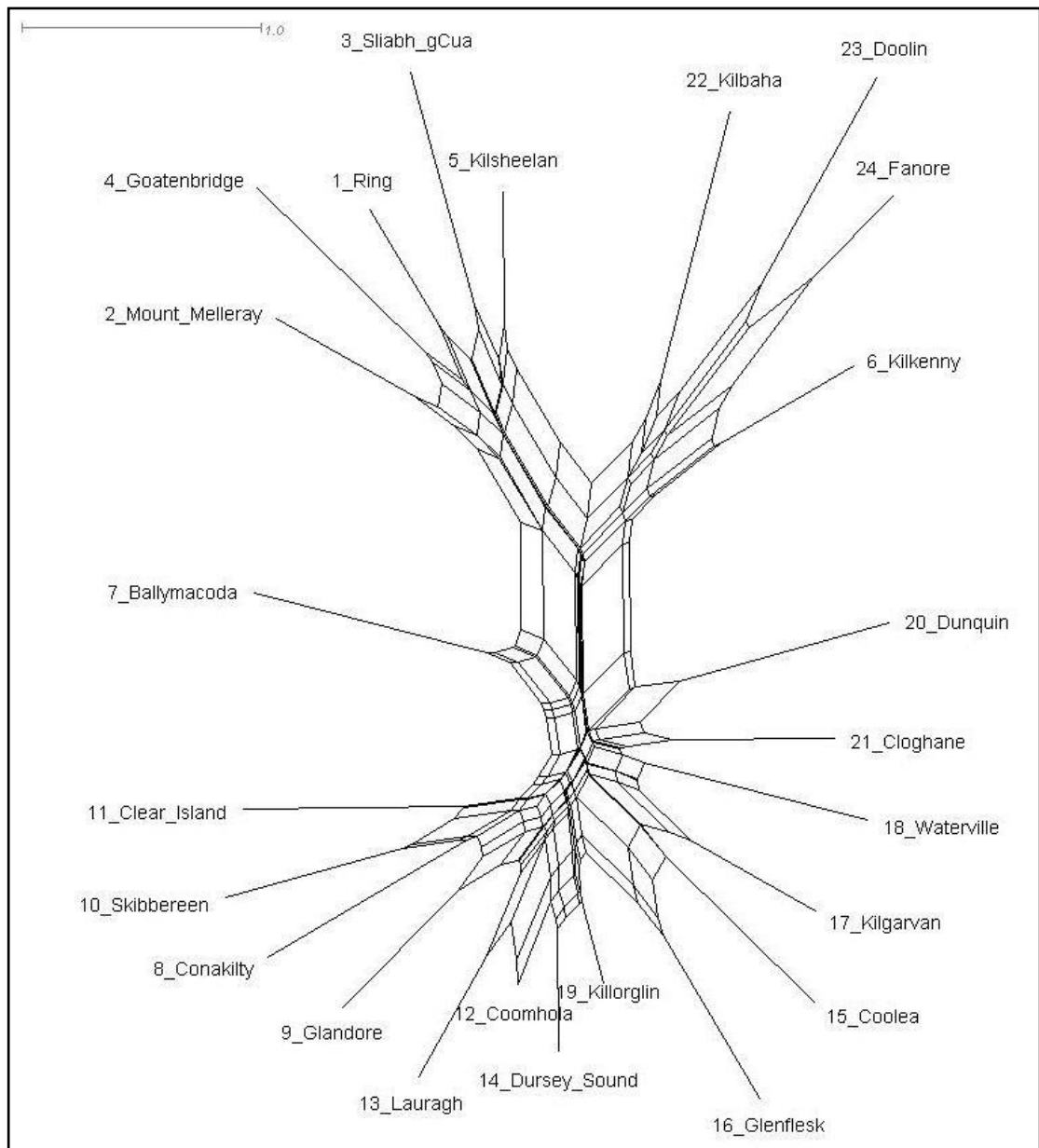


Figure 22 LD analysis of Munster (with Kilkenny) LASID points, based on Kessler (1995)

It is instantly clear that the dialect groupings presented correspond accurately to the geographic distribution of Irish dialects in Munster. Most salient, perhaps, is the distinction between the Irish of the Déise in East Munster (points 1; 2; 3; 4; 5) and other dialects. Interestingly, however, these East Munster dialects show a degree of similarity with the dialects of Clare (points 22; 23; 24), dialects which, in some respects, can be described as intermediate varieties between Connacht and Munster.

This larger dialect grouping of Clare and Déise dialects are closest to the dialect of Kilkenny.⁸³

If one excludes Kilkenny (point 6) from the analysis, and thus limits the analysis to Munster proper, we see a similar pattern. However, in doing so it can be noted that the close linguistic relationship between Dunquin (point 20) and the dialects of Clare, especially the dialect of the southwest coast of Clare (point 22), appear more salient. This salience is consonant with a large number of coastal isoglosses linking these two areas (Ó Curnáin 2012: 89; Ó Sé 2002, see also chapter 6). The linguistic proximity of Clare dialects to the dialects of East Munster is suggestive of a dialect area linking these two places, perhaps indicating an important isogloss bundle separating West Munster (most of Cork and all of Kerry) from the rest of the province. The degree of similarity between the Irish of Clare and that of East Munster has been commented upon previously:

[F]rom what information is available from neighbouring counties we can postulate a belt running from Waterford through South Tipperary, Limerick, and into Clare. In this area we find evidence of Déise type pronunciations. It seems likely that from written evidence that part of North-east Cork came within this belt (Ó Cuív 1951: 71).

Clare Irish is generally of the Munster type, having its closest connections with the Waterford dialects. With these it agrees, for instance, in regard to the evolution of certain diphthongs and in the changing of *ó* into *ú* in contact with a nasal element [...] (Holmer 1962a: 52).⁸⁴

⁸³ Although Kilkenny is part of the modern province of Leinster, it is geographically and linguistically closest to the dialects of Irish spoken in Waterford. For a discussion of some of these shared features, see chapter 6. Historically, the kingdom of Osraige (a name retained for the modern diocese of Ossory, incorporating most of county Kilkenny) occupied a liminal position between the provinces of Munster and Leinster (Byrne 2001: 169).

⁸⁴ This suggestion is also supported by the onomastic evidence discussed in chapter 6.

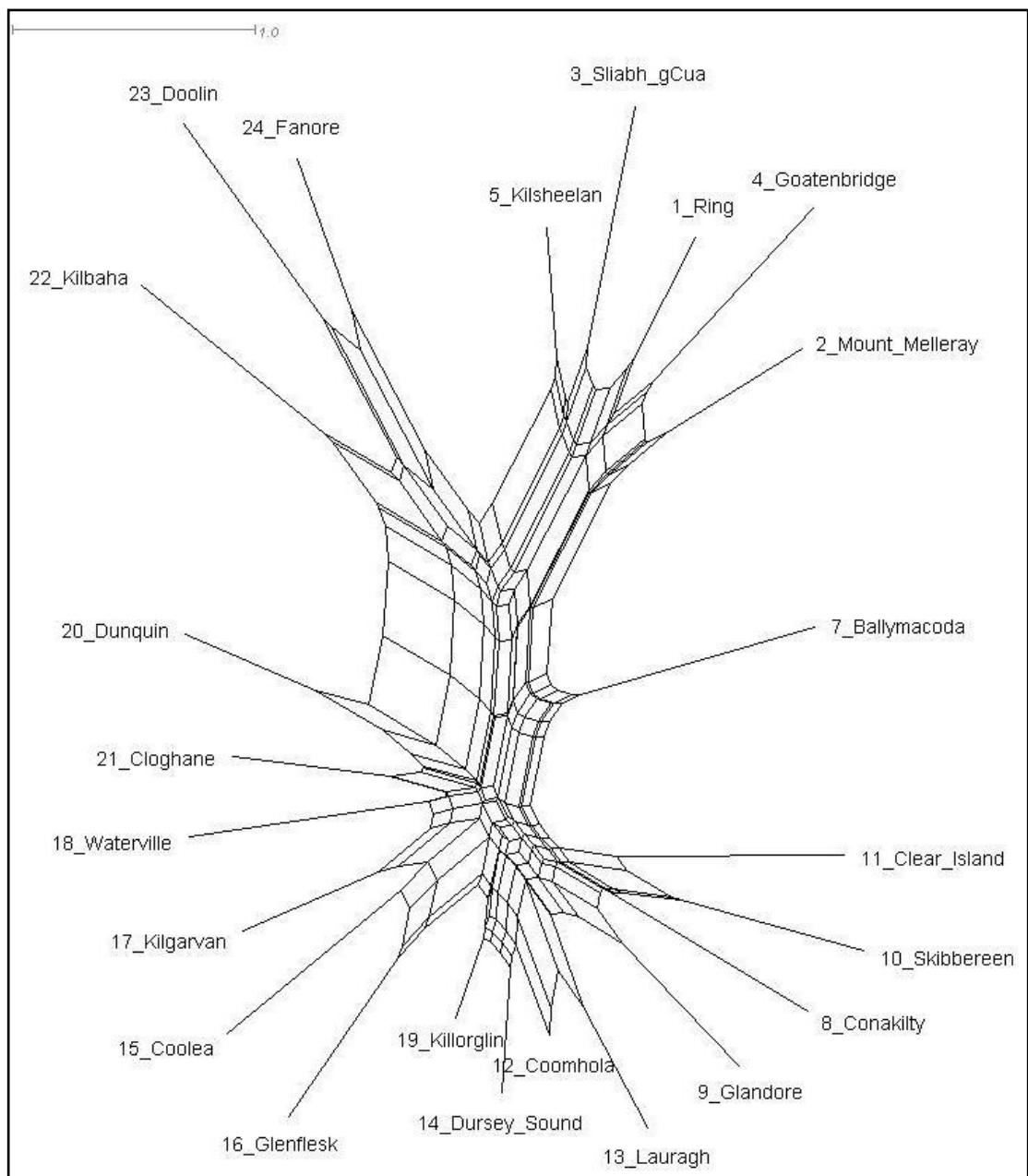


Figure 23 LD analysis of Munster *LASID* points, based on Kessler (1995)

This analysis of variation within West Munster (Cork and Kerry) allows for the testing of other hypotheses. Ó Cuív, dealing primarily with the dialects of Cork, outlined three separate dialect areas (see Figure 24), all of which are covered by points in *LASID*:

There seem to be three directions in which we can trace close dialectal affinities. The first, which I might call the coastal region, extends from Kilbrittain on the coast south-west of Cork city through Carbery

westwards into Berehaven. [...] The second, which I call the central region, covers Mid and West Cork and includes the Baronies of East and West Muskerry and Duhallow. Carrignavar, due north of Cork city, is the most easterly point I have in this region. [...] Finally we have the south-eastern region whose dialect I have discussed in some detail. This area was cut off from the south and south-western coastal region by Cork Harbour and Cork City, a factor which probably led to closer contacts with the adjoining county of Waterford which are clearly reflected in the dialect (Ó Cuív 1951: 70–1).

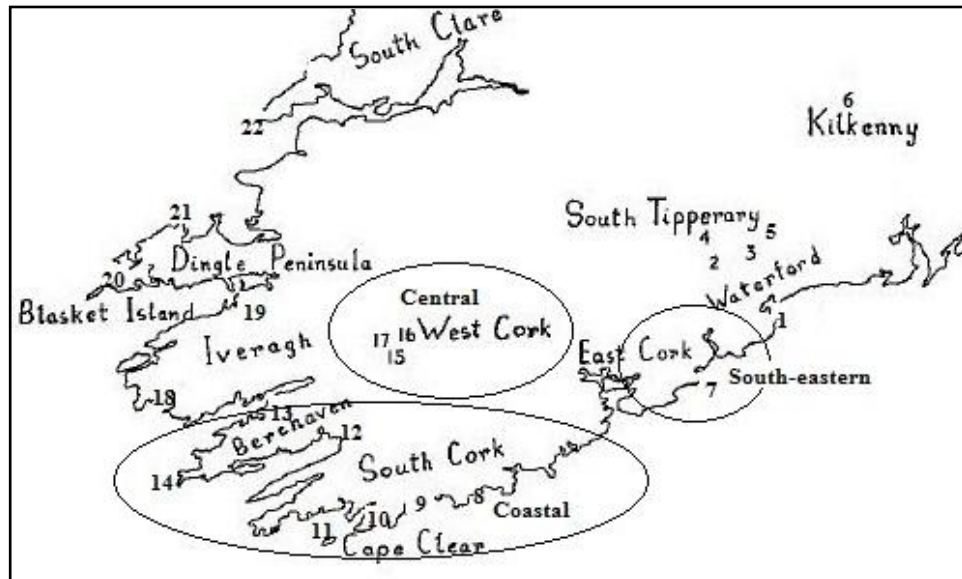


Figure 24 Cork dialect areas as outlined by Ó Cuív (1951)

As seen in the Figure 25 below, the geographic and linguistic dialect areas set out by Ó Cuív are borne out by the phonetic distance measurement. In fact, the phonetic distance measurement allows for the further subdivision of the coastal group. The southern coast of county Cork (points 8; 9; 10; 11) is distinguishable from dialect areas further west along the coast (points 12; 13; 14), around the Berehaven peninsula. The most striking aspect of these computer-generated representations is the degree to which they correspond with geographic realities.

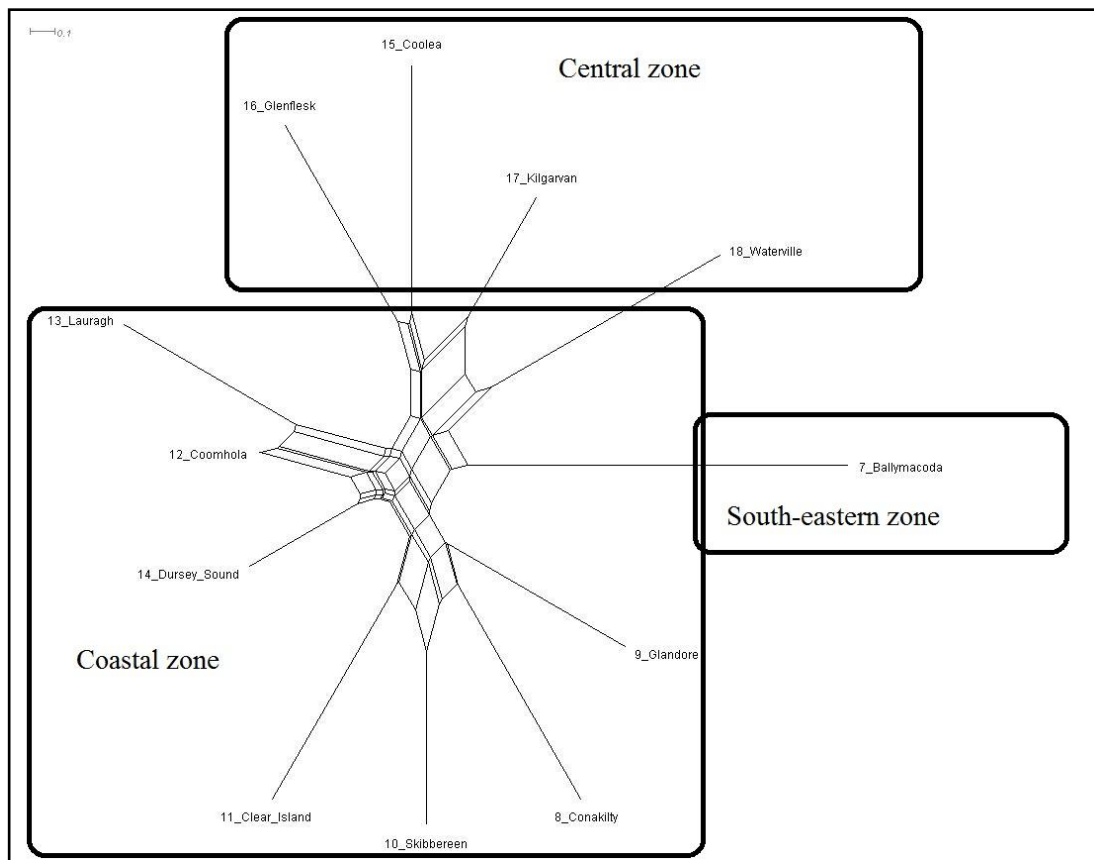


Figure 25 LD analysis of *LASID* Cork dialects, labelled as in Ó Cuív (1951).

2.8.3.4 Analysis of Connacht dialects

Two decades before the fieldwork upon which *LASID* is based was carried out, Tomás Ó Máille wrote the following in his outline of the dialects of Connacht:

Thríd is thríd, ní go leor athruighthe atá ar Ghaedhilg Chonnachta i n-aon áit seachas a chéile, agus is do réir a chéile a thagas an t-athrú sin isteach. Is léir an t-athrú ar fhocla agus suin seachas a chéile. Ach an méid acu a athruigheas ní i gcuideachta a athruigheas siad. Is doiligh da bharr sin, ceanntair chanamhna a dhealú amach ó n-a chéile sa gcúige (Ó Máille 1927: 132).⁸⁵

Be that as it may, Ó Máille (1927: 132) went on to list seven general areas, stressing the lack of definition between them. Ó Curnáin (2007: 51) gives a more confident classification. He observes two relevant isogloss bundles. The first divides the province in north and south: ‘Within Connacht the major isogloss bundle divides the province north and south of a line which extends east from Clew Bay’. The second isogloss bundle is more dispersed and defines the variety labelled by Ó Curnáin as ‘South Connacht Interstitial Irish’:

This zone comprises most of West Co. Galway and much of that part of South-East Co. Galway which is south of Galway city. The interstitial isogloss bundle reaches the sea at Killary Harbour and again west of Galway city where it crosses Galway Bay to join South-East Co. Galway somewhere between Órán Mór and Cinn Mhara (Ó Curnáin 2007: 51).⁸⁶

Ó Curnáin’s assessment of the relative importance of this isogloss bundle is not necessarily borne out by the quantitative analysis, however. Definite trends emerge from the quantitative analysis represented in Figure 27; although they do not fully correspond to the outline of Ó Curnáin, they may be said to endorse it in a qualified way. As with other areas analysed, the quantitative results correspond with geographic realities.

⁸⁵ My translation: ‘On the whole, there is not a great degree of variation from place to place in Connacht Irish and what changes are observable are gradual. Changes in certain words and sounds are clearer than others. But those which do change do not all do so at once. It is therefore difficult to distinguish dialectal zones within the province’.

⁸⁶ See figure 26 for a geographic outline of some of these locations.

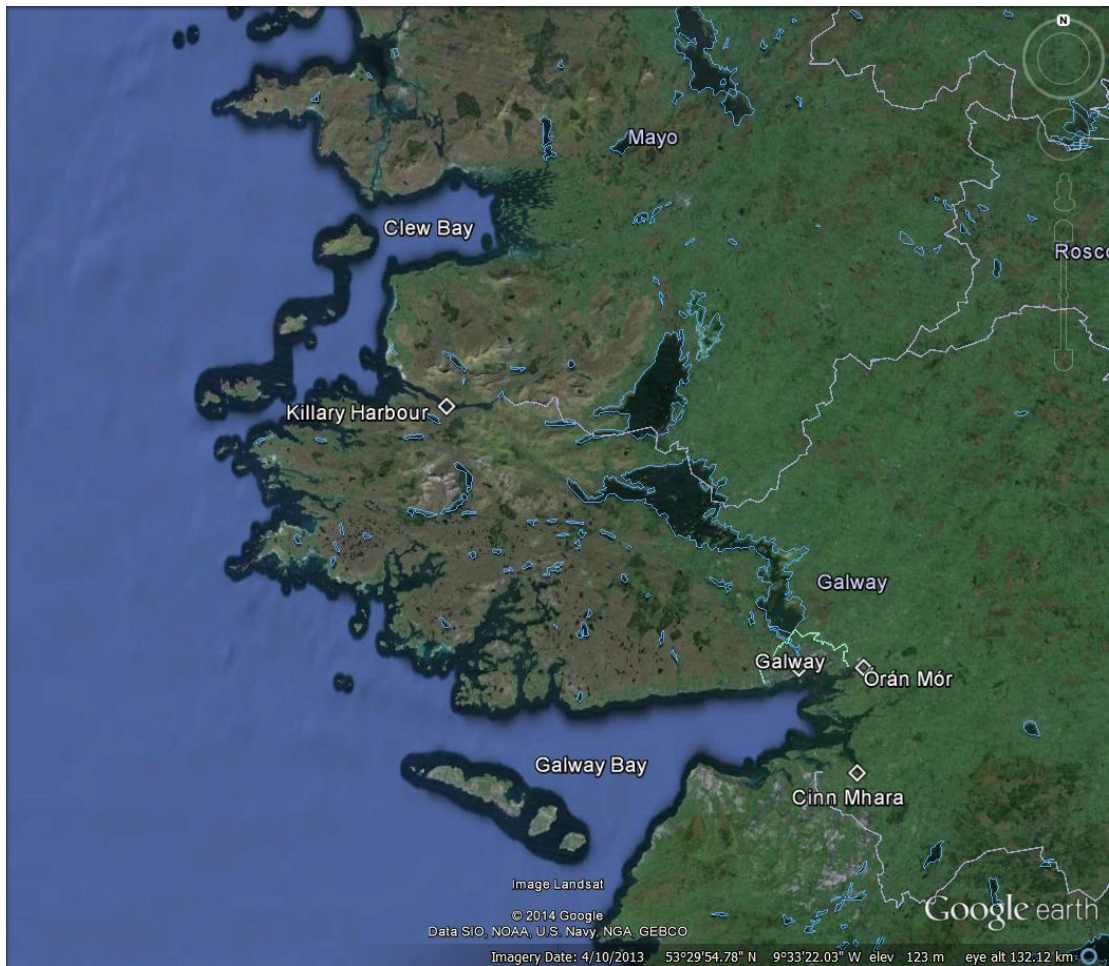


Figure 26 Some important points for Ó Curnáin's (2007) classification of Connacht dialects

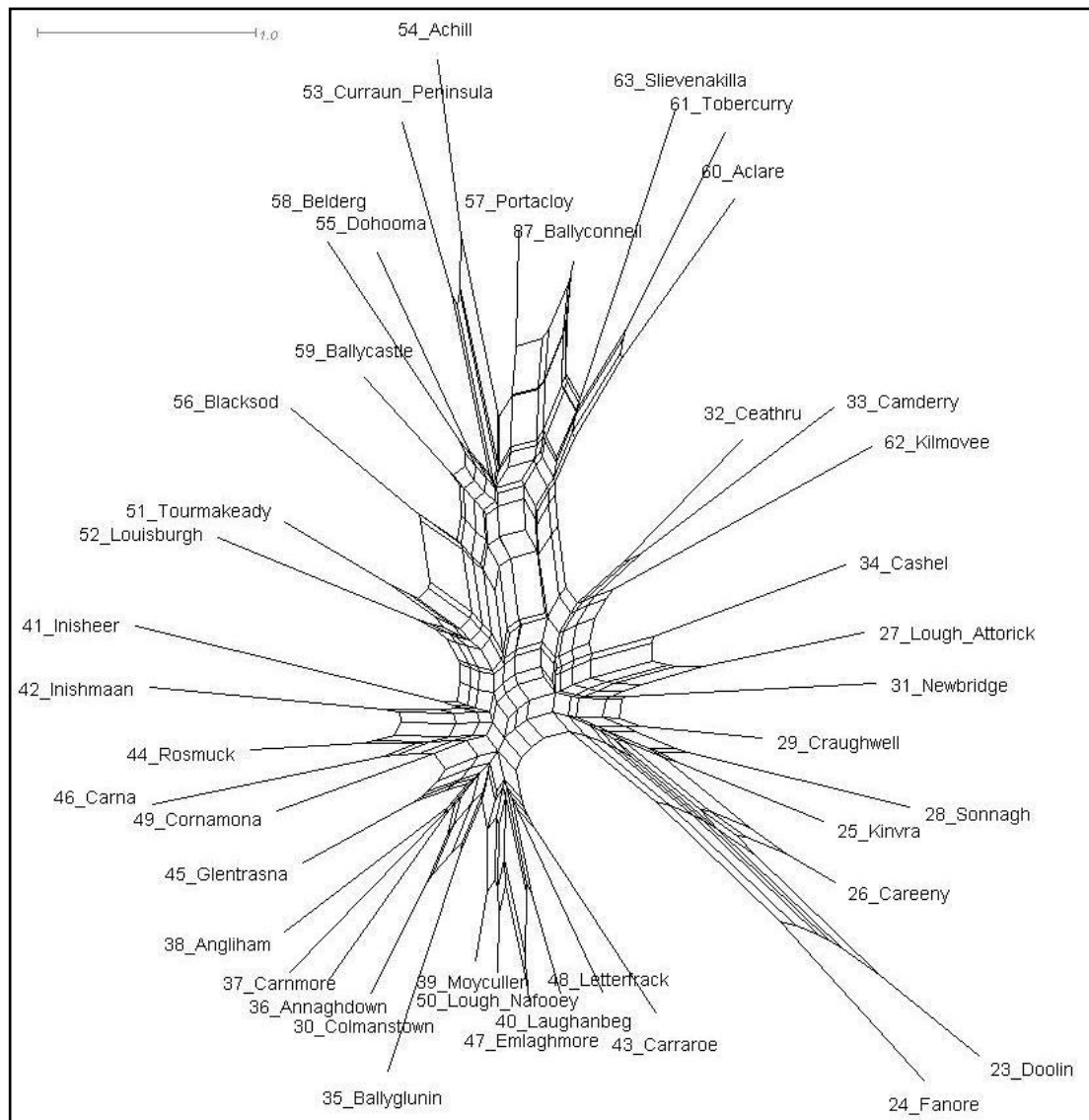


Figure 27 LD analysis of Connacht dialects (and North Clare) in *LASID*, based on (Kessler 1995)

One of the most salient divisions in the *Neighbor-Net* generated network (Figure 27) is one which largely corresponds to Ó Máille's (1927: 13) dividing line of the Galway to Clifden train-line. It contradicts both Ó Máille (1927: 13) and Ó Curnáin (2007: 51), however, in that it includes a number of (points 30; 35; 36; 37; 38) to the east of Galway city. This does not contradict the existence of Ó Curnáin's 'South Connacht Interstitial Irish', as such, but it does suggest that this is only part of the story. South Connacht Interstitial Irish is distinguished by two types of features, according to Ó Curnáin (2007: 51):

- a) Munsterisms, i.e. features which it shares with Munster, and
- b) Features belonging neither to Munster nor Connacht ‘proper’ but rather to this interstitial (or transitional, in this instance interprovincial zone).

It would appear, however, that a classification on this basis alone would be misleading. The quantitative analysis suggests that those dialects to the east of Lough Corrib share many traits with those on the west, more so than with those further north, or those dialects further south towards the Clare border.

Other issues are raised by the data, however. The Irish of Achill, as has been noted above, has its origins in a settlement of Ulster people in the middle of the seventeenth century. The linguistic implications have been recognised for some time, the first modern scholarly commentator being Ó Máille:

Ó thuaidh, tá canamhain Acla (.i. Oileán Acla agus Corrán Acla). Is ionann í sin mórán agus an Ghaedhilg atá sa gcuid ó dheas de Thír Chonaill, ach go bhfuil roinn de Gh[aedhilg] MhuighEo measgtha thríti (Ó Máille 1927: 133).⁸⁷

The salience of this dialect and its anomalous situation in the region has often been commented upon since (cf. *LASID* i, xviii, n.1; Mhac an Fhailigh 1968: xii). This situation is clearly reflected in the degree to which Achill and Ballycroy (*LASID* points 53, 54) group together, to the exclusion of those dialects which are geographically close to them (*LASID* points 52, 55, 56).

One final feature which emerges from the data is the extent to which a dialect grouping in the east of the province emerges, one which seems to share many features with the Irish of Clare. This has not, as far as I am aware, been commented upon before,⁸⁸ not least because those dialects in the east of the province surveyed in *LASID* were moribund at the time of the survey and have since disappeared altogether. We have seen evidence for this previously, however; in the LD-network

⁸⁷ My translation: ‘To the north is the Irish of Achill (i.e. Achill Island and the Curraun Peninsula). This is largely the same as that dialect found in the south of Donegal, except for the fact that some Mayo Irish is mixed through it’.

⁸⁸ Ó Sé (1989: 157–8), commenting of the stress patterns of east Connacht dialects, states: ‘It is possible that stress shifting to the extent outlined above was in fact a feature of the Shannon basin and that the north-east Connacht area of stress shifting was not an accentual island, being linked to north Tipperary and perhaps to parts of Longford’.

for the whole of Ireland (Figure 19) we see the emergence of an ‘East Connacht grouping’ (*LASID* points 27; 32; 33; 34; 62). It seems likely that further analysis of this grouping will be informative in terms of those dialects previously spoken as far east as the banks of the Shannon and further, into the modern counties of Leinster; but that is outwith the scope of the current study. One can, however, disregard the assertion in Hickey (2011: 338) that ‘the transition from Southern Irish to Western Irish was abrupt in North Co. Clare’ as overly simplistic. While the difference between the Irish of Clare and that of the area around Galway city is, in some ways, striking, the distinction between the Irish of Clare and that of East Connacht is gradual rather than abrupt.

2.8.3.5 Comparing Kessler’s lexical and phonetic data – the case of Ulster:

While both of Kessler’s data sets, when analysed on a pan-Gaelic scale, seem to correlate well together, it may be useful to examine how both data sets (lexical and phonetic) relate to each other on a micro-level (i.e. in intra-provincial terms), taking the Ulster data as a test case.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ I exclude Rathlin because of its classification as a dialect more akin to Scottish Gaelic.

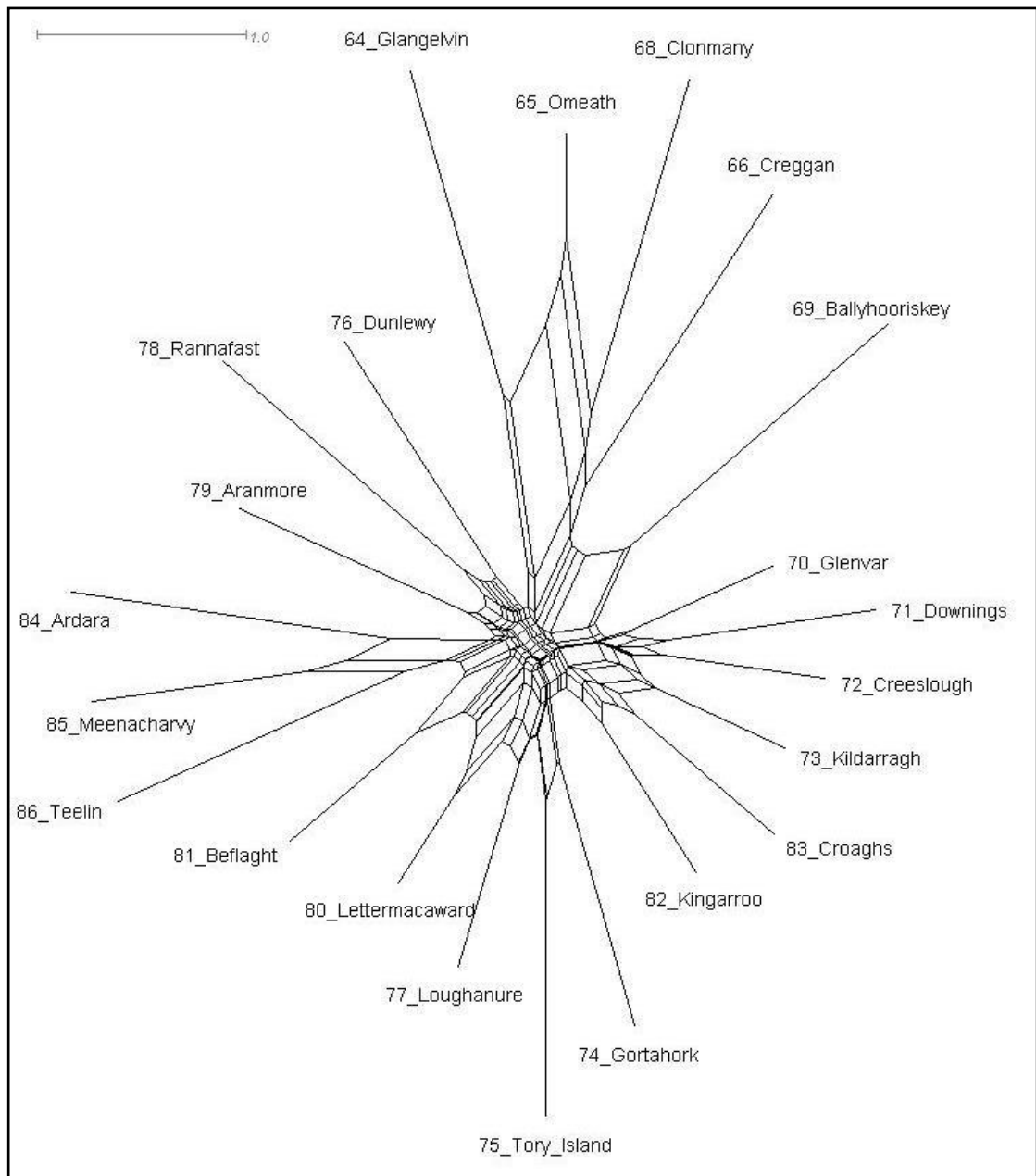


Figure 28 Etymon identity analysis of Ulster dialects (excluding Rathlin) in LASID, based on Kessler (1995)

In the etymon identity analysis (Figure 28), quite clearly, the distinction outlined by Wagner (1958: 32) between East and West Ulster is validated; the dialects of East Ulster (points 64, 65, 66, 68) cluster together clearly, and to a lesser extent with the dialect of Ballyhooriskey (point 69), of which Wagner (1958: 33) commented that it was ‘quite different from other Donegal dialects’. Aside from this significant division, we can notice other clusters of dialects: the south-westerly dialects of

Donegal (points 84, 85, 86) form another clear sub-grouping. The comments of Wagner (*LASID* i: xx) in relation to the dialect of Glenvar (point 70) being linguistically close to the geographically distant dialects of the Bluestack Mountains (points 82; 83) are also borne out by the analysis as these dialects form part of a grouping (points 70– 3, 82, 83) located in the north and east of the county (excluding Ballyhooriskey, point 69).

When the East Ulster dialects, including Ballyhooriskey (point 69), are excluded from the analysis other interesting relationships are highlighted (see Figure 29). Again, southwest Donegal dialects (points 84, 85, 86) clearly form a sub-grouping of their own and it is easy to see individual cases of similarity such as the reticulations shared by Tory Island (point 75) and Gortahork (point 74), the nearest point on the mainland to it.

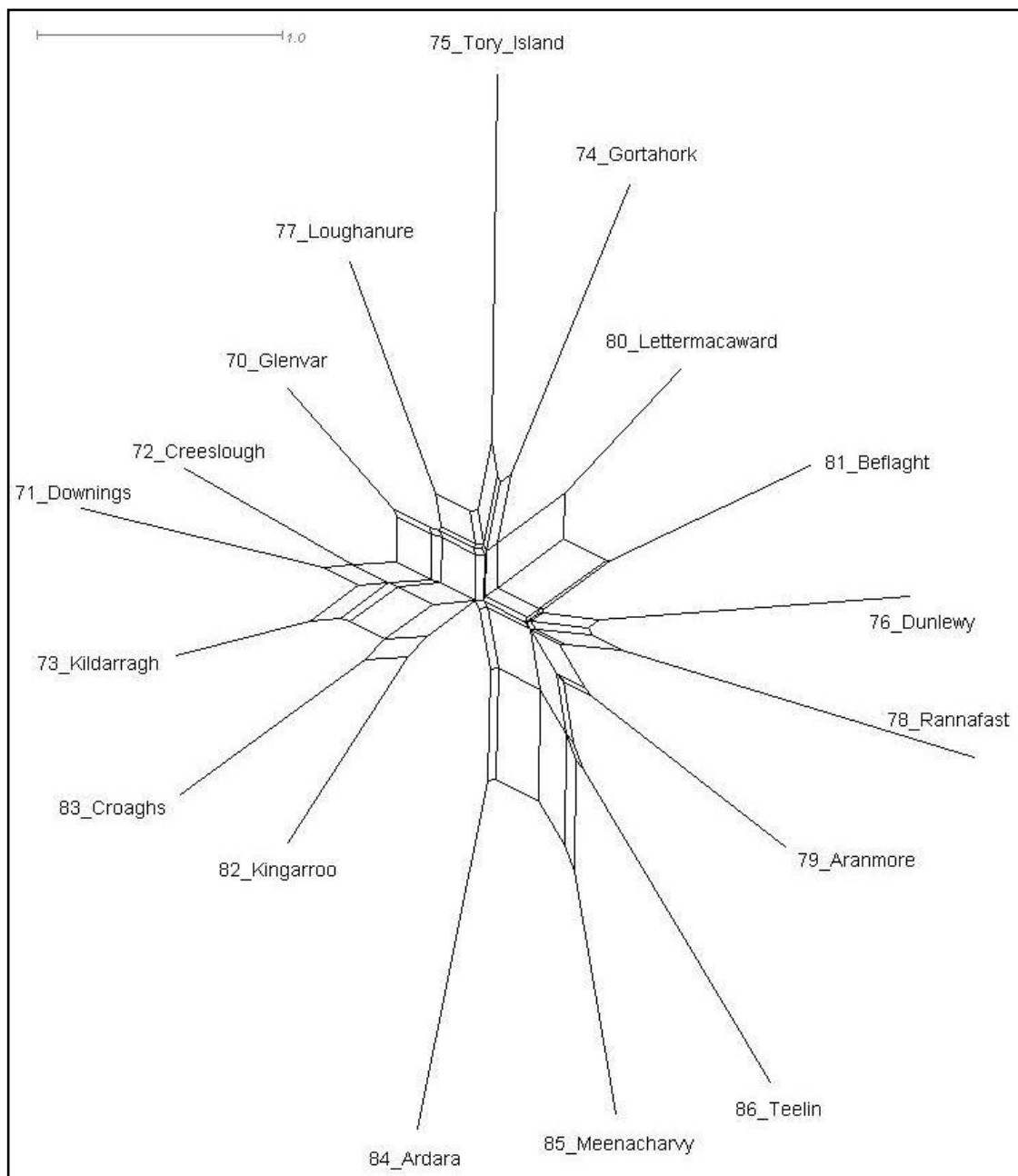


Figure 29 Etymon identity analysis of West Ulster dialects in *LASID* analysed, based on Kessler (1995)

The etymon identity analysis of Ulster (Figures 28 and 29) will now be compared to the phonetic distance analysis of the same dialect points (Figure 30). Once again, the clear distinction between the east (points 65, 66, 68) and west of the province is also evident in the phonetic distance analysis. It also provides a clearer geographic differentiation between the dialectal groupings for Donegal, however.

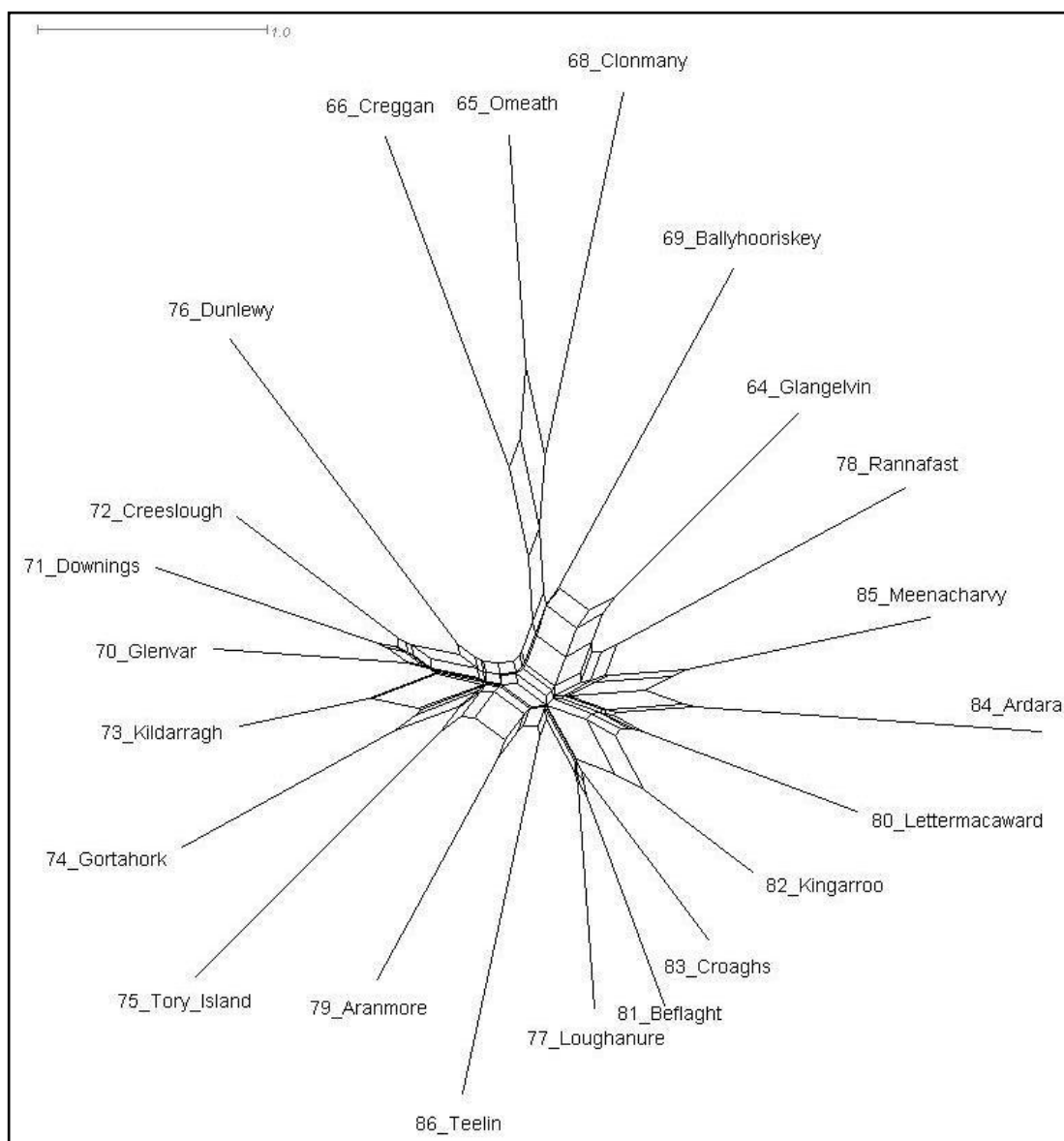


Figure 30 LD analysis of Ulster dialects (excluding Rathlin) in LASID, based on Kessler (1995)

Excluding East Ulster dialects from the analysis, we can see a much clearer correlation between the geographic location of points and the phonetic data set than was the case for the etymon identity analysis. Here we see a very clear two-way distinction working on a north-eastern versus south-western basis. Those dialects which fall into the north-eastern group (points 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76) are those which have been said to share a number of features with East Ulster Irish (Ó

Baoill 1996a: 33). They are separated, geographically, from the south-western grouping (points 77–85) by a line running inland from Cnoc Fola. A similar dialectal distinction in the Irish of Donegal was observed, and the historical reason for it outlined, by Ó Baoill:

Cnoc Fola, the north-west point, is the meeting place of two quite different subdialects, particularly if we pay attention to certain phonetic patterns and phonological contrasts. Cnoc Fola, which forms the north-west boundary, was until fairly recently a natural boundary not easily accessed from either direction [...] The dialect spoken immediately to the east of Cnoc Fola can be easily identified by certain well known features. These features are part of a linguistic continuum which is shared by other subdialects further to the east. Historically, these features belong to a common core found in a variety referred to by various writers as East Ulster Irish (D. P. Ó Baoill 1996a: 33).

Thus not only do both analyses (phonetic distance measurement and etymon identity analysis) agree on the major intra-provincial divisions (in Ulster in the present case), they also agree on most of the sub-provincial divisions, such as the classification of a south-west group, and both analyses imply the significance of Cnoc Fola as a natural dialect boundary on north-western Donegal. Further, it supports the robustness of the lexical data and provides us with an example of how the dialectal significance of lexical variation may be measured.

2.9 Implications

What then are the implications of the quantitative analyses outlined above for the varying hypotheses of O’Rahilly (1932), Williams (1994a; 1998; 2012) and Ó Buachalla (2002), regarding the inter-relationship of Gaelic dialects? At first glance it could be suggested that they tell us what we knew already: Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx are separate languages; Irish has three primary dialect groupings, etc. This would be to vastly underestimate the significance of the data, however. The production of familiar patterns from familiar data, as outlined in McMahan and McMahan (2005: 48), still constitutes a step forward: the patterns outlined above are in fact different, ‘not in shape, but in statistical robustness and assured viability’.

Ó Buachalla’s (2002) claims as to the primary division within Irish are substantiated if we take account of a broad range of empirical linguistic evidence, both quantitative and qualitative. The morphological, syntactic, prosodic and phonological data clearly supports the suggestion that the primary dialect division in Ireland is that which distinguishes the ‘Northern’ Irish dialects of Ulster from the ‘Southern’ Irish dialects of Connacht and Munster, in synchronic terms. This ought to put to rest O’Rahilly’s notion of a ‘southern’ dialect consisting of Munster Irish and a Northern one of Connacht and Ulster (O’Rahilly 1932: 260). Further, however, it refutes Williams’s inference of two equally important isogloss bundles in Ireland. Rather, the linguistic evidence of Irish would seem to point to the existence of one primary bundle of isoglosses separating Ulster from the rest of Ireland, and a secondary isogloss bundle separating Connacht from Munster.

We are also in a position to cautiously comment on the compactness of these two isogloss bundles, i.e. between Connacht and Munster and between Ulster and Connacht. According to the quantitative evidence above a relatively sharp divide exists between the Irish dialects of Ulster and Connacht. The dialectal boundary between Connacht and Munster, on the other hand, is not as clear cut. This is evidenced by the lexical and phonetic analyses cited above, but have also been noted by the foremost authority on the now extinct dialects of Co. Clare, the border county between Connacht and Munster:

[T]he differences [between dialects of Clare Irish] are as a rule gradual, so that it is generally impossible to draw definite boundary lines for completely distinct dialect types and even if certain very general phonetic or morphological traits are considered, the dialect areas are rather vaguely defined [...] It is clear from what was stated in section 7 that separate boundary lines could be drawn for practically every phonetic, morphological and lexical form [...] (Holmer 1962a: 8–10).

This assessment of dialectal variation between Connacht and Munster contrasts sharply with the admittedly impressionistic comments of language scholars of the previous century in their assessment of variation between Ulster and Connacht:

[...] the westward province almost precisely coincides with the modern limit of the province, for, on passing a distance of only a single mile from the county of Donegal into that of Leitrim, we find every person using the negative *Ní* (Mac Adam 1858: 175, cited in Hughes 1997: 274).

[S]hort as the distance is from Cavan to Mohill, the greatest difference is observable in the accentuation of the language of both districts (John O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey letters, cited in Ó Tuathail 1934: xxv).

How does the quantitative analysis provided by Elsie and Kessler fit in a pan-Gaelic context, however? Ó Buachalla (2002: 8) suggested, somewhat boldly, that the features which he examined 'constitute a far stronger bundle of isoglosses than the bundle which divides East from West'. That is to say, they are stronger than those bundles of isoglosses which distinguish Irish dialects from Scottish ones. The synchronic evidence of both Elsie and Kessler refutes this emphatically; the distance between the dialects of Ulster and those of Scotland is great. It has already been noted that Elsie's survey was unable to take cognisance of the dialects of East Ulster Irish which would potentially act as a sort of bridge between the dialects of Donegal and Argyll, but this alone cannot explain the huge distance between the varieties that are surveyed in Elsie (1986). This criticism cannot be made of the data associated with Kessler (1995) because of the remarkably better areal coverage of *LASID*. As well as its enhanced areal coverage, *LASID* provides us with an historical snapshot of the linguistic situation of Gaelic dialects on the cusp of the 20th century, among speakers mostly born in the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. *LASID* i, ix–x).

Kessler's information, while suggesting a more contiguous linguistic landscape, also suggests that even the Irish of East Ulster is more closely related to Irish dialects than it is to Scottish ones. Therefore, while the major isogloss bundle in Ireland distinguishes Ulster Irish from its southern neighbours, the most significant isogloss bundle, in the pan-Gaelic context, is that which distinguishes Ireland from Scotland.⁹⁰

The position of Manx (and Rathlin to a lesser extent) within the pan-Gaelic framework remains problematic. Some of the analyses above (Elsie 1986) suggest that Manx should be grouped, albeit somewhat loosely, with Irish dialects; others (Kessler 1995) suggest it should be grouped with the Gaelic of Rathlin and Scotland. This is confounded by the lack of comparative philological investigations into Manx and its relationship with all of the languages it has come into contact with throughout its history. On the whole, it seems likely that Manx is the product of the type of 'new-dialect formation' described in Trudgill (2004), and is particularly ill-fitted to the tree-type structure hitherto used to describe Gaelic dialects. This is all the more pertinent when set beside the opinion of Thomson, who states that it is unlikely, because of the closed nature of the Manx community, that linguistic innovations arising elsewhere in the Gaelic-speaking world would manage to penetrate it after 1350, or even earlier (personal communication cited in Greene 1976: 67).

2.10 Conclusion

The quantitative methods employed by linguists and non-linguists alike have developed greatly since the emergence of Swadesh's glottochronological theories. They have developed a level of sophistication which is a world away from the early studies of McNamara (1961) and others, and have come to be employed in general linguistic commentary. Anttila (1972: 397) has stated: 'It is clear that lexicostatistics [and dialectometry by extension] is supplementary to other methods, both as preliminary starting point and in the final subgrouping and chronological inferences.' This is an important statement. The weaknesses in O'Rahilly's (1932: 161–91) thesis

⁹⁰ I refrain from making reference to Rathlin here because it was not included in Elsie's (1986) survey; Kessler's (1995) data suggests that it clusters with Scottish varieties. It is still accurate, however, to describe it as a transitional dialect between those of East Ulster and Southwest Scotland.

on Ulster Irish have been greatly elucidated by Ó Buachalla (1977; 2002) and Ó Dochartaigh (1987), and serve to highlight the need for a method of testing philological hypotheses as objectively as possible. The methodologies presented here are not intended to replace traditional analyses, but rather to complement them.

One can now conclude, on the basis of a broad range of linguistic features for which empirical evidence is available, along with objective quantitative investigations of phonetics and lexis, that there is something unique about the dialect of Ulster in the larger Irish context.⁹¹ Ó Buachalla (2002: 8) suggests, however, that the dialect boundary separating the Gaelic dialects of Ulster from the rest of Ireland ‘may represent a historic division in the proto-language.’ This is a potentially attractive suggestion, but one which requires a more in-depth treatment. One must be careful of projecting synchronic variation backwards into the diachronic situation without making reference to our earliest attested linguistic evidence. The following chapters will focus on investigating the empirical evidence for historical dialectal divisions in the Gaelic languages, the validity of previously accepted theoretical stages of Gaelic’s historical development and the methodological implications that arise from these findings for Gaelic dialectology, for Celtic philology and for historical linguistics more generally. Most especially, it will attempt to explain how the picture of Irish dialects illustrated above came to be.

⁹¹ Hickey (1999) comes to similar conclusions as regards the varieties of West Germanic spoken in Ireland, i.e. that the greatest bundling of isoglosses separates Ulster from the rest of the country. Giegerich (1992: 82) also draws attention to the ‘sharp’ linguistic division between what he terms ‘Southern and Northern Hiberno-English’. Giegerich attributes this division in Hiberno-English to Southern Hiberno-English being derived historically from Southern British accents; Northern Hiberno-English, however, he claims to be more closely related to Scots. This can only be part of the story, considering the equally ‘sharp’ and largely geographically identical division in the Gaelic dialects of Ireland.

3. The Dialectology of Early Irish: Review

3.1 Introduction

Clear dialectal distinctions exist in the synchronic Gaelic dialects but the quantitative-based analysis of the previous chapter allows us to start to discuss dialect relationships, not only dialectal distinctions. The consensus on the question of dialectal variation in the Early Irish period (Old Irish 600–900; Middle Irish 900–1200), however, is still largely that expressed by O’Rahilly (1932) and developed by Jackson (1951).⁹² This hypothesis states that diatopic variation was not a feature of the Gaelic language until the end of the Middle Irish period (*circa* 1200), by which time one sees the emergence of the highly codified Classical Irish, a strictly codified language drawing on a variety of forms that had developed in certain parts of Ireland⁹³ for the purposes of allowing a degree of metrical flexibility to poets (on which see McManus 1994: 335; Ó Cuív 1980). It is clear that a high degree of dialectal variation existed during the Classical period; however, the exact nature of this variation is less clear due to the omnipresence of the Classical language in the written sources.

The ground becomes increasingly less firm the further back in time one goes. Textual investigations of contemporary Middle Irish sources by C. Breatnach (1990) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008) have indicated that regional variation in both Ireland and Scotland existed in the Middle Irish period and had already by that stage started to emerge in the written record. The question of dialects during the Old Irish period is more vexed. There are two general surveys of the question of dialectal variation in Old Irish: Ahlqvist (1988) and Russell (2005).

While many of the problems inherent in O’Rahilly and Jackson’s interpretation of the evidence have been discussed by Ó Maolalaigh (1995–6; 2008); Ó Buachalla

⁹² Ó Maolalaigh’s (2008) is an important reassessment of this position.

⁹³ Ó Maolalaigh (1998: 14) contends that ‘the Classical norm was created on Irish soil by poets who drew solely on the resources of the language as it was spoken and written in Ireland. In short, there are no innovative features of Classical Irish which cannot be explained in purely Irish linguistic terms’. Although *IGT* and *BST* contain features from more than one dialect, there is no reason to suppose that all dialects are equally represented. C. Breatnach (1990: 486) notes that the language of *IGT* and *BST* is clearly divergent from contemporary dialects of Munster.

(2002); Gillies (2004) and others, these analyses have been informed, for the most part, by reference to and expert analysis of the modern Gaelic dialects. A number of faults underlying Jackson's theory as it pertains to Early Irish have remained largely unquestioned. The problems are ones of theory and method. Literary Old Irish, as shall be demonstrated, is relatively homogeneous language, one which does not display any obvious dialectal features. The fact that hardly any dialectal features are discernible is highly unusual for any language. In recent years it has become increasingly recognised that significant differences must have existed, even during the Early Irish period, between Irish and Scottish varieties of Gaelic (see Ó Maolalaigh 1995–6; 2008; Gillies 2004). No such theory of potential dialectal variation within Ireland has been published, excepting, of course, that made by Ó Buachalla (2002: 8), who only goes so far as to say that the modern isogloss bundle distinguishing the historic province of Ulster from the rest of Ireland 'may represent a historic division in the protolanguage'. Ó Buachalla's contribution, however, is very short and, unfortunately, he does not elaborate on how he understands the term 'protolanguage' in this context. It seems reasonable, however, to assume he means to associate it with the early medieval period at least. While the hypothesis suggesting the distinction between Ulster and the rest of Ireland is confirmed in synchronic terms by the previous chapter, judgement must be reserved on the suggestion that this was also the historic state of Gaelic dialects, in light of the fact that virtually no evidence from Early Irish is presented in Ó Buachalla's argument.

3.2 Why expect variation?

Apart from the obvious linguistic axiom that no language exists without variation, there are other reasons to expect dialectal variation in Gaelic at an early stage. Among the most relevant pieces of evidence suggesting that we ought to expect to find dialectal variation is that presented by Brittonic, the other branch of Insular Celtic, the language group most closely related to Goidelic (i.e. Gaelic). Recently, some scholars have suggested that there is little evidence for a formal distinction between Goidelic and Brittonic until the first century AD, maintaining that the difference in the development of $*k^w$,⁹⁴ which is likely to pre-date the first century

⁹⁴ This sound becomes $*p$ in Brittonic and $*k$ in Goidelic (cf. Russell 1995: 14–5).

AD, is merely a single ‘trivial’ isogloss (Schrijver 2009: 205; cf. Clancy 2010: 381).⁹⁵ This is a problematic claim from a sociolinguistic perspective when nothing is known of the social meaning attached to this ‘trivial’ distinguishing feature (cf. J. Milroy 1992: 83). Whatever the validity of Schrijver’s suggestion, by 600 not only were Goidelic and Brittonic differentiated from one another, but further, it is clear that by this date ‘a range of dialects’ had developed in Brittonic with clear differentiation even internal to what is now Wales (Charles-Edwards 2013: 76, cf. Russell 2005: 440). One could reasonably expect then that Goidelic, spread over an equally expansive area from Corca Dhuibhne in the southwest of Ireland to Drumalban in the northwest of Scotland, and also incorporating the Isle of Man, would demonstrate at least some variation.

Aside from mere chronological considerations, Ó Maolalaigh has recently highlighted another reason one might expect to see variation in the written record:

When one considers [...] the contact with other linguistic groups [...] which we know prevailed before and during the Old and Middle Gaelic periods, one sees that the potential for the emergence of dialectal divergences in the pan-Goedelic area must have existed for centuries before the Early Modern era, i.e. well before 1200 (Ó Maolalaigh 2008: 185).

Ó Maolalaigh’s point is made as part of a larger case for early differentiation between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, but the same argument could be made for internal variation within Ireland itself. As Charles-Edwards has pointed out, we know little about the process through which Ireland itself became Gaelicised:

By the end of the iron age there is a convenient congruence between the linguistic situation – the prevalence of Irish throughout the island – and ethnicity; but we cannot assume a similar congruence throughout what may have been the long and complex process of gaelicisation (Charles-Edwards 2005a: lxvii).

The situation of early medieval Ireland contrasts sharply with that of early Iceland, for instance, which, because of its status as a *terra nova* and a colony gave rise to a

⁹⁵ This argument is part of a larger hypothesis, forwarded by Schrijver (2009), which seeks to explain the homogeneity of Old Irish by arguing that Celtic is a recent arrival in Ireland and that the ‘monolithic’ nature of Old Irish is a reflex of a recent language shift from a non-Celtic to Celtic language. For further discussion see chapter 6.

rapid type of dialect levelling, accounting for a lack of variation there where there 'were fewer social constraints [...] [and] not much social distance between different sectors of the population: there was no aristocracy and institutional power (the Church, for example) was weak' (Leonard 2012: 66). This was obviously not the case in areas where Gaelic was spoken. Perhaps Russell (2005: 439) puts it strongest when he remarks that 'given the multiplicity of small kingdoms, the relative difficulty of travel, and the geographical spread of the language, it is inconceivable that there were not dialects of Irish in the seventh and eighth centuries'. Indeed, internally and independent of any prehistoric upheaval, one would expect a great degree of sociolinguistic variation to be discernible, because of the complex stratification of early medieval Gaelic society (F. Kelly 1988: 7–11).

3.3 References to linguistic variation in earlier stages of Gaelic

Aside from these arguments, there are wisps of evidence which indicate that variation was a feature of Gaelic at a period earlier than that envisaged by O'Rahilly. Indeed, O'Rahilly (1932: 7) is incorrect when he states that Donlevy, writing in 1742, is 'the first writer of Irish who explicitly acknowledges the existence of Irish dialects'.⁹⁶ There are not many potential references to Gaelic dialectal variation in historical sources before this, explicit or implicit, but there are some. It is pertinent to note that O'Donovan (1845: lxxiii), although writing a century after Donlevy, mentions the occurrence of a common adage on the provincial dialects of Irish⁹⁷ as being known all over the country, a fact which itself indicates the age of the saying. O'Donovan, however, also mentions its occurrence in Lombard's *De Regno Hibernae Commentarius*, published in 1632, and O'Rahilly (1932: 250, n. 1) suggests that this was borrowed from Stanyhurt's *Description of Ireland*, published in 1577.

⁹⁶ This mistake is acknowledged by O'Rahilly (1932: 265) in the list of corrigenda. In fact there is evidence for a number of such observations. A letter from Henry Rowlands to Edward Lhwyd, dated 29 June 1704 notes that 'the same words [in Irish] are observed not seldom to express different proprieties of things, and sometimes are differently pronounced in different parts of the kingdom' (quoted in Sharpe 2013: 132, n. 415).

⁹⁷ This is translated by O'Donovan as: 'The Munsterman has the accent without the propriety; The Ulsterman has the propriety without the accent; The Leinsterman has neither the propriety nor the accent; The Connaughtman has the accent and the propriety'.

While it would be wrong to read too much into these references, or others such as that contained in Mac Fhirbhisigh's preface to *Leabhar na nGenealach* (c. 1649), and external sources such as the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Laxdæla saga*, they do significantly inform the discussion. A number of these historical references are examined below; they have never before been dealt with together as far as I am aware.

3.3.1 *Leabhar na nGenealach*

Although he wrote in the middle of the seventeenth century, at the end of the Classical Irish tradition, hereditary scribe Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (c. 1600–1671) made a rare but interesting observation on dialectal variation in one of his manuscripts. This is of interest as it gives an indication of the perception of the scribe and scholar as to the existence of diatopic variation, in Ireland at least, not only in his own time, but also at an earlier period:

A charaid, ataid comhroghna canamhna isin lebhar-sa, agus bioth a fhios <det> gurob eadh fo dera iomad de sin an difrioghadh canamna ata agus baoi edir chriochaibh Banbha, mar as lér du i n-abair Leath Chuinn 'Aodh', 'Maol', no a samhuil ele, a der Leath Mogha 'Aedh', 'Mael' no 'Mál', agus mar sin d'fhoclaibh ele mar ata rod.

O friend, there is a selection of dialects in this book, and know that the reason for much of this is the difference that does and did exist between the territories of Banbha [= Ireland], as is clear where Leath Chuinn [= the northern half of Ireland] says 'Aodh', 'Maol' or other such like [and] Leath Mhogha [the southern half of Ireland] says 'Aedh', 'Mael' or 'Mál', and so on with other words as is [to be seen] before you (Ó Muraíle 2003: 20.8).

It is not remarkable that dialectal variation existed in seventeenth-century Ireland; we have plenty of evidence to indicate the sort of variation that did exist, and O'Rahilly (1932: 27–48) and Hickey (2011: 351–60) have discussed the realisation of the vowel in question at length. It is more remarkable that Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, a member of a hereditary learned family, writing almost a century before the earliest reference given in *IDPP*, cites the existence of both contemporary and historic dialectal variation in Ireland.

3.3.2 *Annals of the Four Masters 1258*

Perhaps the most famous such reference, certainly the most often cited (see O’Rahilly 1932: 162; Jackson 1951: 92), is that from *AFM* which makes mention of the return of Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill to Ireland from Scotland in 1258, at the opening of the Classical Irish period. Upon his return Ó Domhnaill is said to have addressed the messengers of Ó Néill ‘in the Gaelic of Scotland’, *tria san nGaoidhilcc nAlbanaigh*:

Conadh ann do raidh an t-seinbriathar airdhirc triasan n-Gaoidhilcc n-Albanaigh boí occa acc agallaimh na t-techthadh .i. go m-biadh a domhan fein ag gach fer.

It was on this occasion he repeated the celebrated proverb, in Scottish Gaelic, in which he conferred with the emissaries, namely, ‘That every man should have his own world’.

The implication of this comment, if it is to be taken as genuine, is that a discernible and distinctive Scottish form of Gaelic existed.⁹⁸

3.3.3 *Laxdæla saga c. 1250*:

Of all Icelandic sagas *Laxdæla saga* is the one which is most relevant for its references to Irish and to Ireland.⁹⁹ The hero of the saga is Óláfr, the son of an Icelandic king and an Irish princess, Melkorka. In one episode of the saga Óláfr, along with a ship full of Norsemen, was visiting his maternal grand-father, the Irish king Myrkjartan, *Muircheartach*. It is clear, however, that the Norsemen alone, without Óláfr who had learned Irish from his mother, would have required interpreters to communicate with the Irish, as one might expect, perhaps. However, we are not only told that Óláfr has been taught Irish by his mother, but that it is the ‘best’ sort of Irish: ‘It’s clear that, whether or not he’s our kinsman, this Óláfr is a high-born man, and also that he speaks, of all people, the best Irish’. The term used in the original Icelandic is ‘bezt írsku’. While it would be unwise to read too much into this reference, it presents us with the possibility that, not only was Óláfr’s birth status recognised by his grand-father’s Irish guards, but that his dialect of Irish,

⁹⁸ The source, however, *AFM*, is an early seventeenth-century one. It is therefore impossible to be certain that this reference is contemporary.

⁹⁹ The following reading of *Laxdæla saga* is greatly indebted to Leonard (2012: 119–21).

learned from his mother, was recognised by them as identical to their own, ‘the best Irish’.

There is another ambiguous, but nonetheless relevant, reference in the same saga. As Óláfr is about to depart to visit his maternal grand-father, his Irish mother, Melkorka says good-bye and reassures him that: ‘I have prepared you for leaving home as best I could, and taught you to speak Irish, so that it won’t make any difference to you in which part of Ireland you land’ (from Leonard 2012: 120). Townend (2002: 149) suggests that the final clause implies that Óláfr would not encounter any problems in those parts of Ireland where Norse was spoken. Leonard (2012: 120), however, has suggested that it may alternatively imply that Óláfr would not have trouble understanding a variety of Irish dialects as he had received such a good education.

3.3.4 *Airec Menman Uraid mac Coisse c. 950–980*

The early Middle Irish tale *Airec Menman Uraid maic Coisse* ‘The stratagem of Urard mac Coisse’, was composed by the poet Urard mac Coisse sometime before his death at the end of the tenth century (*AU* 990.2). The tale contains the term *gic-goc* (v.l. *gic-gog*) in the phrase *nirbu gic-goc Gallgaidhel* ‘it was not the stuttering [?] of the Norse-Irish’. Kelly (2007: 98) suggests that the expression may be intended to convey ‘the awkward mixture of languages employed by those of hybrid Norse-Irish race, or it may simply refer to the harshly-accented Irish which they spoke’. Marstrander (1915–6: 383–4) had previously suggested that *gic-goc* is actually a borrowing from Norse *gigga* ‘to stagger’ and *gogga* ‘to mumble’. The scenario he envisaged is apparently that the Norse-Irish applied the terms *gigga* and *gogga* to their halting attempts at speaking Irish, and that this phrase was taken into the language and used by the author of *Airec Menman Uraid maic Coisse* (see Kelly 2007: 98–9). Kelly (2007: 99), however, draws attention to the fact that the expression *gic-goc* is similar to a number of onomatopoeic words or phrases in the later language referring to various squeaking, faint or silly sounds, whether made by humans or animals. The conclusion he draws from this is that it is more easily

explicable as a native expression, rather than a Norse loan.¹⁰⁰ Either way, we are presented with a clear indication of the perception of significant linguistic difference between speakers of a Gaelic variety.

How then are we to understand the use of the term *Gallgaidhel*, and to whom does it refer? Clancy (2008: 45) claims the term seems to have been used, initially, ‘for an unlocalisable group or series of groups, presumably Gaelic-speaking, but of Norse or mixed Norse and Gaelic descent, who briefly participated in dynastic struggles in Ireland’. By c. 900, he notes that Bute could be described as within a territory called ‘Gall-Ghàidheil’, a territory which by the 12th century seems to have been equated with the south-western seaboard of Scotland, particularly the lower Firth of Clyde and the nearby coastlines. The reference in *Airec Menman Uraid* is, therefore, possibly the earliest references to Manx or Scottish varieties of Gaelic.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the possibility of this reference being to varieties of Gaelic spoken in the Isle of Man, or Scotland is attractive.¹⁰² In the case of the Isle of Man, there can be little doubt but that dialectal variation did exist; both Gaelic and British were present on the Isle of Man throughout the period from 400 until the Viking conquest, which Charles-Edwards (2013: 151) argues could have been as late as 902. One can reasonably expect this intense type of language contact to have resulted in linguistic variation in both British and Gaelic and ultimately to have brought about new-dialect formation in the Isle of Man.

3.3.5 *Cormac’s glossary c. 900*

An early, albeit brief, reference to an instance of dialectal variation is contained in *Sanas Cormaic*, Cormac’s Glossary, where it is suggested that the word *naire*, otherwise designated *senbérla* ‘archaic language’, is claimed to be the current form (*gnáthbérla*) in west Munster, corresponding to *éicin* ‘indeed’:

¹⁰⁰ Kelly (2007: 99) points out that Norse *gigga* refers to clumsy movement rather than speech, noting that ‘there seems no reason for the Norse-Irish to have walked as well as talked in an awkward manner’. Be that as it may, there is no obstacle to this being applied metaphorically.

¹⁰¹ This point has also been made in Williams (1994b: 740) insofar as it relates to Manx. It could just as easily be a reference to the Gaelic variety spoken in Viking Dublin, however.

¹⁰² Charles-Edwards (2013: 573) suggests that the separateness of the *Gallgaidhel* was established, not primarily by language, but by their links with the Isle of Man, Dublin, and the Hebrides.

Nairne .i. glaine, no nairne, amal bid naire nobeth and. Senbelræ didiu annairesin. Isinann 7 asbertha écin. Is gnath bélrasm tra [cid indiu] la hIrmumain maxime, unde dicunt “Infil ni bes toich duit?” “Fil naire,” arinti dianimcomarcer .i. fil eicin.

Nairne ‘pure’, or *nairne* as if it were *naire*. That *naire* is Old Language. It is the same as if *écin* ‘indeed,’ were said. It is common speech even today, in West Munster chiefly, whence they say, “Is there anything that is pleasing to you?” ‘*Fil naire*’, says he who is asked, that is, ‘There is indeed’.¹⁰³

As Russell (2005: 449) points out, the implication seems to be that in the environs of Cashel *écin* is usual and *naire* is regarded as old-fashioned, but further west *naire* was still in use. While this lexeme is unknown in other Irish sources,¹⁰⁴ it appears to correspond closely, both semantically and functionally, to Scottish Gaelic *nàile*, which is explained by Dwelly (s.v. *nàile*) as meaning ‘indeed, truly’.¹⁰⁵

The references to dialectal variation discussed above, both internal and external, are somewhat sparse, but they offer an important corrective to the narrative of *IDPP*. They also contrast greatly with internal references to variation in the higher registers of Gaelic which are much more common in the literature. The picture that emerges then is one of a literate class who are ‘unsurprisingly preoccupied with fine distinctions between types of high-register learned language [...] [but] less concerned with lower-level distinctions of the type we may be interested in’ (Russell 2005: 449).

¹⁰³ The text printed here is that published in Stokes (1891); I have modified Stokes’s translation slightly.

¹⁰⁴ Its occurrence as *naire* in later lexicographical works such as O’Clery’s Glossary indicate is was taken directly from Cormac, and also imply that the stressed vowel may have been long, but left unmarked in the extant manuscript witnesses, which would not be unusual (cf. *GOI*: 20).

¹⁰⁵ Black (2001: 386–7) seeks to explain the Scottish Gaelic asseveration *nàile* as the name of a saint in origin, i.e. the Irish Náile, who Black connects with *Loch Mo Nàire* in Sutherland. Even excluding the alternative explanation offered by Cormac’s Glossary, the reasons for Black’s identification are not convincing. The Irish saint, Náile, is a rather obscure one, and there is no indication that his cult was known in Scotland (see P. Ó Riain 2011: 509–10). Further, *Loch Mo Nàire* has a distinct folk etymology in which the saint did not feature (Mackay 1914: 17). The existence of this folk etymology indicates that the current Gaelic may be a reanalysis of another form. Even assuming Náile was a well-known saint in Scotland at some point, it would be quite remarkable for his name to become such a common lexeme in poetry and song. The most economical explanation of Scottish Gaelic *nàile*, therefore, is as a cognate of *naire* of Cormac’s Glossary, with which it appears to be semantically identical.

3.4 The treatment of dialect in *DIL* and *GOI*

Before dealing with any individual investigations, reference must be made to the two major reference works for Early Irish: *Dictionary of the Irish language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*, the final fascicle of which was published in 1976; and Rudolf Thurneysen's *A Grammar of Old Irish*, published in 1946, which remains the fullest treatment of the grammar of Old Irish. These two works are the most fundamental reference points for the study of Early Irish; their treatment of dialectal variation in Early Irish has greatly influenced, indeed helped to form, subsequent scholarly treatment of the topic.

Dictionary of the Irish Language

The *Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL)* was published by the RIA over a period of seven decades from 1913 to 1976. It is an historical dictionary of the Early Irish period and is the primary source of lexical information for Old and Middle Irish. One would typically expect an historical dictionary to provide certain information; primarily, one would expect a full account of the headword's occurrence 'in different periods, places and genres' (Merkin 1983: 123). *DIL*, however, does not necessarily meet this expectation. The geographical distribution of headwords was not considered of great importance for Irish due to the view that Old and Middle Irish did not display dialectal features (Nyhan 2006: 54). When compiling entries, therefore, editors did not look for evidence of geographical distribution. The flawed and circular nature of such an approach to the creation of a historical dictionary is obvious, but it must be remembered that the most eminent of Gaelic scholars throughout the long compilation of *DIL*, Thurneysen, O'Rahilly and Jackson, were of the opinion that dialect was not a feature of Early Irish. It may also be the case that the geographic distribution of lexical items was not viewed as being of great relevance; studies of lexical distribution were not highly regarded by early twentieth-

century scholars of Irish.¹⁰⁶ The only references to dialectal variation noted by the compilers of *DIL*¹⁰⁷ are outlined below, as per letter and headword:

B: *bech* not relevant for Early Irish dialectology. See Hamp (1971) for a treatment of the dialectal distinction between *beach* and *meach* in the modern dialects.

bocán contains a reference to the Hiberno-English dialect of Donegal.

D: *dardóin* [*sic*] contains a reference to the use of *partan* in certain dialects of English and Scots.

dígu the verbal noun of *do-goa* ‘rejects, spurns, refuses’. *DIL* notes that in some dialects of Irish and in Scottish Gaelic this has been reduced to *diu*.

dúalgas includes a passing remark on a specific usage of the Aran islands, not relevant for the dialectology of Early Irish.

R: The information under the letter entry contains a reference to the phonetic quality of orthographic <r> in modern Gaelic dialects.

S: *seic* contains the following entry ‘Mid.Ir. (? dialectal) form of the anaphoric enclitic pron[oun] *side*’.

simlér contains a reference to the Irish word as a loan of the dialectal variant *chimley* in English.

U: *úaibreach* contains a reference to *IGT* Dec. 17 which notes *úaibreach* as a dialectal variant of *úabrach*.

The lack of commentary on the geographic distribution of Early Irish words contained in *DIL* is striking and differentiates it from most other historical dictionaries (Merkin 1983: 123). It certainly presents us with a striking contrast when held up against English historical dialectology, which focuses a great deal more on word geography (cf. McIntosh 1989). The references to dialectal variation in *DIL* are almost exclusively to variation in modern dialects of English, Irish or Scottish Gaelic. The only reference to the possibility of dialectal variation in Early Irish is the variant anaphoric enclitic *seic*, although even this suggestion is accompanied by a question mark.

¹⁰⁶ See O’Rahilly’s (1932: 240–5) short but highly influential treatment of word geography.

¹⁰⁷ I stress here that what follows is simply a catalogue of the references made to dialect by the compilers of *DIL*; it does not imply that this is the only information of relevance to dialectology contained in *DIL*.

Rudolf Thurneysen's *A Grammar of Old Irish (GOI)*, the major reference work on the grammar of Old Irish, is based on the most archaic strata of the language for which there is a significant corpus: the Old Irish Glosses. *GOI* is an enlargement, expansion and translation of Thurneysen's earlier *Handbuch des Altirischen*, published in 1909. *GOI*, more so than any other scholarly work, has shaped the way that Old Irish is thought of as a language (cf. chapter 5). It is the foundational text upon which our understanding of Old Irish rests and so serves as a good point of entry to a more general discussion of dialectal distinctions in Early Irish. Thurneysen's grammar is based almost exclusively on a small group of texts which consist for the most part of Irish glosses in Latin manuscripts, and describes the language of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth (*GOI*: 4–7). There are five main linguistic features to which Thurneysen points specifically as potential indicators of dialectal variation within the closed corpus of the glosses:

Linguistic differences in the Old Irish sources are almost all differences of period, and are the result of morphological development. Contemporary divergences, such as would point to dialectal peculiarities, are very rare; cf. for instance the superlative *-imem* (§371) found only in the Milan glosses, or the varying forms of the preposition *air-*, *er-*, *ir-*, (§823), between which, however, no strict line of demarcation can be drawn; further the almost complete absence of *ón*, by-form of *són* 'that' (neut. § 479), in Sg. The paucity of the sources does not suffice to explain this comparative uniformity; in the literary language a levelling and intermixing of dialects must have taken place. This process was undoubtedly assisted from the earliest times by wandering poets, singers and scholars, who would naturally wish to be understood everywhere. Further, in the monastic communities of the sixth and the following centuries, from which our sources are ultimately derived, the teachers were drawn from various parts of the country (*GOI*: 12).

Thurneysen's fourth possible dialectal difference is that of the rise of palatalization (*GOI*: 104; see also Ahlqvist 1988: 26–7). The fifth involves variation between *céin* and *féin* meaning 'self' (*GOI*: 104; Ahlqvist 1988: 26).

While features outlined by Thurneysen have been elaborated on by Ahlqvist (1988) and Russell (2005), not all of the features lend themselves to elaboration. As Ahlqvist (1988: 25) notes, the superlative endings of Milan are problematic because

superlative endings in Old Irish disappear rather early on, leaving no trace in the later language. The various palatal and non-palatal qualities of the preposition *air-* etc. is similarly problematic according to Ahlqvist (1988: 25), ‘because the same labialization seems to have taken place all over the Gaelic world’. The variation between the anaphoric pronouns *ón* and *són* presents a similar difficulty because although the variation may indeed be one of dialect, these anaphoric pronouns have left no trace in the modern languages, leaving their geographical implications unknown.

Ahlqvist (1988: 26–7) concludes that Thurneysen ‘used [dialect] as a sort of pis-aller, to describe phenomena for which he had no other explanations. However,’ Ahlqvist continues ‘it seems to me quite reasonable to assume that future research may yet validate at least some of his suspicions’.

3.5 The way forward

The logical conclusion that some degree of dialectal variation must have existed during the Old Irish period, if not in the written record of Old Irish, has led more recent commentators on Early Irish to ask why then it is not discernible. Charles-Edwards (1995: 727) states that ‘it is safe to assume that there were dialects; the problem is simply why these differences do not surface in the standard language’. Rather than maintaining the absolute linguistic unity of the Early Irish period espoused by Jackson, some recent contributions have attempted to account for the lack of clear dialectal variation in Early Irish. Russell (2005: 443) obviously favours the scenario whereby a specific local variety was adopted and adapted for wider use as a literary medium: ‘[t]he dialect evidence, meagre as it is, points more to the rise in status of a single dialect, such as we see in late standard Old English or Castilian Spanish’. Stifter (2009: 60) also acknowledges this possibility but adds another, i.e. that the lack of attested variation may be the result of the codification of a standard grammar.

The various interpretations of Stifter and Russell of the lack of discernible evidence for dialectal variation do not, as the Jackson (1951) hypothesis does, rule out the possibility of dialectal variation. Instead, they recognise the distinction not

recognised by Jackson (1951: 88) between written and spoken forms of language.¹⁰⁸ Jackson's theory, were it correct, would present, as MacAulay (1975: 6) has noted, 'an unparalleled sociolinguistic phenomenon considering the situation of contact and admixture that we know obtained'. Therefore, if no discernible dialectal variation can be found, this situation itself requires explanation.¹⁰⁹ A number of studies, other than those of C. Breatnach (1990) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008), have been carried out, however, and have focused on a variety of features.

3.6 The focus of previous research

A small but significant number of contributions have been made on the question of dialect in Old Irish since the publication of *GOI*; the most important trends will be outlined below.

3.6.1 *Lexis and onomastics*

P. Kelly's 1982 lexical survey is the only investigation of the potential of dialectal vocabulary differences in Old Irish. Her focus is the names of animals, focusing on seven animals and the various names by which they are known in Early Irish. She sets up two differing sets of names, marked and unmarked, the unmarked words being those typically found in Old Irish. The marked lexemes, however, Kelly claims are limited to the south of Ireland during the Old Irish period:

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| <i>ferb</i> | 'cow' |
| <i>marc</i> | 'horse' |
| <i>sed/seg</i> | 'deer' |
| <i>cethnat</i> | 'sheep' |
| <i>cadla</i> | 'goat' |
| <i>cremthann</i> | 'fox' |

¹⁰⁸ As already pointed out, this was a distinction which Jackson (1983: 10) only recognised later in his scholarly career.

¹⁰⁹ Labov (1974b: 225) has noted that everywhere the idea of linguistic homogeneity has been investigated it has been shown to be untenable.

The validity of P. Kelly's results relied on Binchy's (1958) ascription of a northern locale to the group of law texts known as *Senchas Már* (*SM*), and a southern provenance for the group of law texts known as *Bretha Nemed* (*BN*). More recently, L. Breatnach (1984) has confirmed Binchy's location of *BN*, coming to the conclusion that it was 'compiled in Munster between 721 and 742'. The *BN* texts are those which contain the marked lexemes and Kelly succeeds in arguing that these marginal lexical items are ones which belong to a southern (one presumes Munster) dialect. As regards the location of the compilation of *SM*, F. Kelly (1988: 242) suggested that it was compiled in the territory of the northern Féni, the northern midlands, on the basis that many of the names contained in it relate to this area and to neighbouring parts of Ulster. L. Breatnach (2011) has since persuasively argued for the locus of production as Armagh, dating the compilation to the period between 660 and 680.¹¹⁰

One short contribution on the question of dialect features in Old Irish had focused on onomastic evidence. Murray (2005), after offering a brief summary of previous scholarship, discusses the geographic distribution of the place-name element *muirbolc*, finding it limited to Ulster and Scotland. He mentions some seven other place name elements which appear restricted to certain specific areas. While the evidence of place names, allied with P. Kelly's (1982) short lexical survey, would seem to indicate that further research into lexis and place name elements might prove fruitful, Murray's (2005: 106) contention that 'the best area in which to look for these dialectal variations is vocabulary' seems as yet premature.¹¹¹

3.6.2 Features-based approaches: the negative particle: *ní* / *nicon*

The distinction which exists in modern Gaelic dialects between the negative particles *ní* and *cha* (and related forms) is of major significance to the question of dialect in Early Irish. Its significance for historical dialectology has been flagged up by numerous scholars, including O'Rahilly (1932: 293), Ó Buachalla (1977; 1982: 431), Ó Dochartaigh (1976), and Wagner (1986). There is a tripartite distinction in modern

¹¹⁰ See chapter 5 for a discussion of the role of legal texts, especially *SM*, in the formation of standard Old Irish.

¹¹¹ A more penetrating analysis of the use of place names in historical linguistics, and for historical dialectology by extension, is Ó Maolalaigh (1998).

Gaelic dialects between Scotland, which uses *cha* exclusively, the old province of Ulster which uses both *cha* and *ní*,¹¹² and finally the rest of Ireland which uses *ní* exclusively. This distinction has been consistently referred to in discussions of dialects in Old Irish and the potential distribution of their original Old Irish forms respectively *ní* and *nicon*. The precise relevance of this distinction, however, is far from clear. Both forms occur in all three major Old Irish glossary corpora.

Wagner (1986: 1) has suggested that *nicon* may have never been a feature of Southern dialects, although he neglects to give a clear definition of where the north ends and the south starts. We can perhaps extrapolate that he means that the use of the particle was confined to the historic province of Ulster. Ahlqvist (1988: 27) has noted that only a detailed examination of their distribution in the corpora of Old Irish glosses will lead to a full understanding of any subtle dialectal differences which exist between the three main corpora. This suggestion itself, however, highlights a potential problem which will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, but has not before been referred to: the possibility that these three corpora might all belong to the same larger dialect area. If they do, then the detailed examination advocated by Ahlqvist (1988: 27) may well prove fruitless.

3.6.3 *Textual approaches*

As already mentioned, two studies of Middle Irish texts (C. Breatnach 1990; Ó Maolalaigh 2008) have taken the approach of dealing with texts with a verifiable geographic provenance: *The Annals of Inisfallen*, written in the south of Ireland, and the Gaelic notes in the manuscript known as the Book of Deer, written in the northeast of Scotland. Taken together, not only do these studies indicate that there was a divergence between Irish and Scottish Gaelic by the end of the Middle Irish period, they further suggest that internal dialectal divisions in Irish and Scottish Gaelic were in existence. Ó Maolalaigh (2008: 263) concludes that the evidence from the Book of Deer ‘points to a number of Scotticisms, some of which may betray local eastern Scottish Gaelic dialect forms’. Similarly, C. Breatnach concludes his discussion of the *Annals of Inisfallen* saying:

¹¹² The negative particle *cha* is clearly attested in nineteenth-century dialects as far south as Athboy (O’Rahilly 1932: 166).

Is é an rud is suaithinsí faoi na litrithe a phléitear thuas ná go léiríonn siad go dtéann roinnt mhaith de na fuaimnithe atá le fáil i gcanúintí na Mumhan sa lá atá inniu ann siar go dtí tréimhse luath sa Ghaeilge. Tá sé tugtha faoi deara go dtéann cuid acu siar chomh fada le deireadh an aonú haois déag ar a dhéanaí (C. Breatnach 1990: 486).¹¹³

These conclusions obviously point to a divergence between Scottish Gaelic and Irish having been in existence during Middle Irish period, at least, a point supported by other studies using the comparative method (cf. Gillies 2004). They also indicate, however, that a more local sort of variation had potentially arisen; the linguistic features of these sources are not merely particular to Ireland or Scotland, they are quite clearly particular to Munster and the east of Scotland, respectively.

3.7 Methodological approaches

There are essentially two avenues of investigation open to scholars wishing to trace dialectal features in a ‘text language’ like Old Irish, one for which we have no speakers¹¹⁴ and are reliant solely on texts:

1. Correlation of medieval features with modern features
2. Location of contemporary texts in time and space

The first approach, seeking to establish a correlation between older linguistic features known to us from texts and modern linguistic features, is problematic. As we have seen, this has been the approach of the majority of scholars who have made reference to the questions of dialect in Old Irish (Ahlqvist 1988: 26; McCone 1985: 96–7; Wagner 1982: 104; Russell 2005). Ahlqvist’s (1988: 26) conclusion exemplifies the problem with a reliance on this methodological approach: ‘Unfortunately, however, these dialect differences seem to have left no trace in the modern language, so that their geographical implications remain unknown to me’. Russell (2005: 441) is forced to come to a similar conclusion: ‘[the validity of these features as a] manifestation of dialectal variation is unprovable on the grounds that none of these features shows dialectal variation in the later language’. However, as Russell himself

¹¹³ My translation: ‘The most significant point to be made about the spellings discussed above is that they indicate that many of the pronunciations found in contemporary Munster dialects existed at an early stage in Irish. It has been shown that some of them can be traced back as far as the end of the eleventh century at the very latest’.

¹¹⁴ See Fleischman (2000:34) for more on the concept of a ‘text language’, and some of the principles of historical linguistics particular to them.

notes, even if these features do present themselves in modern dialects, the extent to which one can rely on them is not clear:

The upshot of this brief consideration of the evidence for dialect distinctions in Old Irish is that, while there are tantalising indications, little of it can be matched to modern dialect distributions, not least because it is unclear how far one can map modern dialectal patterns back onto the linguistic situation of early Ireland (Russell 2005: 442).

The clearest example of this type of conundrum is the very clear tripartite distinction in modern Gaelic dialects between Scotland, Ulster and the rest of Ireland in their use of negative particles.

As to the second avenue of investigation available, i.e. locating texts to act as anchors for dialectal investigation, it can be said that this has been little used in Gaelic historical dialectology, although it has clearly been among the preferred methods used by dialectologists of Old English (see for instance Gneuss 1972). The problem of ‘locating’ Early Irish texts has been highlighted by scholars:

[T]he absence of a reliable ascription to the real author [which] deprives us of the knowledge of the date of composition or the place of origin [of a text] [thus the] language remains unfixed in period or dialect (Mac Eoin 1982: 113).

In this regard, P. Kelly’s (1982) analysis is a significant departure from the norm, not only because of its results, but also in terms of the methodology it employs and the approach to the subject. C. Breatnach (1990) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008) are the only scholars to have followed a similar approach, although they both deal with somewhat later texts and even then not in a comparative sense in the way that Kelly does. In that regard, the methodology used by both C. Breatnach (1990) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008) can be described as a hybrid approach, in that it relies on the correlation of attested medieval linguistic features with modern linguistic forms but does so based on temporally and geographically secure texts which can serve as anchors. This hybrid approach has proven successful, and could be applied to other texts of Middle Irish and Early Modern provenance.¹¹⁵ The application of the methodology to other

¹¹⁵ Its application to Old Irish texts may be problematic because of the small number of texts contained in contemporary manuscripts, compared to those of the Middle Irish period (cf. Russell 2005: 413).

Middle Irish texts would undoubtedly shed light on variation during the Old Irish period. Certainly the application of similar methods to Middle English material has been fundamentally important for recent developments in the dialectology of Old English (cf. Hogg 2006: 413).

3.8 General problems in historical dialectology

Two of the main methodological pitfalls of historical linguistics have been articulated in Fleischman (2000) in a very influential contribution which outlines the dangers involved. The first has been termed the ‘Historicist Reflex’. It involves the filling of the holes in our knowledge of a stage of the language with what we know from earlier or later stages of that or related languages, the grammar of which has been more firmly established:

An instance of this methodological fallacy that has been commented on frequently in the literature involves the claim, found in every grammatical description of Old French, that the language of medieval France had an operative two-case system, the radically reduced legacy of Latin’s more abundant case-marking morphology. However, a careful scrutiny of the manuscript data has led various researchers to conclude that this so-called case system was an anachronistic grammatical fiction with little or no foundation in the reality of Old French texts and presumably even less in the contemporaneous spoken language (Fleischman 2000: 37).

A pertinent Gaelic example of this methodological difficulty is Jackson’s (1972) treatment of the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer. Jackson (1972: 141), firm in his knowledge of Middle Irish, dismissed a number of spellings as ‘fairly certain errors’. Subsequent research by Ó Maolalaigh (2008), however, has shown a number of these presumed errors to be reflective of dialectal features of the northeast of Scotland. Jackson here falls foul of Fleischman’s ‘Historicist Reflex’ by assuming that any deviation from the Middle Irish of *LL* and *LU*, for instance, must represent an error on the part of the scribe.

The opposite, the assumption that our knowledge of a modern language can be applied to earlier stages of the language, Fleischman called ‘Conceptual Inertia’. One form which Conceptual Inertia can take involves the failure to recognise a category or distinction operative in an older language because it is no longer operative in the

modern language or no longer formally marked. Tellingly, there are fewer examples of this methodological pitfall in Gaelic historical linguistics, largely, one assumes, because many of those earlier scholars who concerned themselves with the development of Early Gaelic did not show the same degree of interest in later stages of the language. The historical reflex and conceptual inertia are essentially the same mistake, however: the projection of the known into the unknown.

If this avoidance of the projection of the known into the unknown is applied in its most extreme manifestations, however, then the uniformitarian principle upon which much of historical linguistics rests would be invalid. The role, then, of historical linguistics is, as Labov (1994: 11) has put it, to ‘make the best use of bad data’, bad data in this instance being the historical and fragmentary documents upon which historical linguistics relies. An important strategy in overcoming ‘bad’, when working in historical sociolinguistics has been pointed out by Spencer (2000: 8): the need to avoid ‘inappropriate questions and overly ambitious interpretations’.

3.9 Case studies in Gaelic historical dialectology

The very nature of the Gaelic historical data means that an analysis of the type set out in the previous chapter would be an example of an ‘inappropriate question’, as defined by Spencer (2000: 8). Rather, the rest of this chapter will examine two specific linguistic features which are of potential relevance to the question of dialectal variation during the Early Irish period. These case studies highlight more problems than solutions, but they also allow for the formulation of what are appropriate questions. These features constitute, and have constituted, the brief narrative of Old Irish dialectology over the last number of decades (cf. Wagner 1982; McCone 1985; Ahlqvist 1988; Russell 2005).

3.9.1 *Tech* → *taigh* / *tigh*

The first case study, a phonological one, concerns the initial segment of the Gaelic word meaning ‘house’ and related forms: Modern Irish *teach/tigh*, Scottish Gaelic *taigh*, Old Irish *tech*. This particular feature is often mentioned as a feature which is

relevant to the dialectology of early Gaelic (Wagner 1982; Ahlqvist 1988; Russell 2005) but has mostly received only cursory mention.

Modern dialectal evidence

There is a clear phonological dialectal distinction in the modern Gaelic dialects in the case of this lexeme (*LASID* i: 147). In all case forms of this lexeme in Munster and Connacht the initial segment is invariably palatalised, in both singular and plural forms. In the dialects of Scottish Gaelic and Manx, the initial segment is invariably non-palatal, in both singular and plural forms. The dialect area of Ulster is the third and final dialect area and it forms a buffer zone between the two extremes, with both palatal and non-palatal forms found here. In East Ulster non-palatal forms predominate and are found in both plural and singular forms. In the rest of the province non-palatal forms are limited to the dative singular and the general plural forms.

The variation, however, is not only phonological, but morphological as well:

The geographical borders between the old Irish provinces are also important linguistic borders. In the north the old historical border between Ulster and Connacht constitutes the border-line between *teach* [historical nominative] (pt. 63) and *taighe* [historical dative] (64) [both used as nominative]. The two points are separated by a mountain ridge. In the south the historical border between Connacht and Munster, again characterised by a mountain area, runs between pts. 24 (type *tigh*) and point 25 (type *teach*) (Wagner 1982: 104–5).

In Scottish Gaelic, Manx, and many of the dialects of East Ulster, the historical nominative *teach* has disappeared and been replaced by the historical dative form *taigh*. As to when this happened, we can note that it was well established in Manx by the time of Phillips's prayer book, c. 1610 (Thomson 1953: 325–6). This process whereby the old nominative / accusative singular has been replaced by the dative has also occurred in Munster.

Although in the contemporary Irish context, because of the contraction of Irish-speaking areas, one might take the historical nominative to be representative, in actual fact it is only West Ulster (i.e. most but not all of Donegal) and Connacht

where the historic nominative is retained. All dialects of Scottish Gaelic, Manx as well as most Ulster dialects and all of Munster have replaced the nominative with the historical dative. This process was well under way in at least some dialects by the sixteenth century, as the evidence of Manx indicates. The case of Ulster requires the most discussion as it is here that one encounters the greatest amount of variation in the nominal paradigm (cf. A. J. Hughes 1994: 614):

| Ulster | Singular | Plural |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nominative | <i>teach/toigh</i> | <i>toighthe</i> |
| Genitive | <i>toighe</i> | <i>toightheach / toighthe</i> |
| Dative | <i>toigh</i> | <i>toighthe</i> |

Hughes (1994: 614), incidentally, seems to accept that this split can be traced back to the Old Irish period. While we have noted that Connacht forms are generally /t/-initial, an important exception to the Connacht pattern is that of Achill, *LASID* points 53 and 54, where non-palatal forms occur (cf. Stockman 1974: 241). These non-palatal forms in this part of Achill are described as irrefutable proof of Ulster influence by Hughes (1994: 614). If this is the case, then these forms are of relevance in terms of chronology. The relationship between the Irish of Achill, or at least certain parts thereof, and the Irish of Ulster has been discussed above. The linguistic data has been correlated with the historical evidence:

Some time previous to 1664 he [Rory, son of Manus O'Donnell] settled with a large train of followers consisting of some of the septs of Tirconnell (as O'Gallagher, MacSweeney, O'Clery, O'Toland, etc) at Ballycroy [in the parish of Achill], in the south of the Barony of Erris (cited in Stockman 1974: ii).

The more salient dialectal distinctions within the parish of Achill have their origins at this mid-seventeenth century point (cf. Stockman 1974: 351–6). It is noteworthy, as far as the forms of *taigh* etc. go, that the forms have not spread any further than this. This suggests that by the middle of the seventeenth century the distinction with which we are familiar today was already in existence between Connacht and Ulster.

The maintenance of this distinction is not surprising in light of what is known about the sociolinguistic situation in this part of Mayo.¹¹⁶

Historical development

As to the historical development of the forms discussed above, scholars such as Wagner (1982: 104), Ahlqvist (1988: 29–30), and, more recently, Russell (2005: 441) had accepted that the non-palatal initial in the Old Irish dative singular *taig*, as seen in the modern dialects of Ulster, Scotland and Man was an innovation. The suggested explanation for this innovation was the influence of the nominal paradigm of *mag* ‘plain’. This was the view espoused by Thurneysen: ‘forms [of *tech*] with *a* have probably been influenced by *maige*, *maig*, from *mag* ‘plain’ (GOI: 216). Ahlqvist (1988: 35, n. 10) thought this explanation doubtful. McCone (1994: 79), however, has since argued that this variation is the result of a specific sound law whereby *e* was lowered to the front vowel *æ* where it preceded *y* or *y^w* followed by *i* or *e*, but *y* after the vowel in the next syllable stopped this development. This offers a viable explanation for the palatal quality of the initial segment in the genitive singular. McCone (1994: 79) gives further examples of this type of development, comparing accusative singular Old Irish *daig* (< **dæy^wih* < **dey^wih*) with genitive singular Old Irish *dego* (< **dey^wōh*). McCone (1994: 79) suggests the following derivational patterns:

Nominative/accusative singular:

**tegos* > **teyah* > Old Irish *tech*

Dative singular:

**tegesi* > **tegis* > **teyih* > **tæyih* > Old Irish *taig*

Genitive singular:

**tegosos* > **tegisos* > **teyiyah* > **tiy'eyah* > Old Irish *tige*

¹¹⁶ Up until the nineteenth century as least, the people of this part of Achill were reputed to ‘intermarry almost exclusively with one another’ (cited in O’Rahilly 1932: 189), helping to explain this dialectal conservatism.

This argument was also made by McCone in an earlier article where he accounted for the subsequent anomalous development of the paradigm:

This anomalous paradigm was then levelled in two directions, the pattern of *nem*, *nime*, *nim* ‘heaven’ generating dat. *tig* (Ml. 57c7), and that of *mag*, *maige*, *maig* ‘plain’ generating gen. *taige* (Sg. 66a19). To judge from the present-day dialects of Irish and Scots Gaelic, the former was basically a southern and the latter a northern solution (McCone 1991: 8, n. 28).

This presents a fundamental change in perspective as far as this feature is concerned. Rather than the dative singular *taig* being the innovative form, McCone has explained it as the expected form. The subsequent developments outlined in McCone (1991: 8, n. 28), however, are hardly certain. Ahlqvist’s (1988: 35, n. 10) scepticism of the influence of another nominal paradigm on that of *tech* may yet prove well-founded. It seems that intra-paradigmatic levelling may be a better explanation than interparadigmatic levelling between *tech* and either *nem* or *mag*. That is to say, it seems entirely possible that the palatal dative forms were influenced not by another nominal paradigm such as that of *nem* or *mag*, but by the other case forms of the lexeme. It would be easier to accept the case forwarded by McCone for interparadigmatic levelling if the citation forms were more similar to one another than they are.

The evidence of adverbs

Further, the adverbs *istech* and *istig*, ‘into’ and ‘in’ respectively, and their various forms, present us with potentially valuable evidence, which has yet to be discussed. They are all the more valuable because unlike other adverbs containing the element *tech*, *éindí* for instance, these adverbs are found intact throughout the Gaelic dialects, a point which may itself be indicative of their antiquity. Etymologically speaking, both adverbs contain the preposition *i* followed by either the accusative or dative form of the noun *tech* (*DIL* s.v.), depending on whether movement is or is not implied. The adverb *istech*, originally meaning ‘into the house’, contains the accusative of *tech* after the preposition *i* and can, therefore, be expected to show palatal /tʲ/, as it does. The adverb *istig* originally meaning ‘in the house’, however, contains the dative of *tech*, also preceded by the preposition *i*. Here, as already noted,

McCone has shown how dative *taig* is the expected form, historically speaking. The expected adverbial form, therefore, would be *istaig*.

A comparison of the adverbial forms with the nominal paradigm simplifies matters. Wagner (1982: 101) outlines the following forms of these two adverbs as they are found in the various dialect areas: [ə'ʃt'ig'] is the general form in Munster, [ə'ʃt'i] or [ə'ʃt'ix'] is found in Connacht, with one exception, Achill. Ulster presents us with the forms [ə'stix'] or [ə'stɪ] and finally Scottish Gaelic [ə'støi]. In all dialects of Scottish Gaelic, as we have already seen, the historical dative *taigh* has replaced the nominative *tech*, although the accusative still does exist in the adverb *as-teach* 'into'.¹¹⁷ Where the historical accusative is retained, however, it is always with palatal /t'/. However, in the adverb *as taigh* 'in' the historic dative with non-palatal /t/ is retained. This is also the case in Manx, *stiagh* [ʃt'a:x] (= *istech*) versus *sthie* [stɑ:i] (= *istig*) (Broderick 1984ii: s.v.v.).

Previously, that is before McCone's explanation of the development of the dative *taig*, the adverbs were viewed as being somewhat anomalous and were mostly uncommented upon by those who took an interest in the dialectal significance of the initial segment of the word for house in Gaelic. They are mentioned only briefly in Wagner (1982) and are not mentioned at all in Ahlqvist (1988) or Russell (2005). The distribution noted by Wagner, when McCone's derivational pattern is taken into account, presents us with an interesting pattern, however. It matches perfectly the distribution of the simplex *tech* in modern dialects. This is important because it is an attestation as to the age of the variation. The adverbs variously spelt *as taigh*, *istigh* and *sthie* in the Gaelic languages contained fossilized case forms of the lexeme *tech*, but there is no evidence that the fossilized form of the dative from either Munster or Connacht had a non-palatal initial. The exception to the Connacht data is, unsurprisingly, Achill. Here the forms are *isteach* [ə'ʃt'fɔx] with palatal /t'/, but *istigh* is realised as [ə'stɪ] or [ə'stix'] with non-palatal initial.

¹¹⁷ There are signs, however, of the breakdown of the distinction between *as teach* and *as taigh* in certain dialects of Scottish Gaelic (Borgstrøm 1937: 98; 1940: 114).

Dating

The implication of the Achill data is, as has been noted, that the current variation between Ulster and the rest of Ireland is as old as the middle of the seventeenth century. But further, the clear pattern of the adverbs indicates that the variation must go back to the point at which the dative and accusative forms of *tech* were fossilised in the adverbs *istech* and *istig*, which is much earlier than that. Early Modern usage would suggest that *istech* and *istig* lost their original meaning rather early. *DIL* notes that ‘[i]n the earliest examples the literal meaning is retained. Later it is clearly forgotten’.

The existence of variation in the paradigm of the word *tech* during the Early Modern Gaelic period is also evidenced in *IGT* §31 (see also McManus 1994: 380):

| Classical Gaelic | Singular | Plural |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Nominative | <i>tech / teagh</i> | <i>t(o)ighe</i> |
| Accusative | <i>tech / teagh</i> | <i>t(o)ighe</i> |
| Genitive | <i>t(o)ighe</i> | <i>tech / t(o)igheadh</i> |
| Dative | <i>t(o)igh</i> | <i>t(o)ighibh</i> |

The occurrence of these variant forms in *IGT* indicates that by the time of the codification of the Classical language c. 1200, a degree of dialectal variation did indeed exist (Ó Cuív 1980). The modern evidence for this feature strongly suggests that the northeast was the centre of gravity for forms with non-palatal initial. Further, we know that the language of Classical Gaelic was largely an Irish-based standard (Ó Maolalaigh 1998: 14)¹¹⁸ and so we can be confident that the variation existed in Ireland in the period up till 1200. This is relevant in the context of the Old Irish glosses, examples from which will now be presented and discussed:

The evidence of the glosses

The forms presented in Würzburg are unproblematic; they conform to the sound change outlined by McCone above. The Milan and St Gall examples present greater complications. There are fewer examples of the dative singular from Milan (2) than

¹¹⁸ C. Breatnach’s (1990: 486) investigation of the language of *AI* indicates clearly that the Classical Irish standard was far removed from contemporary linguistic norms, at least in Munster.

from Würzburg (4), and there are none at all from St Gall, although St Gall does present a single example of the genitive singular which appears to be non-palatal. There are only two examples of the dative singular in Milan (compared with four in Würzburg) and none in St Gall.

| Würzburg | Singular | Plural |
|-----------------|---|--------|
| Nom | <i>teg</i> (4a7), <i>tech</i> (15c13, 33a2) | — |
| Acc | — | — |
| Gen | <i>tige</i> (7c9) | — |
| Dat | <i>taig</i> (23b9(x2), 33a6, 9b23) | — |

| Milan | Singular | Plural |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Nom | — | — |
| Acc | <i>tech</i> (44b1) | <i>tige</i> (92d15) |
| Gen | — | — |
| Dat | <i>tig</i> (57c7, 120d2) | — |

| St Gall | Singular | Plural |
|----------------|----------------------|--------|
| Nom | — | — |
| Acc | — | — |
| Gen | <i>taige</i> (66a19) | — |
| Dat | — | — |

Can anything useful be said about these forms? We can assume that those northern dialects where the historical dative retains its non-palatal initial are genuine relics from the Old Irish period, which means that from an early period there were two reasonably well established variants of the dative singular: *taig* and *tig*. The Milan glosses otherwise present us with a lexical item and other linguistic forms which suggest a northern provenance (cf. Ó Maolalaigh 1997; 207, n. 14, forthcoming; Clancy 2003–4, forthcoming, and see also chapter 5 of this thesis). Ó Maolalaigh (1997: 225) notes that the most common reflex in Scottish Gaelic of the posited Old Irish phoneme */a/ in *taigh* is /xj/. This, as he points out, is precisely the development of /oy'/, thus suggesting that *taigh* became *toigh* in Scottish Gaelic at a very early date. This allows us to secure the existence of the dative *taigh* at an early date in

Scottish Gaelic; there may be little reason to believe that the palatal *tigh* variant was ever current in Scotland.

A sociolinguistic variable

Although it might appear that the evidence indicates a clear-cut dialectal distinction, this may not be the case. Dialectal variation is just one way in which this variation might be explained. The fact that this instance of phonological variation is unique to this lexeme means that there may be sociolinguistically relevant factors into which we have no insight. In this regard, it should also be noted of Scottish Gaelic orthography that *tigh* is the usual form found in older orthography, right up into the twentieth century, despite what Mackinnon (1909: 16) called ‘the invariably broad t-sound’ in Scottish Gaelic. In an instance such as this, where no other phonological controls are available, it is likely that practitioners of literacy at any period were subject to sociolinguistic influences into which we have no insight.

In conclusion, it can be said that the dialectal evidence for this feature certainly points to an early dialectal divergence, probably as old as the Middle Irish period at least. The degree to which this can be related to what is going on in the Old Irish Glosses, however, is far from certain, not least because so little is known about the greater sociolinguistic context of the forms found in the Old Irish Glosses.

3.9.2 Prepositional relatives in the Gaelic languages

It has been suggested on more than one occasion by McCone (1985: 96; 1989: 85), that one of the few instances which is potentially relevant for dialectal variation in Old Irish is a syntactic one – the prepositional relative clause. On the Old Irish prepositional relative McCone (1985: 96) has the following to say:

The standard Old Irish method of forming a prepositional relative was by means of a preposition plus –(s)a followed by nasalization (*GOI*: 320), a type that has dominated in the literature until quite recently and is still the norm in present-day Scots Gaelic. However, a construction with a conjugated preposition in the relative clause is the rule in today’s spoken Irish in Ireland itself and seems to be at least as old as the following two isolated examples from the Glosses [...]

MI. 87d15 *nech **suidigther** loc daingen dó* ‘Southern type’
 anyone is.established place strong to.him

Sg. 26b5 ‘anyone to whom is established a strong place’
ní fail ní nad-taí mo dligeth fair ‘Southern type’
 NEG is anything REL.neg touch my law on.it
 ‘there is nothing on which my law does not touch’

This type of construction employs what is described in the linguistics literature as a resumptive strategy in dealing with the preposition. This resumptive strategy is not at all well attested in Old Irish (see Ó hUiginn 2013: 166 for other examples) and stands, according to McCone, in opposition to the ‘northern type’ of construction, described in the literature as pied-piped, which is by far the more typical in Old Irish:

* *nech di-a suidighther loc daingen*

anyone to.REL is.established strong place

* *ní fail ní for-na-taí mo dliged*

is.NEG anything on.REL touch my law

McCone (1985: 96) suggests that the emergence of the ‘southern type’ arose in the ‘very late prehistory of Irish’, and goes on to state that he believes this to be one of the few indicators of dialectal variation in the glosses. The standard Old Irish method (favoured in Scottish Gaelic) he describes as being of northern origin and the innovative (now current in all of Ireland), he regards as being of broadly southern origin.

Mac Eoin has followed this chronological outline. Commenting also on the relative age of the constructions, he writes:

... the form which is used when the relation is expressed by means of a preposition, a type of sentence for which there are two possible constructions: in positive sentences only, the preposition precedes the particle and the rest of the sentence follows, e.g., *an t-oileán as a dtáinig an bád* ‘the island from which the boat came’ (using the preposition *as* ‘out of’). Historically, this is the older construction but it is now almost completely replaced by the other, which places the indirect relative particle at the beginning of the clause and the preposition at the end in its conjugated form agreeing in person and number with the antecedent, e.g., *an teach a bhfaca mé an tine ann* ‘the house in which I saw the fire’ (using *ann*, third-person singular masculine of the conjugated form of the preposition *i* ‘in’ agreeing with *teach*) (Mac Eoin 1993: 140).

Ó Buachalla (1983: 69) says that there are but ‘minimal vestiges’ of the pied-piped construction left in modern Irish, it having been almost totally replaced with the resumptive strategy. When the pied-piped strategy does occur it is limited to a small number of prepositions and then only in the affirmative.

Scottish Gaelic

The evidence of Modern Scottish Gaelic equates well with the situation in Old Irish. The typical construction is cited in Gillies (2009: 296):

am fear ris an robh mi a’ bruidhinn.

the man with.REL was I at speaking

‘the man I was speaking to’

Gillies (2009: 266) also notes the existence of a common alternative construction in Scottish Gaelic, ‘the use of the direct relative pronoun *a*^L asyntactically’: *am fear a bha mi a’ bruidhinn ris* ‘the man to whom I was talking’ (lit. the man who I was talking to him).’

This alternative seems to follow the pattern exhibited in all other Gaelic dialects for morphologically more complex indirect relatives to be replaced by the less complex direct relative (Ó hUiginn 1994: 607; Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 526; Ó Siadhail 1979: 146). Adger and Ramchand (2006) have suggested that the variation between the two types of constructions mentioned by Gillies (2009) is explicable in terms of diatopic variation. This has since been restated in Adger (2010) and most recently again in Sheil (2012).

Dialectal divergence

In the Gaelic of Kintyre, Holmer (1962b: 85) finds that the pied-piped strategy is the only option: *dùn ris an abairear Dùn Domhnuill, fo’n àite anns an deachaidh a mhac a chrochadh* etc. He notes, however, that ‘such constructions are [...] avoided as much as possible in the spoken language, noting that this accounts for the excessive use of *agus* ‘and’ in the stories. This also seems to be the case in Arran in Scotland, according to Holmer (1957: 131). Rathlin, however, is somewhat different from

Kintyre in that it seems to favour, or at the very least tolerate, the resumptive strategy, used with the independent form of the verb:

The relative which has a special antecedent is an *ən* when preceded by a preposition, but usually some kind of circumlocution is used in Irish, ... *bhá toigh ann in Reachlainn a bhá ead ag deanadh póitean ann* ... (Holmer 1942: 95–6).

Just across the water from Scotland in the Glens of Antrim, however, it appears that the dependent form of the verb was used (cf. Holmer 1940: 53): *an t-amadán a rabh féim aige ar an broсна (sic)*. This seems to provide us with at least one secure isogloss. The ‘Irish’ resumptive strategy, however, which requires the use of the dependent form of the verb, is ungrammatical in Scottish Gaelic, as far as I can ascertain:

***an duine an robh mi a’ bruidhinn ris*¹¹⁹

3.9.3 Assessment

In his most recent contribution on Gaelic syntax, Ó hUiginn has suggested, for the first time, an account which distinguishes between the Old Irish resumptive strategy and that used in Modern Irish:

While they share a notable syntactic similarity in the use of the resumptive pronoun, we should bear in mind that the modern construction has developed ultimately from the prepositional relative, while its counterpart in the earlier language is based on a relative construction that does not involve the use of the preposition and particle (*s*)*a*^N (Ó hUiginn 2013: 169).

In other words, the resumptive strategy used in Modern Irish may be quite independent in origin of the Old Irish examples; so that ultimately this feature must be discounted, at least in the way in which it has until now been used.

¹¹⁹ Broderick (2009: 352) gives the Manx construction *yn baatey row mee ayn* but fails to provide any evidence for its occurrence; it is not found in Phillips (cf. Thomson 1953) nor in the Manx translation of the Bible, nor is it recorded in the speech of the Manx native speakers. I would suggest that Broderick here falls foul of the ‘Historicist Reflex’ outlined in Fleischman (2000: 37) and discussed above.

3.10 Conclusions

Russell summed up the meagre evidence for dialectal variation in Old Irish as follows:

Two points, however, do emerge. First, the more one tries to pin down any traces of dialectal variation, the more one is struck by the overwhelmingly uniform nature of the language. On the other hand, in the rare cases where one can get some grip on the variation and relate it to modern distributions, the standard features seem to correspond to what is found in Scottish Gaelic and Ulster Irish, while the marginal features are more southern (Russell 2005: 442–3).

Yet at least two of the features assumed to ‘correspond with what is found in Scottish Gaelic and Ulster Irish’ have been shown to be inadmissible. Further, another point not commented upon by Russell emerges: although there are clearly sociolinguistic factors which may need to be taken into account in the question of Old Irish dialects, Gaelic scholarship has not, for the most part, applied sociolinguistic models to Early Irish. Doing so would, at the very least allow for the testing of these sociolinguistic models in a medieval language situation. At most, it might provide a working hypothesis for explaining the homogeneity of Old Irish, or at least allow for the exclusion of the ‘inappropriate questions’ that Labov’s (1994: 11) ‘bad data’ is ill-equipped to answer. This is all the more the case in light of Labov’s (1974a) assertion that some longstanding problems can only be solved by recourse to sociolinguistic principles. The focus throughout has been on the linguistic data alone, devoid of any sociolinguistic context. Returning to that context, I would argue, may be essential if any real progress is to be made in terms of Early Irish dialectology.

Russell’s position on how progress in the dialectology of Old Irish can be made is perhaps unduly reductionist:

But even if we are convinced that there must have been dialects, it is far from clear how we can make progress. Essentially we have the evidence of three corpora of glosses with which to work, but they are not contemporaneous with each other (Russell 2005: 440).

The features outlined earlier in this chapter largely constitute the narrative of Old Irish dialectology over the last number of years (cf. Ahlqvist 1988; Russell 2005). I

have attempted to show, however, that these features are ill-equipped to do so. Russell (2005: 439) is surely correct in his assertion that it is 'inconceivable' that there were not dialects of Irish in the seventh and eighth centuries, but that they are not visible in the written record. The question arising from this is why? Labov (1972) observed that wherever linguistic homogeneity is pursued, it disappears. Although the assumption of unity between written and spoken language espoused by Jackson (1951; 1972) has, for the most part, been abandoned by Gaelic linguists, no real separation has emerged in their treatment. In short, Gaelic linguistics acknowledges that written and spoken language fulfil different functions, yet they continue to be treated together with little or no reference to the sociolinguistic principles which have so usefully been applied to other language situations. The nature of the written record itself must be examined and the environment in which Old Irish existed discussed. These are essentially sociolinguistic questions, it is noticeable in the discussion of Old Irish generally, and most especially dialectal variation in Old Irish, how little reference has ever been made to sociolinguistic principles. The following two chapters attempt to address this gap.

4. Norms, Networks and Prestige in Early Irish

4.1 Introduction

Languages, according to Bourdieu (1991: 46), only exist in the practical state, i.e. ‘in the form of so many linguistic habitus which are at least partially orchestrated’. Taking cognisance of this point, it is important then to acknowledge a difference, in theory at least, between the ‘text language’¹²⁰ we call Old Irish, constituted by the glosses found in the earliest manuscripts, on one hand and the varieties of Goidelic spoken throughout Ireland and much of Scotland during the Old Irish period. Old Irish is a written language dated to the period AD 600–900 showing, as we have seen, little variation which can usefully be described in diatopic terms (Stifter 2013: 167). It has often been referred to as a medieval ‘standard language’ (Charles-Edwards 1995: 728; 2000: 583), a term discussed further below. This chapter aims to investigate, independently of the philological case studies in the previous chapter, the socio-historical and cultural processes which are likely to have facilitated the emergence of this ‘standard’. In this regard, the chapter can be described as a historical sociolinguistic investigation. Specifically, it will test Labov’s (1974a: 827) assertion that ‘many of the long-standing problems of historical linguistics can be resolved only if we are willing to use general principles drawn from [...] sociolinguistic research’. No such historical sociolinguistic approach has previously been applied to Old Irish; the approach taken to Old Irish here firmly embeds the language in the community of ‘users’.

While Winter (1998: 78, 82) warns of the ‘near-insurmountable difficulties’ associated with sociolinguistic research into the remote past, he notes that historical sociolinguistic research can yield viable results if sufficient data are available in terms of both linguistic and societal information. Luckily, this is the case for Old Irish, at least in Ireland.¹²¹

¹²⁰ According to Fleischman (2000: 34), a ‘text language’ is a language which, for the purposes of the researcher, exists exclusively in written texts, regardless of whether or not it was once a spoken language. For further discussion of this concept and its application in the context of Middle English see Laing and Lass (2006: 418).

¹²¹ The historical evidence which would be required of Scotland and the Isle of Man is not available (cf. Woolf 2007: 2–3). Further, the linguistic evidence of *LASID*, which has forms the basis for much

According to Romaine (1988: 1453), ‘the main methodological task of socio-historical linguistics is to develop a set of procedures for the reconstruction of language in its social context and to use the findings of sociolinguistics as controls in the process of reconstruction and as a means of informing theories of change’. This chapter will focus particularly on the reconstruction of that social context for Old Irish. The development of literacy in Old Irish is intrinsically linked to Christian literacy (Stevenson 1989: 127; Ó Néill 2003: 13). The subsequent use of Old Irish as both a literary and legal medium is closely if not exclusively associated with an ecclesiastical context (Mac Cana 1972; F. Kelly 1988: 232; Ó Corráin et al. 1984: 412). For these reasons, the infrastructure of early medieval Gaelic monasticism is central to this historical sociolinguistic investigation of Old Irish. The analytic framework for this investigation draws on a range of sociolinguistic and cultural theories informing our understanding of linguistic norm formation and maintenance, prestige, as well as anthropological and sociolinguistic investigations of the role, structure and evolution of social networks.

4.2 Norm formation and ‘Acts of Identity’

Labov (1972: 120) has argued that the existence of a shared system of language norms is a key criterion in determining the boundaries of a given speech community and its sociolinguistic structures. What is meant by ‘norms’ is a set of common linguistic values which are shared, diffused and internalised within the speech community. The text language of the Old Irish period, 600–900, can be treated as such a set of norms. While they can be described as stable, these norms are not, however, static; they change over time, indicating that Old Irish was not simply a *Schriftsprache*,¹²² but, rather, that it had some basis in a spoken variety or varieties (Charles-Edwards 1995: 727). As to the emergence of new linguistic norms, Tuten (2003: 53), in his investigation of *koineization* in medieval Spanish, argues that ‘new

of the analysis contained in this thesis, does not provide sufficient coverage of Scottish Gaelic to be compared to the Irish material. Ideally, one would wish to make a dialectometric analysis of *SGDS*, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹²² Charles-Edwards (1995: 727) uses the term *Schriftsprache* to denote a language which is written but not spoken. This is to be distinguished from Fleischman’s (2000: 34) concept of the ‘text language’. Fleischman’s term makes no assumption as to whether or not a written language was or was not based on a spoken variety; it simply indicates that it is available to the linguistic researcher *only* in its written form.

norms can *only* be created as new social networks crystallize’, a process which he describes as ‘multigenerational’. If this model is to be applicable in the context of the text language of Old Irish, it must obviously take cognisance of what Ó Néill (2003: 13) has termed ‘the cultural primacy of the written word’ and further, the fact that the early medieval ecclesiastical schools of the Gaelic world had ‘a monopoly on its production’. Indeed, the spread of literacy, *ipso facto*, would result in the creation of new social networks. It is clear from the work of Milroy and Milroy (1985) and L. Milroy (1987) that the network of ‘users’ of a language influences both the formation and maintenance of linguistic norms. Further, Milroy and Milroy (1985) and L. Milroy (1987) provide the following secure sociolinguistic point of departure: The stronger and more cohesive the social network, the stronger the likelihood of a high degree of linguistic cohesion between members of the network.¹²³ In the case of Old Irish, one is concerned with networks of scribes trained in ecclesiastical schools. Mindful of all these factors, one may note that it was ‘[i]n the fifty years between 525 and 575 [that] many of the great monasteries of Ireland and western Scotland were founded: Clonard, Clonmacnoise, Iona and Bangor, to name only four of the most distinguished houses’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 250; de Paor 1971: 98). These newly established monastic houses will have constituted a central part of the ‘new social networks’ which gave rise to the system of linguistic and orthographic norms described as Old Irish, which were already emerging *circa* 600.

Connected to the ‘network of users’ idea is identity itself, as well as the role of language in identity formation (at the individual or group level). Recognising the close relationship between language and identity, and considering *all* language activity to be an expression of identity, the influential ‘Acts of Identity’ model developed by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller suggests:

[T]he individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, so as to be unlike those from which he wishes to be distinguished (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 181).

¹²³ This is essentially the same point made by Tuten (2003) in his assertion that the emergence of new social and linguistic norms accompanies the emergence of close-knit networks.

The ‘Acts of Identity’ model was originally developed in the context of variation in language use and choice in the creole language of Belize. Literary acts, however, like the speech acts analysed by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), can also be acts of identity and often carry huge social and symbolic weight, even in a contemporary context (Wallace 2008: 64). This is also the case for medieval Ireland where, as Johnston (2013: 176) has recently asserted, ‘[l]iteracy was far more than an academic or even political pursuit: it was a crucible of identity’. Accepting the claim of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 247) that ‘all linguistic tokens are socially marked’, the ‘Acts of Identity’ model is applicable to any linguistic situation – including that of Old Irish. ‘Acts of Identity’, however, are only possible for a language user to the extent that the user in question:

1. Can identify the desirable group
2. Has both adequate access to that group, and the ability to analyse the linguistic behaviour of the desirable group
3. Has strong motivation to ‘join’ it, and this motivation is either reinforced or rejected by the group
4. Has the ability to modify his or her behaviour (see Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 182).

4.3 Defining prestige

The first and most basic requirement of the ‘Acts of Identity’ model is the identification of the ‘desirable group’, the group with the highest levels of ‘prestige’ in any given context, and the group, therefore, with which speakers (or writers) wish to be identified. The question of prestige is a central one with the socio-historical linguistics of written language. It is not necessarily easily addressed with any single approach, however:

[T]he reconstruction of prestige patterns is a multidisciplinary enterprise with links to many research fields, such as sociolinguistics, network studies, social history, and cultural evolution (Sairio and Palander-Collin 2012: 627).

Old Irish does not provide us with the data typically analysed in historical sociolinguistics: most variation has been explained in chronological rather than diatopic terms, other instances of variation are attributable to differences between registers and/or genres. In this sense it differs from Old English, which shows diatopic variation in the earliest written record (Toon 1992; Hogg 2006). Neither can the case of Old Irish find a parallel in Icelandic, a language which shows a similar lack of diatopic variation in its earliest (and subsequent) written record (Leonard 2012). This lack of diatopic variation in Icelandic has been attributed to dialect levelling occurring in a *tabula rasa* environment (Trudgill 2004; Leonard 2012). This scenario could not be deemed applicable in the Gaelic world, however. The lack of diatopic variation in Old Irish might be usefully addressed once an outline of the cultural, literary and linguistic prestige patterns which are likely to have existed in the early medieval Gaelic world are analysed. While it is recognised (Lass 1980: 120) that the reason for society's preference for a certain linguistic innovation may be system-internal – one of the variants may, for instance, be more economical than the other – evidence suggests that often such preferences are social in origin (J. Milroy 2003), reflecting the typically chance adoption of a particular variant as a symbol of group identity (Leonard 2012: 28). The former (i.e. system-internal explanation) has traditionally been the dominant paradigm in historical linguistics (see Hickey 2012: 388–9, 404, n. 3), while the latter has been the focus of sociolinguistic research.

Whether a linguistic form is believed to have high or low prestige depends not on its linguistic shape but entirely on the perceived social status or importance of the speakers who use that form (J. Milroy 2012: 572). Sociolinguistic research, be it historical or otherwise, needs extra-linguistic societal information and information regarding prestige patterns is one such type of important information. It may seem a trivial point, but the understanding of prestige by historical linguists and philologists can often be at odds with that articulated by J. Milroy (2012: 572). For historical linguists and philologists, prestige is often attributed to the linguistically older, more

conservative forms of a given language.¹²⁴ It is therefore important to clarify at this point that by ‘prestige’ form I mean the prestige form from the point of view of the users of Old Irish as written medium during the Old Irish period, rather than the prestige associated in the minds of some scholars of Old Irish with the most linguistically archaic forms to be found in Old Irish.

Those individuals (or groups of individuals) who achieve status by excelling in socially valued fields of activity are said to have ‘prestige’ (Henrich and Gil-White 2001: 167). Prestige is, therefore, a social, rather than a linguistic phenomenon (J. Milroy 2012: 572). In order to better understand the potential role of prestige in the linguistic context of the early medieval Gaelic world, I will draw on a theoretical framework which seeks to explain the role of prestige in the processes associated with cultural transmission. Henrich and Gil-White (2001), building on the work of earlier evolutionary and cultural theorists, have advanced an attractive theory which, among other things, suggests that to improve the quality of information acquired through cultural transmission and the cost-effectiveness of this acquisition, people focus on prestigious rather than randomly selected individuals. Their model is one which aims to better explain the processes involved in intergenerationally stable, high-fidelity social transmission. This seems exactly the type of social and cultural transmission to have prevailed during the Old Irish period in terms of literacy and therefore is the type of model most likely to enhance our understanding of the processes through which such remarkably steady transmission took place.

4.3.1 Distinguishing between prestige and dominance

Historically, many evolutionary theorists have conflated prestige with dominance. According to Henrich and Gil-White’s (2001: 171) interpretation, prestige is ‘freely conferred deference’ to an individual who excels in valued domains of activity. They distinguish clearly between the psychological processes involved in dominance and prestige. For Henrich and Gil-White one of the most important factors in prestige is

¹²⁴ Ahlqvist (1988: 34) also notes that ‘the importance of “the prestigious forms of Old Irish” is largely a function of modern scholars’ knowledge about the language that was codified in Thurneysen’s Grammar’.

that, unlike dominance, it is freely and willingly conferred. Their theory suggests that:

the most skilled/knowledgeable models will, on average, end up with the biggest and most lavish clienteles, so the *size* and *lavishness* of a given model's clientele (the *prestige*) provides a convenient and reliable proxy for that person's information quality (Henrich and Gil-White 2001: 167–8).

Thus the by-product of prestige is not fear, but influence and the degree of prestige can be measured. In linguistic terms, Sairio and Palander-Collin (2012: 627–8) note that prestige is most often associated with the standard variety of a language, and standard languages themselves tend to originate in varieties spoken by a prestige group with political or economic power and education. Moreover, as Sairio and Palander-Collin (2012: 627–8) point out, across languages, a standard often has a literary history, having been the variety used by 'great authors'. The norms associated with a 'standard' language are undoubtedly important for users of the language. As J. Milroy (1992: 83) notes, 'there would be little point in having these norms if they did not carry social meaning, distinguishing between one community and another and carrying a sense of community identity'. In the case of Gaelic, the introduction of the written vernacular is tied to the monastic environment in which Old Irish undoubtedly developed and underwent focusing.¹²⁵

4.3.2 *Old Irish and Uí Néill dominance*

The distinction drawn between the different processes involved in prestige and dominance acts as an important corrective to the way in which some scholars, primarily historians, have recently sought to explain the apparent homogeneity of Old Irish. The emergence of written Old Irish by the start of the seventh century coincides with a profound change in the political structure of Gaelic society.¹²⁶ In particular, it coincides with the expansion of the Uí Néill as the dominant political dynasty in the island of Ireland (Byrne 1969; Ó Cróinín 2005: 201). It has been

¹²⁵ My understanding of focusing in this context is the same as that developed in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 115–116): 'Language [...] is the instrument through which, by means of individual adjustments in response to feedback, both 'languages' and 'groups' may become more highly focused in the sense that the behaviour of members of a group may become more alike [...] 'Focusing' will imply regularity in the linguistic code, less variability; 'diffusion' the converse'.

¹²⁶ This issue will be discussed further in chapter 6.

suggested by various scholars that the emergence of these new dynastic structures, and particularly the political *dominance* of the Uí Néill, was a central factor in the emergence of Old Irish and may account for its homogeneity. Charles-Edwards and Johnston are representative of this view:

A further aspect of the **dominance** of the Féni¹²⁷ was, perhaps, the creation of standard Old Irish. This was a language almost entirely free of dialect. It was certainly a literary language, a language of poets, of lawyers and of churchmen; but it may also have been, at least in part, the language of a secular elite (Charles-Edwards 2000: 583).

The easiest way to account for such a unified language, in an island marked by local divisions of the kind prone to encourage dialect is to suppose, first, that the standard language was, in origin, the dialect spoken by a politically **dominant** group, and, secondarily that their dialect was adopted by the poets and the lawyers as the language of ‘the people of art’, *aes dána* [...] The prevalence of Old Irish as the standard literary language of Ireland may thus be associated with the triumph of the Uí Néill and their allies, the Éoganachta (Charles-Edwards 2003: 34).

The language is likely to be the dialect of a **dominant** group, one that was adopted by clerics and *aes dáno* under the pressure of creating a mutually intelligible literate culture, a literate culture that could serve as an apposite local counterpart to the international world of Latin writing (Johnston 2013: 22).

Setting aside the theoretical difficulties around the role of dominance in cultural transmission for the moment (see below for discussion), it is appropriate to recognise that these suggestions represent an important advance for scholarship in that they explicitly recognise the role of social factors in explaining the homogeneity of Old Irish. There are a number of difficulties with this interpretation, however, theoretical and otherwise. Domination implies imposition, but the imposition of a standard language, as highlighted by Byrne, was both politically and practically impossible during the Old Irish period:

A great measure of cultural unity in Ireland is apparent from the time of our earliest records. This cannot have been imposed by political means. The Connachta or Uí Néill were certainly not in a position to **impose**

¹²⁷ The Féni was a confederation comprised primarily of the Uí Néill, along with their parent kin-group the Connachta and their allies the Éoganachta and Airgíalla (see Charles-Edwards 2000: 160, n. 67). In this extract, and those following, the emphasis is mine.

their rule, let alone their language, over the Ulaid and Laigin even as late as the eighth century (Byrne 1971: 139).

Imposition can, therefore, be ruled out, but there is no evidence for the type of scenario which I take to be suggested in Johnston (2013: 22), that ‘standard’ Old Irish was adopted by the learned caste ‘under the pressure of creating a mutually intelligible literate culture’. On the contrary, it seems from all that is known about the emergence of standard languages that we can categorically rule out inclusivity as having been a factor in the selection of a norm by the *aés dána*.¹²⁸ Typologically, that is not how medieval standard languages typically emerge, as Millar (2010: 16) points out: ‘The standard itself developed through the most qualified speakers’. We can replace Millar’s ‘speakers’ with ‘users’, a more appropriate term in the context of a text language, but the most basic point remains: it is highly unlikely that the Old Irish ‘standard’ was the result of a conscious attempt to find a mutually intelligible or inclusive variety of language.

The most pressing problem in the accounts offered by Charles-Edwards and Johnston, however, has to do with the proposal that the dominance of one group could account for the emergence of the written standard of the Old Irish type. This is to misunderstand the dynamic involved with cultural transmission and the linguistic processes which are likely to have prevailed in the scholarly and ecclesiastical situation in which Old Irish orthography developed. Imposition, or dominance, need not be the defining characteristic; indeed, it cannot have been. Dominant groups are feared and while they can elicit compliance, more than mere compliance is required for the spread and reinforcement of linguistic and literary norms. Henrich and Gil-White (2001) predict that where non-conformity with the dominant individual’s or group’s behaviour is taken as a challenge, individuals will copy, but only in the presence of the dominant individual or group, and only to appease them. Compliance, therefore, rather than internalization, is the pattern of cultural transmission expected from a situation involving domination. Henrich and Gil-White (2001: 186) predict, however, that prestige-biased cultural transfer has greater post-interaction stability than dominance-induced transfer and this type of situation would

¹²⁸ Johnston (2013: 28) recognises that the standard language will have had its origin in a learned and elitist milieu.

more accurately account for the homogeneity of Old Irish as a text language. Cultural and evolutionary theorists emphasise the role of prestige as the most important factor in cultural transmission, involving a psychological process distinct from that associated with the ‘domination’ of one group by another:

Prestige rests on merit in the eyes of others (rather than force deployed against them), and promotes the admiration of inferiors (not their fear), a desire for proximity (not distance), and periods of sustained observation (not furtive glances) (Henrich and Gil-White 2001: 170).

Another feature of prestige, one which further distinguishes it from dominance, is its ability to be domain specific.¹²⁹ Prestige hierarchies are domain-specific because valuable assets vary depending on time and place.¹³⁰

The simple equation of Uí Néill dominance with the emergence of Old Irish does not stand up to an examination which is informed by processes of cultural transmission. A more subtle and nuanced analysis of the processes at work is required from the perspective of historical sociolinguistics.¹³¹ The period immediately preceding the beginning of the seventh century is one characterised by a number of social, cultural and political developments, all of which, it will be argued, facilitated the emergence of the text language of Old Irish. The rise of what Ó Corráin (1972: 14–23) influentially termed ‘the hegemony of the Uí Néill’ is connected to them all. I have already noted the emergence of some of the most influential ecclesiastical schools during this period, but the century and a half between 550 and 700 is also characterised by other developments, all of which are inter-connected, and deserving of further discussion:

1. The genesis of an Old Irish literature
2. The aggrandisement of Armagh
3. The emergence of a unified Irish identity.

¹²⁹ The term ‘domain’ is used here, as above, in its social rather than linguistic sense.

¹³⁰ I give here an illustrative example from Henrich and Gil-White (2001: 170): ‘[I]f I defer to you because of your superior computer skills and you defer to Bob because he is an excellent grass hockey player, I may not give Bob any special deference if grass hockey is not my thing’.

¹³¹ Charles-Edwards (2000: 518) has employed a more nuanced approach in studying other aspects of the Uí Néill: ‘Armchair historians often look first and last for displays of brute force as evidence of political power. Yet the power of the Uí Néill may have rested more on origin legends, however fictional, than on mere military capacity’.

4.4 Developments in Gaeldom 550–700

4.4.1 *Old Irish literature*

Wagner (1986: 1) has pointed out that the majority of Old and Middle Irish literature belongs to what he called ‘the North’. Looking at the situation from another perspective, Charles-Edwards (2000: 172–3) has more recently observed that ‘the political history of Munster and southern Leinster is very much thinner than for lands ruled by the Uí Néill and their immediate neighbours. Even in hagiography, in the seventh and eighth centuries, there are relatively few Lives celebrating the saints of churches further south than the northern fringes of Munster and Leinster.’ Thus during the early Christian period most of our historical and literary evidence comes from the historical province of Ulster (Charles-Edwards 2005a: lxi).

As to the genesis of this literary output, two separate but related literary developments in the Gaelic world during the sixth and seventh centuries were outlined by Mac Cana (1972). The first is the rapid extension of the use of writing in Irish in the late sixth century, itself defining the start of the Old Irish period. The second is what Mac Cana (1972: 102) describes as ‘an extraordinary quickening of intellectual and artistic activity which was to continue far beyond the limit of the [seventh] century’. The source of this artistic creativity, he argued, was the scriptoria of ‘the more progressive monasteries’. In that sense, both of these developments have an added geographic aspect:

While there is no reason to suppose that these individuals were confined to any one part of the country, nevertheless the evidence strongly suggests that it was only in the east, or more precisely in the south-east, of Ulster that their activities assumed something of the impetus and cohesiveness of a cultural movement. Here conservation and creativity went hand in hand: the relatively new skill of writing in the vernacular began to be vigorously exploited not only for the direct recording of secular oral tradition – heroic, mythological and the more strictly didactic – but also at the same time as a vehicle for the imaginative re-creation of certain segments of that tradition, so that one may with due reservations

speak of this region of south-east Ulster as the cradle of written Irish literature (Mac Cana 1972: 102).¹³²

Despite his vigorous opposition to so much of Mac Cana's interpretation and treatment of Early Irish literature (cf. McCone 1990: 1–28), McCone, in his discussion of the tale *Echtrae Chonnlai* and the manuscript known as *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, (henceforth *CDS*) is also drawn to the notion of southeast Ulster as the 'cradle' of Irish literature:

One can hardly help wondering whether this locality and its monasteries might have been the cradle of continuous prose and prosimetrum writing in Old Irish (McCone 2000: 119).

The compilation of *CDS* indicates an early and abiding interest in literary production.¹³³ The location of the monastery of Druim Snechta, Drumsnat in modern county Monaghan,¹³⁴ and its relations with other centres of learning are important.¹³⁵ Perhaps even more relevant, however, is Drumsnat's relationship to Bangor, the monastery's mother-church (Byrne 2005a: 678; Bhreathnach 2005a: 63).¹³⁶ The monastery of Bangor in modern Co. Down, founded by Comgall around 558, seems to have been one of the primary centres of learning involved in the process described by Mac Cana (1972). Ó hUiginn (1992: 62), for instance, suspects that it is at Bangor that the Ulster Cycles tales were first redacted. Bangor was not the only centre of learning in the area, however; it formed part of a tight network of monasteries from which a great many innovative ideas radiated outwards:

¹³² These comments were made in a discussion of a number of texts from the *Cín Dromma Snechtai* corpus of texts, a southeast Ulster compilation whose literary importance lies primarily in the early date ascribed to them (see Mac Cana 1972: 102). For a more recent, albeit shorter, discussion of the *CDS* texts and their importance for the preservation of a number of linguistic features of Early Old Irish, see Stifter (2013: 166–7).

¹³³ This compilation is typically dated to the late seventh, or early eighth century (Mac Cana 1972: 102; Carey 2007: 27), although Mac Mathúna (1985: 411–8) advocated a tenth-century date.

¹³⁴ Bhreathnach (2005a: 63) is undoubtedly mistaken in locating the Druim Snechta of *CDS* in modern county Leitrim; Ó Concheanainn (1988: 3), McCone (2000: 118) and Byrne (2005a: 678) all locate it in modern Monaghan and no compelling evidence is provided for Bhreathnach's identification.

¹³⁵ McCone (2000: 119) notes that the monastery of Drumsnat is located a short distance from the three schools in which Cenn Fáelad, the Cenél nÉogain *sapiens* (*AU* 679.2), is reputed to have obtained his training in Latin, law and poetry.

¹³⁶ In an article yet to be published, David Stifter (forthcoming) re-examines the notion that *CDS* was in fact originally a product of Bangor itself, rather than the daughter house of Drumsnat, concluding that this is likely to have been the case.

[I]t is clear in any case that monasteries in the north-east of the country were a hub of activity in the sixth century, and played a significant part in exchanging ideas with British churches and in radiating them out from the north-east to churches elsewhere in Ireland. The kingdom of Dál Fiatach was host not only to the monastery founded by Comgall (†602/5) at Bennchor [Bangor] at the mouth of Belfast Lough but also to a series of churches around Strangford Lough, of which the most important were Finnian's monastery at Mag mBili [Moville], Mo Chae's church at Nóendruimm (Nendrum), and the more southerly churches of Sabul (Saul) and Dún Lethglaisse (Downpatrick) which are located in what was probably 'the heartland of Patrick's ministry'. These churches, encompassed in a single kingdom, benefitting from a maritime situation that facilitated travel between them, and in an area closer to Britain than anywhere else on the Irish coast, were well placed to have significant influence on the development of literary tradition in Hiberno-Latin and Irish (Ní Dhonnchadha 2010: 547).¹³⁷

As well as, and connected to, their literary output, these centres were also important in education, educating many 'of the saints and scholars of Ireland in the sixth century' (Flower 1947: 13), including Columbanus and Colum Cille.

Highlighting further what she terms 'the salience of the North of Ireland' in the early stages of the Gaelic literary tradition, Ní Dhonnchadha (2010: 566–7) notes the status of *Amrae Coluimb Chille* as by far the earliest source of information concerning Colum Cille, written before his cult could obscure the reality of the man, and apparently by one who knew him well. Ní Dhonnchadha calls it 'a uniquely valuable instance of rhetorical style in the vernacular at the end of the sixth century'. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that *Amrae Coluimb Chille* is largely the product of a reworking of an earlier text (Bisagni 2009). Regardless, the salience of the north of Ireland referred to by Ní Dhonnchadha in this instance needs to be refined and in fact expanded, inasmuch as the poem is a product of the Columban monastery of Iona, in Scotland. Clancy and Márkus (1995: 27) had already noted that '[Iona was] a monastery where there was a deep and sustained interest in the written word. Other

¹³⁷ Note, however, that both Colum Cille and Columbanus received some of their early education in Leinster Irish (Ní Dhonnchadha (2010: 547–8), and that a small corpus of anonymous rhymeless poems on pagan Leinster rulers allegedly represents some of the earliest extant composition in Irish (Carney 1971). Carney's (1971) dating of this corpus, however, is not entirely secure (cf. Corthals 1990; Stifter 2013: 185–6), and he later (Carney 1989: 54–5) partially retracted some of the ideas expressed in his earlier paper. Some of this corpus may in fact be better dated, albeit very tentatively, to roughly the beginning of the seventh century (Stifter 2013: 186, and David Stifter, personal communication).

writings associated with Iona show that it was a centre of energetic literary activity through the seventh century and beyond'. One may, therefore, further extend the geographic limits imposed by Ní Dhonnchadha and say that in general the literary salience is one which includes northeast Ireland and parts of southwest Scotland, most specifically Iona.

4.4.2 *The position of Armagh*

Historical evidence does not attest to the existence of the see of Armagh before 640, and Sharpe (1982b) has shown that there are good grounds to believe that the cult of St. Patrick was originally located outside Armagh, in modern county Down.¹³⁸ Throughout the second half of the seventh century, however, we see the emergence of numerous texts associating Armagh with the cult of Patrick,¹³⁹ so that by the end of the seventh century the primacy of Armagh is recognised as far away as Munster (Ó Corráin 1989: 11; 16). The recognition of primacy afforded to Armagh by the end of the seventh century is undoubtedly connected to its association with Patrick and stands as a testament to the success of the seventh century propaganda campaign associating Patrick with Armagh (de Paor 1971: 96; Sharpe 1982b). The seventh-century hagiographical writings of Muirchú, as well as those of the scholar Tírechán, concern themselves with establishing the position of Patrick as the apostle of the Irish. The claims of Armagh as the ecclesiastical See of Patrick follow from the position of Patrick as apostle of the Irish (de Paor 1971: 95). For these reasons, the seventh century has been described as the period of the 'aggrandisement of Armagh' (de Paor 1971; Charles-Edwards 2000: 426–7; L. Breatnach 2011: 42).

Despite the national recognition of the primacy of Armagh by the end of the seventh century, there is no evidence that the Irish church was subject to a rigidly determined hierarchy (Ó Corráin 1989: 16; Johnston 2013: 61). It would appear then that the ecclesiastical primacy of Armagh was maintained by the prestige associated with Armagh, and its alleged founder, rather than by dominance. The propagation of this

¹³⁸ Binchy (1962: 170–1) sees the extension of the cult of Patrick as being closely bound up with the Easter controversy 'which convulsed the Irish Church all through the seventh century'. He sees the victory of the Roman party in the Irish church as having strengthened the prestige of Armagh and facilitating the 'development of the Patrick legend into a "national epic"'.
¹³⁹ Among these texts of seventh-century provenance associating Patrick with Armagh, we may now count *Senchas Már*, the influential collection of law texts. For further discussion see chapter 5.

prestige by Armagh was conscious, however, and is to be associated with the Uí Néill dynasties. Indeed, as Ó Corráin (2005: 585) has claimed, Armagh and the Uí Néill kings were working in tandem, both ‘content to boost the pretensions of the other’. It has been noted that the seventh century also saw the emergence of the Uí Néill dynasty as the dominant political force in the north of the country (Byrne 1969; Ó Cróinín 2005: 211) and the acceptance of the ecclesiastical pre-eminence of Armagh on the island of Ireland. The two developments are not totally independent of one another and both can be connected with the emergence of an ‘Irish’/Gaelic identity in the seventh century.

4.4.3 Emergent Gaelic identity

For Mac Cana (2011), as for some earlier scholars, an Irish ‘national consciousness’ could be traced back into the prehistoric period and was to be located within the context of a cultural unity and cohesiveness that was itself maintained by an unbroken and continuous oral tradition. Recognising some of the weaknesses inherent in such an interpretation of the evidence, other scholars, most notably Ó Corráin (1978; 1998), have argued that the emergence of an Irish ‘national consciousness’ occurred first among the jurists and other learned classes, an élite which was both highly self-aware and greatly respected. This élite, according to Ó Corráin (1978: 7), was unrestrained by local boundaries and able to travel freely to practice their craft where they wished. Rather than see this ‘national consciousness’ as a remnant of an earlier cultural unity, Ó Corráin interprets it as the largely seventh-century product of the learned class, those who consciously sought to cultivate it. From its very genesis, literacy and the new (or at least newly understood) Gaelic identity were intimately connected. Importantly, according to Ó Corráin, this new identity embraced all kin-groups:

[T]he Irish had developed a sense of identity and ‘otherness’ as early as the seventh century and had begun to create an elaborate origin-legend embracing all the tribes and dynasties of the country. This was the work of a mandarin class of monastic and secular scholars whose privileged position in society allowed them to transcend all local and tribal boundaries (Ó Corráin 1978: 35).

This ‘elaborate origin-legend’, preserved in the Middle Irish compilation *Lebor Gábala Érenn*, saw all the peoples of the island of Ireland as descended from the mythical *Míl Espáine*, a figure who himself has been described as a ‘transparent literary invention’ (Ó Corráin 1998: 202), or more precisely as a ‘figment of men steeped in [the Latin writings of St.] Jerome and Isidore [of Seville]’ (Carey 1994b: 9). Charles-Edwards (2004b: 30–3) takes the Milesian legend to be an assertion of the political dominance of the Uí Néill whose original purpose was to describe the relationship between the dynasties which made up the Féni and ‘justified the current political elite’, consisting of the Uí Néill, their allies and clients. The cultivation of this elaborate origin-legend in Irish by the literate class links the supposed ethnic cohesion of the island with the language which gives voice to that cohesion – Irish.

The Milesian theory of ancestral unity among the Irish was under construction by the end of the seventh century, but there are hints of an earlier understanding of Irish identity which is not dependent on common ancestry. *Auraicept na nÉces*, dated by Ahlqvist (1982: 36) to ‘a fairly early stage of the Old Irish period’, is a grammatical tract which explains the mythical history of the Gaelic language, *bérla Féne*. In doing so, the text lays great emphasis on the ethnic diversity of the Gaels but also on their shared language. The mythical redactor of *bérla Féne* was Fénius Farsaid, which again connects the whole enterprise with the Féni and more specifically with the Uí Néill. In this regard, Koch’s (2000) attempt to connect the enterprise of the *Auraicept* with the Uí Néill-backed monastery of Iona in Scottish Dál Riata seems highly plausible.

The most recent contributor to the debate, Wadden (2011), has made a number of highly nuanced observations on the emergence of Irish identity during the seventh century.¹⁴⁰ He accepts the learned and ecclesiastical genesis of this identity. However, rather than accepting the new identity as the product of an independent and unified mandarin class functioning throughout the Gaelic world, he argues that taken together, the Milesian framework and that of the *Auraicept* can be seen as a product of the cooperation between the ecclesiastical authorities of Armagh and the

¹⁴⁰ I am grateful to Dr Patrick Wadden for making relevant portions of his thesis available to me.

dynastically dominant Uí Néill which sought to create the Irish nation for their own ends:

From the late seventh century then, the Patrician Church, and Armagh in particular, pursued a policy of alliance with the dominant Uí Néill dynasties. Their mutual goal was to create a nation to match their aspirations for joint authority over the Irish [...] From the seventh century, scholars working on the behalf of the Uí Néill and for Armagh set about constructing a ‘people’ to match their political and ecclesiastical aspirations. Those scholars working for the Uí Néill initially favoured a Gaelic identity defined in either linguistic or genetic terms, while Armagh focused on the territorial aspect of Irish identity (Wadden 2011: 92–3).

The *Auraicept* and the Milesian legend differ in their focus but their ultimate message is the same: unity, whether based primarily in linguistic or genealogical terms. Rather than being the product of an island-wide mandarin class, this identity is largely the product of the Uí Néill-sponsored scriptoria of Armagh and Iona. The examination of the social context of literary prestige in early medieval Gaeldom, therefore, is likely to enhance our understanding of how — and, most importantly, where — these norms and normative processes arose.

4.4 Explaining language homogeneity

A number of suggested explanations of the lack of obvious diatopic variation in Old Irish have been advanced, often without much discussion. Schrijver (2009: 204–5) has argued that the ‘exceptional nature of Old Irish is explainable if the language resulted from a recent spread in Ireland’. Schrijver’s theory (2009: 205) is reliant on what he terms ‘a few trivial historical and geographical assumptions’. As I will show in chapter 6, however, this is to vastly underplay the magnitude of these assumptions.

For Mac Cana, on the other hand, the apparent homogeneity of language in the early medieval Gaelic world is a reflex of the cultural unity of Ireland as well as the unity and the mobility of the learned orders:

The question of the source and origin of standard written Old Irish has its own particular interest, even if no solution is open to proof, but in the present context what is more remarkable, and more significant, is the fact that the standard did exist and, in so far as one can judge, was accepted in

practice by literate authors, scribes and redactors throughout the land (Mac Cana 2011: 277–8).¹⁴¹

Both Charles-Edwards (2000: 583) and L. Breatnach (2004: 34) seem to accept the central role of the free movement of the learned orders in the maintenance of linguistic norms. This position echoes that of Thurneysen, who maintained that:

The paucity of the sources does not suffice to explain this comparative uniformity; in the literary language a levelling and other mixing of dialects must have taken place. This process was undoubtedly assisted from the earliest times by wandering poets, singers and scholars, who would naturally wish to be understood everywhere (*GOI*: 12).¹⁴²

In a number of publications Charles-Edwards (1995; 2003: 34; 2004b: 32–3), moreover, has suggested that the ‘standard’ of Old Irish is the result of the rise in status of an individual dialect. This suggestion has also received support from Russell (2005: 443): ‘The dialect evidence, meagre as it is, points more to the rise in status of a single dialect, such as we see in standard late Old English or Castilian Spanish’. This possibility, although not challenged in print, has yet to be endorsed in writing by any linguist other than Russell.

While vague reference has been made to what one could call ‘networks’ of users in the discussion of Old Irish, none of this discussion has been informed by sociolinguistic theories of network structure or how they are actually known to function. While it has been suggested that the emergence of new networks also gives rise to new linguistic norms (Tuten 2003: 53), we have seen that the converse is also the case. There is a consensus in sociolinguistic research, both contemporary and historical (Milroy and Milroy 1985; L. Milroy 1987; Bergs 2005), that linguistic conservatism of the type seen in Old Irish is associated with tight-knit and dense networks.

¹⁴¹ Mac Cana (2011: 278) goes on to argue that on this basis, it ‘invites comparison with another phase in the history of the Irish language’, the so-called ‘standard’ of Classical Irish. As I will argue in chapter 5, this is not the case; Classical Modern Irish developed as a codified language specifically for the composition of metrically complex poetry admitting forms from more than one dialect. In this sense, Classical Irish and Old Irish are fundamentally different (Russell 2005: 443).

¹⁴² This is precisely the sort of ‘fanciful’ explanation described by Penny (2006: 54) as ‘owing nothing to observation of the way people actually behave’.

4.5 Social networks

The second requirement of the ‘Acts of Identity’ model proposed by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) is that one has both adequate access to the desired group and the ability to analyse their linguistic behaviour. In the case of Old Irish, this surely means adequate access to the prestigious ecclesiastical schools which had a monopoly on literacy (Ó Néill 2003: 13). These ecclesiastical schools constitute the network from which the focused form of Old Irish emerged and the network which managed to maintain it in a relatively stable manner over a period of three centuries. It has been shown that individuals receive pressure from members of their own social networks to maintain the linguistic norms used by that network (Milroy and Milroy 1985). This sort of norm-reinforcement is stronger when the ties between users are stronger, denser, and multiplex (Conde-Silvestre 2012: 333; J. Milroy 1992).¹⁴³ For the stability of Old Irish as a text language over a period of three centuries to have developed and been maintained, it has to have occurred in a pedagogical situation where these dense and multiplex networks themselves could develop and be maintained with a fair degree of stability. For the analysis of these networks there is only one viable primary source of data, the annalistic entries for the period.

As noted recently in Johnston (2013: 98), ‘[t]he Irish chronicles [=annals] as a whole provide an impressive body of material from which the literate ecclesiastical landscape can be delineated and the people who inhabited it pinpointed’. The annals, in other words, allow us insight into the linguistic and scholarly networks existing in the early medieval Gaelic world. The terminology used to describe the learned orders in the annals varies and the exact nature of what is meant by some of the terms is not always clear. There are, however, two terms in particular which apply to scholars in

¹⁴³ The classification of networks I use here follows that laid out in Conde-Silvestre (2012: 333): ‘A social network is close-knit and dense if most of its members keep some relationship with each other, so that if several individuals from the same network talk about a third or fourth party, it is likely that all of them have some acquaintance with him or her. Networks can also be loose-knit and less dense, when the mutual conversance of their members is less widespread: some of them have relationships with others, while others only have sporadic, brief bonds. Finally, networks can be multiplex or uniplex depending on the social domains in which interpersonal contact is established: in the workplace, the neighbourhood, within groups of friends, kin, or family, in one or more than one capacity at the same time. Finally, the ties that bind individuals from the same network can be strong or weak, depending on a variety of factors, such as duration, periodicity, emotional intensity, intimacy, reciprocity, or the function of the relationships’.

the annals: the *sapiens*, ‘wise man’, a title of status attested in the annals from 661, and the *scriba*, ‘scribe’, which is attested only from 697. Both terms, discussed below, emerge rather late in the annalistic record when one considers that the contemporaneous entries in the annals record began shortly after the foundation of the Iona’s monastic community by Colum Cille in 563, where the earliest of Irish annals were kept until *circa* 740 (A. Smyth 1972: 9–12; Charles-Edwards 2000: 282; 2006: 8).

The *scriba* is usually associated by the annalist with a church in such a way as to suggest that it was an office held in a particular church. He was a person of ‘the highest rank in the hierarchy of learning’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 270). It is important to note that although the Latin term *scriba* is usually translated as ‘scribe’, he was not just associated with the copying of scripture; he was also charged with its interpretation. The *scriba* was, therefore, an eminently important person in clerical education in early medieval Gaeldom. This pedagogical role is best highlighted by the career of Mailgaimrid, abbot of Bangor, described in the annals as *scriba optimus* (AU 839.1), and cited in both the Milan and St. Gall Glosses as an authority on both biblical exegesis and grammar (see chapter 5).

The early eighth-century *Hibernensis*, a collection of Irish canon law written in Latin, states that *scriba interroget scripturam* (Wasserschleben 1885: 62), and Johnston (2013: 123–4) argues that the *scriba* as defined by the *Hibernensis* was a canon lawyer who also carried out a judicial function. Ruben of Dairinis (AU 725.4), for instance, one of the compilers of the *Hibernensis*, is described in his obit as *scriba Mumhan* (AU 725.4). Ruben, along with Cú Chuimne of Iona (AU 747.5, see also Charles-Edwards 2000: 265) the other compiler of the *Hibernensis*, ‘helped compile canon law through copying from pre-existing authorities and, through copying, created authoritative ecclesiastical canons which formed the basis for ecclesiastical judgements’ (Johnston 2013: 124).

The *sapiens* on the other hand was rarely *sapiens* of a church and is not usually associated with a church at all in annalistic entries (Charles-Edwards 2006: 10), although there was a certain overlap between the two categories (Charles-Edwards 2000: 266). While the *scriba* appears to have had a clear institutional role in the

education of clerics, this may not have been the case for all *sapientes*. For this reason and because of the impossibility of locating so many of them, the present survey excludes *sapientes*. Instead, the occurrence of the term *scriba* in the Annals of Ulster up to 900, the arbitrary date usually assigned to the end of the Old Irish period, is analysed.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ I have omitted those five instances where the term *scriba* occurs but is not attached to a place and cannot be otherwise located (*AU* 745.5; 796.1; 817.1; 843.7; 867.2; 874.1). Where a *scriba* is explicitly associated with more than one place in the relevant annalistic entry, I have included the reference under both.

Table 1 *Scribae* recorded in *AU* to 900

| Ecclesiastical centre | Occurrences in <i>AU</i> | Total |
|--|--|--------------|
| Armagh | 725.4; 732.14; 808.1; 814.1; 831.4; 846.1; 852.1; 888.3; 893.1 | 9 |
| Clonmacnoise | 730.5; 796.1; 798.3; 814.2; 869.1; 891.8 | 6 |
| Kildare | 725.4; 730.5; 834.7; 864.5; 875.1 | 5 |
| Finglas | 796.1; 812.1; 838.1; 867.2 | 4 |
| Trevet (Meath) | 739.2; 774.2; 888.3 | 3 |
| Generic 'Munster' | 796.1; 847.1 | 2 |
| Bangor (Down) | 730.9; 839.1 | 2 |
| Clochar (Tyrone) | 810.1; 869.8 | 2 |
| Lusk (Dublin) | 697.11; 800.3 | 2 |
| Roscommon | 816.3; 874.1 | 2 |
| Achadh Bó (Aghaboe, Laois) | 813.2 | 1 |
| Birr | 822.1 | 1 |
| Cell Chuilinn (Kilcullen, Kildare) | 785.1 | 1 |
| Cell Manach (Kilnamanagh, Dublin) | 785.1 | 1 |
| Cell Moinni (Kilmoone, Meath) | 814.1 | 1 |
| Cell Delga (Kildalkey, Meath) | 868.5 | 1 |
| Cell Fhoibrig (Kilbrew, Meath) | 838.1 | 1 |
| Clonard | 830.2 | 1 |
| Clones (Monaghan) | 840.7 | 1 |
| Cloyne | 867.2 | 1 |
| Connor (Antrim) | 867.1 | 1 |
| Cork | 876.4 | 1 |
| Daiminis (Fermanagh) | 869.1 | 1 |
| Dairinis (Waterford) | 725.4 | 1 |
| Derry | 724.6 | 1 |
| Dísert Ciaráin Belaig Dúin (Castlekeeran, Meath) | 870.5 | 1 |
| Dom Liacc (Duleek, Meath) | 872.1 | 1 |
| Durrow (Offaly) | 872.8 | 1 |
| Inis Caín Dego (Monaghan) | 855.6 | 1 |
| Inis Cathaig (Scattery Island, Clare) | 796.1 | 1 |
| Láthrach mBriúin (Laraghbryan, Kildare) | 856.7 | 1 |
| Letubae (on the Liffey?) | 773.2 | 1 |
| Liath Mór Mo Chóemóc (Twomileborris, Tipperary) | 752.3 | 1 |
| Loch Cré (Ros Cré) | 807.5 | 1 |
| Linn Duachail (Louth) | 808.2 | 1 |
| Lismore (Waterford) | 856.7 | 1 |
| Lugmad (Louth) | 742.5 | 1 |
| Lynally (Offaly) | 817.2 | 1 |
| Nendrum (Down) | 873.7 | 1 |
| Saiger (Seir Kieran, Offaly) | 869.2 | 1 |
| Tallaght | 874.4 | 1 |
| Tech Tailli (Tehelly, Offaly) | 867.2 | 1 |
| Trim (Meath) | 821.4 | 1 |

It has been demonstrated (Charles-Edwards 2006; Evans 2010: 2) that the earliest annalistic records for the Gaelic world, until *circa* 740, were at least primarily the product of Iona and that this chronicle was subsequently incorporated into the Annals of Ulster. It might be suggested, as a result of this geographic bias, that the annals do not offer a representative sample of all literary activity in the Gaelic world. A representative sample, however, is not required for our purpose. The evidence that the annals do give us is an indication of the networks of information-sharing between ecclesiastical centres during the period, particularly those of *scribae* who appear to have had a role in clerical education. Sparse records for certain centres of ecclesiastical activity are likely to correspond to more sporadic communication between these centres and those in which annalists were working. It is not claimed, therefore, that the annals necessarily offer a realistic and comprehensive indication of the activity of all *scribae* throughout the country, but they do give us a clear indication of which centres were ‘talking’ to each other. Representing the distribution of *scribae* in cartographic terms allows us to start to appreciate the extent of that ‘conversation’ in a more practical way.¹⁴⁵

On the whole, most *scribae*, indeed the vast majority, are recorded for centres east of a line running from Cork to Derry (see Figure 31). As seen in Table 1, however, not all of the monastic centres producing or recording *scribae* do so with the same degree of frequency. The vast majority of monastic centres recording the presence of a *scriba* do so only once throughout the period up to 900, indicating that an analysis based on geographic distribution alone is not sufficient. When those locations for which we have a record of more than one *scriba* are treated separately, the degree to which Armagh stands out from even the other most productive centres is clear (Figure 32). We have already seen that the ecclesiastical centre of Armagh was intimately associated with the Uí Néill (Ó Corráin 2005: 585; Stacey 2007: 223). In fact both Armagh and Clonmacnoise (for which the second largest number of *scribae* is recorded) enjoyed the patronage of different branches of the Uí Néill dynasty

¹⁴⁵ Three *scribae* are labelled in *AU* with the generic ‘Munster’. Two have not been included in the map because they cannot be located any more specifically. The third, Ruben of Dairinis (*AU* 725.4), although not explicitly associated with a monastery in his obit, is known to be associated with the monastery of Dairinis on the banks of the Blackwater in modern county Waterford (Thurneysen 1908: 1-5).

(Sharpe 1982b; Byrne 2001: 91). Significant royal patronage also helps explain the high number of *scribae* at Kildare, the major ecclesiastical centre for the dynasts of Leinster (Byrne 2005a: 671; Ó Corráin 2005: 585).



Figure 31 Distribution of *scribae* in AU up to 900¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ The density of monastic centres in Brega is such that they can not all be clearly represented on the map. See Figure 37 for the distributon of centres in Brega.

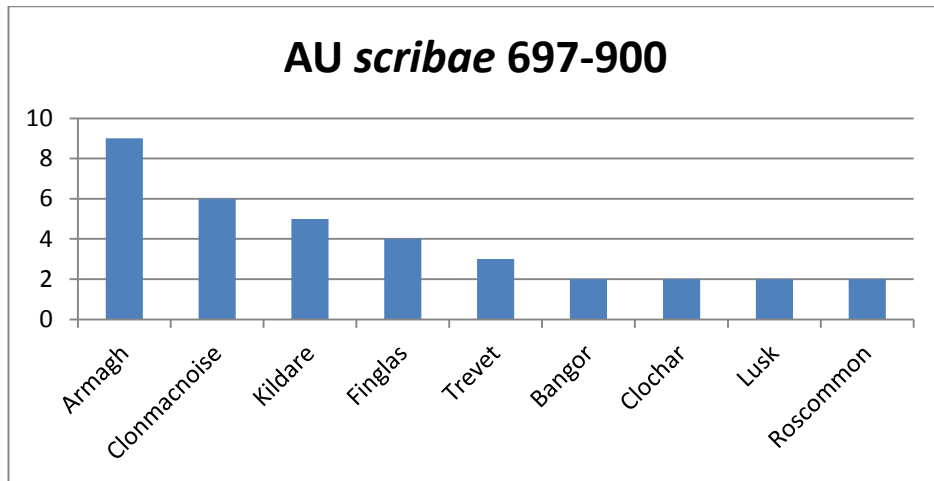


Figure 32 Centres recording multiple *scribae*

When this relative difference in terms of frequency between sites is represented cartographically, the result is somewhat clearer, giving a better sense of the geographic distribution of centres as well as an indication of their relative importance, at least in terms of the recording of *scribae* in the annals (Figure 33).



Figure 33 Distribution of *scribae*, with most productive centres highlighted

These representations, while showing the bare geographic location of centres, do not give us any indication of the cultural and political environment of the time. The rise of the Uí Néill and the attendant change from what Byrne (1971) called a ‘tribal base’ to a dynastic-based political system (discussed further in chapter 6) left the political geography of the country drastically changed in a relatively short period of

time.¹⁴⁷ The result was a political hegemony of the Uí Néill extending from Derry in the north to Durrow in the south. The geographical extent of this political hegemony was outlined by Ó Corráin, see Figure 34.

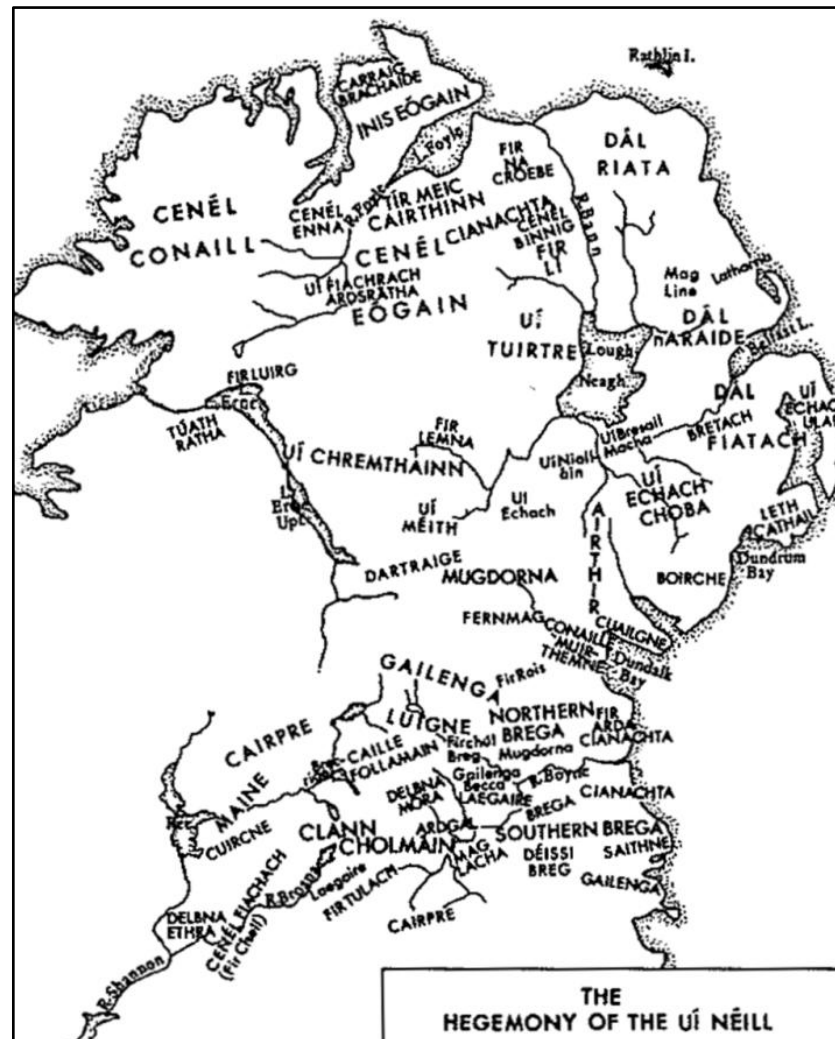


Figure 34 'The hegemony of the Uí Néill' (Ó Corráin 1972)

While Ó Corráin (1972) effectively drew attention to the hegemony of the Uí Néill, Byrne's (1969) earlier map provides a cartographically clearer indication of the geographic extent of this hegemony, taking in, as it does, the areas associated with both the Southern and Northern Uí Néill as well as the Airgíalla and Ulaid (Figure 35):

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 6 for further discussion of the nature of this important transitional period.

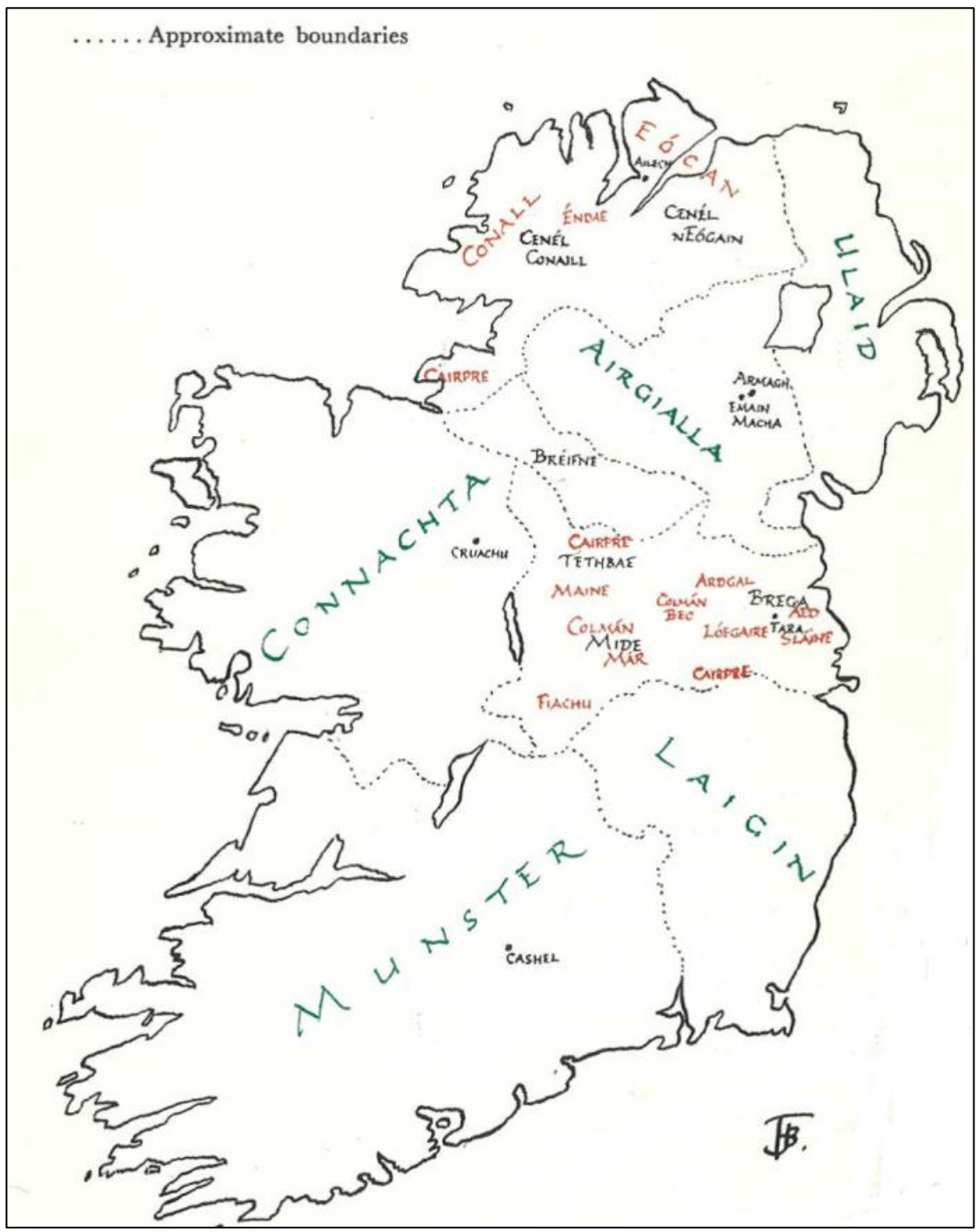


Figure 35 Political boundaries in Ireland circa 800 (Byrne 1969: 10)

It is immediately clear, when one combines the geographic distribution of recorded *scribae* (Figure 31) with the approximate political boundaries of Ireland *circa* 800 (Figure 35), that the preponderance of *scribae* reported in the annals is in the territory described by Ó Corráin as being under ‘the hegemony of the Uí Néill’. In Figure 36 we see a clear distribution of monastic sites with *scribae* in the territory of the Southern Uí Néill, a region ‘stretching from the eastern coast of Dublin to the River Shannon, thus including the northern part of county Dublin, the northwest of county Offaly and the whole of the modern counties of Meath, Westmeath and Longford’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 15). The southern extent of this area of Southern Uí Néill control reached as far south as Birr in modern Co. Offaly, and therefore bordered the province of Munster (Karkov and Ruffing 1997: 349; Smyth 1974: 142), far from the modern bounds of the province of Ulster, the area perhaps most associated with the Uí Néill in the modern mind.



Figure 36 Locations of scribes in AU with Byrne's map (1969) superimposed



Figure 37 Location of scribe in Brega and Mide recorded in AU

Aside from the simple geographic location of centres of scribal activity, when the evidence is probed further, a multiplicity of relationships between individual centres emerges, allowing for the mapping of an elaborate network structure. Carrying on the analogy made earlier, that the annals allow us to gauge the geographic extent of the ‘conversation’, it is clear that although cartographic representation of the geographic extent of the ‘conversation’ is useful it has limits in allowing us to gauge the depth of that conversation. I will now examine some of these inter-institutional relationships in more detail in an effort to set out a rudimentary network structure in which the

norm formation and maintenance relevant to Old Irish as a text language has to have taken place. The evidence outlined above indicates clearly that the role of Armagh in this network structure will be of prime importance. Not only does Armagh have the largest number of recorded *scribae* in *AU*, evidence set out below shows it also had the most extensive network of affiliated and dependent churches which record *scribae*. Armagh's presence was especially strong in the fertile plains of Brega, in the territory of the Southern Uí Néill (Charles-Edwards 2000: 21–2; 2006: 12).

4.5.1 Armagh and her familia

The strong and enduring presence of Armagh in Brega mean that it is sensible to discuss Brega churches affiliated to Armagh. Trevet records three *scribae* in *AU* (739.2, 774.2, 888.3), and Kilmoone records one (*AU* 814.1); both centres, in what is now Meath, were closely affiliated to Armagh.¹⁴⁸ The same is true of the closely associated monasteries of Lusk and Duleek, who together record three *scribae* in the period before 900 (*AU* 697.11; 800.3; 872.1).¹⁴⁹ The monastery of Cell Fhoibrig, also in modern county Meath, which records a single instance of a *scriba* in the period up

¹⁴⁸ Obits contained in *AU* 814.1 and *AU* 888.3 are of further interest in that the *scribae* recorded in them are both described as *máer* 'steward', i.e. an institutional representative of Armagh. If this was also true for other *scribae* recorded in the annals, it may help to explain the high number of instances of a lone *scriba* recorded in the annals for certain centres. That is to say these individual *scribae* may also be representatives of the larger monasteries present in smaller centres. The judicial role of the *scriba* will have made him a likely candidate to become a *máer*, or steward of a smaller church on behalf of the mother-church. In his analysis of the role of the *máer*, Etchingham (1999: 210–14) has shown that he had a judicial role as well as a revenue-collecting role. Examples of individuals in the annals who combined the roles of *máer* and *scriba*, as well as the particular association of the office of *máer* with the *familia* of Armagh (cf. Hughes 1966: 209–10; Charles-Edwards 2000: 256), add another layer of complexity to linguistic norm-maintenance in Old Irish.

¹⁴⁹ An early reference to an affiliation between Duleek and Armagh is found in Tírechán, who associates Duleek with Patrick's disciple Cethiacus (Bieler 1979: 146). Duleek's patron, Cianán, is also mentioned in the Tripartite Life of Patrick, where Patrick blesses him while Cianán is still in his mother's womb (Mulchrone 1939: 96). The endurance of the relationship between Lusk/Duleek and Armagh is confirmed by the obit of a 'steward of Patrick' (i.e. Armagh) in *AU* (929.1), who is also described as a bishop and *scriba* in Lusk and Duleek. It is perhaps not without significance that Lusk, a member of the Patrician *familia*, provides the annals with the earliest occurrence of the term *scriba* (for discussion see Charles-Edwards 2006: 15). We shall see later in this chapter that the *familia* of Armagh also records the first instances of the term *fer léigind* in the late ninth century, a term which would go on to eclipse that of *scriba* in the annals. For further discussion of the close relationship between Lusk and Duleek see Johnston (2013: 120) and Hughes (1966: 162). For the pedigree of the ecclesiastical family associated with Lusk and Duleek see *CGH* (168–9).

to 900 (*AU* 831.1), is also likely to have had some sort of affiliation to Armagh, although its exact nature is not clear.¹⁵⁰

The presence of a single *scriba* in the monastery of Clones, the main church of the Uí Chremthainn dynasty of Airgíalla, which had historically been less than eager to embrace its near neighbour Armagh (McCone 1984: 313), is recorded in the annals (*AU* 840.7). It is significant that this date coincides with a period of approximately two decades when the abbacy of Armagh was being hotly contested, and occasionally won, by the Uí Chremthainn.¹⁵¹ Somewhat similarly, annalistic investigation allows us to adduce that the single pre-900 Clonard *scriba* recorded in the annals (*AU* 830.2) died in the middle of the eight-year period in which Éugan of Mainister held the abbacy of Clonard and Armagh in unison.¹⁵² Instances such as these (along with *AU* 814.1, 888.3) support the notion that the *scriba*, within the *familia* of Patrick, was typically educated at Armagh and was likely to have been an institutional representative of Armagh.

That some sort of long-standing institutional affiliation existed between Lugmad (for which we have the obit of a single *scriba* *AU* 742.5) and Armagh is implied by Adomnán in *VC* (182–3) where the founder of Lugmad is represented as a British disciple of Patrick. It is also clear from the fact that Torbach, the abbot of Armagh responsible for commissioning the Book of Armagh, was the son of an abbot of Lugmad, and Torbach's own son went on to succeed to the abbacy of Lugmad (cf. P. Ó Riain 1994: 32). Hagiographical evidence also indicates that Clochar, for which the presence of two *scribae* is recorded (*AU* 810.1; 869.8), seems to have been a part of Armagh's *familia* from the seventh century onwards (McCone 1984: 310; 313). The monastery of Nendrum, recording a single *scriba* in our period (*AU* 873.7), was also institutionally affiliated to Armagh (P. Ó Riain 2011: 152–3; Charles-Edwards 2000: 27–8).

¹⁵⁰ Robartach, abbot of Cell Fhoibrig, was also the *equonimus* ('church steward') of Slane, as indicated in his obit (*AU* 787.1). The relationship between Slane and Armagh was particularly amicable (Charles-Edwards 2000: 254).

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of the dynastic politics and internal power struggle between Airgíalla dynasties associated with Clochar and Clones at this period see McCone (1984).

¹⁵² For Éugan's obit see *AU* (834.2).

These institutional connections between centres of learning lead to the conclusion that the number of *scribae* directly associated with Armagh in the actual text of the annals is a significant underestimate of the number of *scribae* functioning within the larger *familia* of Patrick in the Old Irish period. Assuming that this is the full extent of the Armagh network, an assumption which is probably overly conservative, the number of *scribae* recorded for the *familia* of Patrick comes to 21, dwarfing its nearest rivals, and more than doubling the number apparent on the first inspection.¹⁵³

4.5.2 Other networks

Armagh is not the only ecclesiastical centre with a web of dependent or associated houses, although it is undoubtedly the most salient. Durrow, Tech Tailli and Lynally are all located within a very short distance of each other in modern Co. Offaly, a region controlled by the Southern Uí Néill during our period. Durrow itself was an important Columban foundation¹⁵⁴ and the *familia* of Iona had a particularly close relationship to the monastery of Aghaboe, a short distance to the south (Charles-Edwards 2000: 123). Although located in the northern territory of the Osraige, Aghaboe was founded by Cainnech, a native of modern Co. Derry. Finglas, a prolific centre of *scribae* throughout the late eighth and ninth century (*AU* 796.1; 812.1; 838.1; 867.2), was originally a daughter-house of Aghaboe (Charles-Edwards 2006: 15).

The monasteries of both Lynally and Láthrach mBriúin (modern Laraghbryan, Co. Kildare), are connected genealogically with the monastery of Connor, in modern Co. Antrim. *AU* records the presence of a *scriba* in all three during the ninth century (*AU* 817.2; 856.7; 867.1). Lynally was founded by Colmán of the Dál Sailni, near Connor, in modern county Antrim (Doherty 1991: 89–90). The Antrim monastery of Connor was, at one time, the leading church east of the Bann (Charles-Edwards 2000: 61–4). A reflex of this genealogical relationship, and evidence for its continued relevance beyond the time of its foundation, is found in the occurrence of annalistic obits for men who had simultaneously been heads of Connor and Lynally,

¹⁵³ For a discussion of the various office holders, including *scribae*, in the church of Armagh during the medieval period more generally see Pettiau (2001).

¹⁵⁴ Durrow was closely associated with Clann Cholmáin of the Southern Uí Néill throughout the eighth century (Clancy 2003–04: 219).

or Connor, Lynally and Laraghbryan.¹⁵⁵ Similar links between Clonmacnoise and other monastic centres exist. Two of the ninth-century ecclesiastical leaders of the monastery of Daiminis on Loch Erne in modern Fermanagh held ecclesiastical office in Clonmacnoise (see *AU* 869.1; 896.8).¹⁵⁶

A similar connection between two of the Munster monasteries recording the presence of *scribae* – Lismore and Cork – is clear from the reference to Daniél, whose death is recorded in *AI* (863). Although not recorded as a *scriba*, he held the abbacy of both monasteries simultaneously (Charles-Edwards 2006: 316, n. 4). To these two Munster monasteries we may add Dairinis the monastery that produced Ruben of *Hibernensis* fame, described simply as *scriba Mumhan* in *AU* (725.4). Dairinis was linked to the nearby monastery of Lismore.

There is only one *scriba* listed in the annals for the Southern Uí Néill monastery of Tech Telli (*AU* 867.2), but a short discussion of this monastic centre highlights the sort of indirect interrelationships that prevailed between monastic houses. Máel Ruain (*AU* 887.7), abbot of Tech Tailli, was also abbot of Dísert Díarmata and Cell Achaid. While *AU* does not explicitly record the presence of a *scriba* in either Dísert Díarmata or Cell Achaid, these relationships are nonetheless informative. Dísert Díarmata, founded in 812, was primarily associated with Bangor in Co. Down¹⁵⁷ through its founder Díarmait ua Áed Róin († 825), the grandson of a king of the Ulaid, who himself is recorded in the annals not as a *scriba* but as *religonis doctor totius Hiberniae*. As to Cell Achaid, it can be noted that *AU* records the death of Robartach, *princeps* of Cell Achaid, an ecclesiastic who was also bishop of Kildare (*AU* 875.1).

4.5.3 The case of Kildare

The case of Kildare warrants specific attention. *AU* records five *scribae* for Kildare, a number exceeded only by Armagh and Clonmacnoise. The situation of Kildare differs from both of these centres in a way which has a fundamental bearing on the

¹⁵⁵ *AU* 778.6 and 867.2 records the deaths of the joint abbot of Connor and Lynally; *AU* 901.2 records the death of the superior of Connor, who was also superior of Lynally and Laraghbryan.

¹⁵⁶ The monasteries of Cell Chuilinn and Cell Manach are also united under the same abbot, recorded in the annals as *scriba* (*AU* 785.1).

¹⁵⁷ On which see Ó Cróinín (2005a: 194) and Johnston (2013: 116, n. 138).

present discussion and requires the presentation of some preliminary historical background. In the seventh century, particularly during the Paschal controversy, Kildare appears to have been a brief but viable threat to the ecclesiastical primacy of Armagh in Ireland (Charles-Edwards 2000: 428–9) with a network of affiliated churches as far away as parts of Ulster (McCone 1984: 321). Yet in contrast with Armagh and Clonmacnoise, there is no indication that Kildare sent *scriba*-emissaries to affiliated houses during the eighth and ninth centuries. Control of Kildare, as pointed out by Byrne (2005a: 671), was ‘essential to any king of Leinster’, and the position of Kildare is therefore tightly bound up with the position of Leinster in contemporary Irish politics in a way which is reminiscent of the relationship between the Uí Néill and Armagh. Through the eighth century Leinster was in a relatively weak position, hemmed in by the Uí Néill to the north and their Éoganachta allies in the west (Charles-Edwards 2000: 579), a fact perhaps reflected in the total absence of a recorded *scriba* in Kildare in the century between 730 and 834. This political situation undoubtedly influenced the ecclesiastical infrastructure and it is towards the end of the eighth century that Kildare essentially surrendered all of its satellite ecclesiastical centres outside Leinster to Armagh in return for the security of those within Leinster. The situation is played out in dramatic terms between Patrick and Brigit in a hagiographical text in the Book of Armagh:

[B]etween holy Patrick and Brigit, the pillars of the Irish, there was so much friendship of love that they had one heart and one mind. Christ accomplished many miracles through him and her. So the holy man said to the Christian virgin: ‘O my Brigit, your paruchia will be reckoned to your rule in your province, but in the eastern and western part it will be in my control’ (McCone 1982: 107).

It is not until the ninth century, a period characterised by an easier relationship with Armagh, that Kildare undergoes something of a renaissance of learning, indicated by a steady stream of recorded *scribae* (AU 834.7; 864.4; 875.1). Under the patronage of the kings of Leinster, Kildare may have been in a position to produce a high number of *scribae* and maintain a significant centre of learning; political and dynastic factors precluded it, however, from adopting the position of dissemination open to Armagh, and to a lesser extent Clonmacnoise.

4.5.4 *The problem of Iona*

There is no doubt that Ó Corráin (1989: 15) is correct in his estimation of Iona and Armagh as ‘the greatest ecclesiastical power-centres in the Irish world’. Iona was, after all, ‘a monastery where there was a deep and sustained interest in the written word’, and ‘[o]ther writings associated with Iona show that it was a centre of energetic literary activity through the seventh century and beyond’ (Clancy and Márkus 1995: 27). Yet Iona, as noted in Ó Néill (2003: 16), ‘highlights a paradox of evidence’ in that no certainly localisable biblical manuscripts survive from there, and as shown above, *AU* provides no evidence for the presence of a *scriba* on Iona.

This situation is all the more remarkable given that our annalistic records until *circa* 740 are reliant on the chronicle kept at Iona (Charles-Edwards 2006: 7; Evans 2010: 2). The lack of recorded *scribae* at Iona may, in part, be attributable to this fact. It is conceivable that the obits of members of the Iona community were more likely to record them in a capacity other than that of *scriba*, the fact that *scribae* nearly always held another important ecclesiastical office might mean that they occur in the annals, up to *circa* 740, under a different description. This would make sense in that the eighth-century practice of the annalists seems to have been for a person to be given only one title conferring high rank (Charles-Edwards 2000: 267). This does not explain the lack of instances from 740 onwards, however. Even members of the larger *familia* of Columba are poorly represented. *AU* records *scribae* in Derry (*AU* 724.6) and Durrow (*AU* 872.8).

Members of the Iona community are recorded as *sapiens*, however. This is the case with Cú Chuimne of Iona, one of the two architects of the *Hibernesis* (Thurneysen 1908), whose death is recorded in the annals (*AU* 747.5). The annals do not, however, specifically link him to Iona. Indrechtach Finnachta, an abbot of Iona killed at the hands of Saxon robbers on his way to Rome, is similarly recorded as a *sapiens optimus* (*AU* 854.3).

4.5.5 Central actor(s) in the network structure?

The preceding discussion highlights the complex scholarly networks of Gaelic ecclesiastical centres during this period. The pedagogical role of the *scriba* referred to above means that these networks played a central role in norm maintenance during the Old Irish period. There is a significant geographic element to these networks, however, one which is focused on the northeastern quarter of the island. L. Milroy (1987) has shown that a network linked with strong network ties which are dense and multiplex functions as a norm enforcer, while loose-knit structures have been argued to promote linguistic variation. A social network can be defined as dense if most of its members keep some relationship with the others. The example used by Conde-Silvestre (2012: 333) to define a dense network is if ‘several individuals from the same network talk about a third or fourth party, it is likely that all of them have some acquaintance with him or her’. The classification of network structure as multiplex or uniplex depends on the social domains in which interpersonal contact is established (Conde-Silvestre 2012: 333). In the context of a monastic community living in close quarters, relationships are likely to have been multiplex. This fact is further emphasised by the multiple roles of individual *scribae* in the annals where they are often also abbots or stewards of monasteries, or bishops, making their relationship with their literate monastic colleagues perhaps the most multiplex of all (for example, *AU* 742.5; 752.3; 774.2; 808.1; 812.1; 817.1; 830.2; 834.7; 856.7; 869.2; 876.4; 891.8). The trends in linguistic networks outlined by L. Milroy (1987) are not limited to linguistic networks; they are found in analyses of all social network structures (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 172) and are, I will argue, equally applicable to literate networks in early medieval Ireland.

The view of Binchy (1943: 209–10), Charles-Edwards (2000: 583) and Mac Cana (2011: 277) among others, that regular interaction between the *literati* from *all* parts of medieval Ireland helped keep the literary language free from dialect, can be viewed as being part of a larger narrative which argues that despite its political disunity, Ireland maintained a cohesive cultural unity ‘created and intellectually enforced by monks and their *fili* allies’ (Johnston 2013: 22). This framework for understanding literacy in early medieval Ireland has been recently criticised by

Johnston (2013: 22–6), who emphasises that the interests of these communities were not fixed for all times in all places. In sociolinguistic terms, we may note that the mobility of the *fili* is not a sufficient explanation for the homogeneity of Old Irish.¹⁵⁸ An important question not dealt with by any of these authors is that the right of the *áes dána* to free movement (see F. Kelly 1988: 46) does not necessarily equate with the ability to move freely around a country where such movement would, in practical terms, remain difficult. In short, from a sociolinguistic perspective, it is very difficult to see how the ‘regular interaction’ of *literati* from all over Ireland might create and sustain a network structure which would be sufficiently ‘dense’ or ‘multiplex’ across the whole of the island to explain the stability of Old Irish as a text language. All this is quite aside from the fact that the vast majority of the Old Irish corpus (i.e. the Old Irish Glosses) has no connection to the composition of poetry and that the traditional explanation finds little support in the annalistic evidence, which clearly indicates a distinct geographic bias in the location of centres of literacy, in their relative productivity, and in their visibility within the network structure.¹⁵⁹

I have noted above that the general terms for a learned man in the annals are either *scriba* or *sapiens*, but that the nature of the recording of the *sapiens* justifies their being excluded from a distributional analysis. Notwithstanding this point, it may be noted that only exceptionally, three times in fact, does the collocation of terms *scriba* and *sapiens* occur in the annals:

AU 831.4: Cernach m. Duncon, **scriba 7 sapiens** 7 sacerdos Airdd Macae, pausait.

AU 846.1: Ferddomnach **sapiens 7 scriba** optimus Airdd Machae [...].

AU 888.2: Mael Patraicc **scriba 7 sapiens** optimus, princeps Treoit 7 maer muintiri Patraicc fri Sliabh andes, quiéuit.

¹⁵⁸ This explanation, which can be traced back to Thurneysen (*GOI*: 12), is another ‘which owes nothing to observation of the way people really behave’ (Penny 2006: 54), one which historical linguistics more generally has come to move away from.

¹⁵⁹ This geographic bias permeates Old Irish literature, not only the Old Irish Glosses (see chapter 5 for discussion). *SM*, the earliest and most prestigious of law texts, was a product of Armagh (L. Breatnach 2011). Much of the Ulster Cycle appears to have been first redacted at Bangor (cf. Ó hUiginn 1992: 62), this also appears to be the case for material in *CDS* (Stifter, forthcoming), and many of the central texts in the Cycle of the Kings quite clearly reflect an Uí Néill bias (cf. Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 102). Similarly, the largest corpus of Old Irish poetry is also the product of southeast Ulster (Carney 1964: xiv).

It is highly significant, I would argue, that all three of these examples are connected with Armagh,¹⁶⁰ in so much as it serves to emphasise, once again, the salience of Armagh as the central and most visible actor in the early medieval Gaelic network of scholarly and literary activity. In terms of prestige then, these factors are indications of the ‘size and lavishness of a given model’s clientele’ as outlined by Henrich and Gil-White (2001: 167–8).

Another example of the leading role of Armagh in the network structure of Gaelic literacy is the emergence of the term *fer léigind* ‘man of learning’ towards the end of the ninth century. The term is only attested twice before 900, on both occasions in relation to scholars from Armagh: *AU* 879 in reference to Mochta, *fer léigind* of Armagh; *AU* 899 Bresal, *fer léigind* of Armagh.¹⁶¹ This term, which emerges first in Armagh, comes to eclipse that of *scriba* in the annalistic record in the tenth century. The apparent rise of the *fer léigind* and the concurrent decline of the *scriba* in annalistic records of the tenth century led the seventeenth-century Franciscan scholar John Colgan to conclude that they were the same office by different names (see Johnston 2013: 124 for discussion). This conclusion was followed and developed by later scholars (cf. Hughes 1958: 243). Johnston’s (2013: 124–6) more subtle analysis of the role and function of the *scriba* as opposed to the *fer léigind* suggests that they were not identical; unlike the *scriba*, the *fer léigind* was largely confined to the wealthier monasteries¹⁶² and, again unlike the *scriba*, the annalists do not, on the whole, charge the *fer léigind* with other ecclesiastical offices. These factors mean that the change in terminology likely reflects an actual change in pedagogical practice and organisation (Herbert 2007: 97; Johnston 2013: 126). What is clear beyond any doubt, however, is that the phenomenon of the *fer léigind* emerges first

¹⁶⁰ The second, Ferdornach, is better known as the scribe of part of the Book of Armagh (Sharpe 1982a). The salience of the Armagh ecclesiastical school is highlighted further in *AU* (852.1) where Díarmait, the successor of Patrick, is described as *sapientissimus omnium doctorum Europe* ‘the most learned of all teachers of Europe’.

¹⁶¹ Johnston (2013: 196) notes the occurrence of the term *fer léigind* in *AI* 809, in relation to an Armagh cleric. This is unlikely to be a contemporary reference; in the corresponding entry in *AU* he is described simply as ‘abbot of Armagh’. See Charles-Edwards (2006: 285, n. 2) for a discussion of a later interpolation in the annalistic record for 827.

¹⁶² A later association with Armagh is indicated when in 1162 a synod declared that only alumni of Armagh’s school could hold the position of *fer léigind* anywhere in Ireland (see *AU* 1162.3).

in Armagh and subsequently, throughout the tenth century, other wealthy monasteries (Clonmacnoise, Kildare and others) follow suit (Johnston 2013: 125).¹⁶³

One focus of network studies in sociology has been to determine and categorize the functional roles of individual network members, typically referred to as ‘actors’ (Bergs 2005: 28). Roles within a network can be defined with respect to different surrounding network structures; a network may have a core with one or more central participant(s). These central participants are prominent actors that are extensively ‘involved’ with other actors. These highly involved central actors have, on average, stronger ties and also more secondary ties than other network members. They tend to gather round them a high density structure and are *visible* to other members of the network. At the level of the individual, rather than at institutional level, this is another reason for focusing on *scribae* in the annals. The fact that *scribae* are so well-recorded in the annals allows us to work on the premise that both within and outside monasteries they are men of whom notice is taken. In other words, as a class of individuals they have the high level of visibility to other members of the network that we would expect from ‘highly involved actors’. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the *scriba* more often than not held an important ecclesiastical office in addition to his role as *scriba*, a fact which no doubt further facilitated his visibility within the network structure of learning. This multi-functionality of the *scriba* is relevant if we refer back to the basic classificatory paradigm for social networks in sociolinguistics; networks are multiplex if interpersonal contact is established in more than one domain (Conde-Silvestre 2012: 333).

At the institutional level, all the evidence suggests that Armagh, throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, was the most central and most visible participant in the scholarly network of the medieval Gaelic world. More than anywhere else, it is at the middle of a network of monastic and scholarly hubs located across the area under the hegemony of the Uí Néill, and, indeed, outside of it. Armagh’s position as a leading centre of scholarship will have ensured its position as a centre for teaching and learning. It is the only centre of learning for which we have a continuous presence of

¹⁶³ The earliest mention of a *scriba* in the annals is in Lusk, part of the *familia* of Armagh (AU 697.11).

scribae throughout the ninth century (AU 808, 814, 831, 846,¹⁶⁴ 852, 888, and 893) and it is in Armagh, at the end of this century, that we see the emergence of the new pedagogical phenomenon of the *fer léigind*, as discussed above. One is reminded of the image described by Ní Dhonnchadha (2010: 547) in her discussion of the East Ulster monastery of Bangor and its Strangford Lough neighbours in the sixth century as ‘radiating ideas’ from the north-east of Ireland. It is easy to imagine that in the course of the seventh century, at a time when the cult of Patrick was also shifting from its original centre in the coastal monasteries of county Down to the emergent power-centre of Armagh, that the intellectual centre of radiation also moved slightly westwards to Armagh, from where the outward ‘radiation’ of ideas continued on an even greater scale, and with increased momentum under the generous patronage of the most politically successful dynasty on the island.¹⁶⁵ In short, Armagh, as the intellectual epicentre of the hegemony of the Uí Néill (cf. Stacey 2007: 223; Wadden 2011), was also the epicentre of literary activity in Ireland for as long as that hegemony lasted and indeed beyond.¹⁶⁶

4.6 Middle Irish: from ‘standard’ to ‘anarchy’?

In their seminal study, Milroy and Milroy (1985: 375) suggested that their observations on the linguistic functions of networks could be of use in diachronic studies of linguistic evolution: ‘A comparison of the social and cultural conditions obtaining in periods of slow and rapid change should cast light on the social motivations of change’. In the case of Irish, we may reasonably ask the question, if the stability of language observed during the Old Irish period is explicable in terms of tight-knit network-induced norm maintenance, whether the converse can be used to explain the high degree of variability to be found in Middle Irish. As Carney (1983: 211) observed, Middle Irish is often thought of ‘as a state of linguistic

¹⁶⁴ This date marks the death of Ferdornach, who at the time of the writing of the book of Armagh in 807 was already a master scribe (Sharpe 1982a: 13). This indicates clearly that Armagh was capable of supporting, and may even have required the presence of more than one *scriba* at a time.

¹⁶⁵ As discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, the seventh century is the period which has been termed by scholars as that of the ‘aggrandisement of Armagh’, on which see de Paor (1971). This involved the appropriation of the cult of Patrick by Armagh; it had formerly centred on Down (Sharpe 1982b).

¹⁶⁶ It is useful at this point to refer to contemporary developments in the Anglo-Saxon world which suggest parallels with the Irish situation. There the successive hegemonies of Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex each occasioned a successive flowering of learning of their own (Toon 1992: 417).

anarchy where anything could happen'. This perspective on the language of the period 900–1200, always in comparison with the relative stability of the earlier period, has led scholars interested in the transition from Old to Middle Irish to write of 'breakdowns', 'deterioration', and 'anarchy':

By the end of the ninth century A.D. the breakdown of the social structure of Ireland made the maintenance of the standardised Old Irish language impossible, and it was not until the end of the twelfth century that a new standard was evolved; for the intervening period, which we call that of Middle Irish, all texts show a mixture of archaizing and innovating forms (Greene 1992: 522).

L. Breatnach (1994: 226) has heavily criticised this interpretation of the evidence. As Breatnach points out, the 'breakdown of the social structure' suggested by Greene to have occurred towards the end of the ninth century pales into insignificance when compared with the breakdown in social structure at the end of the twelfth century, the period in which the Classical 'standard' emerges. Breatnach suggests that the apparent anarchy is partly explicable by the fact that the language of Middle Irish has never been subjected to the sort of modern codification which *GOI* provided for Old Irish.¹⁶⁷ It cannot be doubted, however, that Middle Irish, relative to Old Irish, does present readers with a wide range of variants. Instead of attributing this to the 'anarchy' invoked by others, Breatnach attributes it to the eclectic nature of the literary language itself:

Tá an malartú seo le cur i leith rud éigin eile seachas teanga thranglamach nó mearbhall an údair nó an scríobhaí, is é sin le rá, caithfidh gur teanga liteartha eicléicteach, a ghlac go fairsing le foirmeacha canúnacha, ársa, srl. a bhí sa M[heán] G[haeilge], ar a laghad teanga na filíochta, ar nós na N[ua] G[haeilge] Clasacaí (L. Breatnach 1994: 226).¹⁶⁸

The 'ready acceptance' of a variety of forms in Middle Irish highlighted by Breatnach gives rise to a number of questions. Traditionally, explications of the linguistic change seen in Middle Irish texts have consisted of functional

¹⁶⁷ The only grammar of Middle Irish, besides Breatnach's (1994) outline published in Irish, is that of Dottin (1913), in French and based entirely on the texts of the fifteenth-century *Leabhar Breac*.

¹⁶⁸ My translation: 'This variation is attributable to something other than confusion of language, or uncertainty on the part of the author or scribe. That is to say, Middle Irish must have been an eclectic language, which readily accepted dialectal forms, archaic forms, just like Classical Modern Irish. This is the case at least for the language of poetry'.

explanations.¹⁶⁹ They have not usually sought to address the actuation problem formulated in Weinreich et al. (1968), which asks not how change occurs, but why. For Middle Irish the actuation problem can be summed up as follows: why does the literary language start to allow such a high degree of variation at this chronological stage where it does not seem to have accepted it before?¹⁷⁰ Clarification of this point would greatly add to our understanding of the internal development of the Gaelic languages. As J. Milroy has noted:

in order to define those aspects of change which are indeed endogenous, we need to specify much more clearly than we have to date what precisely are the exogenous factors from which they are separated, and these include the role of the speaker / listener in innovation and diffusion of innovations (J. Milroy 2003: 148).

The association between tight, close-knit networks and the maintenance of linguistic norms has been discussed in detail above. Milroy and Milroy (1985: 359) have also shown that the loosening of such close-knit networks is associated with linguistic change. This is essentially the converse of the suggestion made by Tuten (2003), who associates the ‘crystallisation of new networks’ in medieval Spain with the emergence of new linguistic norms. By its very nature, the breakdown, even partial breakdown, of one network equates directly to the creation of a new network. In this regard it may be best to avoid terms like ‘breakdown’ and ‘creation’ altogether as they suggest a discontinuity between two networks which may not have been felt by members of the network(s). Instead of using these terms we can usefully employ the term ‘renegotiation’ in describing the perpetual and dynamic process of constant change involved in the evolution of network structures.

¹⁶⁹ A recent example of this is found in Stifter (2009: 110) where the transition from Old to Middle Irish is described: ‘Two factors were responsible in major ways to bring about the changes from Old to Middle and then on to Modern Irish. Phonological erosion among unstressed vowels led to the loss of grammatical distinctions and categories which in turn necessitated the restructuring especially of the nominal and pronominal sector. The complexities and redundancies of the Old Irish verbal system lent themselves almost naturally to drastic simplifications and regularizations’. The image suggested in this extract is, to quote J. Milroy (2003: 151), ‘one of an overarching authority (the language) that oversees and regulates changes in order to make itself less liable to ambiguity [...] [T]he agency in this discourse is the language and not the speakers’.

¹⁷⁰ Changing speech patterns alone are not sufficient to account for this; evidence for innovations typically considered to be particular to Middle Irish are to be found in the earliest of the Old Irish Glosses as outliers, indicating that they were current in speech, and hinting that they had not yet received widespread acceptance in the written language (cf. McCone 1985).

The transition to the apparent ‘linguistic chaos of the Middle Irish period’ found in the text language of Middle Irish is likely to have its origins in, indeed must have its origins in, the renegotiation of the network structures which brought about the focusing of the ‘text language’ of Old Irish in the first place. We have seen that, by the eighth and ninth centuries, the prestigious ecclesiastical school of Armagh was, along with its large *familia* of dependent and associated churches, the central actor within this relatively stable network structure. Other visible actors within this network structure were those monastic houses founded in the mid-to-late sixth century: Clonmacnoise, Iona and Bangor. What then was the nature of the renegotiation of networks in the tenth century which led to the emergence of Middle Irish?

Many surveys of the Columban *familia* assume that the construction of the Columban monastery of Kells in the first decades of the ninth century entailed the effective abandonment of Iona (see Clancy 2003–4: 215 for discussion). Herbert (1988: 72) and Clancy (2003–04: 218), however, show clearly that this was not in fact the case. It was not until later in the ninth century, after decades of being ravaged by Viking attacks, that the political influence and ecclesiastical position of Iona was reduced to relative insignificance. The decline of Iona was such that by the end of the tenth century the *familia* of Columba in Ireland had entered into an association with the *familia* of Patrick, ‘with the latter apparently the dominant partner’ (Herbert 1989: 72). The *urbs* of Armagh appears to have had the capacity to regenerate itself almost immediately after Viking attacks (Ó Corráin 1972: 108–9; 2005: 599), in a way which would never have been feasible for a small and vulnerable island-based monastic community, no matter how prestigious or intellectually active. The decline in the influence of Iona was as much a result of political factors as anything else, however:

The fact that Kenneth [mac Alpin] chose Dunkeld as his chief ecclesiastical centre was undoubtedly a blow to Iona prestige. Thus from the mid-ninth century, as the focus of secular and ecclesiastical rule in Scotland moved eastward, Iona’s association with the centre of power declined. Yet Kenneth mac Alpin was not unmindful of the legacy of Colum Cille’s influence. Dunkeld was placed under the saint’s patronage,

and relics, real or alleged, are said to have been transferred to the church from Iona (Herbert 1988: 72).

Iona is not the only major centre of learning to fall into decline in this period; Bangor also saw a sharp fall in its fortunes. The last *scriba* recorded for the monastery of Bangor, Céile, died on pilgrimage to Rome in 929 (*AU* 929.1), but the monastery appears to have failed to ever produce a *fer léigind*.¹⁷¹ The case of Bangor, not unlike that of Iona, is at least partly explicable in terms of patronage, or lack of patronage:

[Bangor was] in an excellent position for the very early development of a scriptorium, and her Antiphony is one of our earliest surviving manuscripts. During the eighth century more scribes' obits are recorded for Bangor than for any other Irish house,¹⁷² but in the ninth century the weakness of her position becomes apparent [...] The explanation for Bangor's failure to develop in the ninth century and her collapse in the tenth may be found [...] in the narrow limitations of her financial resources (Hughes 1958: 259–60).

Throughout the Old Irish period Armagh's daughter houses were to be found across a wide geographic spread, with a particularly high density on the fertile plains of Brega. Any expansionist aspirations of Bangor's, along with any attendant financial benefits, appear to have been mostly limited to the monastery of Apur Crosan (Applecross), on a remote (in Irish terms) peninsula of northwest Scotland.¹⁷³

The disappearance of major actors such as Iona and Bangor is not the only sort of network renegotiation taking place by the start of the Middle Irish period, however. The drastic decline in the obits of *scribae* from around 900, one which veers towards the terminal after 950, is accompanied by the emergence of the term *fer léigind*, signalling a new departure in terms of the transmission of literacy in monastic schools:

¹⁷¹ As discussed above, the reign of the *scriba* in Gaelic monasteries was coming to an end by this period so one would not expect the presence of a *scriba* after this point.

¹⁷² This may not be true. While there are numerous eighth-century references to Bangor in *AU*, perhaps more than to any other Irish establishment, only once is a *scriba* specifically mentioned as being attached to Bangor in *AU* (730.9). Hughes is followed in this erroneous claim by Stevenson (1987–8: 212) and Hamlin (1997: 51). This does not detract from Bangor's position as a prestigious centre of learning, particularly in the seventh and eighth centuries. Hughes's (1958: 261) assessment of Bangor as 'a great scriptorium and a centre of ecclesiastical studies, but only for about two centuries' remains accurate.

¹⁷³ The foundation of Apur Crosan is recorded in *AU* 673.5.

[T]he ninth and tenth centuries witnessed substantial increases in the power, prestige and wealth of the overkings. Their patronage, always a factor, must have played a major role among ecclesiastical institutions, especially as royal wealth and revenue increased. Wealth was more concentrated, too, meaning that regional overkings became relatively more important as well as wealthier and, as the royal conference of 859 illustrated, elite secular and ecclesiastical interests frequently coincided. Simultaneously, the lessening in prestige of local lordships was surely a heavy blow to the patronage networks of the smallest churches, and in the long run propelled the wealthiest monasteries towards a fuller dominance. This may well have resulted in a concomitant decrease in the resources and importance of those smaller churches that had boasted so many *scribae*. It is arguably significant that a number of small churches that produced ecclesiastical scholars and *scribae* in the ninth century failed to do so in the tenth. This would tie in well with the factors that gave rise to *fir léigind*, factors of institutional supremacy [...] The ascendancy of Armagh and Clonmacnoise as teaching centres in the tenth century is reflected in a succession of *fir léigind*. They signal a concentration of the control of high-level literacy in a few centres (Johnston 2013: 127).

A number of factors observed by Johnston will have had profound effects on the network structure associated with vernacular literacy during the Middle Irish period. Firstly, the disappearance of smaller centres of learning from the pedagogical landscape is significant. Most of those centres which record only one *scriba* do so during the ninth century. Of these, most are associated in some way or another with larger federations, of which we have seen Armagh was by far the largest. From the point at which the *fir léigind* emerge from the annalistic record, and throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, *fir léigind* are mostly confined to the larger monasteries of Armagh, Clonard, Clonmacnoise, Glendalough, Kildare and Leighlenn.¹⁷⁴

Further comment must be made on the position of *fer léigind* itself because while it was noted earlier that the position of *scriba* was often held in conjunction with another senior ecclesiastical office, this was not the case for the *fer léigind* (see also Johnston 2013: 125). His sole charge appears to have been ‘to maintain teaching and scholarship’ (Herbert 2007: 97). Part of the justification for classifying Old Irish linguistic networks as tight-knit and cohesive is that the *scriba* often also held another position within a monastery, making his relationships with fellow scholars

¹⁷⁴ This does not include those centres which record the presence of a *fer léigind* only once, for which see Johnston (2013: 196–8).

multiplex. Many also straddled institutions, often acting as the representative of the head house of the *familia*, as we have seen. The evidence points to the decline of the *scriba* and concurrent emergence of the *fir léigind* as an indication of a real change in pedagogical organisation throughout the Gaelic world, one characterised by centralisation and consolidation. This has obvious implications for our understanding of the emergence of Middle Irish. Herbert (2007: 96–8) has argued that this centralising tendency signals an interruption in scholarly productivity during the Viking activity of the ninth and tenth centuries. Johnston (2013: 112; 128), on the other hand, has suggested that the contraction of Latin learning, reflected in the demise of both the *scriba* and the *sapiens*, is suggestive of a new focus of scholarly activity during this period. This change, Johnston argues, may partly be attributed to the availability of generous patronage for Irish composition at home.¹⁷⁵ Herbert (2007: 98) links what she sees as the ‘resumption of learned activity’ in the late tenth and early eleventh century to the emergence of two successful kings: Máel Sechnaill of the Uí Néill and Brian Borúma of Dál Cais. Competition between the two had positive results for centres of learning as both sought to gain the favour of the *literati* by dispensing patronage on monastic schools (Herbert 1989: 72–3; Ó Corráin 1973).

The implications of the evidence are that in the period between approximately 850 and 950, network links between practitioners of Irish literacy underwent large-scale changes. By the Middle Irish period these networks were not as tight-knit and relationships between actors tended to be less multiplex than previously had been the case. This coincided with an increase in the number of actors, an expansion in their geographic distribution and an expansion of the domains in which Irish was used.¹⁷⁶ Not only does the number of Middle Irish texts contained in contemporary manuscripts increase drastically, when compared with the small corpus of Old Irish, the geographic range of their origins also increases greatly in the Middle Irish period (see L. Breatnach 1994: 222–5 and chapter 5). We know the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer to have been written in the extreme northeast of the Gaelic world, Aberdeenshire, in the mid-twelfth century (Jackson 1972; Ó Maolalaigh 2008). At

¹⁷⁵ Hughes (1958: 266–7) has pointed out that from the late ninth century onwards, the obits of poets and historians, both associated with vernacular learning, become markedly more common.

¹⁷⁶ Dumville (1982: 330) has noted the drastic increase of the use of Irish in the annals from 939 onwards, for instance.

the same time, and earlier, contemporaneous annalistic entries were being made in Middle Irish in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, compiled in the southeast Munster monastery of Lismore, in modern county Waterford.¹⁷⁷ These two texts show the extreme geographic distribution of texts during this period. Significantly, both sets of Middle Irish texts have been shown conclusively and clearly to contain a number of linguistic features associated specifically with the twentieth century dialects of areas close to which they were written,¹⁷⁸ leading one to conclude that such dialect features were already current in the speech of the Middle Irish period.¹⁷⁹

While former centres of literary activity such as Iona and Bangor declined, others were on a steep ascent. Glendalough, for instance, had been a monastic settlement of significance by the eighth century (Mac Shamhráin 1996: 3) but it is not until the tenth century that it first emerges in the annalistic record as a centre of scholarly activity (Mac Shamhráin 1989: 93–4). The rapid ascent of Glendalough as a centre of scholarship would continue throughout the rest of the Middle Irish period (cf. Byrne 1984: xxii; 1987: 21, 40; P. Ó Riain 1981: 174–5), finding its fullest expression in the great Middle Irish manuscript compilation known as *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha*.¹⁸⁰ The other large manuscript codex of the Middle Irish period, known as the Book of Leinster, has been argued to be of Loígis (around the area covered by the modern county of Laois) provenance, and is most closely associated with the monastery of Clonenagh (Schlüter 2010: 224). Like Glendalough, Clonenagh is an early foundation but does not appear as a centre of scholarship in the Old Irish period at all. In contrast to the contraction and restriction of the Old Irish period, Leinster in the Middle Irish period is a polity characterised by ‘remarkable cultural self-

¹⁷⁷ Although the *Annals of Inisfallen* are named for the West Munster monastery in which the chronicle would subsequently be kept, it is clear that until the mid-twelfth century the *Annals of Inisfallen* were most closely associated with Lismore, in modern county Waterford. For further discussion see Mac Airt (1951: xxviii–xxxi). K. Hughes (1958: 268) notes that from the late ninth century the entries in *AI* become ‘fuller’, indicating an increase in, and possibly expansion of, literary activity in Lismore around this period.

¹⁷⁸ The case of the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer is more complex because Gaelic in recent centuries has not been spoken in the area in question. Rather, Ó Maolalaigh’s (2008) analysis highlights linguistic features which link the Gaelic of the notes to the modern dialects spoken in the east of Scotland.

¹⁷⁹ On this see Ó Maolalaigh (2008) and C. Breatnach (1990).

¹⁸⁰ P. Ó Riain (1981) identified this manuscript with that now known as Rawlinson B502, an identification which was subsequently vigorously rejected by C. Breatnach (1997), giving rise to a debate yet to be resolved. What is beyond any doubt, however, is that *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha* was one of the great manuscript compilations of the Middle Irish period.

confidence' (Byrne 1987: 21). Both of these great Middle Irish manuscripts can be viewed as manifestations of this confidence.

The prestige associated with Armagh in the Old Irish period endured into the Middle Irish period, however, in a variety of domains: political, scholarly and literary. Notwithstanding the endurance of its prestige, the scholarly network of which Armagh was the centre was greatly changed from that of the Old Irish period.¹⁸¹ The use of Armagh by Brian Borúma and other aspiring kings highlights its enduring political symbolism throughout this period.

Irish kings like Brian, therefore, who became benefactors of Armagh were associating themselves with what was a centre of religion and learning for people from both Ireland and Scotland, the classic illustration of which was the gesture made in 1169 by the then king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, to provide a perpetual grant of 'ten cows every year from himself, and from every king [of Ireland] that should succeed him, for ever, to the lector of Armagh, in honour of St Patrick, to instruct in learning the students of Ireland and Scotland' (Duffy 2013: 145)

As Charles-Edwards (2006: 288, n. 3) has noted, the perpetual grant to the lector of Armagh is indicative of its 'leading position in clerical education'. This incident reminds us that the cultural theory of prestige formulated in Henrich and Gil-White (2001: 182) predicts that prestigious individuals will see 'an asymmetrical flow of 'perks' in their favour' and that they are usually also excused from certain social obligations. A similar indication of the scholarly prestige still associated with Armagh in the Middle Irish period is the creative way in which the hereditary scholarly family of Meic Cuinn na mBocht, hereditary scribes of Clonmacnoise, concocted a genealogy for themselves associating themselves with Armagh (Ó Corráin, forthcoming). Indeed if we refer to one of the great Middle Irish manuscripts, *Lebar na hUidre*, the compilation of which involved the scribal family of Meic Cuinn na mBocht, we see again the role of Armagh as a source of scholarly authority:

¹⁸¹ The internal circumstances of Armagh had also changed. The centralisation of pedagogical function associated with the *fer léigind* and discussed by Johnston (2013: 127 and Herbert (2007: 96–8) largely came about during the period when Clann Sínaich held the abbacy of Armagh. This period corresponds to an increased interest in secular learning at Armagh (see Ó Mainnín 2009: 79–82).

Fland tra 7 Eochaid eolach hua Céirín is iat ro thinolsat so a llebraibh Eochoda hui Flandacan i nArd Macha 7 a llebraib Manistrech 7 asna lebraib togaidib archena .i. asin Libur Budi testo asin carcar i nArd Macha 7 asin Libur Girr boí i mManistir 7 is side ruc in mac legend leis i ngait dar muir 7 ni frith riam di éis.

It was Flann and Eochaid eolach ua Céirín who put this together from the books of Eochaid ua Flannacáin in Armagh and from the books of Monasterboice, and from other excellent books. That is, from the Yellow Book missing from the safe-room at Armagh, and from, the Short Book which was in Monasterboice, i.e. that which the student took with him in theft across the sea, and never found thereafter.¹⁸²

4.7 Conclusion

From the perspective of cultural theory, we have seen that a limited number of centres of high literary and scholarly prestige existed in the early medieval Gaelic world in the period 600–900: Iona, Armagh, Bangor, Clonmacnoise and Kildare. The most important of these are all located in the area which, during the period 600–900, was under the hegemony of the Uí Néill.¹⁸³ These monastic centres are the only possible cohesive network which was sufficiently ‘dense’ and ‘multiplex’ to allow for the development of a text language as homogeneous as Old Irish. Within this ecclesiastical and intellectual network structure, the central role of Armagh during the period is of great significance. It should be stressed that the most important factor in attributing this status to Armagh is not its position as *primus inter pares* in the island’s ecclesiastical infrastructure; it is due to the prestige that Armagh enjoyed as a centre of learning. Undoubtedly, the two are related; but it is the latter which is of relevance for the present sociolinguistic argument. The political dominance of the Uí Néill is a direct result of their political success. Another result of this success was their patronage of centres of learning such as Clonmacnoise and Iona, but most especially Armagh.

¹⁸² The Gaelic text is from *LU* (2919–24), the translation is my own. The Flann cited by the scribe in *LU* is none other than Flann Mainistreach, *fer léigind* of Monasterboice, in modern county Louth (Herbert 2007: 93). Flann Mainistreach’s connections with the school of Armagh are multifarious (Carey 2004, *ODNB*, s.v. Flann Mainistrech (d. 1056)); he is mentioned in one mid-eleventh century poem as one of four churchmen considered external associates of Armagh (Murphy 1944: 155, 160, see also Herbert 2007: 93).

¹⁸³ Iona, although located in Scottish Dál Riata is intimately associated with the Uí Néill throughout its history (see Herbert 1988).

At the outset of this chapter the main methodological task of historical sociolinguistics, as given by Romaine (1988: 1697), was set out: ‘to develop a set of procedures for the reconstruction of language in its social context and to use the findings of sociolinguistics as controls in the process of reconstruction and as a means of informing theories of change’. The socio-historical evidence when combined with what we know about the nature of linguistic networks and the process of language focusing would suggest that the driving force behind Old Irish was not the dominance of the Uí Néill as such, but the extent to which a tight-knit and cohesive network of monastic centres and prestigious ecclesiastical schools sprung up within the geographic bounds and relative social stability¹⁸⁴ created by the Uí Néill’s political hegemony. While this political hegemony may have been loose by modern standards, it was relatively stable and the ties connecting the centres of learning contained therein were multiplex and dense. They had all the characteristics of a network in which one would expect strong linguistic norm-maintenance. The genesis of this network, I have argued, is likely to have been the foundation of the monastic centres such as Bangor, Clonard, Clonmacnoise and Iona in the sixth century. But it was the ‘aggrandisement’ of Armagh in the seventh century that gave it its most important, most wealthy, most influential and most prestigious actor. What we might usefully call the expansion and renegotiation of this network structure in the period around 900 accounts for the variation permissible in Middle Irish, the product of a new and looser network without the strong norm-enforcement associated with the earlier period.

This chapter has argued strongly for the relevance of network structures for norm-formation and maintenance in Old Irish. In doing so this chapter, along with the following chapter, tests Labov’s (1974a: 827) assertion that many of the long-standing problems of historical linguistics can be resolved only if one is willing to make use of principles drawn from sociolinguistic research. The application of these sociolinguistic frameworks to Old Irish is entirely novel but offers the potential to move scholarship beyond the status quo which sidesteps the issues around the

¹⁸⁴ Stacey (2007: 215) notes the ‘historical fact that Munster’s polity was considerably more fragmented than was that of the north and midlands; certainly the Éoganacht federation was broader and more diffuse than was that of the Uí Néill’.

homogeneity of Old Irish altogether. The conclusion reached in this chapter can be summarised as follows: the only sociolinguistically viable explanation for the sort of norm-maintenance which pertained in Old Irish during the eighth and ninth centuries is to be found within the prestigious network of literary activity centred on the school of Armagh.

5. Modern and medieval codification of Early Irish

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter focused on the socio-cultural context of literacy in early medieval Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. In doing so, reference was made to Old Irish as a text language. What exactly is meant by the linguistic label ‘Old Irish’ will now be explained and expanded upon. In both explaining and expanding on that label, this chapter reconsiders the textual evidence upon which our understanding of Old Irish rests. Thurneysen (*GOI*: 4–7), in compiling *GOI*, drew evidence from a very limited number of texts, which he identifies as:

1 The Würzburg Glosses (Wb.)

2 The Milan Glosses (Ml.)

3 The Turin Glosses (Tur.)

In his analysis these texts were supplemented by a number of what Thurneysen (*GOI*: 6) terms ‘shorter sources’:

4 The Book of Armagh (Arm.)

5 The St Gall Glosses (Sg.)

6 The St Paul Manuscript in Carinthia (St Paul)

Thurneysen is very clear that it is on this corpus that his grammar is based: ‘The present work is based primarily on the above sources, and thus treats in the main of the language of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth’ (*GOI*: 7).¹⁸⁵ The standard of these texts has been the yard-stick against which all subsequent Irish literature is dated, and these constitute the corpus on which we are mainly reliant for our direct knowledge of the language of the Old Irish period. The corpus is primarily

¹⁸⁵ Thurneysen’s assignment of prominence to Tur. and not to Sg. is somewhat anomalous; the largest collections of glosses are those of Würzburg, Milan and St Gall, as discussed below. McCone (1985: 85) has referred to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Würzburg and Milan Glosses. Turin is a very small collection by comparison.

made up of interlinear and marginal glosses on Latin texts with shorter fragments of prose and verse.¹⁸⁶ Although linguistic forms consonant with the Old Irish of the glosses are to be found in the great manuscripts of the Middle Irish period they occur there in an admixture of Old and Middle Irish (McCone 1994: 61–2; cf. Laing and Lass 2006: 424). The materials collated in *GOI*, on the other hand, are found in manuscripts of the Old Irish period and have not been transmitted by later (and potentially modernising) scribes (cf. *GOI*: 8). This is the reason for our reliance on them. This reliance has drawn comment from a number of scholars. Dumville (1997: 29), writing of Würzburg, Milan, and St Gall, goes so far as to state that ‘the normative grammar and linguistic history of Old Irish have rested for almost 150 years on the contents of these three books’. Although this is almost certainly an overstatement, Dumville’s claim does serve to highlight the extent of scholarly reliance on these texts. Russell (2005: 440), for instance, when outlining the possible avenues for investigating dialectal variation in Old Irish asserts that ‘we have the evidence of three corpora of glosses with which to work [Würzburg, Milan, and Saint Gall]’.

Indeed, Mac Eoin (1982: 109) noted that the codification of Old Irish grammar by early scholars of the Celtic languages, from Zeuss through to Thurneysen, lent to it ‘an appearance of consistency and regularity which the original sources do not quite warrant’. This observation calls for further historiographical comment on the intellectual milieu from which the study of Gaelic philology emerged in the century from 1850 to 1950.

5.2 Neogrammarian influence

Many of the scholars referred to by Mac Eoin as having given Old Irish an unwarranted appearance of regularity and consistency were intellectually influenced by the Neogrammarian approach to historical linguistics (on which see McMahon 1994: 17–24). Developed in German-speaking universities in the late nineteenth century, this movement set the foundation for the study of Early Irish philology (cf. McCone 1996: 40). As an intellectual development, the Neogrammarian hypothesis

¹⁸⁶ The individual sources used by Thurneysen in *GOI* will be discussed in greater detail below.

was primarily associated with the University of Leipzig (Bynon 1978: 23), where Thurneysen himself was a student between 1876 and 1879, and from where he obtained his doctorate.¹⁸⁷ Thurneysen, undoubtedly influenced by his time in Leipzig, not to mention current intellectual trends in linguistic thought more generally, became a staunch proponent of the Neogrammarian hypothesis (Tristram 2013: 201, 208, cf. Thurneysen 1882: 5; 1905: 29).¹⁸⁸ The Neogrammarian approach focused on the regularity of sound changes and posited ‘clear sets of innovations that systematically distinguished clusters of languages (or dialects, for that matter) as separate and distinct from other clusters’ (Joseph 2012: 415).

One of the ways in which the Neogrammarian hypothesis made itself felt in Celtic philology and textual analysis was through what came to be known as the proportional dating method. The underlying assumption was a linguistic unidirectionality, reliant on the proposition that transition from one linguistic form to another took place at a regular rate and could be measured quantitatively. The application of the method provided a supposedly secure dating technique for medieval texts:

Accordingly, a text in which the old and new forms were equally represented should have been written half-way through the period of change, and a text containing 60% old forms, let us say, should be older than one containing 40% (Mac Eoin 1982: 135).¹⁸⁹

These assumptions are not unlike those underlying glottochronology (see chapter 2 for discussion). One of a number of inherent weaknesses of the proportional dating method is that it ignores the personal preferences, linguistic training or intentions of the scribe and/or author, not to mention dialect. In this sense, like so much of the Neogrammarian hypothesis, the proportional dating method assumed a uniformity and regularity never exhibited by natural language. Its application to medieval Irish

¹⁸⁷ I am grateful to Dr Brian Ó Catháin for sharing this information with me.

¹⁸⁸ The work of Zeuss (1806–1856) largely predated the emergence of the Neogrammarian movement. He belonged to the initial phase of Indo-European philology, one which focused on the collection and descriptive comparison of historical language data. The Neogrammarian movement, which followed that initial phase, sought explanations of language change which were comparable with explanations in the natural sciences (Wischer 2012: 1330).

¹⁸⁹ For an example of this method in application, see M. Dillon (1937).

language texts has been heavily, and quite justly, criticised by a number of scholars (Mac Niocaill 1968; Mac Eoin 1982: 135; McCone 1996: 35).¹⁹⁰

Underpinned by the same basic principles discussed above, the genealogical implications of the Neogrammarian understanding of language change had a profound impact on Gaelic historical dialectology. These genealogical implications were visually reinforced by the emergent use of *Stammbaum* graphs, or ‘tree models’, pioneered by August Schleicher (1821–1868) in his mid-nineteenth century works on Germanic and its place in the Indo-European classificatory system (see Figure 38).

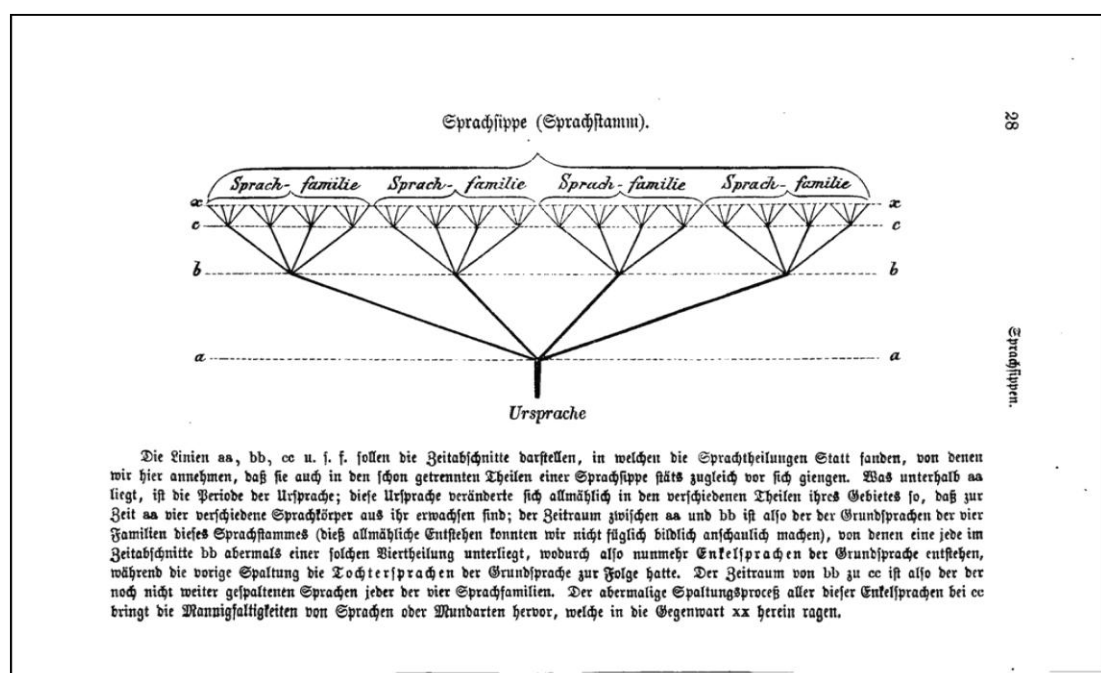


Figure 38 August Schleicher's *Die Deutsche Sprache* 1871

¹⁹⁰ See Jackson (1990: xxii) for what McCone (1996: 35) considers an unsuccessful attempt at the rehabilitation of the method.

These genealogical representations, in turn, influenced and were influenced by emergent theories of biological evolution (cf. Penny 2000: 21, 224, n. 18).¹⁹¹ Much of the nineteenth-century interest in comparative philology was born of a concern to map lines of ethnological kinship (Alter 1999: 31–2). Little wonder, then, that these two disciplines would develop in tandem and influence one another:

Comparative philology [...] embodied a distinctive kind of historical vision, one that was not merely genetic but genealogical. That is, the new discipline was built around the idea of branching descent from a common ancestor (Alter 1999: 2)

For Gaelic dialects, the genealogical element of this theory of linguistic development is especially relevant and was fundamental in both O’Rahilly’s (*IDPP*) and Jackson’s (*CG*) understanding of the historical development of (and dialectal variation in) the Gaelic languages. The resultant schema may be illustrated by the following outline, taking the twentieth-century dialect of West Kerry Irish as our example. The emergence of a distinctive West Kerry Irish must post-date the emergence of proto-Munster Irish from which it is descended. This proto-Munster Irish dialect itself must post-date a homogeneous ‘Irish’ variety of Gaelic, the emergence of which must post-date the ‘Common Gaelic’ period (cf. Jackson 1976: xxix). In other words the assumption is that internal variation did not arise in Munster until there had been a ‘split’ between Ulster, Munster and Connacht, and that this would not have happened until the Irish and Scottish ‘branches’ diverged.¹⁹²

The confluence of these developments in historical linguistics and evolutionary biology, respectively, suggested that the historical development of a language into dialects could be represented by discrete branching nodes. When applied to languages which are well separated in time and space this principle is largely sound (cf. Penny 2000: 22). However, even then this representation is to be recognised as an abstract and vast simplification. That subtlety has, historically, not always been recognised by philologists and the influence of linguistic Darwinism on Gaelic

¹⁹¹ For a critique of the influence of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory on subsequent scholarly understanding of medieval Gaelic law and society more generally see Patterson (1994: 5–6, 20–30), where some of the findings of twentieth-century anthropological fieldwork are instead applied to early medieval Ireland.

¹⁹² As discussed in chapter 1, O’Rahilly (1932: 259–61) clearly saw the dialects of Munster as forming a branch distinct from those of Ulster and Connacht.

philology and historical linguistics has been profound.¹⁹³ In an attack on the enduring influence of these ideas, Ó Buachalla castigated those Gaelic scholars he thought did not recognise the tree method for what it was: a convenient but greatly simplified abstraction:

There is also a danger (and Irish scholars are particularly prone to this) that we assume that the chronological demarcations we have – from Old Irish to Middle Irish to Classical Irish to Modern Irish – that these [*sic*] constitute a direct genetic line of descent [...] Although we are dealing with diachronic identities, the process is not one of genetic descent (Ó Buachalla 1982: 429).

Further, he questioned the assumption that the language of a particular set of texts could be taken as being representative of the totality of the language of the period:

The common fallacy, then, of projecting the language of, for instance, the Old-Irish Glosses or the language of *Saltair na Rann* as being totally and absolutely representative of ‘the language’ of their respective eras must, at least, be questioned and, most probably, totally rejected (Ó Buachalla 1982: 430).

Subsequent research has shown that we should indeed reject the Neogrammarian-inspired notion of an earlier variation-free stage of Gaelic (Ó Maolalaigh 1995–6; 2008; cf. Labov 1974b: 225) from which all modern dialects descend directly; and yet the Old Irish sources are remarkably homogeneous. The following question arises: is it possible to square the apparent homogeneity of the glosses with the theoretical expectation of greater variety in the Old Irish period? In order to do so one must first examine the sources from which knowledge of Old Irish is derived.

5.3 Old Irish: the sources

In order to address this question we must first re-examine the background – social, intellectual and geographical – of the Old Irish Glosses themselves. A reliance on texts, of course, limits the degree of variation one can reasonably expect: ‘written language tends to be more conservative, normative and formal than oral language’

¹⁹³ Ó Dochartaigh (1976: 318) places O’Rahilly ‘clearly within the *Stammbaum* tradition of historical linguistics in his appeal to outside factors and population movements to explain most of the phenomena of change’. This is ‘the old Neogrammarian strategy of talking about dialect borrowings as an explanation for the unsystematic appearance of dialect facts’, as described by Kretzschmar (2002: 86).

(Hernández-Campoy and Schilling 2012: 68). These constraints are greater for Early Irish as the range of sociolinguistic variables is less than, say, the case of contemporary written English, where literacy is widespread across both geographic and social axes. Our concern is the output, in Irish, of literate men – at this period a very small subset of the population. Moreover, it is likely that they would have been drawn from a relatively homogeneous social milieu. Ó Corráin (1972: 84) has shown that the leading ecclesiastical (and therefore scholarly) families were ‘drawn mainly and constantly recruited from the less successful segments of ruling houses’ (see also Etchingham 1999: 1; F. Kelly 1988: 39–40), at a time when Gaelic society was highly stratified in social terms (F. Kelly 1988: 7–10). This means that, in form, Old Irish has its origins in the sociolect(s) of the ruling class.¹⁹⁴ The Old Irish Glosses, then, are invariably the product of upper-class adult male clerics literate in Latin.¹⁹⁵ In terms of their function, it must be remembered that the Old Irish Glosses are the product of monastic schools where they were pedagogical tools: they are the work of scholars, written for the benefit of scholars (Richter 2002: 65).

Since the compilation of *GOI*, progress has been made not only in purely linguistic terms but also in terms of our textual knowledge of the palaeographic and historical origins of the Old Irish Glosses themselves, of which there are over 16,300.¹⁹⁶ The three main collections of glosses (Würzburg, Milan, St Gall) will be dealt with below as well as the much smaller Turin collection and the Old Irish material contained in the *Book of Armagh* and the St Paul codex in Carinthia.

5.3.1 St Gall Glosses

The St Gall corpus (Sg.) consists of glosses on Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae*, a monumental sixth century synthesis of Latin and Greek grammatical tradition. The manuscript contains just over 3,400 interlinear and marginal glosses in Old Irish, with an even greater number in Latin (Hofman 1996: 17). This collection of glosses,

¹⁹⁴ Charles-Edwards (1993: 79) discusses the practice of fosterage among the ruling classes and the role of education as one of its principal functions (the other being the formation of political alliances). It is likely that fosterage among the ruling elite contributed to the maintenance of a type of sociolect amongst the upper classes.

¹⁹⁵ Similar constraints for Middle English are set out in Laing (2004: 51).

¹⁹⁶ The figure of 16,300 is that of the nineteenth century Italian scholar Ascoli, cited in Carney (2005: 491).

more than any other, is ‘an accretion of material from many different strata’ (Stifter 2013: 166, see also *GOI*: 6).¹⁹⁷ The main body of the glosses, in both Latin and Old Irish, are the product of two scribes/copyists, neither of which was the scribe of the main text of the manuscript (Hofman 1996: 17–8).¹⁹⁸

As to the provenance of the manuscript, F. J. Byrne (1984: xix; 2005a: 663) has suggested, based on the marginal invocations of and prayers to a saint named Díarmait (presumed by Byrne to be Díarmait ua Áed Róin whose death is recorded in *AU* 825.2), that they were written in Dísert Díarmata (Castledermot) in modern county Kildare. The monastery of Castledermot was closely connected with Bangor in county Down, from whence the Ulster prince Díarmait had come to found his monastery in Leinster (see chapter 4 for further details). More recently, however, Hofman (1996: 22) has presented a compelling case for locating the glossator in Bangor itself, or potentially in the island monastery of Nendrum, close by, an identification which has largely been accepted (Dumville 1997: 25; Schrijver 1998: 112; Wodtko 1998: 91; L. Breatnach 1999: 159; Richter 2002: 70).¹⁹⁹ The glosses seem to have been entered into the manuscript shortly after the writing of the main text *circa* 851 (Ó Néill 2000: 178). In two glosses (183b3 and 213a10) the authority of an Irish scholar ‘M.G.’ is invoked. Stokes and Strachan (*Thes.* 1: xxiii) expand M.G. as Máel Gaimrid, and identify the scholar with Mailgaimrid *scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Bennchair* whose death is recorded in *AU* (839.1). Dumville (1997: 25) also accepts this identification of Máel Gaimrid and supplies further palaeographical evidence to support Hofman’s suggestion of Bangor as the location of the glossator.

¹⁹⁷ See Lambert (1996) for an analysis of these differing strata.

¹⁹⁸ As well as the glosses in the hands of the two main glossators, there are a very small number of glosses in what Hofman (1996: 23–4) has counted as nine other ninth-century hands, which appear to have been entered into the manuscript subsequent to the work of the two main glossators as often these supplemental glosses correct or expand on the work of the other two.

¹⁹⁹ Ó Néill (2000) continues to stress the salience of Castledermot rather than Bangor. This is probably not relevant for present purposes, however. As Castledermot was not founded by Díarmait until 812 (*AI* 812), the earlier strata of glosses contained in the St Gall manuscript are still likely to have come from a Bangor exemplar. For a brief discussion of the links between Bangor and Castledermot see Johnston (2013: 116) and chapter 4.

5.3.2 Milan Glosses

The Milan corpus (Ml.) forms the largest collection of Old Irish glosses, approximately 8,400.²⁰⁰ It is a glossing of a Latin commentary on the psalms and is unusual in that we know the name of the scribe from colophons: Dáirmait (cf. *Thes* 1, xv). The identity of the scribe Dáirmait is not certain but has been the subject of much speculation (discussed below). Both the main Latin text and the Irish glosses are the product of this Dáirmait's hand (*GOI*: 5). The glosses have been dated, on linguistic grounds, to *circa* 800 but as with the dates given for most other sets of glosses, this is only an estimate (Stifter 2013: 166).

The Milan Codex is currently housed in the Ambrosian Library of Milan, but came to Milan via the Columban monastery at Bobbio, in northern Italy. The manuscript came to Bobbio at some point after the late-ninth century (see Bieler and Carney 1972: 7). The monastery of Bobbio was founded in 614 by Columbanus, who had been a student of Comgall at Bangor; the two monasteries maintained 'enduring links' (Charles-Edwards 2004: *ODNB*: s.v. saints of Ulster).²⁰¹ The connection between the monastery of Bangor and the Milan Glosses is strengthened by the internal references to the authority of two Irish teachers:

Two native authorities, Coirbre and Mailgaimrid are cited in the Milan glosses [...] The observations of both as recorded in the glosses are brief and of a grammatical nature, observations it would appear made on the Latin text of the Milan commentary. Both of them had probably commented on this in Ireland and were well known to the main glossator (McNamara 1973: 259).

Mailgaimrid of the Milan glosses is very probably to be identified with the Mailgaimrid *scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Bennchair* who died in 839, the same authority cited by the glossator of Sg., suggesting that Ml. may also have emerged from Bangor's circle of influence. Bieler and Carney (1972: 6–7), however, describe the evidence to link the glosses with Bangor as 'dubious' and question the identification of Milan's Mailgaimrid with the abbot of Bangor. They correct Best's

²⁰⁰ According to Ascoli, cited in Carney (2005: 491).

<http://www.univie.ac.at/indogermanistik/milan_glosses.htm>.

²⁰¹ Russell (2005: 442, n. 175) alludes to the link between Bangor and Bobbio in his discussion of the origins of the Milan Glosses.

claim that ‘Maelgaimrid is a very uncommon name; in fact these are the only occurrences of it’ by citing the occurrence of one other Máel Gemrid (cf. *CGH*: 302, n. n). A second instance of this name hardly serves to refute Best’s claim that it is very uncommon; indeed, there are only four occurrences of the name in *Leabhar na nGenealach*, (see Ó Muraíle 2003 v: 482; Ó Cuív 1986: 153).

The case against identifying Mailgaimrid of the Milan Glosses with the abbot of Bangor was, therefore, significantly overstated by Bieler and Carney. Mailgaimrid, to judge by the references to him in the glosses, was an influential grammarian and cleric as well as a respected teacher. Bieler and Carney (1972) count four references to him in Milan; in fact there are six.²⁰²

Despite the cautious warnings of Bieler and Carney, the original identification of Thurneysen seems likely to be correct. The Milan gloss 85b11, apparently not noticed by Bieler and Carney, possibly provides us with a further link between the Mailgaimrid of the Milan Glosses and the Mailgaimrid of the St Gall Glosses: both sets of glosses mention Mailgaimrid in a pedagogical context, making analogies with the transition from night to day:

Milan 85b11

Mailgaimrid caecinit Qui ascendit .i. filius; as orientem .i. dungenim rongenairsom hua athir recech duil cenided insin asreid duthabairt as intrachtad air amal as toisegiu grián indáas laithe 7 is laithe foilsigedar cech rét síc is toissigiu gein maicc hua athair recech dúil

Máilgaimrid cecinit: qui ascendit; i.e. Filius, ad orientem, i.e. of the birth whereby He was born of the Father before every element, though it is not that which is easy to get out of the commentary; for as the sun is prior to the day, and it is the day that makes everything clear, so the birth of the Son from the Father is prior to every element

St Gall 183b3

Máil gaimrid dicit A sera obdita .i. ondfescur maull † fritobarthu do-thaidbsin inna inne fil isind serra doberr anobdita .i. dond fritobairt maill fritataibret nadorche donsoilsi is dišin as berr sera mall †

²⁰² Dumville (1997: 23) counts two: 56b33; 68c15. There are, however, at least five, as pointed out by McNamara (1973: 259) over forty years ago, and a sixth (118b8), identified by Aaron Griffith in his yet unpublished re-edition of the entire corpus of the Milan Glosses.

Máil Gaimrid says A sera obdita, i.e. from the evening slow or opposed. To show forth the meaning which is in sera the obdita is put. From the slow opposition with which the darkness opposes itself to the light 'tis hence that sera 'slow' is said.²⁰³

The numerous factors cited above allow us to reasonably identify Mailgaimrid the *scriba optimus* and abbot of Bangor, Mailgaimrid of the Milan Glosses, and Mailgaimrid of the St Gall Glosses as the same individual. This also allows us to associate both sets of glosses with the monastery of Bangor. This conclusion finds support in Dumville's (1997) primarily palaeographic treatment of the Milan and St Gall manuscripts. Dumville (1997: 28–9) connects both manuscripts to the circle of Sedulius Scottus, who was active on the continent from at least the 840s to the 860s, concluding that Milan and St Gall 'appear to be contemporary, to share both scribes²⁰⁴ and sources, and [that] in their intellectual background the manuscripts show connexions with Ulster'.²⁰⁵ Connections with Ulster do not, however, necessarily equate to Ulster origins, at least not in the case of the Milan Glosses.

Clancy (2003–04: 229) makes the attractive suggestion that Díarmait, the scribe of the Milan Glosses, may be identified with Díarmait the abbot of Iona (814–831x849). Like Mailgaimrid, Díarmait was an influential member of the ecclesiastical reforming movement of the *céli Dé*. Members of this movement placed great emphasis on learning and were often put in charge of the larger monastic scriptoria (Hughes 2005: 320). That Díarmait of Iona and Mailgaimrid were contemporaries and both members of the *céli Dé* correlates well with the suggestion made in McNamara (1973: 259) that Mailgaimrid will have been known to Díarmait, the glossator of Milan. Further, Iona and Bangor lie within the same 'sphere of political influence' (A. Smyth 1972: 37, 41).

²⁰³ The text of both glosses has been taken from *Thes.*, translations are indebted to *Thes.* and to those of Griffith and Stifter available at <http://www.univie.ac.at/indogermanistik/milan_glosses.htm>.

²⁰⁴ One should note that although Dumville claims that the two manuscripts share scribes, at no point are the sections common to these scribes outlined, or any further details provided. Moreover, at least one point differentiates the two sets of glosses clearly. Only St Gall uses the punctum delens <š> and <ſ> to indicate the lenition of <s> and <f> (cf. *GOI*: 24). It can be noted that the same is true of the St Paul manuscript in Carinthia discussed below. As noted in the discussion below, the St Paul manuscript in Carinthia and the St Gall glosses are both largely concerned with grammatical learning. The question then arising is whether or not the use of the punctum delens to indicate lenition is a feature of a particular genre of writing.

²⁰⁵ Dumville (1997), based on an inaugural lecture delivered the previous year, does not mention Hofman (1996), presumably having been published too early to take account of it.

The Latin *Life of Comgall*, composed during the lifetime of both Díarmait of Iona and Mailgaimrid of Bangor *circa* 800, indicates a warm friendship between the founder of Bangor and his Iona counterpart, Colum Cille (Smyth 1972: 37; 41; Herbert 1988: 30). While hagiographical texts cannot be taken as historically accurate accounts of political relations in the sixth century, the close relationship between Iona and Bangor that is indicated here can surely be taken to give an indication of the dynamic between the two houses during the lifetime of Mailgaimrid and Díarmait. In a similar fashion but almost a century earlier, Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (VC) informs us that Comgall visited Colum Cille in Iona (VC: 500). Comgall is represented as accompanying Colum Cille on his journey to Brude Mac Maelchoin, a king of the Picts (Bannerman 1966: 155; VC: 22–3). Comgall appears again in VC as Colum Cille's companion in Ireland shortly after the convention of Druim Cett in 575 (VC: 315). There are many other instances within the text which portray a friendly relationship between the two (cf. VC: 490). These connections between the two houses mean there is nothing unlikely about the idea of an Iona glossator having been taught by an abbot of Bangor renowned for his learning. Clancy (2003–04: 229) notes that a manuscript as important as the Schaffhausen manuscript of the *Vita Columbae* is likely to have come to the Continent in the care of a senior Iona official, possibly Díarmait as abbot. Incidentally, Clancy (2003–04: 228) suggests that Díarmait may have died on the Continent. If this is indeed the case, it would explain the early appearance of an important Iona text on the Continent and the fact that Díarmait's death, unlike that of other Iona abbots, was not recorded in the annals. It may also account for the appearance of the Milan Glosses on the continent, as well as the manuscript containing the Turin Glosses (see below).

The reasons for an Iona association with the Milan Glosses are not only historical, however. It has been noted (Ó Maolalaigh 1997: 207, n. 14; Clancy 2003–04; Clancy, forthcoming) that the Milan Glosses contain what appears to be a Pictish loan word into Gaelic, *erelc* meaning 'ambush' (Ml. 28c1; 30a3), a lexeme otherwise unknown in the entire corpus of Old Irish (or Modern Irish) but well-attested, albeit with metathesis as *eileirig* 'deer trap' in Scottish Gaelic (Watson 1926: 137, 184). The only other known occurrence in the whole of the Early Irish period is in the Gaelic notes in the Scottish Book of Deer (Jackson 1972: 52) where it appears

somewhat ambiguously as either a common noun or place name (see Taylor 2008: 296–7, 303; Watson 1926: 489). The swan-neck shape of the deer trap enclosure, as well as the general distribution of the place name element in British and Pictish areas means it may usefully be connected with Old Welsh **ärläch* (Taylor 2008: 296–7, n. 94; cf. Koch 1997: 80–1).²⁰⁶

5.3.3 Turin Glosses

The Turin Glosses are a relatively small number (*circa* 140) of glosses in Old Irish on a fragmentary Latin commentary on Mark's Gospel. It has received significantly less scholarly attention than the three larger collections of glosses. Like the Milan codex, it formerly belonged to the monastery of Bobbio (*Thes* 1, xxvi). It is now preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria of Turin as F. IV.1, fasc 7.

Most recently, Cahill (1999: 189) has asserted that a '[c]omparison of the manuscript texts of the Milan and Turin commentaries certainly suggests that they are the work of the same copyist, namely Diarmait' (cf. *GOI*: 5). Where previous commentators have not precisely differentiated the glossator from the scribe of the Latin text (see McNamara 1973: 222), Cahill is at great pains to establish that the scribe of the glosses in the Turin manuscript is not to be identified with the scribe of the commentary supporting the glosses in that manuscript. In other words, the Turin Glosses are not in the hand of Dáirmait, but the Latin commentary, which the Turin Glosses seek to explicate, is (see *Thes.* xxii).

On the basis of a theological analysis of the gloss material, Cahill (1999) has argued that the Turin Glosses are likely to be the work of an Irish student on the continent, probably at the school of Auxerre in modern France during the third quarter of the ninth century. Unfortunately, the Turin Glosses have not attracted further comment since, so that Cahill's theory has been neither accepted nor rejected. Cahill's date of the third quarter of the ninth century, however, would be consonant with the commentary having come to the continent with Dáirmait of Iona in the second quarter of the ninth century. The distinction between the scribe of the commentary

²⁰⁶ Ó Maolalaigh (forthcoming) suggests that '[p]erhaps the confusion of *n* and *nn* (and *l* and *ll*) in final unstressed syllables in some words in Milan represents another northernism or Scotticism'. On this feature of the Milan Glosses, see *Thes.* 1 (xix) and Strachan (1903: 56–8).

and the glossator notwithstanding, by way of a linguistic connection between Milan and Turin, it may be noted that both retain what McManus (1983: 71) believes to be the old nominative form *spiurt* and genitive *spiurto* ‘spirit’, while the supposedly older, eighth-century Würzburg Glosses use a more innovative form.²⁰⁷

5.3.4 Würzburg Glosses

The Würzburg glosses on the Pauline Epistles (Wb.) are preserved in the library of the University of Würzburg, in a Hiberno-Latin codex M.p.th.f.12. The manuscript contains some 3,560 glosses in Old Irish and an even greater number in Latin. As pointed out by Ó Néill (2001: 33), ‘[n]o other surviving Irish manuscript from this period is so heavily and so busily glossed’. While the number of glosses in the Milan codex exceeds the number in Würzburg in absolute terms, the text which supports the Würzburg Glosses is at least four times shorter.

Three hands have been identified in the glosses. The first, usually referred to as *prima manus*, was responsible for the insertion of approximately eighty short glosses, usually single words. This material has been estimated to date linguistically from *circa* 700 (*Thes.* xxiv; Stifter 2013: 166) and the scribe of the *prima manus* was also responsible for the production of the Latin text supporting the glosses (Breen 1996: 9; Ó Néill 2002: 230). While the material in the other two hands (including that of the ‘main glossator’, i.e. the scribe responsible for most of the glossing), is linguistically later, their material is not linguistically contemporaneous with each other.

Breen (1996: 9) notes that there are no particularly salient palaeographical features to differentiate the three different hands from one another chronologically. Further, he noted that some of the glosses in the *prima manus* appear to have been entered into the manuscript after the second (i.e. the main) glossator had finished his work. This leads Breen (1996: 9) to the conclusion that ‘the archaic orthography and linguistic

²⁰⁷ It has been noted that ‘[i]n some respects the language [of Turin] approaches more nearly to that of Ml. than to that of Wb.’ (*Thes.* xxii). Although highly speculative, it could be that if, as Clancy (2003–04: 228) suggests, Diarmait of Iona died on the continent he may have been accompanied by the glossator of Turin, an Iona cleric. If this is the case, it would account for the linguistic similarity between the two sets of glosses. Similarly, if after the death of the abbot on the continent his retinue stayed put rather than returning to Iona it might explain the puzzling fact that the details of Diarmait’s death were not recorded in the annals.

forms of the *prima manus* are attributable to their having been transcribed from an earlier exemplar, along with the main text'. Ó Néill (2002: 230, n. 3), however, maintains that 'the glosses of the *prima manus* were entered into the manuscript before those of the main glossator'. It is clear, therefore, that the evidence on this point is conflicting (cf. *Thes* 1, xxiv, n. 1). Either one of the two is mistaken or it may reasonably be suggested that at least two scribes were working on the manuscript around the same time. The best way to reconcile this conflicting evidence may be to conclude that the *prima manus* and the main glossator were contemporaries, both copying from different sources. The purpose of the main glossator was almost certainly didactic and pedagogical (Ó Néill 2002: 233, n. 28).

The Würzburg Glosses, then, are the product of a busy and well-established scriptorium, where scribes had access to older gloss material on the Pauline epistles. The three different hands in this very busily glossed manuscript suggest an active teaching environment with a steady and strong continuation of learned tradition throughout the eighth century. Of those centres of learning active around the middle of the eighth century discussed in chapter 4, Armagh was one of the few which stood out. In assessing the viability of an Armagh origin for the Würzburg Glosses, one need only recall that in the first decade of the ninth century Armagh was home to at least two men who held the title *scriba*: Torbach (*AU* 808.1) and Ferdornach (*AU* 846.1), and a further two apprentices who assisted Ferdornach in the compilation of the Book of Armagh (on which see Sharpe 1982a).

Ní Chatháin (1987) suggests that the scribe of the Latin text in the Würzburg codex (i.e. the *prima manus*) shares a common source with the scribe of the Book of Armagh. This common source is a source for the Latin text rather than a source for the Old Irish Glosses which explicate it. Breen notes of the Latin text that:

The variants from the established Vulgate [in the Würzburg manuscript] are in almost every instance found also in the Book of Armagh, where frequently these readings occur elsewhere only in the commentaries of Ambrosiaster (10 occurrences), Pelagius or Sedulius Scottus (Breen 1996: 12).

Dumville, in comparing the manuscript of the Würzburg Glosses with those of Milan and St Gall, states that:

In as much as the ‘Book of Armagh’, a complex codex written in Ireland in the first half of the ninth century, is the point of comparison for the text-scripts of the Würzburg manuscript, which in general are of the reformed type characteristic of the late eighth century and later, it is not to be supposed that the Würzburg manuscript is far distant in date from the other two, while perhaps proceeding from a different group of scholars (Dumville 1997: 34).

Ó Cróinín (2005b: 393), writing of the Würzburg Glosses, points out that the glossators were well-versed in both grammar and computus,²⁰⁸ indicating that they emerged from a highly sophisticated intellectual environment. Breen has expressed similar views:

One remarkable aspect of the [Würzburg Glosses], from the stand point of Old Irish linguistics, is the preparedness of the glossator(s) to undertake the translation of technical theological Latin [...] The glossators not only had a competent knowledge of their sources, but were confident of their ability to convey that understanding in their native language (Breen 1996: 16).

The three different chronological strata of glosses in Würzburg indicate a high degree of continuity of the learned tradition in the centre of their composition and access to a well-stocked library. The associations of the Würzburg Glosses are not as clear or as definitive as one would like but the evidence points to a wealthy and active monastic school functioning throughout the eighth century, of which there a small number. The connections between the Latin texts in the Book of Armagh and the Würzburg manuscript mean that, of this small number, Armagh is the most likely candidate.

5.3.5 *The Book of Armagh*

The Book of Armagh is housed in Trinity College Dublin, as Trinity College Manuscript 52. The few Irish fragments of prose in the codex have been described by

²⁰⁸ Computus was the mathematical computation of the date of Easter, a skill held in very high regard in the early medieval Gaelic world, one which may even have provided the initial impetus for the keeping of annalistic records in the Gaelic world (A. Smyth 1972).

Stokes and Strachan (*Thes* 2, xiii–xvi) and the whole of its contents, both Latin and Irish, published in J. Gwynn (1913).

The codex is the product of the early ninth century scriptorium of Armagh. For most scholars, its primary importance lies not in the Irish material it contains, but rather in its Patrician hagiographical material in Latin. A colophon in the manuscript indicates that it was written *dictante <Tor>bach herede Patriccii*, indicating that this was the personal devotional book of Torbach, abbot of Armagh (Sharpe 1982a: 5).²⁰⁹ The text was produced by Ferdornach, *sapiens et scriba optimus* of Armagh, along with two other apprentice scribes (Sharpe 1982a: 8). According to Sharpe (1982a: 13), Ferdornach was already the master-scribe of Armagh by the time of the compilation of the codex between 807 and 808. He would live another four decades; his death is recorded in *AU* (846.1).

5.3.6 *St Paul MS in Carinthia*

The St Paul Codex consists of just eight folios and is housed at the monastery of St Paul at Unterdrauberg in Carinthia, Austria, having formerly been kept at the monastery at Reichenau on Lake Constance (Dumville 1997: 49; Toner 2009: 1). Oskamp (1978: 385) takes it to be the ‘private copybook’ of an Irish student on the continent.

As well as material in Greek and Latin,²¹⁰ the manuscript contains a number of short verse compositions in Irish, all in the same hand, including probably the most famous piece of Old Irish poetry, ‘Pangur Bán’ (for discussion see Toner 2009). All indications are that the manuscript was written on the continent in the 840s (Toner 2009: 2; Oskamp 1978: 386). Unlike the other collections of Old Irish material, especially the larger collections of glosses, the Irish material does not appear to have had any immediate pedagogical function. The only clue of the origins of the student himself may be the occurrence of an early praise poem to an Áed mac Díarmata. While the positive identification of Áed is not possible, one

²⁰⁹ The death of Torbach is recorded in *AU* 808.1. His period as abbot of Armagh was extremely short; he succeeded to the abbacy in 807 and died in 808, indicating that work on the codex started in this period.

²¹⁰ Oskamp (1978: 386–7) describes the contents of the manuscript, including the material not in Old Irish.

can at least rule Ó Cróinín's (2005a: 198) identification of the Áed of the poem as a Leinster chieftain of the Uí Muiredaig who fell in battle in 714. Ó Cróinín's identification is impossible if one is to accept the date of 760 given by both Charles-Edwards (2000: 95) and Byrne (2001: 289) for the death of the eponymous ancestor Muiredach (see also *AU* 760.5). Besides this, it can only be noted that Dumville (1997: 50) distinguishes the script of this manuscript from the style of Würzburg and Milan.

5.3.7 Old Irish Glosses: summation

The glosses in the Milan and Würzburg codices are, as described by McCone (1985: 85), the 'pillars of standard Old Irish [...] recognized by today's scholarship'. If Dumville's opinion as to the relationship between Milan and St Gall is to be accepted, there are implications for how we interpret linguistic differences between Milan and St Gall, as he himself outlines: 'In so far as the Milan and [St Gall] manuscripts emerged from the same circle at the same period, in the middle of the ninth century, any linguistic differences which their Irish-language texts display must be explained other than by passage of time between them, the received reason' (Dumville 1997: 33). The above analysis associated the Milan, St Gall, and Turin Glosses with a scholarly network based around Bangor and Iona. The glosses in the Book of Armagh are obviously to be associated with the great ecclesiastical school of Armagh. The Latin text supporting the Würzburg Glosses can be said to have Armagh associations and the glosses would certainly fit the profile of Armagh for the period. A distinct possibility which does emerge, then, in light of this survey of the manuscripts containing the most important²¹¹ Old Irish Glosses and their origins, is that they all may well have emerged from an area which straddled East Ulster and southwest Scotland.

The previous chapter argued for the centrality of Armagh in the maintenance of a sociolinguistically important network of scribal centres throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. In the first part of the present chapter I have argued that the textual evidence is consonant with this view inasmuch as the texts upon which

²¹¹ 'Most important' here means those glosses upon which Thurneysen's *GOI* was based.

scholarly understanding of Old Irish relies are associated with the northeast of the Gaelic world. Taking account of the sociolinguistic situation described in the previous chapter along with the textual evidence laid out in the current chapter, it is reasonable that the following scenario be adopted as a working hypothesis: The Old Irish Glosses are for the most part, the product of a relatively confined area in the northeast of Ireland (and Scotland in the case of Milan and Turin and their association with Iona).

To test the validity of this hypothesis, we may ask then two questions, which will be the concern of the rest of this chapter.

- i. What processes would be required to transform the language of this area into the standard of the sort described in the academic commentary?
- ii. Are these processes to be deemed historically viable?

5.4 'Standard' language and 'standardised' language

Taking the working hypothesis set out above, what, can be said about the processes that may have given rise to this 'standard', and how valid a term is 'standard' in this context? Haugen (1966: 933), in response to the language planning issues raised by standardisation in the modern, post-colonial world, identified four main features of a standard language:

1. **Selection of a norm** is the process of selecting a norm to serve as an official language, i.e. a particular regional dialect or sociolect.
2. **Codification of a norm** involves the regularisation of grammar and spelling conventions, demanding a uniformity of usage.
3. **Elaboration of function** requires that the newly selected standard language become functional in a wide range of domains. This often includes areas such as administration, law, education, the media and literature.
4. **Acceptance of a community**, which requires the language community to be willing, not only to generally support the idea of a standard language, but also to put it into practice.

Although the context is clearly different, this typology has also been successfully applied to processes of standardisation in medieval languages (cf. Lodge 2010: 28). To do this, however, requires careful handling, as pointed out by Smith (2000: 136), who adds a further level of terminological subtlety in discussing the question of ‘standardisation’ in Middle English by setting up a contrast between ‘standard’ and ‘standardised’ languages:

A variety which meets all four criteria [of Haugen’s] absolutely may be regarded as **fixed** and therefore **standard**; a variety which meets less than four, or meets all four only partially, may be regarded rather as **focused** and **standardised** (Smith 2000: 128–9).²¹²

This subtle distinction is especially useful for discussion of medieval situations where literacy was the preserve of very few, and where the institutions of linguistic regulation, as defined by Weinreich (1954: 396), may have been radically different from those of the modern nation state. It is fair to say that in the case of Irish no such subtlety in the use of the term ‘standard’ has been employed. Certainly, according to Smith’s distinction, one could usefully describe the Classical language of the bardic tracts (*IGT*, *BST*) as a standardised rather than as a standard language. While Classical Irish fulfils a number of Haugen’s criteria, most notably in terms of codification, it does not undergo elaboration of function and as a result never gained the acceptance of the entire literate community, but remained restricted in use to poetry (McManus 1994: 335).

Most of the discussion of Old Irish as a ‘standard language’ has been in the writing of historians, primarily that of Charles-Edwards (1995: 727–9; 2000: 583; 2003: 34). Gaelic linguists, on the other hand, have largely ignored the larger social context of Old Irish²¹³ and Haugen’s typology. Neither historians nor Gaelic linguists have taken cognisance of recent developments in historical sociolinguistics (on which see Hernández-Campoy and Code-Silvestre 2012) which could greatly elucidate that social context.

²¹² While Smith’s distinction between standard and standardised languages appears to have had little impact on sociolinguists working in the context of the modern nation state, it has proved useful for scholars of historical sociolinguistics (cf. Hogg 2006: 401).

²¹³ One notable exception to this is Russell (2005: 443), but this is simply a supportive restatement of Charles-Edwards’s position.

Charles-Edwards' (1995: 728–9) interpretation of the Irish situation has been greatly influenced by his understanding of the situation in medieval English as garnered from Gneuss (1972). As pointed out by Hogg (2006), however, there are a number of problems with the model of an Old English 'standard' presented in Gneuss's important article. Not least among these is, as Hogg (2009: 401) complains, 'the claim that Gneuss makes for that variety of Old English [i.e. the dialect of Ælfric's late tenth century Winchester scriptorium] being a standard language is not itself established'. The reason why Gneuss's description of Ælfrician Old English as a 'standard' does not stand up to scrutiny is because, firstly, it did not undergo any elaboration of function. It remained confined to the religious and scholarly community in which Ælfric lived and did not come to be adopted in legal or narrative literary use (Hogg 2006: 401). Secondly, although accepted in some parts of the country, it did not gain anything near universal acceptance and scribes were free to follow alternative models (Hogg 2006: 401, cf. Gneuss 1972: 79). The designation of Ælfrician Old English as 'Standard Old English' is a function of modern scholars attributing prestige to the scriptoria of Winchester. The status of Old English then, according to the framework laid out by Smith (2000: 128-129), is that of a focused language. Ælfrician Old English did not establish itself in a sufficiently broad range of literary domains, and in those where it was established it failed to gain the acceptance of the whole community of literate users of the language (cf. Millar 2010: 208–9). Further, Hogg has pointed out that Ælfrician Old English existed alongside what one might call competing proto-standards which were subject to fluctuation:

[T]he relatively few texts we have, although they are mostly charters, have a decidedly heterogeneous linguistic character.

The explanation of this is not, at least in broad outline, particularly difficult. The establishment of the Church in Anglo-Saxon England, after various early difficulties, was firmly based at Canterbury, with its archbishop. But, in contrast to ecclesiastical domains, political structures were for most of the time, much more fluid. Furthermore, the political centres always lay elsewhere. Crudely speaking we may suggest that until the second quarter of the ninth century the major political centres lay in Mercia, with its capital at Lichfield, and to some extent in Northumbria, especially at Durham and York. But from then on Wessex became the dominant force, with its capital at Winchester (Hogg 2006: 406, cf. Toon 1992: 416).

In other words, there was no one centre of sufficiently high prestige to provide a model during the Old English period. Even if there had been such a centre in an aspirational sense, it would have lacked the infrastructural support²¹⁴ required for its set of norms to gain acceptance among the whole of the literate language community. Further, the centres of prestige that did exist were located in dialectally very distinct regions. This contrasts sharply with the sociolinguistic situation in the Gaelic world as described in the previous chapter.

5.4.1 Selection of the norm

The most prestigious scholarly networks in the Gaelic world are clear throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. Weinreich (1954: 396) outlines a division in language standardisation between ‘regulators’ and ‘followers’. He defined this division in terms of ‘authorities’ (academies, ministries of education etc.) and ‘channels of control’ (schools, special publications, etc.). A very small number of powerful centres of prestige would have had the potential to be ‘regulators’ in the medieval Gaelic world. All of the potential candidates are located under the relatively stable political hegemony of the Uí Néill (chapter 4; Stacey 2007: 215). Further, and most importantly, unlike in England where the secular and ecclesiastical authorities were never united (Hogg 2006: 406), Gaelic secular and ecclesiastical interests were united in Armagh (Ó Corráin 2005: 585; Stacey 2007: 223). Both Uí Néill dynasts and Armagh ecclesiastics consciously supported each other’s claims to primacy in their respective fields (Ó Corráin 2005: 585).

The previous chapter noted the consistent recording of *scribae* at Armagh during the eighth and ninth centuries as indicating an unusual degree of cohesion and continuity in the scriptorium of Armagh.²¹⁵ This scriptorium stood ‘unrivalled’ in terms of biblical texts at a time when biblical exegesis ‘stood supreme’ among a multiplicity of literary activity (Ó Néill 2003: 13, 15). Further, it was noted that representatives of

²¹⁴ What is meant here by ‘infrastructural support’ is what Weinreich (1954: 396) calls ‘channels of control’, i.e. a sufficiently wide network of schools subscribing to the norm. It is clear from the previous chapter that, in the eighth and ninth centuries at least, Armagh had by far the most viable ‘channels of control’.

²¹⁵ Ó Néill’s (2003: 16) notes of the Gospel-manuscripts from Armagh, that ‘despite a chronological spread of over three centuries, they reveal a significant degree of agreement in variant readings (and even in scripts), suggesting aspects of conservatism in its library and scriptorium’.

Armagh among its extensive and wealthy *familia* were often recorded in the annals as *scribae*. These men had both a judicial and pedagogical function. This factor alone causes Armagh to stand out among other early Gaelic centres of learning. In other words, Armagh was the only centre of learning in the Gaelic world which could provide sufficient ‘channels of control’ (as defined by Weinreich). Not only that, the Patrician centre of Armagh was the only centre with sufficient authority to function as a regulator (as defined by Weinreich 1954: 396). It is clear that however intellectually active centres such as Kildare were, they lacked the nation-wide network of associated houses in the eighth and ninth centuries which Armagh had. Further, unlike Armagh, they did not have the apostolic endorsement of Patrick to legitimise their authority and firmly cement their prestige. In this regard, Kildare, Clonmacnoise and others must be classified as followers rather than as regulators.

For the eighth and ninth centuries at least, then, Armagh is central to the propagation of Old Irish as a standard. For the early part of the seventh century, however, when Irish was coming into its own in terms of narrative prose, the prestige of Bangor and Iona as seats of learning is pronounced (Stevenson 1987–8; K. Hughes 1958; chapter 4). Returning to the first requirement of a ‘standard’ as set out by Haugen, and taking the situation from the start of the seventh to the end of the ninth century into account, one can at least say that a sociolect of the northeast of the Gaelic world is the only viable candidate for selection.

5.4.2 Codification of the norm

The second of Haugen’s criteria was the codification of the norm, the goal of which is ‘minimal variation in form’ (Haugen 1966: 931). As pointed out by Penny (2000: 200), this process consists of the ‘prescription of a set of unvarying orthographical, grammatical, lexical, and other rules to which writers should conform, if their writing is to carry the highest prestige’. We have very little direct insight into this process in early medieval Irish but we can be certain that it came about in monastic schools. While the details of the process itself are opaque to us, we do have the benefit of a single extraordinary product of the process – *Auraicept na nÉces* (Ahlqvist 1982). The *Auraicept*, dated to *circa* 700 (Charles-Edwards 2004b: 32), is the oldest extant grammar of a European vernacular language, the purpose of which was ‘to raise Irish

to the same level as Latin' (Charles-Edwards 1995: 722). The *Auraicept* named the *bélra Féne* 'speech of the Féni' which it codified: *Goídelc*.²¹⁶ According to Weinreich (1954: 396), affirming the identity of a language and setting it off from other languages is part of the process of standardisation itself.

The *Auraicept* also codified the language, however, and gave it an origin legend, which tells us something of contemporary linguistic politics. The language which the *Auraicept* calls *Goídelc* was created by Fénius Farsaid, whose name is clearly a Latinised form of *Féni*, a term which in its narrowest sense meant those in alliance with the Uí Néill (Charles-Edwards 2004b: 30). The origin legend bestowed on the language claimed it was invented by Fénius in a school, having been extracted from what was the best of existing languages of the world (Charles-Edwards 2000: 579).

The purpose of an origin legend is typically to offer an explanation and validation for a given contemporary situation (cf. Stacey 2007: 165). *Goídel* is an inclusive term for a Gaelic speaker. As such it is open to those who, like the Laigin, Ulaid, and the Scots of northern Britain, were not classified as Féni at this period (Charles-Edwards 2000: 580). Koch has argued:

that the words *Goídil* and *Goídelc* actually entered the mainstream of Irish through the linguistic origin legend [contained in the *Auraicept*]. [They were] incorporated into the surviving 'Babel' story by North Uí Néill proponents of the Insular Easter who sought to enhance the stature of the Gaelic vernacular and Irish scholarship (Koch 2000: 10).

The origin legend is therefore probably simultaneously an assertion and reflex of the position of the main *Féni* group, the Uí Néill. If Koch's theory is correct, the *Auraicept* is likely to be a product of Iona. The *Auraicept* is above all a pedagogical tool, allegedly created in a school, undoubtedly created for use in a school. In this regard the *Auraicept* may, as Charles-Edwards (2004b: 32) has already suggested, indicate that for those 'whose native dialect was not the standard, it was a form of the language that they had to learn'.

²¹⁶ The language name *Goídelc* and related ethnonym *Goídel* cannot be earlier than the seventh century (Koch 1986: 20; 2000; Charles-Edwards 1995: 723).

5.4.3 *Elaboration of the norm*

The first two criteria set out by Haugen (1966) relate to form, whereas the final two relate to function. The third requirement of a ‘standard’ language, according to Haugen (1966), is the elaboration of a norm so that it is not restricted to one linguistic or social domain. Codification results in minimal variation, elaboration results in maximal function. Maximal function is very clear in the case of Old Irish as it comes to be used in a wide variety of functions during the Early Old Irish period, literary, legal and annalistic. Breen (1996: 12) argued that glossing in Irish ‘must have been well established and widely diffused through monastic schools by the end of the sixth century’. From a very early period narrative vernacular literature was being composed and written in Irish, an endeavour in which the salience of the northeast has been highlighted again and again (Mac Cana 1972; McCone 2000: 119; Ní Dhonnchadha 2010; Stifter 2013: 166).

The apparent expansion of Old Irish into the realm of law in the middle of the seventh century (on which see Charles-Edwards 1980: 153; L. Breatnach 2011) appears to post-date the use of Irish in literary narrative. There may not be any reason to regard the use of Irish in either type of text as having separate origins, however. I argue below that legal material in particular had an effect not only on the elaboration of the norm, but also in ensuring its acceptance by the wider literate community. *Senchas Már*, the earliest and most important of the Irish law tracts, is to be dated to the period between 660 and 680, and has been shown by L. Breatnach (2011: 42) to be a product of Armagh. By the end of the seventh century, therefore, Irish had become the language of the glossator and the jurist. Not only does this establish that the sort of elaboration required by Haugen’s (1966) model can be applied to Old Irish, it further corroborates the north-eastern focus already discussed.

5.4.4 *Acceptance of the norm*

Acceptance of the norm is the final necessary element in the creation of a standard as outlined by Haugen (1966). This element is ultimately societal:

A standard language that is the instrument of an authority such as a government can offer its users material rewards in the form of power and

position [...] the kind of significance attributed to language in this context has little to do with its value as an instrument of thought or persuasion. It is primarily symbolic, a matter of prestige (or lack of it) that attaches to specific forms or varieties of language by virtue of identifying the social status of their users (Haugen 1966: 933; cf. Labov 1964).

In post-Reformation Europe the Bible in many instances provided this norm (Pedersen 2005: 177). The supposed divine authority of the Bible was instrumental in the acceptance of linguistic norms as standard by the community (Auer 2005: 15). Meek (1990) has effectively highlighted the influence of the Bible in nineteenth-century literary Scottish Gaelic. While these linguistic situations obviously cannot cast direct light on the acceptance of the norms of Old Irish, in what follows I will argue that an analogous type of development may have occurred which was dependent on the authority of legal texts. Although, as already mentioned, Haugen's typology has never been applied to Early Irish, elements of the first three processes have been discussed in passing by various scholars (most notably by Charles-Edwards and Russell) without reference to the specific typology. The final one, acceptance of the norm, has not featured in any commentary thus far and so requires a more substantial treatment.

Old Irish law has been described as one of the 'central pillars of Irish nationality in the seventh and eighth centuries' (Charles-Edwards 2004b: 30). This centrality, along with the remarkably early establishment of Irish as the exclusive medium for secular law in the middle of the seventh century, suggests that it has a potential role in facilitating the final requirement of Haugen's typology. The degree of commonality between legal and ecclesiastical manuscripts in terms of, among other things, 'spelling-system, script, punctuation, abbreviations and illuminated capitals' (F. Kelly 1988: 232), led Ó Corráin to the conclusion that both the legal and ecclesiastical manuscripts were the product of a single learned class:

[T]he law-tracts, in Latin and in the vernacular, are the work of a single class of learned men who were as well-versed in scripture as in the legal lore of their ancestors and founded their laws on a conscious and sophisticated compromise between the two (Ó Corráin et al. 1984: 412).

The unity of the ecclesiastical and legal classes envisaged by Ó Corráin remains contested, however; Charles-Edwards (2005b: 360–90) maintains that the secular law texts were written at the ‘intersection’ of two distinct separate legal traditions (i.e. secular and ecclesiastic), rather than the secular law being an off-shoot of the ecclesiastical tradition (cf. Stacey 2007: 224). Irrespective of their constitutional basis, there is no reason to suppose that these scholarly communities did not vary across the country in focus and agenda (cf. Johnston 2013: 22, n. 109). There existed during the Old Irish period at least two major centres of legal learning, one in Armagh and the other in Munster (F. Kelly 1988: 242–8; L. Breatnach 2011). Each of these schools clearly has a distinct focus and agenda. The Armagh school produced *SM* (discussed below), described by F. Kelly (1988: 242) as ‘the most important collection of Old Irish law-texts’. The second, a Munster school, produced *BN* (F. Kelly 1988: 246; Binchy 1958).

SM, according to Byrne’s (1971: 136–7) overly reductionist view, was ‘merely an ambitious compilation by one school of jurists which came to acquire particular prestige’. This assessment somewhat downplays the degree of prestige associated with it, not to mention its extraordinary size²¹⁷ (on which see L. Breatnach 2010). Neither does Byrne’s assessment address the origin of this ‘particular prestige’ or the ambitions of the compilers behind it. The incomparable prestige associated with this particular compilation, in comparison with others, surely warrants some thought. Stacey noted that:

a compilation the size of *Senchas Már* implies a considerable degree of organization on the part of those who compiled and redacted it. It also presupposes that the originating jurists had the requisite wealth, ability to travel and, if necessary, means to coerce other schools into giving up for copying their precious law tracts and treatises [...] In short, a production like the *Senchas Már* seems easiest to imagine taking shape in the context of the sort of patronage that Armagh and/or the Uí Néill could have provided’ (Stacey 2007: 223).

²¹⁷ *SM* consists of forty-seven individual tracts, each concerned with a separate legal issue (L. Breatnach 2011: 1–2). It is ‘easily the most extensive and sophisticated project of its kind known from Ireland in the period [...] arguably the most impressive legal undertaking in the west since the compilation of the Justinianic corpus’ (Stacey 2007: 181).

She goes on (Stacey 2007: 223) to note that a motivating factor in the compilation of the *SM* was likely to have been a desire to increase the reputation of the school of its production. It is the only such Irish compilation which can be shown to ‘represent a deliberately assembled collection of tracts which was meant to be experienced as a single lawbook’ (Stacey 2007: 178). Further, it clearly shows considerable editorial intervention at the stage when it was being compiled from its constituent tracts (Stacey 2007: 195). If the ultimate aim of the compilation was to increase the prestige of the associated school, there is no doubt that *SM* was a success.

L. Breatnach (2011) has endorsed and confirmed Stacey’s position on the compilation of *SM*. Arguing for it to be the product of Armagh, L. Breatnach (2011: 42) dates the compilation to ‘roughly between 660 and 680’, a period characterised by the aggrandisement of Armagh. This date is significantly earlier than previous estimates, which dated it to the early eighth century (L. Breatnach 2010: 107; 2005: 354), and places the compilation of *SM* at the very start of literate composition of law tracts in Irish (Charles-Edwards 1980: 153).²¹⁸ The use of Old Irish in legal writing, particularly in the compilation of the prestigious and foundational *Senchas Már*, is pivotal, I would argue, in the final element required of a standard language as outlined in Haugen (1966), i.e. the acceptance of the community.

The very act of writing the laws rendered them canonical; the compilation of *Senchas Már* (the earliest and most prestigious of all legal material) at Armagh offered a prescriptive model for the writing of the law. The transformative potential of *SM* can be usefully demonstrated with a parallel example. The Irish law is often referred to in legal tracts as *Fénechas* ‘the custom of the Féni’, a term and concept which is problematic to define with anything approaching satisfactory precision (Stacey 2007: 189). Like the name Fénius discussed above, it is obviously based on the term *Féni*. While ubiquitous in the tracts of the Munster *BN*-school, the term does not occur in *SM* itself. Instead, *SM* speaks ‘in the present tense of how things are done *la Féniu*

²¹⁸ *SM* then is earlier than the early eighth-century Latin compilation of the *Hibernensis* (Charles-Edwards 1998; Stacey 2007: 178).

“among the *Féni*” (Stacey 2007: 194). Discussing the possible origin of the term *Fénechas*,²¹⁹ Stacey has made the following observation:

[P]erhaps *Fénechas* was a term coined on the model of *senchas* by jurists looking to underscore the particular connection of their law both to ancient oral tradition and to the political people of Féni (Stacey 2007: 194).

Believing that *SM* post-dated other early law tracts, such as the early eighth century *Críth Gablach* (for the date of which see L. Breatnach 2005: 244), which make use of the term *Fénechas*, Stacey purposely used *senchas* with a lower-case initial. Breatnach’s (2011) revised dating of the compilation of *SM*, however, raises the real possibility that *Fénechas* is rather based on *Senchas* with an upper-case initial.²²⁰ In other words, those tracts which mention *Fénechas* are potentially drawing on the authority associated with *SM*. This in turn would be yet another reflex of the prestige associated with that body of material. *SM*, in contrast, makes no reference or appeal to any other body of legal tradition outside of itself (Stacey 2007: 195). Although *SM* does not appeal to any external legal authority, it does invoke the only authority capable of trumping the entire early Irish legal system. Indeed, it specifically and explicitly relates how St Patrick, the purported founder of Armagh, did exactly that:

Ro ráidi Dubthach maccu Lugair in fili bretha fer nÉrenn i recht aicnid 7 i recht fháide [...] Dos-arfén didiu Dubthach do Phátraic. Ní nád tudchaid fri bréithir nDé i recht litre 7 fri cuibsiu na créisen con-airged i n-ord mbritheman la heclais 7 fileda.

Dubthach moccu Lugair the poet stated the judgements of the men of Ireland [delivered] according to the law of nature and the law of the prophets [...] Dubthach, then, expounded them to Patrick. What did not conflict with the word of God in the law of the letter and with the conscience of the faithful has been fastened into the canon of the judges by the church and the poets.²²¹

This Patrician legend of the re-writing of Irish law so as to bring it into line with the new religion has been called ‘a recurrent theme’ in *SM* by L. Breatnach (2005: 313;

²¹⁹ The term itself may be a relatively late one, given that it has not undergone syncopation (cf. Stacey 194), assuming that the middle syllable does not represent a syncopation of two earlier syllables.

²²⁰ Compare the trisyllabic and therefore later term *ogamóir* with the earlier (and syncopated) form *Laitneóir*.

²²¹ Text and translation have been taken from L. Breatnach (2011: 11)

2011: 34), and Stacey (2007: 197) refers to it as being ‘essential’ in the text. It was the invocation of ‘St. Patrick’s authority to confirm the validity of a single native law in a Christian Ireland’ which sanctioned the national status of the *SM* (Charles-Edwards 2004b: 30).

Social theorists Miller and Dollard (1941) postulated that ‘prestigious’ individuals are preferentially copied.²²² The previous chapter emphasised the role of freely conferred deference in situations involving high fidelity cultural transmission. It also drew attention to the ‘Acts of Identity’ model pioneered by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), which dictates that an individual will, if they can, change their linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those with whom they most wish to be identified. These patterns are to be found in the Munster law tract *Cáin ċúithirbe*, dated to *circa* 680 (see L. Breatnach 1986: 51; 2005: 218) and promulgated outside what is now Killarney in Kerry, formerly in the territory of the Éoganachta Locha Léin (Ó Coileáin 1989: 24–6). The tract, composed in part by clerics (L. Breatnach 1986), contains the legend of Patrick’s conversion of Lóegaire, as related in Muirchú, ‘a major item of Armagh propaganda of the seventh century’ (Breatnach 2011: 42).²²³ *SM* is likely to be the earliest surviving legal writing in Irish. It is clear it was closely studied, not only in the territory of the Uí Néill, but also in Munster almost immediately after its compilation and at the same time the legend of the Patrician revision of the law was in circulation (L. Breatnach 2011: 34–5). Recalling the theory of prestige advocated in Henrich and Gil-White (2001: 171), it can confidently be asserted that this ‘info-copying’ on the part of the glossator is an example of ‘freely conferred deference’ and further qualifies as an ‘act of identity’ as outlined by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985).

²²² On the emulation of the Uí Néill in Munster in the early medieval period see Sproule (1984), where it is suggested that the very name Éoganachta is in imitation of the Uí Néill’s Connachta origins, and is a reflex of the ambition of the Éoganachta to create a sort of mirror image to the Uí Néill-dominated Leth Cuinn.

²²³ Too little of the original law tract remains to be certain it contained the legend of the Patrician revision of the law. However, as Wadden (2011: 147) has noted, ‘[i]t is unclear why the composer should have included this story [i.e. the conversion of Lóegaire by Patrick] unless it originally contained an account of Patrick’s revision of the law’. A later introduction to *Cáin ċúithirbe* in Old Irish (*CIH* 688.12–20) claims that Patrick revised *Cáin ċúithirbe* specifically rather than the law in general; but this is obviously an anachronism based on *SM* (see Breatnach 1986: 51).

The ‘info-copying’ from *SM* seen in *Cáin Fúithirbe* can be compared to the overt deference to the authority of Armagh, again in the person of Patrick, as made clear in a section of the Old Irish glossing on the *Senchar Már (OGSM)* which has come to be known as the ‘pseudo-historical prologue’ to the *Senchas Már* (see L. Breatnach 2005: 346):

§9. *Co tánic Pátraic trá, ní tabairthe erlabra acht do t[h]riur: fer comcni cumnech fri aiséis 7 scélugud, fer cerda fri molad 7 aír, brithem fri brithemnas a roscadaib 7 fásaigib. Ó thánic Pátraic immurgu, is fo mámmus atá cach erlabra donaib í-seo do fiur in bérlai báin .i. inna canóine.*

§9. Until Patrick came, (authority in) speaking was only granted to three men: the historian with a good memory for explanation and narration; the man of art for praise and satire; the judge for giving judgements with *roscada* and maxims. After Patrick's coming, however, all of these (kinds of authoritative) speech are subject to the possessor of the white language, i.e., of the scriptures.²²⁴

The pseudo-historical prologue to *SM* has been shown by L. Breatnach (2005: 344) to be a text of Munster provenance dated to not very long after the middle of the eighth century. This is of relevance as it indicates clearly that the *SM* was being studied closely in a Munster law school, far removed from the direct political influence of the Uí Néill, suggesting deference to the scholarly authority of Armagh rather than compliance with the dominance of the Uí Néill polity. The middle of the eighth century is, as we have seen, towards the end of the period during which the Irish law texts were taking their canonical form (Charles-Edwards 2005b: 331; Stifter 2013: 163).

The Munster origins of the Old Irish Glosses on *SM (OGSM)* and their acceptance of Patrick's authority suggest that *SM* held significant prestige as far afield as Munster. The influence of the Armagh *SM* on the Munster *OGSM* was not only legal but also, as pointed out by L. Breatnach, linguistic / stylistic:

A further argument in support of this conclusion is, I believe, to be found in a striking verbal parallel between *SM* and two Latin Armagh documents [...] [*SM*] contains five instances of *isin insi-so*, or the like.

²²⁴ The text and translation quoted are taken from Carey (1994a: 12, 19).

[...] The only other examples I know of in Irish-language sources outside *SM* are three instances in *OGSM* [...] (L. Breatnach 2011: 38).

Very clearly in this case, one can say that the Munster glossator who wrote the Old Irish glosses on *SM* was, consciously or unconsciously, imitating a stylistic flourish adopted from an Armagh text.²²⁵ Given, as we have seen, that prestige is domain-specific it is not surprising that the Munster glossator would follow the prestigious earlier text, not only linguistically, but also stylistically.²²⁶

This deference to the scholarly authority of Armagh can be usefully viewed in light of the processes involved in focusing, as outlined by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller:

Within this general theory we see speech acts as acts of projection: the speaker is projecting his inner universe, implicitly with the invitation to others to share it, at least so far as they recognise his language as an accurate symbolization of the world, and to share his attitude towards it. By verbalizing, as he does, he is seeking to reinforce his models of the world, and hopes for acts of solidarity from those with whom he wishes to identify. The feedback he receives from those with whom he talks may reinforce him [...] To the extent that he is reinforced, his behaviour in that particular context may become more regular, more focused [...] (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 181).

We may also see this process being played out by the Munster glossator of the *SM*, in his acceptance and emulation of stylistic features contained in *SM*, and by the authors of *Cáin Fúithirbe* in their inclusion of what Breatnach (2011: 42) calls ‘a major item of Armagh propaganda’. We see it also in the ubiquitous references to *Fénechas* in texts of the *BN*-school, which are unknown in texts from the earlier *SM* (Stacey 2007: 192).

²²⁵ There is a further dimension to this usage on the part of the Munster glossator, however; the sense of Irish identity propagated by the ecclesiastical authorities of Armagh in both *SM* and subsequent texts was one which embraced the island of Ireland where the primacy of Armagh was secure (see Wadden 2011: 55–96; L. Breatnach 2011: 37 for discussion). It did not, for instance, seek to incorporate Gaelic Scotland into this schema.

²²⁶ F. Kelly (1988: 249) refers to the curious case of a number of misunderstandings on the part of the scholar (see also Charles-Edwards and Kelly 1983: 19) who was glossing during the Old Irish period: ‘[I]t is hard to explain why the glossator should occasionally misunderstand the text’. Given the Munster provenance of the glosses (L. Breatnach 2005: 344–5) and the Armagh provenance of the text, it might be worth revisiting the possibility of these misunderstandings being due, potentially at least, to dialectal variation.

5.5 Writing the law – social and psychological implications

One might reasonably ask why the law would be so influential. To answer this it is worth reflecting on Bourdieu's assessment of legal discourse:

It is a creative speech which brings into existence that which it utters. It is the limit aimed at by all performative utterances – blessings, curses, orders, wishes or insults. In other words, it is the divine word, the word of divine right, which, like the *intuitus originarius* which Kant ascribed to God, creates what it states, in contrast to all derived, observational statements, which simply record a pre-existent given (Bourdieu 1991:42).

Tabouret-Keller (1997: 318) has also noted that 'imposing on a language the dimensions of an institution, of legitimacy linked to power over a territory and over other institutions, especially law, has several consequences'. One of these consequences is undoubtedly the further elevation of the language of the law. He who utters the law is, in the words of Bourdieu (1991: 41), 'the legitimate speaker, authorized to speak and to speak with authority'. Two separate phenomena come together in the case of *SM*, the power of the law and the power of literacy. Written law can be viewed as being doubly puissant, a consequence of which for Old Irish is reflected in Binchy's (1966: 88) observation that from 'the moment it was committed to the page, Irish law was regarded by its custodians as eternal and immutable'.

Thurneysen (1973) suggested, on the basis of the eighth-century *OGSM*, that by the eighth century the law texts cannot have had any significance for the practical administration of the law. It is anomalous that, despite this apparent detachment from practical and even legal reality, the process of copying, annotating and studying the law texts which had reached their canonical form by the middle of the eighth century continued intensely for centuries (F. Kelly 1988: 226). Stacey has shown that Thurneysen's reading of the situation is likely to have been inaccurate. Rather than serving as textbooks outlining procedures to be followed on a case-by-case basis, Stacey (1991: 44–8) contends that the purpose of the canonical law texts was to convey the 'principles and priorities behind the process of justice'. This point further highlights the pedagogical role of much of our extant legal material. For the early Irish, according to Stacey (2007: 165), law was language and even more significantly, language was law, 'in the sense that it both differentiated the legal from

the nonlegal and established the credibility of those claiming jurisdiction in legal matters’.

The study of the law, then, meant the study of the language of the law, and there is evidence to suggest that *SM* may have set the model of language which was appropriate for the writing of the law. It is worthwhile to reflect on the following comment by Stacey on the transformative nature of literacy and textuality in relation to the law:

Native law undoubtedly existed before the wide-scale dissemination of written texts. However, it was presumably intensely localised and, in any case, the commitment of law to writing and subsequent development of a textual community around the written lawbooks must surely have changed whatever class of tradition was already in place almost beyond recognition (Stacey 2011: 143).

It was suggested in chapter 4 that the introduction of literacy could, *ipso facto*, result in the creation of new social networks, giving rise to a new set of linguistic norms (Tuten 2003: 53). The scenario outlined by Stacey above highlights that the compilation, and dissemination, of *SM* at an early date has to have brought about the institutionalization of prestige norms. Institutionalization of prestige norms is associated with focusing and with standard language because it often forms the basis of prescriptivism within a society (Tabouret-Keller 1992: 179). The compilation of *SM*, to paraphrase Bourdieu (1991: 42), can be viewed as a creative mode of language which brought into existence that which it uttered.

5.6 The origins of ‘Standard’ Old Irish?

Although Haugen’s typology has never before been applied to medieval Irish, the above analysis has proved useful. It outlines a theoretically robust socio-historical scenario by which the homogeneity of Old Irish as a text language can be explained without appeal to *Stammbaum*-inspired evolutionary analogies. Schrijver (2009) in one of the most recent attempts to come to terms with what he calls the ‘monolithic’ nature of Old Irish, offers a number of potential explanations for its homogeneous nature. All of these explanations, however, call for elaborate linguistic assumptions which find little or no support in the historical or archaeological record and make no

reference to the sociolinguistic situation which this thesis has shown to have prevailed during the eighth and ninth centuries.²²⁷ Schrijver's treatment of the problem is in line with the traditional practice of historical linguistics criticised by J. Milroy:

The discourse of historical linguistics is still very much set in a traditional mould, in which languages bring about changes within themselves, without the immediate agency of language users (J. Milroy 2003: 150).

In contrast to the explanations offered by Schrijver, Stifter sets out a different set of options which might account for the unusually uniform nature of Old Irish:

[It] presupposes either the early adaption of a specific local variety as the basis for a standard, or the early codification of a standard grammar (Stifter 2009: 60).

Although more reasonable than those laid out by Schrijver, these possibilities are not without problems. For one thing, there is no reason why the two scenarios presented by Stifter as alternatives should be seen as mutually exclusive. However, it may be that Stifter (2009: 60) intends 'the early codification of a standard grammar' to mean a 'standard' which incorporated features from a number of dialectal varieties, not unlike that of Classical Irish (Ó Cuív 1980; Russell 2005: 443). But the evidence assembled in the present and previous chapters has highlighted the degree to which

²²⁷ Schrijver (2009: 205) claims that '[t]he linguistic ancestors of Irish and Highland British Celtic are phonologically and grammatically identical up until the first datable isogloss separating British from Irish Celtic', which he places in the first century AD. The possibly earlier isogloss whereby Insular Celtic **k*^w develops to **p* in British and **k* in Goidelic is dismissed as 'now generally believed to be trivial' by Schrijver, although it can hardly have been trivial to speakers, especially not if their language was otherwise homogeneous. These 'linguistic ancestors' are postulates. Moreover, Schrijver (2000; 2005) argues that the presence of a non-Celtic language in Ireland as late as the middle of the first millennium A.D. indicates that a language shift situation pertained in Ireland in the period immediately before the Old Irish period. The argument for the existence of a non-Celtic language in Ireland at this date has been forcefully challenged by Isaac (2003) and remains highly dubious. Further, the 'radical phonological changes' which Schrijver envisages as taking place between 400 and 600, i.e. in the transition from Ogam inscriptions to manuscript records, takes no account of the socio-historical situation. This chapter has argued that the emergence of Old Irish as a text language occurred in the northeast of Ireland and that the social network which supported its maintenance until the start of the tenth century was focused in the same area. The vast majority of Ogam inscriptions to which Schrijver seeks to relate the evidence of Old Irish are located at the extreme southwest of Ireland (McManus 1991: 45). It is perfectly reasonable to place the language of Ogam inscriptions prior to the evidence of the Old Irish Glosses in a chronological sequence, but to relate the two to one another in a genealogical sequence, without reference to their divergent geographic locations (or the very different socio-historical circumstances of their production), must surely be regarded as methodologically unsound (cf. Laing and Lass 2006: 421; Penny 2006).

literary activity, at various points, has been unevenly distributed in the Gaelic world. This means that the early codification of an ‘inclusive’ standard language of the type that I take to be understood by Stifter is unlikely, if not impossible.²²⁸

That leaves the ‘early adaption of a specific local variety as the basis for a standard’, the type of explanation which has been most notably proposed by Charles-Edwards (1995; 2000), and tentatively endorsed by Russell (2005). The evidence presented above certainly supports this type of explanation for the homogeneity of Old Irish. It should perhaps be emphasised, however, that there is little evidence for any sort of linguistic imposition. Rather, what little evidence we have points squarely at prestige-induced deference as the central theme in the emergence of Old Irish as standard text language. Throughout the latter part of the seventh and the whole of the eighth and ninth centuries, it would appear that the prestige of Armagh as a seat of learning was indeed supreme. Armagh constituted the central and most visible actor in a larger network of centres of literacy, the most prolific of which were focused on the northeast of the Gaelic world. This north-eastern focus also appears to be reflected in the attested Old Irish sources, in as much as the Old Irish Glosses can be associated, with varying degrees of certainty, with Bangor, Iona and Armagh.

Sharpe (1982b) has demonstrated that the ecclesiastic authorities of seventh-century Armagh appropriated Patrick from their Ulaid neighbours to the east, developing Patrick’s cult at Armagh as part of a campaign of political aggrandisement (cf. de Paor 1971; Binchy 1962: 170–1).²²⁹ There is evidence which suggests that a similar literary appropriation may have taken place whereby the Ulster Cycle and related texts, initially redacted in Ulaid territory, most likely at Bangor itself (Ó hUiginn 1992: 62; Stifter, forthcoming), subsequently came to be reframed by Armagh and the Uí Néill (Aitchison 1987; P. Ó Riain 1994). I would venture to add that these cultural processes may find a parallel in terms of language: the role of Bangor and Iona in the initial cultivation of learning in Latin and Irish in the second half of the

²²⁸ Further, it seems likely the regional inclusivity traditionally attributed to Classical Irish (Ó Cuív 1980) may have been overstated (C. Breatnach 1990; Ó Maolalaigh 1998).

²²⁹ Seventh-century Armagh hagiography is, according to Sharpe (1982b: 44), ‘interested in restructuring the cult [of Patrick], taking fullest advantage of Patrick’s national reputation, but concerned also to shift the local attachment from Down and the Ulaid to Armagh and the Southern Uí Néill’.

sixth and first half of the seventh century may be seen to have been central to the first two processes involved in the creation of a standard text language (i.e. the selection and codification of the norm). The second two processes involved in the emergence of a standard (i.e. elaboration and acceptance of the norm), however, were largely reliant on the national prestige of Armagh and its Uí Néill patrons, and intimately connected with the authority of *Senchas Már*. The geographic proximity of these centres at least partly explains the ease with which the ecclesiastical school of Armagh could adopt the practice of Bangor.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to proffer an explanation for the homogeneity of Old Irish by outlining the likely avenues by which the early medieval Gaelic world came to produce and accept a standard language. In this process, new vistas and avenues have been opened through which questions of diatopic variation in Early Irish may be explored. The most effective way of overcoming the ‘bad data’ conundrum, as Labov (1994: 11) framed it, is the avoidance of what Spencer (2000: 8) calls ‘inappropriate questions’. When sociolinguistic models are applied to Old Irish, the text language is seen as the product of the northeast of the Gaelic world, and most intimately associated with the prestige enjoyed by the ecclesiastical school of Armagh, and the Uí Néill more generally.²³⁰ In the context of this new sociolinguistically informed understanding of Old Irish as a text language, the question ‘where is the dialectal variation in Old Irish?’, is seen to be an example of an inappropriate question (as outlined by Spencer 2000: 8); the data is simply not sufficient to answer it. What can be said, however, is that Byrne’s (1971: 166) observation on medieval Irish society generally can also be applied to language: ‘[medieval] Irish society was not static although medieval men of learning and modern historians have conspired to make it seem so’. The unusual sociolinguistic situation of Old Irish, combined with modern linguistic analysis within a Neogrammarian-inspired framework only, have both

²³⁰ As will be discussed in the next chapter, one can view this text language as a type of ‘new dialect’, arising from the new linguistic and social networks which formed in the wake of the foundation of the major monasteries (and the rise of Armagh), but also on account of the rise of the Uí Néill to prominence and their geographic expansion. The emergence of the text language, therefore, is likely to be running parallel to a similar process of new-dialect formation under the hegemony of the Uí Néill more generally.

contributed to the veneer of linguistic homogeneity which characterises the Old Irish period.

The discussion of medieval Irish language in this thesis until now has, of necessity, been limited to that of the text language. Of greater significance for the linguistic behaviour of the majority of the population, i.e. those not involved in the system of ecclesiastical education, was, what Charles-Edwards (2003: 34) calls, '[t]he change to a new dynastic order', which itself coincided with the start of the Old Irish period. The dynastic, demographic and social upheaval this entailed is likely to have caused large-scale structural renegotiation of linguistic networks of speakers across the whole of the Gaelic speaking world. The following chapter will examine these upheavals. Informed by a sociolinguistic understanding of the phenomena of dialect contact and new-dialect formation, it may allow some insight into the situation of Gaelic dialects during the Old Irish period. Further, it will allow for the comparison of the resulting hypothetical historic dialect relationships with the new twentieth-century dialect relationships outlined in chapter 2. That will be the focus of chapter 6.

6. Towards a dialectology of the Old Irish period?

6.1 Introduction

Previous chapters dealing with the Old Irish period have focused exclusively, and of necessity, on the text language of Old Irish, its origins, formation and maintenance. The extent to which this new understanding of Old Irish as a text language directly informs our understanding of dialectal variation during the Old Irish period more generally is, of course, limited. However, with the homogeneity of Old Irish accounted for in sociolinguistic terms, it may be possible that some tentative progress can be made on the question of dialectal variation in the Old Irish period more generally. The current chapter focuses on presenting the historical sociolinguistic evidence for the Old Irish period to see if it can be usefully compared with the dialectometric evidence presented in chapter 2. It will be argued that the emergence of what Charles-Edwards (2003: 34) called a ‘new dynastic order’ in Irish politics, most clearly exemplified by the rapid geographic expansion and political success of the Uí Néill in the sixth century, brought about a dialect contact situation followed by new-dialect formation. In this chapter I argue that there are clear sociolinguistic indications that the Old Irish period ought to be viewed as having been formative in the differentiation of Gaelic dialects from one another.

The distinction between the language attested in our earliest sources and that spoken by the population at large during the same period is one that has received acknowledgment in some discussions of Early Irish (MacAulay 1975: 87; Greene 1969: 16; Carney 1983: 205; McCone 1985: 86), yet no sociolinguistically informed hypothesis relating the text language to contemporary dialect divisions has ever emerged. This is precisely the type of hypothesis this chapter endeavours to provide. In doing so I rely heavily on what is known of the social structure of early medieval Ireland, in conjunction with sociolinguistically robust models of language change.

The formulation of this hypothesis, however, requires the exclusion of Scotland. While the position of Iona has been treated in previous chapters, and its important role in learned networks in early medieval Gaeldom stressed, our understanding of linguistic practices and developments beyond those learned networks in Scotland is

insecure due to a lack of evidence (Woolf 2007: 2–3). There is another aspect, moreover, in which the Irish and Scottish situations differ substantially. Ireland enters the historic period with a fully Gaelic-speaking population in place (Charles-Edwards 2005a: lxvii). In Scotland, on the other hand, Gaelic appears to have been spoken in a relatively limited geographic area during most of the Old Irish period (Dumville 2002: 185), but to have subsequently undergone significant geographic expansion across most of Scotland as a result of language shift, particularly in the period between 800 and 1200 (Woolf 2007: 322–40; Clancy 2010). In this sense, Scotland and Ireland are clearly subject to very different sociolinguistic dynamics in the Early Irish period which means they are not suitable to be treated together.

6.2 Dialects of the ‘common people’?

The most basic territorial unit in early medieval Ireland was that of a *túath*, usually translated as ‘tribe’ or ‘petty kingdom’, of which it is estimated there were at least 150 (Byrne 2001: 7). The *túath* has been described as ‘pre-eminently a community of farmers’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 103). Unlike the learned classes, the ordinary freeman was effectively confined to his own *túath* except when on military service, when on pilgrimage, or when attending an *óenach*.²³¹ Beyond the borders of his own *túath* the freeman did not have legal rights (Byrne 2001: 39; F. Kelly 1988: 3–4).²³² This localism, along with the essentially rural character of Irish society (F. Kelly 1988: 6–7), ensured that whatever the evidence of our written texts, diatopic (not to mention diastratic) variation must have existed in early medieval Ireland (cf. Russell 2005: 439).

Ó Buachalla (1985: 32) highlighted the deficiencies of an historical account of Irish based solely and completely on the literary data, stating that it would ‘automatically be an inherently inadequate and inaccurate one’. The sociolinguistic evidence of previous chapters identified the northeast of the Gaelic world as the area in which the standard language of the period 600–900 was developed and from whence it spread.

²³¹ The *óenach* was a ‘regular assembly for political, social, and perhaps commercial purposes’ (F. Kelly 1988: 4).

²³² It would be inaccurate to think of the *túath* as existing in complete isolation, however; ‘all [*túatha*] were linked together into federations [...] All kings were either in allegiance to over-kings or themselves exercised suzerainty over sub-kings’ (Byrne 2001: 39).

The expectations of what the evidence of Old Irish can provide, in dialectal terms, must be modified accordingly.

Ultimately, then, if one is to examine the history of early dialectal variation in Gaelic, it is necessary to return to the synchronic evidence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The more detailed analysis of synchronic twentieth-century dialect relationships presented in chapter 2 may help to clarify diachronic issues. This was acknowledged by Hamp (1971: 185), who claimed that ‘we must exploit the modern folk speech [...], wherever it takes us, either in deepening our grasp of features registered in the literary language, or in overthrowing prejudices that a one-sided awe for the literary tradition has instilled in us’. Labov (1974a) has also drawn attention to the potential of synchronic patterns of variation in elucidating the linguistic past. Admittedly, in doing so, we are severely limited, at least in the case of the Gaelic languages, because the evidence for modern forms of the language is nowhere near as full as one would like. Despite its less than ideal coverage, the evidence of *LASID* provides the best foundation on which to start. This foundation can be supplemented, where there are gaps in the nineteenth and twentieth century accounts,²³³ with the evidence of older texts and onomastics. This supplemental evidence, although much more difficult to marshal, has the benefit of filling two gaps: geographic and chronological. That is to say, it can provide evidence with a clear time depth and, when judiciously selected, can provide evidence from areas in which Irish was on the decline as early as the seventeenth century.

6.3 Tribes and tribalism?

In a seminal paper Byrne argued that:

Irish history between the seventh and tenth centuries presents us with the spectacle of a tribal society being transformed by the introduction of a dynastic polity to a state wherein territorial lordship replaces hegemony over tribes as a political principle (Byrne 1971: 162).

²³³ Of course, this supplemental kind of information would be available for Scotland. It is the foundation of a LD analysis of *SGDS* which is currently lacking for Scottish Gaelic. As already noted, the Scottish Gaelic material in *LASID* is not sufficient for our purposes.

The appropriateness of the term ‘tribal’ was questioned, but ultimately accepted, by Byrne (1971: 128–30). The idea that Ireland’s polity was transformed from a tribal to a dynastic one from the seventh century onwards gained traction over a number of years, most especially, perhaps, in the writing of Ó Corráin (1978), who argued that the centrality of the *túath* in the laws of the seventh and eighth centuries had all but disappeared by the time later Old Irish glosses and commentaries on them were written in the ninth century. For instance, he saw the passing of the importance of the tribal *túath* as being implicit in the often-quoted law tract which defines a *túath*:

*Niba tuath tuath gan egna gan egluis gan filidh gan righ aracorathar
cuir agus cairde do thuathaibh.*

A *túath* without a scholar, without a church, without a poet, without a king who might make contracts and treaties with [other] *túatha* is not a *túath*.²³⁴

The implication of the text, according to Ó Corráin (1978: 9), is that some former *túatha* no longer met these requirements. Charles-Edwards (1971: 117–22) also endorses the view that the rise of the great dynasties of the Early Irish period undermined the system of the *túath*, although he does so more tentatively.

Whether this systemic change did or did not occur has exercised a great many historians of the Gaelic world. Etchingam (1996: 129–30) has heavily criticised such an interpretation, noting that this hypothesis, ‘which would locate the postulated change at or before the dawn of Irish history, in a period for which we have virtually no contemporary documentation, is, of course, impossible to test’. This is, of course, true. But Etchingam’s observation fails to acknowledge the very real, attested, and hugely politically significant changes that were in full swing during the sixth and seventh centuries. This period of dynastic change, whether or not it introduced a new *type* of political infrastructure, was indisputably transformative. As Charles-Edwards puts it:

The triumph of the Éoganachta and of the Uí Néill [...] in both the southern and the northern halves of the island more or less coincided [...] with the triumph of Christianity, and thus marked the dividing point

²³⁴ The text printed here is as in E. J. Gwynn (1942: 31); a diplomatic transcription can be found in *CIH* 1123.32. The present translation is my own.

between the largely prehistoric and historical periods, between Late Iron Age Ireland and Early Christian Ireland. On current archaeological evidence, this dividing point followed the start of a revival in agriculture, shown especially in the extension of settlement (Charles-Edwards 2003: 33–4).

For sociolinguistic purposes, the tribalism versus dynasticism debate serves little purpose. Whether the type of socio-political changes envisaged by Byrne, Ó Corráin and more recently by Ó Cróinín (2005a: 205) and Herbert (2000: 62), did or did not happen is not relevant. What is relevant, however, is the undoubted fact that the period coincided with a tremendous change in fortune of certain population groups, particularly the Uí Néill in the north and the midlands. Concurrent with, and conceivably as a result of, the political success of the Uí Néill, the Éoganachta established themselves as the dominant political force in Munster, seeking to emulate the success of their prestigious Uí Néill allies (Charles-Edwards 2000: 489; Connon 2005: 226; Sproule 1984). It is, therefore, safe to follow Charles-Edwards (2003: 34) when he characterises the period as one which introduced a ‘new dynastic order’. It will be argued below that these population expansions are likely to have had significant sociolinguistic ramifications.

Seventh-century written sources indicate that this ‘new dynastic order’ had an effect on personal identity. In Adomnán’s seventh-century *VC*, he applies the Latin word *gens* to a specific type of kindred (Charles-Edwards 1993: 141–5), the corresponding Gaelic terms for which are *corcu* (eg. Corcu Duibne), *dál* (eg. Dál Fiatach) and, in the case of compounds, *-r(a)ige* (eg. Cíarraige). In the earliest sources, men are ascribed to their *gens* by means of the obscure gentilic term *moccu* (Charles-Edwards 2000: 96; McManus 1991: 119–20). The obscurity of the term *moccu* lies in the fact that, even during the seventh-century lifetime of Adomnán, the term appears to have been ‘either disappearing or becoming fossilised’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 97), so that by around 700 it appears to have become obsolete altogether (Charles-Edwards 1993: 160). The decline of the term indicates that it was no longer politically relevant. The law tracts also exhibit a reflex of this change in modes of personal identification: laws of the eighth century, in contrast with those of the seventh, barely mention the concept of the *gens* (Charles-Edwards 2000: 97). The gentilic term *gens* can be contrasted with the parentilic Gaelic term *áue*, by which it came to be

replaced. This term unambiguously refers to a kindred defined by common descent in the male line (McManus 1991: 111; Charles-Edwards 2000: 97).²³⁵ It is no doubt significant that the Uí Néill used this term to describe themselves.

6.4 Demographics and sociolinguistics

It is the contention of this chapter that the far-reaching demographic effects of the dynastic success of the Uí Néill and others such as the Éoganachta and Déisi (later Dál Cais) are also linguistically important. In marked contrast with later population plantations, which students of Irish history are more familiar with, the expansion of the Uí Néill and others in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries involved large-scale population mixing and population replacement.²³⁶ This process of population replacement can be associated with two features of early Gaelic society in particular. The first is the practice of polygyny and the second is an inclusive right of inheritance.

Polygyny

It has been shown convincingly that in late medieval England, a society in which polygyny was not permitted, there was a strong correlation between wealth and family size (Razi 1980: 87). The evidence relating to marriage in early medieval Ireland indicates clearly that polygyny was permitted, but for obvious economic reasons was likely to be limited to the well-off who could afford multiple wives (F. Kelly 1988: 70). In early medieval Ireland, then, one would expect to see an even greater correlation between wealth and family size than in late medieval England and indeed one does. This correlation is possibly best illustrated by reference to the large

²³⁵ The form AVI, an early form of *áue* > *Uí*, is also used in Ogam inscriptions (Mac Neill 1911–2: 368–9; McManus 1991: 110–1), but its usage here differs fundamentally from that of the post-Ogam period. Of those sixteen examples of Ogam AVI collected by Mac Neill (1911–2: 368), five are followed by a feminine name and another two are followed by names of uncertain gender. As there are no sept-names derived from a female ancestor in the documentary period, Mac Neill (1911: 83) concluded that the use of AVI in the Ogam record had a religious import, rather than the genealogical import attached to *áue* and *Uí* in later sources.

²³⁶ The most tempting situation with which to draw parallels is perhaps the seventeenth-century plantation of Ulster. In contrast with the plantation of Ulster, the expansions discussed below involved people speaking dialects of the same language, and for whom religious affiliation was no barrier to inter-marriage on a large scale. In fact, there is evidence (discussed below) that part of the process of dynastic expansion involved marriages between men of the expanding kindreds and the women of the conquered kindreds. It is notable, in this context, that the Uí Néill claimed descent from the kings of Ulaid through the female line (Connors 2005: 255).

number of sons attributed to kings in *CGH* (F. Kelly 1988: 70, n. 14). The result of the practice was that successful royal and aristocratic families multiplied rapidly (Ó Corráin 1972: 44).

The social position of the immediate family of a man who held kingship was secure, in as much as any tenure of kingship was secure. The discarded segments of ruling houses (the children of less politically successful branches of an aristocratic family) had fewer options open to them. Certainly, one option was a career in the church; the upper ranks of the church were consistently and constantly drawn from the less successful ruling houses (Ó Corráin 1972: 84; F. Kelly 1988: 39–40). Moreover, there is much evidence for kings installing relatives, often brothers, in the abbacy of churches within their jurisdiction (for examples see Ó Corráin 1973; K. Hughes 2005: 313; Byrne 2005a: 671). By contrast, those not in a position to gain high office in the church, or unable to carve out a lordship for themselves,²³⁷ ‘slipped slowly downwards in Irish society’, ultimately replacing the freehold farmers and other common classes (Ó Corráin 1972: 44).

Inclusive rights of inheritance

The common practice of polygyny among the wealthier classes is also reflected in the law of inheritance in early medieval Ireland. The normal procedure for the inheritance of land appears to have been one of division between all of a man’s sons, regardless of whether they were sons of his primary wife or not (F. Kelly 1997: 412; 1988: 102). A notable, and perhaps related, feature of the early Irish system of land inheritance is ‘a kinsman’s entitlement to a re-sharing of the kin-land in certain circumstances’ (F. Kelly 1997: 414–5). Thus, it seems that ‘if one branch of a kin is particularly prolific, its members may demand a re-sharing at the expense of a less prolific branch’. Therefore, while royal dynasties increased rapidly in numbers over a few generations, a dynasty could shed extraneous members, resolving itself into ‘a number of royal factions or segments, based on close family connections’ (Ó Corráin 1972: 38). As already mentioned, once these less successful aristocratic offspring lose their social status, they came to replace their kinsmen’s original base clients.

²³⁷ On the concept of *tír claidib* ‘sword land’ see F. Kelly (1997: 398).

Downward social mobility

For the reasons outlined above, early Irish social mobility was mostly unidirectional: ‘[t]he poor, who failed to replace themselves fully as the generations passed, were reinforced by the less successful descendants of the wealthy’ (Charles-Edwards 1993: 60). The less prolific lower orders of society were constantly being replaced by the impoverished offspring of their lords, a phenomenon which has been described as ‘a general squeezing out of the class of landowning commoner in Irish society’ (F. Kelly 1997: 428). This downward social mobility in early medieval Ireland is clear from the following portion of the Old Irish law text *Cáin Fúithirbe*, along with an accompanying gloss:

§2 *Dobaitar aí uais ceneoil .i. menip flaith a athair 7 a shenathair, cidh comcinel a bunad, doba flaith aire.*

§2 The grandsons of a noble kindred are extinguished i.e. when someone’s father is not a lord, nor his grandfather, though he may be of equal kindred as to his origin, lordship dies for him.²³⁸

No doubt this was the fate of the majority of the descendants of lords and kings, ‘those who disappear after a number of generations from the annals and genealogies’ (Jaski 2000: 179). A requirement of noble status in early medieval Ireland was the ability to maintain base clients (F. Kelly 1988: 29). At some point, however, for most grandsons of a lord their resources would become limited in order to support their own increasing descendants. Individuals who were not able to support sufficient base clients could not maintain noble status and would have been forced to ‘accept a grant from a superior lord and become base clients themselves’ (Jaski 2000: 179). *Cáin Fúithirbe*, quoted above, and other legal texts such as *Cáin Aicillne* (see F. Kelly 1988: 29, n. 76 for discussion) refer to what must have been a very common phenomenon: impoverished nobility becoming base clients of the head of their own kindred.

Intermittent crop-failure and famine would have facilitated the further expansion of the most successful kindreds while simultaneously eradicating the less successful (cf.

²³⁸ The tentative text of this passage has been taken from Jaski (2000: 178), the even more tentative translation is my own.

F. Kelly 1997: 354–5). It was undoubtedly the less successful poor who were most likely to suffer in times of famine or epidemics, as is clear from an annal entry from the year in *AU* 825:

AU (825.7) *Magna pestilentia in Hibernia insola senioribus 7 pueris 7 informis; magna fames 7 defectio panis*

A great pestilence in the island of Ireland affected the old, the children and the weak; [there was] great famine and shortage of bread

Ó Corráin (2005: 579) has suggested that it ‘is hardly a coincidence that the dynasties that were to dominate Irish politics until the twelfth century rose to power, for the most part, in the period of the plagues and their aftermath’.²³⁹

Evidence that the prolific, but impoverished, minor nobility were constantly replacing the holders of the land is to be found in a Middle Irish genealogical tract contained in the late fourteenth-century Book of Ballymote:

Is uaidib se ro fas daerchis fognuma for saerclandaib Erenn .i. na feranna dia fognaitis dofallsat na saerclanda uaib 7 atroebatarsun 7 forbrisetar na saerclanda foraib 7 rucsat a ferann uaidib co ro len in doerchis na soerclanda de sein for slicht in feraind ar at soera uili Fir h-Erenn acht in lucht doruirmisem.

From these [aforementioned septs] a tributary rent of service grew up on the free families of Ireland, that is, the free families deprived them of the lands for which they used to do service and they died out and the free families overpowered them and took their land from them so that the families continued attached to the land, for the men of Ireland are all free except the people we have reckoned.²⁴⁰

Although contained in the Book of Ballymote, the scribe indicates that he has extracted this information from the earlier Book of Glendalough, *dia rer Libuir Glinne Da Locha*.²⁴¹

²³⁹ The epidemics referred to by Ó Corráin (2005: 579) occurred in the ‘second half of the seventh century, throughout the eighth, and in the first quarter of the ninth’. The first of these is notable as the period characterised by the aggrandisement of Armagh (cf. de Paor 1971).

²⁴⁰ This text and translation have been taken from Ó Raithbheartaigh (1932: 108).

²⁴¹ On the contested identity of the Book of Glendalough see P. Ó Riain (1981) and C. Breatnach (1997).

The political success and attendant geographic expansion of a population group in early medieval Ireland resulted, therefore, in real and tangible demographic change. Further, as the power-base of a successful dynasty expanded so did its influence outside its own territory. Powerful dynasts and overkings were free to grant land within the territory of a client-king, and were free to plant their less successful kinsmen amongst people under their control, facilitating further the expansion of their own less politically successful relatives (Jaski 2000: 281; Charles-Edwards 2000: 298). These population movements will undoubtedly have brought about a situation of dialect contact. There are sociolinguistic models which are sufficiently robust to allow us to postulate the processes and outcomes of this dialect contact.

6.5 Dialect contact and its results

6.5.1 Contact

The rapid political ascension of the Uí Néill and the Éoganachta and their attendant and equally rapid geographic expansion within Ireland gave rise to large-scale movement of people immediately prior to the Old Irish period. Further, once established, the political dominance of the Uí Néill and the Éoganachta was, on the whole, stable throughout the Old Irish period.²⁴² In its initial phase, this dynamic expansionism will, naturally, also have resulted in different dialects of Gaelic coming into contact with one another as the successful dynasties expanded and absorbed both land and people. One of the results of what Charles-Edwards (2003: 34) has called the ‘new dynastic order’ in sixth- and seventh-century Ireland was, therefore, the sort of ‘large-scale disruption of close-knit, localised networks which have historically maintained highly systematic and complex sets of socially structured linguistic norms’ (L. Milroy 2002: 7). We are secure in this assumption, even if the norms which were maintained by these close-knit networks remain largely unknown.

There is evidence from other linguistic situations comparable with early Ireland which serves as good indications of the likely outcomes of dialect contact of the early Irish type. Lass (1990) made a useful and influential distinction between what

²⁴² The polities of the Laigin and the Ulaid were also largely geographically stable throughout this period, not least because they were tightly confined by their more successful neighbours.

he terms intra- and extra-territorial dialect contact. Extra-territorial dialect contact occurs when dialects come into contact in an entirely new area. The results of this type of contact can be observed in New Zealand English (Trudgill 2004), or in medieval Icelandic (Leonard 2012). Intra-territorial language contact involves contact between dialects within the original language area; examples to observe include medieval Castilian Spanish (Tuten 2003) and twentieth-century English ‘new towns’ such as Milton Keynes (Kerswill and Williams 2000). In the case of medieval Ireland we are clearly dealing with cases of intra-territorial dialect contact. In time, this type of dialect contact can result in new-dialect formation, as will now be demonstrated.

6.5.2 Koineization and new-dialect formation

Trudgill (2004: 84–9) argues that six processes are involved in new-dialect formation:

- 1) Mixing;
- 2) Levelling;
- 3) Unmarking;
- 4) Interdialect development;
- 5) Reallocation;
- 6) Focusing.

The first five of these processes can collectively be referred to as koineization (Trudgill 2004: 89).²⁴³ For new-dialect formation, however, Trudgill (2004: 89) has claimed that focusing is also required.²⁴⁴

Mixing involves the initial contact between dialects, is often accompanied by a great amount of linguistic variability (Trudgill 1986: 107), and is followed by a process known as dialect levelling (Trudgill 1986: 126; Leonard 2012: 31). Dialect levelling is essentially structural dialect loss; it reduces variation both within and between dialects resulting in individual dialects becoming more homogeneous and different dialects becoming more similar (Hinskens et al. 2005: 11). Unmarking is intimately related to dialect levelling and has been labelled a ‘subtype of levelling’ by Trudgill

²⁴³ For a discussion of koineization and some of the terminological problems associated with its application see Tuten (2003: 9–22).

²⁴⁴ This is the type of focusing outlined by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 181–2) and discussed in chapter 4.

(2004: 85). Here the localised norms which may have previously been supported by a close-knit network structure but are now disrupted in contact with other dialects start to disappear (L. Milroy 2003: 158). The emergence of inter-dialect features may also be observed at this point. These can be defined as ‘forms which were not actually present in any of the dialects contributing to the mixture, but which arise out of interaction between them’ (Trudgill 2004: 86). The final process in the formation of Trudgill’s koine, and the penultimate one in his structure of new-dialect formation, is reallocation:

Occasionally, even after levelling, more than one competing variant left over from the original mixture may survive. Where this happens, reallocation will occur, such that variants originally from different regional dialects will in the new dialect become social class variants, stylistic variants or, in the case of phonology, allophonic variants (Trudgill 2004: 88).

Focusing is what distinguishes koineization from new-dialect formation, according to Trudgill’s (2004) schema. It is ‘the process by means of which the new variety acquires norms and stability’ (Trudgill 2004: 88) and typically accompanies the emergence of new social networks which act as norm-enforcers (Schreier 2012: 542; Tuten 2003; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 191–2). Sociolinguistic commentators on new-dialect formation have observed that, as a whole, the process requires speakers to ‘waive their previous allegiances and social divisions to show mutual solidarity’ (Kerswill 2002: 673; Leonard 2012: 32). Of course, this need not be conscious, but it does require the sort of renegotiation and restructuring of identities which historians postulate – for different reasons – occurred in the wake of the dynastic success of the Uí Néill.

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate that these sociolinguistic factors are likely to have had a role in new-dialect formation leading up to the Old Irish period. In order to do this, historical data will be synthesised with the most robust linguistic data available (i.e. the quantitative analyses of chapter 2). This data will be supplemented by other evidence at points which are problematic for chronological or geographical reasons. The result is a hypothesis which may allow scholarship on the historical dialectology of the Gaelic languages to move forward.

6.6 The hegemony of the Uí Néill

As the most powerful political force on the island of Ireland from the start of the historical period to the tenth century at least (Ó Cróinín 2005a: 201), the Uí Néill are obviously the most important of the groups to be discussed here. Not only was their expansion in the period between the late fifth and sixth centuries particularly rapid, their hegemony covered the largest geographic area. Further, this hegemony resulted in the creation of a remarkably stable, not to mention enduring, polity.²⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, the area once under the hegemony of the Uí Néill provides the greatest amount of historical data for the early medieval period, and a reasonable amount of synchronic linguistic data is available from the area once covered by this hegemony.

The Uí Néill are the reputed descendants of Níall Noígiallach. Níall, like his sons, belonged to the ethnic group the Connachta. In the earliest poems about Colum Cille, the Uí Néill founder of Iona, he is referred to by the gentilic term *moccu Chuinn*, a member of the *gens* which took its name from Conn,²⁴⁶ the common ancestor of the Uí Néill and the Connachta (Charles-Edwards 1993: 162; 2000: 465). There are no strong reasons to believe that Níall himself was anything other than the king of an ordinary *túath* (Charles-Edwards 2000: 441). Genealogical and literary material set Níall apart from the Connachta, however, in portraying him as the only child of his father Eochaid by his mother Cairenn. The dynasties of the Connachta, on the other hand, are portrayed as the offspring of Eochaid by his other wives (Connon 2005: 252).

While Níall himself is portrayed in later texts as having many wives, the traditions around his offspring chiefly revolve around two women only:

The wives in question are Indiu, daughter of the Ulster king Lugaid son of Óengus Finn, and Rígnach, daughter of Meda son of Ros. That both women are from the Dál Fiatach of Ulster, albeit from different branches, underlines the northern focus of the Uí Néill's first area of expansion and stresses their links with the dominant Ulster dynasty (Connon 2005: 255).

²⁴⁵ Chapter 4 argued that the strong norm maintenance in the text language of Old Irish was a reflex of this stability.

²⁴⁶ This term and mode of identification was 'either disappearing or becoming fossilized' in the seventh century (Charles-Edwards 2000: 97).

It is most often Indiu who appears as the ancestress of the four dominant dynasties of the Uí Néill: Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain of the Northern Uí Néill and Clann Cholmáin and Síol nÁeda Sláne of the Southern Uí Néill. As though to underpin the Uí Néill association with the dynasties of the Ulaid, the tale *Eachtra Chonaill Gulban* relates that Éogan and Conall were born at the home of their maternal grandfather, the king of the Ulaid, when Indiu went to stay with her father while Níall was on campaign in Leinster (Lehmacher 1923: 214).

What annalistic evidence there is for the sons of Níall indicates their floruits should be set at about 470–520 (Charles-Edwards 2000: 443), placing Níall himself around the middle of the fifth century. The term Uí Néill cannot have come into existence until the generation of Níall's grandsons at the earliest so that it cannot be older than the sixth century (Charles-Edwards 2000: 441).²⁴⁷ It appears that by the early eighth century the Uí Néill had ceased to consider themselves a mere branch of the Connachta (Charles-Edwards 1993: 159). The two appellations must have co-existed for a period, at least initially.

Placing the eponymous Níall as a *rí túaithe* in the middle of the fifth century, Byrne (1969: 22) thought the Uí Néill could not have exceeded a few dozen individuals by the start of the sixth century. It has been suggested (Charles-Edwards 2000: 113, 464–5) that the early expansion of the Uí Néill may have originated in the campaigns of *fián*-like groups led by the sons of Níall.²⁴⁸ By the end of the sixth century, and with remarkable speed, the Uí Néill had attained their position of prominence in the midlands and north of Ireland through a succession of successful military campaigns (Charles-Edwards 2000: 441).

The descendants of Níall gained control of the midland kingdoms of Mide and Brega during the period 494–535 (Charles-Edwards 2000: 454). The initial stage of the conquest of the midlands seems to have been led by bands of *fianna* led by Níall's sons Coirpre and Fíachu (Charles-Edwards 2000: 468). That they wrested control of

²⁴⁷ The earliest use of the term may well be in *Amra Choluim Chille* (Stokes 1899: 156–7), the praise poem attributed to Dallán Forgaill composed upon the death of Colum Cille (†597). Bisagni (2009: 10) has recently shown that although probably constructed around a sixth- or seventh-century core, the poem shows signs of extensive re-working in the Late Old Irish period.

²⁴⁸ If this is the case, their expansion can be seen in the light of what is later called *tír claidib*, 'sword land', i.e. land obtained by force (cf. F. Kelly 1997: 398).

Brega from the Laigin is indicated by the occurrence of an Ogam inscription in the barony of Slane in modern county Louth, in the medieval kingdom of Brega. The inscription reads MAQI CAIRATINI AUI INEQUAGLASI. Mac Airt (1951: 589) identified the person commemorated in the inscription with Mac Cáirthinn meic Cóelboth, whose death in battle is recorded in *AI* (447), a member of the Uí Enechglais dynasty. The Uí Enechglais were one of several Laigin dynasties and the inscription indicates that prior to the successes of the Uí Néill, the dynasties of Laigin controlled an area as far north as Slane in Louth (see Ó Cróinín 2005a: 191–2). Within a century, by the early 600s, the Uí Néill had reached the limits of their expansion in the midlands (Ó Cróinín 2005a: 200).

The Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain, descended from Níall's sons Conall and Éogan respectively, are collectively termed the Northern Uí Néill in contradistinction from the Southern Uí Néill dynasties of Mide and Brega. The Cenél Conaill heartland covered most of modern county Donegal, with the exception of Inishowen, which was the territory of Cenél nÉogain, who had their base at Aileach (Mac Cotter 2008: 227). The most important marker of the eastward expansion of the Northern Uí Néill across Ulster is their victory over certain Ulaid groups, with the support of two Ulaid peoples in the battle of *Móin Daire Lothair* in 563 (AU 563.1).²⁴⁹ By the closing decades of the sixth century, the Northern Uí Néill, especially Cenél nÉogain, 'were pressing upon the petty kingdoms of mid-Ulster' (Mac Shamhráin 2000: 61), so that from that point onwards, the Ulaid were confined to an area east of the Bann (Sharpe 1982b: 52).

By the start of the seventh century, the Uí Néill were politically dominant in the northern half of Ireland. The geographic extent of this hegemony, however, was not limited to the lands held directly by the Uí Néill. Uí Néill expansion also involved the support and participation of other population groups who may be understood as having played an important role in the new social networks that developed through this process of political aggrandisement. The most important participants in the hegemony of the Uí Néill who were not Uí Néill by birth were the federation of

²⁴⁹ The location of *Móin Daire Lothair* is not known. For further details of the battle, see Ó Cróinín (2005a: 214–5), and Charles-Edwards (2000: 295).

peoples known as the Airgíalla,²⁵⁰ a name which itself is of no great antiquity and is usually explained as meaning ‘hostage-givers’, i.e. vassals (Mac Neill 1911–2: 63).

The diverse origins of the Airgíalla dynasties were obscured in the early eighth century by an origin legend which placed them ‘in a schema that links them to the Connachta and Uí Néill’ (Bhreathnach 2005b: 95). This origin legend portrayed the Airgíalla as close relations of the Uí Néill, second only to the Connachta in their alleged genealogical proximity to the Uí Néill (Charles-Edwards 1993: 48; 2005c: 123). The legend acknowledged that the Airgíalla were precluded from holding kingship of the Uí Néill by the stain of *finjal*, ‘kin-slaying’. This legend accounted for the close relationship between the two peoples, but also established and sought to justify the position of the Uí Néill and Airgíalla relative to one another (Mac Shamhráin 2000: 56). Airgíalla allegiance to the Uí Néill was enduring and their federation constituted an indispensable element in the military power of the Uí Néill from at least the start of the eighth century (Charles-Edwards 2000: 518). Further entwining the fate of the Uí Néill and Airgíalla is the fact that the royal lineages of the Airgíalla held the abbacy of Armagh, which played an important role in the development of Uí Néill interests from the seventh century (Charles-Edwards 2000: 512).

The influence of this Uí Néill hegemony also extended beyond the bounds of Ireland. Iona, one of the most important ecclesiastical centres in the early medieval Gaelic world, played a significant role in the promotion of Uí Néill interests (Herbert 1988: 35). Having been founded by Colum Cille, a Cenél Conaill dynast, Iona continued to draw its abbots from that Northern Uí Néill dynasty for most of its history (Herbert 1988: 74–5, 310–11; Charles-Edwards 2000: 282), and thereby incorporating Scottish Dál Riata into the Uí Néill sphere of influence.²⁵¹

The successful execution of Uí Néill expansionist policies resulted in a hegemony which encompassed a vast swathe of the island (Figure 39). From Inishowen in the

²⁵⁰ This federation of peoples inhabited much of modern counties Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh (Charles-Edwards 2000: 632).

²⁵¹ Sharpe (2000: 50) has alluded to the possibility that the Gaelic settlers of Scotland, if that is indeed how they are to be understood, are as likely to have been drawn from the Uí Néill and Ulaid territories as they are from any original Dál Riata homeland on the island of Ireland for which there is little evidence.

north, the hegemony of the Uí Néill extended in a broad arc as far as the north coast of county Dublin. The annalists refer to the land of the Southern Uí Néill as extending ‘from the Shannon to the sea’, incorporating the northern half of Dublin, most of Offaly and the whole of the modern counties of Meath, Westmeath and Longford (Charles-Edwards 2000: 15, 441). This also meant that the ancient site of Tara also came under the control of the Uí Néill, leading to a refashioning of that formerly sacral site by the Uí Néill as a *caput Scotorum*, a symbol of royal authority across Ireland (Bhreatnach 1996).



Figure 39 Political divisions in Ireland circa 800 (Byrne 1969: 16)

Once established in the area discussed above, the hegemony of the Uí Néill exhibited a relatively unusual degree of stability. The evidence of the late sixth century indicates that the overlordship of all the Uí Néill alternated between the two dynasties of the Northern Uí Néill: Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain (Charles-Edwards 2000: 494). From the 730s until the tenth century this political pattern was

replaced by another: ‘In the midlands power shifted westwards, from Brega to Mide; in the north it shifted eastwards, from Cenél Conaill to Cenél nÉogain’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 571). The result was that between 743 and 944 the kingship of Tara alternated between the Cenél nÉogain of the Northern Uí Néill and the Clann Cholmáin of the Southern Uí Néill (Warntjes 2003–04: 394; Ó Cróinín 2005a: 211). This remarkable feature of the kingship of Tara was facilitated by ‘close marriage alliances’ between both branches so that leading dynasts of one branch married their daughters off to those sons of the other dynastic branch who were eventually expected to succeed to the kingship (Jaski 2000: 70, 281, see also Warntjes 2003–04: 423–4). There is also evidence that when the king of Tara was of the Northern Uí Néill, he might choose a dynast of the Southern Uí Néill to ‘exercise some authority’ over the lands of the Southern Uí Néill, and vice versa (Charles-Edwards 2000: 572). This was another feature of the Uí Néill polity which facilitated stability. The relative stability of the Uí Néill was to end in the tenth century, however, with a definitive split occurring in 970. This would spell the end of the alternation of kingship between Cenél nÉogain and Clann Cholmáin and also the total breakdown in solidarity between the Uí Néill (Byrne 2005b: 864).

6.6.1 The sociolinguistic implications of Uí Néill hegemony

The linguistic relevance of the historical exposition above is this: it provides the ideal sort of environment for new-dialect formation arising from dialect contact. The expansion of the Uí Néill was quite obviously transformative in political terms, but was also transformative in demographic terms. As discussed earlier, as any successful dynasty expanded in numbers in early medieval Ireland, it slowly but surely replaced the landowning classes and was free to plant peoples in areas under its control or under the control of its vassals. Further, the power and prestige associated with the Uí Néill caused the identity of those close to them to be reframed so that, ultimately, Uí Néill power ‘may have rested more on origin-legends, however fictional, than on mere military capacity’ (Charles-Edwards 2000: 518). The clearest such case is that of the Airgíalla, but they are not the only one (cf. Sproule 1984). Although this type of regional identity formation was not unique to the Uí

Néill hegemony, theirs was undoubtedly the most successful,²⁵² providing a model for others:

Eventually, the entire political landscape could be moulded by an enduring hegemony, such as that of the Uí Néill, to the point at which the identities of their vassals were understood in terms of relationships to the Uí Néill (Charles-Edwards 2000: 512).

The Uí Néill hegemony is characterised by a cohesion and stability which sets it apart from all other political units in early medieval Ireland. It can only be compared with the polity of the Éoganachta, but even that is not a comparison of equals. The hegemony of the Uí Néill was more widely based, of longer duration and qualitatively more stable than that of the Éoganachta who sought to emulate them (Bhreathnach 1996; Sproule 1984). The Éoganacht overlordship of Munster ‘had never been particularly strong’ (Jaski 1995: 341) and was inherently ‘broader and more diffuse than that of the Uí Néill’ (Stacey 2007: 215).²⁵³ The descent of the Uí Néill from a common ancestor is not seriously doubted by historians (cf. Charles-Edwards 2000: 441–68), but no such certainty exists in respect of the Éoganachta (cf. Sproule 1984: 37). Indeed, it has been argued, not unconvincingly, by Sproule (1984) that the very name Éoganachta is modelled on the Connachta, in imitation of the early successes of the dynasties which would later be known as the Uí Néill. The genealogical evidence indicates that this was part of a larger Éoganachta strategy ‘to create a southern equivalent to the Uí Néill and Connachta’ (Sproule 1984: 36).²⁵⁴

The polity of the Uí Néill is not comparable with the polities of the Ulaid or the Laigin; these are characterised by dramatic geographic contraction in the early medieval period. Neither are the Connachta, alleged cousins of the Uí Néill, comparable as they had no strong tradition of over kingship at all (Ó Cróinín 2005a: 227). The hegemony of the Uí Néill is, therefore, early medieval Ireland’s example

²⁵² One of the factors which made the Uí Néill so successful in this regard was their close association with Armagh, the ultimate authority in the propagation of origin legends.

²⁵³ W. Smyth’s (1997: 22) claim that ‘Munster appears in the historical record as the least disrupted, most stable and culturally and politically the most durable of all the early medieval provinces’ is misguided. The paucity of annalistic entries for early medieval Munster means does not imply stability (see Charles-Edwards 2005a: lx). On the fragmented nature of the Éoganacht polity, in comparison to that of the Uí Néill, see Ó Corráin (1972: 8) and Ó Cróinín (2005a: 225).

²⁵⁴ It is, of course, not altogether surprising that this would be the case if, as Charles-Edwards (2000: 489–91) has argued, Éoganachta control of Munster was established in the sixth century with the aid of the Uí Néill, who, at this early period, still saw themselves as Connachta.

par excellence of what sociolinguist Weinreich (1954: 397) called a ‘cultural area’ which one might expect to correlate with ‘the borders, centres, and overall dynamics of [a] language area’. The prestige of the Uí Néill, both inside and outside their own hegemony, will almost certainly have had far-reaching sociolinguistic effects on early medieval Ireland. The nature of the socio-historical evidence is such that it would be sociolinguistically remarkable if the hegemony of the Uí Néill did not leave a mark on the dialectal landscape of Irish. It is in this context that one can return to the synchronic dialectal evidence presented in chapter 2.

6.6.2 Modern dialectal evidence

To what extent might one expect to see a reflex of this remarkable stability in the linguistic evidence of more recent centuries? The relative distinctiveness of Ulster Irish, in comparison with the dialects of Munster and Connacht, has already been outlined in chapter 2 and is illustrated again by the dendrograph in Figure 40. It has been suggested by Ó Buachalla (2002: 8) that the division between dialects found north and south of a line between the Boyne and Erne rivers is ‘the primary division in Irish dialectology, one which may represent a historic division in the protolanguage’. It is not entirely clear what Ó Buachalla means by the term ‘protolanguage’ but the distinctiveness is nonetheless pronounced and it is well-known that different diachronic developments lead to different synchronic results (Hogg 1988: 187). The possibility that this distinctiveness is a reflex of the sociolinguistic situation posited to have existed during the hegemony of the Uí Néill must now be examined. There is an obvious weakness in the use of *LASID* in an investigation of this sort, however. While *LASID* provides excellent coverage for areas in the northwest of the area formerly under the hegemony of the Uí Néill, the east is less well served and it does not serve the southern extremities of their polity, Mide and Brega (constituting areas of modern counties of Louth, Meath, Westmeath, Offaly and Longford), at all. This gap requires the deployment of the sort of supplemental evidence discussed in the introduction.

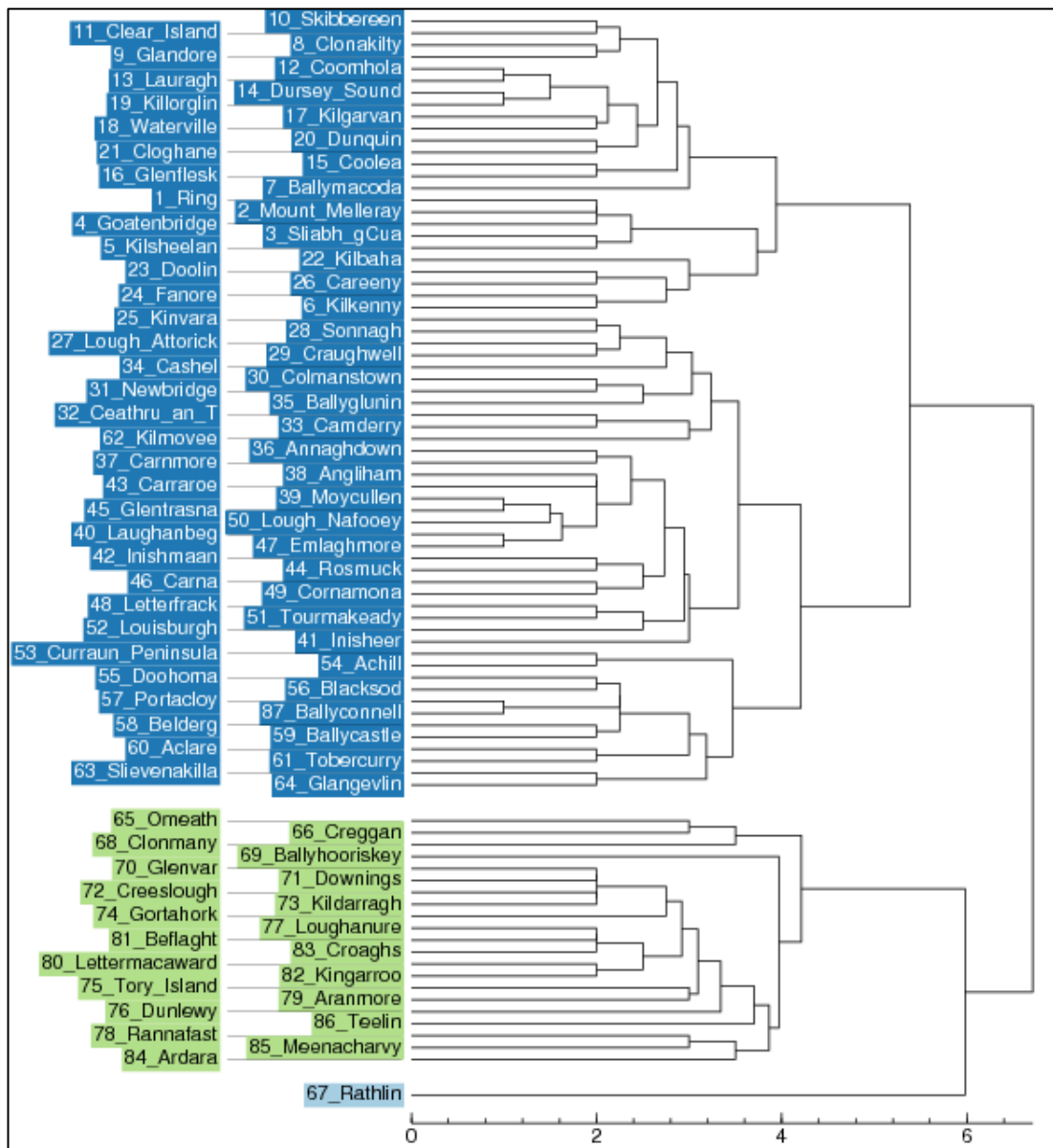


Figure 40 LD-based classification of Irish dialects in LASID (Kessler 1995), represented in Gabmap dendrogram

Many of the linguistic features which scholars have used to define twentieth-century ‘Ulster’ Irish, features such as the shortening of long vowels in unstressed syllables and the use of the negative particle *cha*, were clearly found in areas of north Meath into the nineteenth century (O’Rahilly 1932: 188; A. J. Hughes 1997). O’Rahilly (1932) viewed these ‘Ulsterisms’ as ‘intrusive’, but by the early nineteenth century the dialect of north county Meath was bordered to the south by English, rather than by a different dialect of Irish. Any suggestion, therefore, that these and other features

were historically found no further south than north Meath must at least be questioned. From O’Rahilly’s perspective, viewing these features as ‘intrusions’, there was no requirement to entertain the notion that they might extend further south.²⁵⁵ Even Ó Buachalla’s (2002: 7) citation of the Boyne as a dialect boundary must be viewed as being arbitrary; in recent centuries it has been a language boundary rather than the site of any isogloss bundle. The Boyne is a reasonable point at which to draw a line on the east coast, however; not far beyond it in the late medieval and early modern period is the English-speaking Pale, the boundary of which was never completely stable (cf. Hickey 2007: 32). More tangible, in the present context, may be the dialectal situation in other areas formerly under the hegemony of the Uí Néill. Some scholarly investigations based on textual and onomastic sources have outlined other distinctively ‘Ulster’ features found in the Irish once spoken in Longford and Westmeath (Williams 1972; 2012; Finnegan 2013).

In fact, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, the scholar Seosamh Laoide observed:

From Fore, in Westmeath, through Meath, Cavan and Monaghan to Slieve Gullion in Armagh, and thence to Carlingford, in Louth there runs what may be called a vein or thread of Irish without much interruption. In these counties [...] people still speak a dialect of Irish that has probably suffered more from the inroads of English than any other form of spoken Gaelic [...] The Irish of the district referred to is a variety of the Northern or Ulster dialect, of which it forms a sub-dialect pretty well defined by some peculiarities of its own in pronunciation and vocabulary [...] There appear to be two varieties of this Southern dialect of Northern Irish. These may be called Meathian and Oirghiallan, from the ancient territories in portions of which they survive (Laoide 1896: 145, see Figure 41).

One might reasonably wonder what the dialectal situation was to the immediate south of these areas at a period during which Irish was still spoken in them, i.e. the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (cf. Figure 41). In examining this question, it is

²⁵⁵ According to O’Rahilly (1932: 18), ‘Midhe was pre-eminently the battle-ground of the dialects’. Further, it is not only clear that O’Rahilly viewed the ‘Ulster’-type features of Louth and Meath as intrusions, he also viewed them as relatively late intrusions. But citing no evidence for his interpretation, O’Rahilly (1932: 261) suggests that ‘in the territory which [Ulster Irish] had won for itself in Louth and N. Meath it displaced a dialect which was more nearly related to the Southern than to the Connacht type’.

necessary to re-examine the notion of ‘Galeonic Irish’, a dialect classification that encompasses the dialects of Connacht and Leinster which has been argued for by Williams (1994a; 1998; 2012).

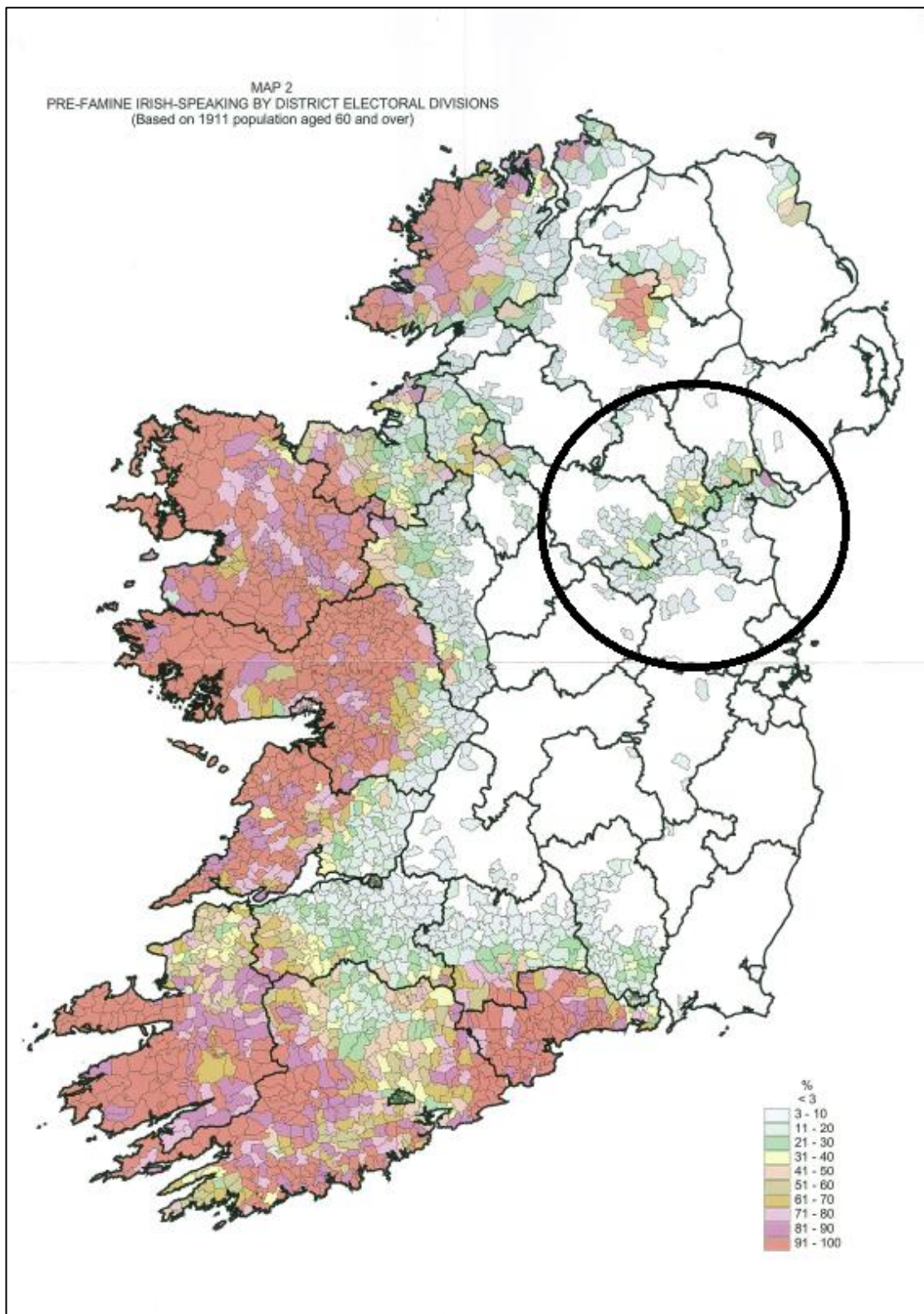


Figure 41 Pre-famine Irish-speaking population (FitzGerald 2003) with area referred to by Laoide (1896) circled

6.6.2.1 Galeonic Irish

Williams (1994a; 1998; 2012) has argued for a historical division of Irish which distinguishes three major Irish dialects. In Ulster, and from Leitrim in the west to the Boyne in the east, Williams (1998: 545) postulates a ‘northern Irish’, the chief characteristic of which was ‘the reduction of unstressed syllables’. Williams’s southern Irish corresponds to the province of Munster and ‘was chiefly distinguished by its tendency to shift the accent onto long final syllables in disyllables and trisyllables where the preceding syllable was short.’ Between these two dialect areas, in Connacht and Leinster, Williams has argued for the existence of a variety he calls ‘Galeonic Irish’.²⁵⁶

It is worth quoting the exact definitions of the dialect area given by Williams:

In between the northern and the southern dialect was a third, spoken in all Connaught, and across the midlands, Offaly, Leix [= Laois], Westmeath and to Dublin and southwards to Kildare, Wicklow, Carlow and Wexford [...] The chief distinguishing feature of Galeonic Irish was the following: although like the Irish of Munster it shifted the accent from the root syllable to an originally unstressed long vowel, the accent did not remain on the long syllable, but was thrown back again on to the previously accented syllable. The first shift of accent had weakened the newly stressed vowel and it remained weakened when the accent again fell upon it (Williams 1998: 546).

This stress pattern is the only feature used to define Galeonic Irish in Williams (1998; 2012), but the earliest formulation of the division contained in Williams (1994a: 467–72) made reference to one other feature: $n > r/C_.$ The latter is problematic as a classificatory feature, however. Although limited to Scotland, Man and the dialects of Ulster and Connacht in this century, this does not appear to have been the case historically. It was a clear feature of the Irish of Clare until the demise of the dialect in the mid-twentieth century and there is evidence of hypercorrection in

²⁵⁶ In Williams (1994a) Galeonic Irish is presented as a postulate in inverted commas; in Williams (1998; 2012), however, the inverted commas are dispensed with. The label used for this postulated variety is potentially misleading. It is derived from the prehistoric population group the Gaileóin, a people of Leinster who also appear to have settled in small numbers in Connacht, yet Williams (1994a: 471) does not suggest that Galeonic Irish derives historically from the Gaileóin.

both Clare (Holmer 1962a: 74) and the Déise.²⁵⁷ Further, onomastic evidence (cf. Hickey 2011: 340) shows clearly that this was much more widespread in Munster than Williams (1994a: 471–2) allowed for and is likely to be socially rather than geographically conditioned (cf. Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 490).

The question arises, then, as to whether or not the evidence of differing stress patterns alone is a sufficient basis on which to classify Irish dialects. The answer would appear to be that it is not (cf. Hogg 1988: 187). There are, in the first instance, problems with the cursory four-page treatment Williams (1994a: 467–71) affords the stress patterns at issue in light of the uncertainty which still bedevils Irish language scholarship as to its origin and exact chronology (cf. Ó Sé 1989: 175). Most significantly, no mention is made of the fact that the area in question is not totally homogeneous in terms of stress patterns: parts of east Connacht diverge significantly from this pattern (Hickey 2011: 314–8), bisecting the dialect area postulated by Williams. Despite Williams's (1994a: 446) invocation of contact with Munster Vikings in seeking to explain stress patterns in the Isle of Man, there is no examination of the sort of sociolinguistic conditioning which may have been happening elsewhere in the area in question at the same period. Further, Williams (1994a: 472–7) catalogues a greater number of features distinguishing between the 'subdialects' of Galeonic Irish than are set out in justifying the 'Galeonic' classification in the first instance.

A full assessment and revision of the 'Galeonic Irish' hypothesis, although desirable, is beyond the limited space available here. The question remains, at a time when Irish was spoken over a greater geographic expanse than in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, how far south were the 'Ulster' features to be found. This presents an obvious problem of evidence. In circumnavigating this difficulty, one is reminded of Labov's (1994: 11) admonition to historical linguists to 'make the best of bad data'. The modern county of Offaly was the southern extremity of the hegemony of the Uí Néill in the early medieval period. From the perspective of

²⁵⁷ As for the Déise, $n > r/C_$ occurs often according to Ussher (1945: 331, 332). R. B. Breatnach (1947), curiously, does not mention it, but there is a single lexical item in his material which appears to be a hypercorrection indicating that it may have formerly been a feature of the dialect: /d(ə)nu:f/ *drúis* 'lust' (R. B. Breatnach 1947: 47).

comparative dialectology it is strategically important in that scholarship is relatively well informed as to the sort of dialects spoken to the south and west of Offaly, but next to nothing is known of the area to the immediate north. The greatest insight into the dialect of Irish once spoken in Offaly is to be found in a seventeenth-century religious work titled *Lucerna Fidelium*. An exhaustive examination of the text is not possible here but a discussion of some key features will allow for an enhanced appreciation of the relevant dialectal relationships.

Galeonic Irish, *Lucerna Fidelium* and the Irish of Offaly

Lucerna Fidelium is a Catholic text composed in Irish by the seventeenth-century Franciscan priest Francis Molloy,²⁵⁸ a native of the area of Ballycowen in central Offaly (cf. Ó Súilleabháin 1962: x). Because of Molloy's departure from many of the strictures of Classical Irish, his language is a useful source in examining the dialect once spoken in this part of Offaly. For present purposes it is necessary to work on the assumption that the dialectal features found in the seventeenth-century text were also features of the dialect spoken in the area during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In what follows, a number of the linguistic features of *LF* will be presented and their associations with what we know of other Irish dialects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries outlined, as well as other textual sources readily accessible through *Corpas*.

The realisation of <ao> as /i:/ would be expected for this area, based on the evidence of place names (Hickey 2011: 358), and agrees with the dialectal usage in Connacht, as well as that of Meath (O'Rahilly 1932: 27). Molloy's spelling in *LF* provides examples. Classical Irish *tiodhlacadh* with initial segment /t'i:/ is spelt *taodhlachadh* once in *LF*,²⁵⁹ while *choidhche* /xi:x'ə/ is spelt *chaoidhche*²⁶⁰ and the dialectal plural imperative form of the verb *glac* is rendered *glacaoidhe* with final /i:/, rather than the expected orthographic form *glacaidh*.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Molloy was born *circa* 1606 according to Ó Súilleabháin (1962: x).

²⁵⁹ See *LF* 2133. The Classical Irish spelling also occurs at *LF* 340, 596.

²⁶⁰ *LF* 271, 4714.

²⁶¹ *LF* 3772.

The tendency for the de-palatalization of historic /rʲ/ to /rs/ is found in Scottish Gaelic and in Ulster Irish (O’Rahilly 1932: 206), but Williams (1998: 553) has, perhaps, underestimated the extent to which it is also found in Connacht dialects.²⁶² This feature may also have been a feature of the language of *LF*.²⁶³

The lenition of original internal /k/ in dependent forms of the verb ‘to see’ (and derived forms) is attested in the twentieth-century dialects of counties Donegal (Wagner 1959: 150), Tyrone (Ó Tuathail 1933: xxiv), Armagh (Ní Bhaoill 2010: 328) and Louth (Ó Searcaigh 1925: 180; *LASID* iv: 298). This linguistic feature is much older than the twentieth century, however, and can be found in texts of the mid-nineteenth century in Tyrone and Derry (Ó Buachalla 1969–70: 266), and other texts of East Ulster provenance (Ní Mhuirgheasa and Ó Ceithearnaigh 1952: 197). It is also found in nineteenth-century texts from Meath (Beckett 1967: 138, 148), and in a late eighteenth-century manuscript of Longford provenance (Williams 1972: 104). The earliest attestation of this feature known to me is contained in an early sixteenth-century Ulster text (Ó Súilleabháin 1976: 204). To these we may add a number of clear examples in *LF*: *ní fhacha* 1086, *go bhfaichfea* 2853, *sofhaichse* 5413.

According to Ó Searcaigh (1925: 66), the first person singular of the present indicative in Ulster is not palatalised, with the exception of the west Cavan area of Glengalvin (= *LASID* point 64). Although on the whole this appears to be accurate (cf. C. Ó Baoill 1978: 223–4), it does not seem to be as universal as Ó Searcaigh implies (cf. Wagner 1959: 100). Ó Searcaigh’s observation also applies to southeast Ulster (McKenna 2001: lx) and Meath (Laoide 1914: 126; O’Rahilly 1932: 169; Beckett 1967: 72–3). In *LF*, there are two instances which clearly agree with this dialectal usage: *deuram* ‘I say’ 996, *fillem* ‘I return’ 4477. The other examples in *LF* conform to the expected Classical form in this regard (cf. McManus 1994: 396).

In Classical Irish the preposition *seach* ‘past, beyond’ was followed by the accusative, as was also the case in Old Irish (*GOI*: 530; McManus 1994: 433). In *LF*, however, as in a very small number of other texts, the preposition governs the

²⁶² Williams (1998: 553) cites this feature as unique to Ulster and Scottish Gaelic, although this de-palatalization is most common in these dialects, see also *LASID* i: 183, 255, where it appears also in Connacht, most especially in the east of the province.

²⁶³ See *LF* 4904, where *do thursa* is written instead of the expected form *do thuirisigh*.

genitive.²⁶⁴ This rare linguistic feature appears to be largely limited geographically to south Ulster; it occurs in three separate post-Classical texts from the Cavan/Fermanagh area,²⁶⁵ and another of less localisable southern Ulster provenance.²⁶⁶ Outside of south Ulster, this feature appears most clearly in texts of northeast Connacht provenance.²⁶⁷ It is clear from the examples discussed that this feature, in the period after 1600 at least, was one shared by south(west) Ulster, northeast Connacht and by the dialect spoken by the author of *LF*.

The language of *LF* shows a marked tendency towards the nasalisation of a noun after a preposition and the singular article even after *insa* ‘in the’.²⁶⁸ In Munster and the vast majority of Ulster Irish dialects *insa*, *sa* ‘in the’ causes lenition (Ó Siadhail 1989: 127–9). In Connacht dialects, as well as those of southeast Ulster and Meath (Beckett 1967: 70), however, eclipsis is usual. This is also the case in the language of *LF*.²⁶⁹ Eclipsis is usual in this context in *LF* for all other prepositions,²⁷⁰ with the exception of *don* / *den*, which always causes lenition,²⁷¹ and the case of *m*-initial

²⁶⁴ *LF* 1578, 2157, 4310, 4507.

²⁶⁵ The first two texts are of a similar genre: *Eachtra Macaoimh an Iolair* (de Teiltiún and Laoide 1912: 29, 30, 31, 35) and *Eachtra Ridire na Leomhan* (Ní Chróinín 1952: lines 1584, 2658) are both late-medieval Romance tales written in the Fermanagh/Cavan area. Their language has received only cursory scholarly attention; see C. Dillon (2013) for a recent insightful but necessarily limited treatment of dialect features in the latter text. The third text is a life of St Bridget originally commissioned by Brian Mag Uidhir of Fermanagh and published by Ó Domhnaill (1940: 64) from two manuscripts, RIA MS 23 A 15, written by a Séamus Mag Uidhir in 1712, and RIA MS 23 L 33, copied by the Dublin scribe Richard Tipper in 1739.

²⁶⁶ The text *Beatha San Froinsias* is certainly of south Ulster provenance as the text contains linguistic features associated with both southeast and southwest Ulster (Ó Súilleabháin 1957: xvii). There is a single example of the preposition *seach* followed by the genitive in the text (see line 2262).

²⁶⁷ For a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century example from Leitrim, see Carney (1950: 239, 270). It also occurs in the writing of Thaddeus Connellon, the Sligo scholar and teacher, in his text *Reidh-leighin air Ghnothuibh Cearba*, which has previously been discussed. The third Connacht text in which this feature occurs is the seventeenth-century *Buaidh na naomhchroiche* (Ó Súilleabháin 1972: 35, 55, 181, 209, 230). The editor of the latter text expressed the view that it may have been translated into Irish by a man from north Connacht (Ó Súilleabháin 1972: xiii). Further linguistic investigation of this suggestion may prove fruitful.

²⁶⁸ *LF*: *san mbeathaidh* 363, 787, *san gCre* 349, *ar an bpeaca* 718, *ar an bpeacadh* 697.

²⁶⁹ *LF*: *san ccuigeadh* 731, *san gcuigeadh* 5209, *san gcumann* 972, *san gcreideamh* 5156, *san bpeacadh*, *san mbiobla* 4736, 4743, 4767, *san gcaibidil* 4800, *san nGaidheilg* 610, *san ngluais* 4891, *san mball* 5510, *sa bpoll* 5517, *san bpunc* 5572, *san mbeatha* 5595.

²⁷⁰ Examples from *LF* include: *leis an ccorp* 678, *as an ccroiche* 684, *as an mbiobla* 4784, 4935, 5374, *as an bpeacadh* 1012, *on mbiobla* 4785, *ar an mbiobla* 4800, *leis an mbiobla* 4819, 4891, 5151, 5299, 5678, *ar an ngluais* 5165, *ar a' bhfirine* 5306, *ar an gcraig* 5361, *leis an ccredeamh* 418, *leis an bpaidir* 991.

²⁷¹ Examples from *LF* include: *don Chré* 601, 602, 615, 648, 729, *don chroich* 670, *don bhiobla* 4890, 4913, 4942, *don mheid* 4939, 5226, *don chluais* 5089. The following examples of <sV> can also be noted here: *don tsort* 5567, 5728, *don tseinreachd* 387.

nouns which appear to be lenited following all prepositions.²⁷² In this regard *LF* closely resembles the language of the southeast Ulster/Meath scribe Muiris Ó Gormáin (cf. McCaughey 1967–8: 218; C. Ó Baoill 1978: 255–6).

Another characteristic of the language of *LF* is its common use of the pronoun *inn*, as both object and subject pronoun, rather than *sinn*.²⁷³ Both existed in Classical Irish (McManus 1994: 429). There are only sporadic occurrences of this pronominal usage in Irish dialects of the last century, all of which are confined to north Donegal and East Ulster (cf. Ó Sé 1996: 27). There are a number of occurrences in *Corpas* (approx. 350); when examples from verse are excluded, the majority of these seem to be from East Ulster texts (cf. McKenna 2001: 349), although it is noticeably common also in the Irish translation of the Old Testament. This is significant as this translation was undertaken in the early seventeenth century by Murtagh King, a member of a learned scribal family associated with an area around the border between Offaly and Westmeath (McCaughey 2001: 36–41). It appears, therefore, that this usage is likely to reflect the spoken language of Offaly in the seventeenth century. That being the case, the isogloss links Offaly, and possibly Westmeath, with East Ulster. A similar usage occurs in *LF* whereby the third singular and plural pronominal subject forms are written *é, í, iad*, rather than *sé, sí, siad*.²⁷⁴ C. Ó Baoill (1978: 257–8) notes that this feature is found in a wide geographic area across Ulster, but in all of these areas the *s*-initial forms are by far the more common.

In Classical Irish there was a degree of variation permitted in the third singular of the present tense, which undoubtedly reflected a degree of dialectal variation which was established by the thirteenth century:

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|------|---------------------|
| indep. | <i>brisidh (sé)</i> | dep. | <i>ní bhris</i> |
| | | | <i>ní bhriseann</i> |

²⁷² *LF*: *as an mheud seo* 5267, *leis an mheid* 5621, *don mheud* 5687,

²⁷³ *LF*: *saor inn a Dhe* 268, *gurab e bheannaighes inn* 815, *na leig ind a ccathughadh* 1165, *inn fein* 2928, *gibe modh ar a gcloinid inn* 3220.

²⁷⁴ *LF*: *go ccluín iad* 3224, *ni bhfuil e ann* 4280, *nach bhfuil iad* 5280.

The dependent form of the verb with suffixed *-(e)ann*, permitted in Classical verse, is a Middle Irish innovation (McCone 1987: 224–7; A. J. Hughes 1997: 231) and there is no reason to expect that it developed at the same time across all dialects. This *-(e)ann* suffix subsequently spread to independent position (McGonagle 1976a: 203) so that by the seventeenth century it had started ‘to oust the absolute [independent] form’ (O’Rahilly 1932: 132). The earliest attestations of this development are from Connacht and date to the fifteenth century (Ó Súilleabháin 1945–7: 62). There is a strong dialectal element to the distribution of the flexionless present tense (i.e. present tense forms of the verb with neither *-(e)ann* nor *-(a)idh*) in Irish dialects of the early twentieth century. McGonagle (1976b) has shown that in the early twentieth century, flexionless forms were limited to the irregular verbs and best preserved in Ulster. Given Molloy’s otherwise clear penchant for dialectal spellings and deviation from the norm of Classical Irish, it is reasonable to assume that the spread of the ending *-(e)ann* to independent position was not a feature of Molloy’s dialect since *LF* does not provide a single example (cf. Ó Súilleabháin 1962: xxi). In support of this suggestion, it can be noted that there are a number of instances in *LF* of the flexionless dependent also.²⁷⁵ Further, there a number of instances in *LF* where the historical independent ending has migrated to the dependent.²⁷⁶ This phenomenon is particularly well-attested in the Irish of southwest Donegal and less so in north Connacht and East Ulster (McGonagle 1976b: 205–7). Assuming the verbal forms in *LF* are representative of the dialect, it appears that this dialect feature was shared with Offaly.

There are also a number of lexical items and idioms attested in *LF* which help relate the language of the text to other, better-attested, dialects of Irish. In the modern Gaelic languages the structure *ruig/leig leas* ‘need to (bother with)’ is most closely associated with Scottish Gaelic, rather than with Irish. C. Ó Baoill (1978: 118–9) has shown, however, that this structure was once to be found in East Ulster dialects, attested in texts from Armagh, Monaghan, Omeath and Meath in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as in recordings from the last native speakers of these

²⁷⁵ *LF*: *an gcuir sibhsi* 4148, *nach ccreid* 4163, *nach tuig* 4646, *go n-iarr* 4660, *ni lean* 4982.

²⁷⁶ *LF*: 378, 2826.

areas. The examples cited by C. Ó Baoill are all negative. The one example in *LF* is interrogative.²⁷⁷

The construction *t(h)ig le*, meaning ‘to be able’, is, in the words of Ó Siadhail (1989: 293), ‘for the most part associated with Donegal’, but is also found in Connacht, although in Iorras Aithneach at least the construction is ‘more or less obsolete’ (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1219). The construction is extremely common in *LF*.²⁷⁸

The use of *go seadh* ‘yet’ in *LF* is remarkably frequent.²⁷⁹ This usage is extremely common in East Ulster dialects and is also reported by Wagner (*LASID* i: 169) at Omeath (point 65) and Inishowen (point 68). Sommerfelt (1929: 131, 148) reports it for south Armagh. Such is its geographically restricted use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 195) claimed it was ‘a lexeme not found outside East Ulster’. This claim can be qualified by reference to published sources.²⁸⁰ The form *go seadh* ‘yet’ occurs in the following Ulster texts: *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*;²⁸¹ *An Bheatha Dhiadha*;²⁸² a poem of southeast Ulster provenance;²⁸³ the late East Ulster tale known as *Imthiacht Dheirdre la Naoise*;²⁸⁴ and in a song collected in the early twentieth century in Donegal.²⁸⁵ It is significant that the lexeme also occurs in the writing of two northeast Connacht writers: Tadhg Ó Coinnialláin (1835) and Charles O’Conor of Belanagare (Ní Chinnéide 1957: 9), both born in Sligo. Of all of these texts mentioned, *An Bheatha Dhiadha* is the only one of these texts which comes close to *LF* in terms of the frequency of the use of *go seadh*.

²⁷⁷ *LF*: 572.

²⁷⁸ *LF*: 2005, 4199, 4517, 4785, 4886, 4986, 5104.

²⁷⁹ *LF*: 1095, 3243, 3356, 3896, 4484, 4909, 4940, 5025, 5314.

²⁸⁰ The following instances are all those attested in *Corpas*.

²⁸¹ This text is a seventeenth-century anthology compiled for the East Ulster dynast Cormac Ó Néill (Ó Donnchadha 1931: 274).

²⁸² The author of this text was not known to the editor with any certainty, but the language of the text is decidedly Ulster in provenance (Ó Fachtna 1967: x, xii, xix). For examples of *go seadh* in use in this text see Ó Fachtna (1967: 23, 84, 96). C. Dillon (2013: 34) has recently suggested that the translator of this text was Philip O’Reilly (*circa* 1600–1660), a native of south Ulster, a Franciscan associated with the Irish College in Prague.

²⁸³ This poem is contained in manuscripts in the hands of the southeast Ulster poet and scribe Muiris Ó Gormáin and the more obscure Aodh Ó Dálaigh (Ó Dubhthaigh 1958–61: 41, 45).

²⁸⁴ For instances of the use of *go seadh* in the text see Ó Buachalla (1962–4: 124, 141).

²⁸⁵ The text of the poem was published in *Cuallacht Choluim Cille* (1909), where it is noted that the poem was ‘written from the dictation of Anna Chonaill Ruaidh mic Loinsigh, a resident of Glenfinn, Co. Donegal by Peadar Mac Loinsigh of the same place’.

The verb *aithris* is found in Ulster alongside *ársuigh*, a late development of the former with the meaning ‘to tell’ or ‘to relate’ (cf. Williams 1969–70). According to Williams (1969–70: 182), there is ‘good evidence that *aithris/airis* was commonly used in southeast Ulster to mean “tell, relate”’. It is found in certain parts of north Connacht as a verb (Mhac an Fhailigh 1968, s.v.) but in Iorras Aithneach it appears to be known only as a noun (Ó Curnáin 2007, s.v.). The use of *aithris* ‘tell, relate’ is common in *LF*.²⁸⁶

Table 2 Phonological and morphological features in *LF* and their distribution in modern dialects

| | Linguistic features of <i>LF</i> | Connacht | South Ulster only (incl. Meath) | Ulster |
|---|--|----------|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | <ao> = /i:/ | √ | √ | √ |
| 2 | /rʲ/ → /rs/ | ≈ | √ | √ |
| 3 | prep. + art. = eclipsis | √ | √ | — |
| 4 | 1 st singular present /-m`/ | — | √ | √ |
| 5 | <i>Ní fhacha</i> etc. | — | √ | √ |
| 6 | <i>seach</i> + genitive | ≈ | √ | — |
| 7 | pronominal <i>inn</i> | — | √ | ≈ |
| 8 | object pronominal <i>é, í, iad</i> | — | √ | √ |
| 9 | retention of flexionless present tense | ≈ | √ | √ |

Table 3 Idioms or lexical items in *LF* and their dialectal in modern dialects

| | Idioms/lexical items in <i>LF</i> | Connacht | South Ulster only (incl. Meath) | Ulster |
|---|------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | <i>ruig/leig leas</i> ‘to have to’ | — | √ | √ |
| 2 | <i>t(h)ig le</i> ‘to be able to’ | ≈ | √ | √ |
| 3 | <i>go seadh</i> ‘yet’ | ≈ | √ | √ |
| 4 | verb <i>aithris</i> ‘to tell’ | ≈ | √ | √ |

This brief analysis indicates that when Laoide (1896: 145) suggested that a distinctive dialect existed in counties Meath, Westmeath and Louth, a good number of the features which he may have had in mind extended as far south as Offaly during the seventeenth century. While there are, as Williams (1998) has argued, a

²⁸⁶ *LF*: 4843, 5054.

number of features of the language of *LF* which might associate it with Connacht, there are many more which would place it in the larger intra-dialect continuum ranging from Inishowen in the north to Offaly in the south. It has already been noted that Williams's (1994a; 1998) sole defining feature for 'Galeonic Irish' was its stress patterns. A single feature does not warrant such a classification; a better classification would be one which included Offaly in a continuum of dialect features shared with Westmeath, parts of Longford,²⁸⁷ Meath, Cavan, Fermanagh, Louth and south Armagh. A smaller, but not insignificant, number of these dialect features are shared with the dialects of central and west Ulster. It is worth noting that prior to the formulation of his 'Galeonic Irish' theory, Williams (1972: 11) himself, in his discussion of a manuscript written in Longford, wrote that it exhibited 'features that one would associate with both southeast Ulster and Connaught [...] with the Ulster features in a strong majority'. Once the fallacy of 'Galeonic Irish' is done away with, a more interesting pattern emerges.

This classification should not be interpreted to mean that the boundaries of this dialect area were water-tight. As one would expect a number of these classificatory features are also found outwith this area. O'Rahilly (cited in Lloyd [Laoide] 1912: 21) drew attention to the similarity between the language of *LF* and that of Seán Ó Neachtain, the eighteenth-century Roscommon scribe, who was born five miles west of the Shannon, which separates counties Roscommon and Westmeath. This type of similarity is to be expected and supports rather than refutes the general argument that the area outlined above is a robust classificatory schema for the language of *LF*. Incidentally, this provides a context for the occurrence of the word *mart* 'cow', most usually associated with southeast Ulster (A. J. Hughes 1994: 613), in apparent free variation with *bó* in an area of south Roscommon (*LASID* i: 3) less than eight miles west of the Shannon.²⁸⁸

The occurrence of so-called 'Ulster' features as far south as Offaly in the late seventeenth century raises an important question. Could this be a reflex of the new-

²⁸⁷ See Williams (1972: 111) for a discussion of an eighteenth-century manuscript witness to the dialect of Longford; Piatt (1941–2) presents vestiges of the spoken language from early twentieth-century fieldwork.

²⁸⁸ Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 192) saw the occurrence of *mart* 'cow' in this area as anomalous; the present discussion highlights that it is not.

dialect formation process which has been postulated earlier in this thesis, a process which, it is suggested, happened during the long period of Uí Néill stability in the whole of the region under their hegemony? Williams (1998: 562) goes no further than to note that '[g]iven that Offaly is in the middle of Ireland, the affinities of Offaly Irish are perhaps what one might expect'. It is worth looking at the political as well as the physical geography of Offaly, however, in discussing its dialectal position. As to the modern county of Offaly, it is, as outlined in FitzPatrick (1998: 93), a rather late superimposition upon parts of five early historic kingdoms: Delbna Ethra, Éile Tuaisceart, Cenél Fiachrach (later Fir Chell), Uí Failge, and a small part of Uí Maine. According to FitzPatrick:

In effect, this landmass constituted the crossroads between the provinces of Leinster, Mide, Munster, and Connacht in early historic times. It was the confluence point of four powerful and frequently contending provincial overkingdoms and more significantly the political playground of the Southern Uí Néill high-kings – a hegemony which reached the height of its power in the ninth century (FitzPatrick 1998: 93).

Ballycowan, a short distance to the west of Tullamore, the area of Molloy's birth, was in the heartland of Southern Uí Néill territory of Clann Cholmáin (Karkov and Ruffing 1997), and not far from the location of the great Columban monastery of Durrow (Byrne 2005a: 665).

When taken in conjunction with the historical sociolinguistic scenario, it appears that the quantitative data equips us well to explain the distinctiveness of 'Ulster' Irish. The dialect features discussed are coextensive with the area under the hegemony of the Uí Néill in the period between the sixth and tenth centuries. The rapid spread of the Uí Néill across this area combined with the subsequent relative stability of their polity would provide a very favourable environment for the type of regional koineization which ultimately leads to new-dialect formation.

There was a period of almost five centuries during which the Southern and Northern Uí Néill were united by a shared identity forming what Weinreich (1954: 397) would call a 'culture area' which endured until the tenth century (Jaski 1995: 346, cf. Byrne 2005b: 864). This period, if we are to judge from the flourishing of learning evident in chapter 4, appears to have been a period of remarkable sociocultural (and one can

assume sociolinguistic) stability when compared to the subsequent history of the area in question. This early stability can be compared with the sociocultural upheavals of the later period between the Norman Conquest and the start of the seventeenth centuries. The latter period is characterised by the sociolinguistic disruption of the Norman invasion, the encroachment of the English-speaking Pale on lands once held by the Southern Uí Néill (and the attendant language shift), and the Plantation of Ulster under James VI & I mean that the genesis of this greater ‘Ulster’ dialect are likely to belong to the Early Irish period. Given the degree of the breakdown in solidarity between the northern and southern branches of the Uí Néill in the tenth century, it is clear that the ideal sociolinguistic environment for this type of new-dialect formation is the earliest stages of the Old Irish period itself.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the primary dialectal divisions in other languages such as English, French and Spanish clearly originate in a similarly distant past, so that there is little surprising about the suggestion that the large-scale changes in social structure and demography of the Old Irish period might still cast a shadow on dialects of Irish. Unfortunately, the lack of coverage of *LASID* in the southeast of the area formerly under the hegemony of the Uí Néill does not allow for as fine-grained a discussion as one might like. But what clues we have for the southeast of the area in question in more recent centuries, is reassuringly congruent with the data from areas where evidence is more readily available. The northwest of the former hegemony of the Uí Néill is, of course, better served by *LASID*. Focus will now be directed there.

6.6.3 *Cenél Conaill versus Cenél nÉogain*

It is useful now to probe further the historical sociolinguistic situation in the area of the Uí Néill hegemony for which we have the most robust evidence from *LASID*. The two Uí Néill dynasties of political significance in the northern part of the greater Uí Néill hegemony were Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain. The early eighth-century Uí Néill shift in power whereby the northern Cenél nÉogain and the southern Clann Cholmáin maintained a duopoly on the kingship of Tara has been mentioned above. This shift in power had the effect of confining the Cenél Conaill to their northwest homeland, where they were ‘ill-placed for expansion’ and could acquire no new

lands or power (Ó Corráin 1972: 72). This had an impact on relations between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain:

Until the beginning of the eighth century they [Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain] had shared in the overkingship of the Northern Uí Néill. From this point forward, however, the Cenél Eógain made every effort to exclude them from the kingship, an effort which resulted in a long series of dynastic struggles which culminated in the battle of Cloiteach in 789. As a result of this battle, the Cenél Conaill were permanently excluded from the overkingship of the Northern Uí Néill. The Cenél Conaill retained their lands in Donegal and remained permanently hostile to Cenél Eógain; as a result of this hostility, the overkings of Cenél Eógain exercised no effective authority over Donegal, with the exception of Inishowen and the Lagan valley to the south of it (Ó Corráin 1972: 17).

This historical fact renders the border between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain lands one of the most important political boundaries within the hegemony of the Uí Néill during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. As Cenél Conaill were being relegated to the political side-lines by their Cenél nÉogain cousins, the Cenél nÉogain, after 735, were increasingly absorbing the Airgíalla (Charles-Edwards 2000: 573–4; Ó Cróinín 2005a: 211).

6.6.3.1 *Modern dialect evidence*

Since O’Rahilly’s (1932) exposition on purported Scottish influence on Ulster dialects, the question of the internal relationship of Ulster dialects has exercised scholars (Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 192). One of the most authoritative statements on dialect relationships in Ulster was made by Wagner after his fieldwork for *LASID*:

Ulster Irish consists of two main dialects, an East Ulster (points 65, 66, 68) and a Donegal dialect (points 69–86) (Wagner 1958: 32).

While Ó Dochartaigh (1987: 192) is no doubt correct to assert that Wagner implied ‘too rigid a set of boundaries between various dialect groupings’, the delineation of general trends is nonetheless useful in the context of historical dialectology and historical sociolinguistics, provided that one bears in mind they are not absolute distinctions. In that regard, the results of the quantitative analysis of Ulster dialects are of the utmost importance.

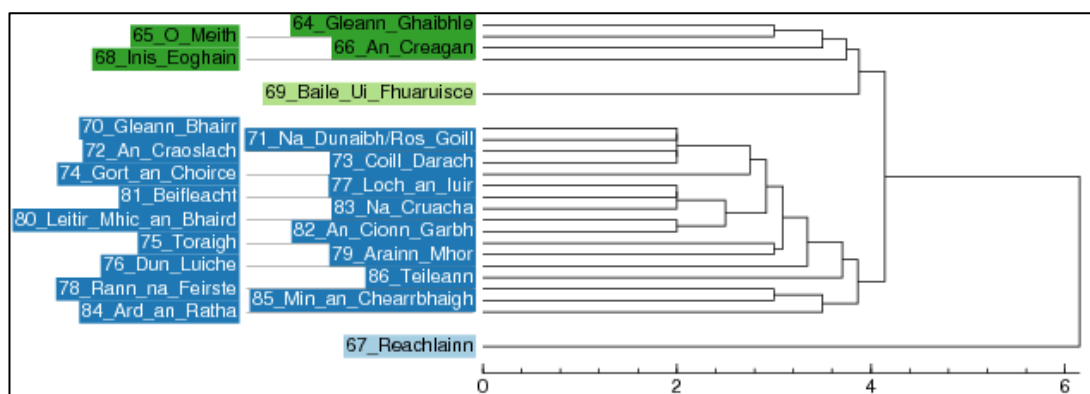


Figure 42 LD-based classification of Ulster dialects in LASID, based on Kessler (1995), represented in Gabmap

The quantitative analysis accords well with Wagner’s observations. We can outline, without claiming any sort of watertight division, two larger areas and at least two linguistic ‘outliers’, of Ballyhooriskey and Rathlin. East Ulster, including the dialects of Louth, Cavan,²⁸⁹ and Tyrone surveyed in *LASID* can be generally distinguished from the Donegal dialects. There are two northeast Donegal dialect points, however, which do not group with the other Donegal dialects. The first of these is Inishowen (point 68), which groups with other East Ulster dialects. The second is Ballyhooriskey (point 69) on the Fanad peninsula, of which Wagner (1958: xx) remarks that it is ‘quite different from other Donegal dialects’.²⁹⁰ The position of Ballyhooriskey on the dendrogram supports Ó Dochartaigh’s (1987: 192) contention that the east/west division in Ulster is not absolute, but as a whole, it is clear that, if

²⁸⁹ It can be noted that when all Irish dialects surveyed in *LASID* are analysed together according to LD, this dialect point in northwest Cavan appears to be closest to those of Connacht. Unsurprisingly, the manuscript evidence from the opposite end of the county indicates a closer relationship with the dialects of East Ulster (cf. C. Dillon 2013).

²⁹⁰ In this context it is useful to recall that the Fanad peninsula, on which Ballyhooriskey is located, was intensely settled by members of the Scottish Clann Suibhne during the late medieval period, who were planted there by Ó Domhnaill of Tír Conaill. While this was not the only area of the region to be settled by Scottish *gallóglai*gh, the large-scale Mac Suibhne settlement of Fanad gave rise to an enduring chieftaincy which was recognised as the senior branch in the region (Simms 1995: 187–8). In this regard, the situation of the Fanad peninsula may find a parallel in the situations of two islands already discussed, i.e. Achill, and Rathlin. If the distinctiveness of this dialect is indeed to be traced to this population settlement then it offers an explanation for the fact that the dialect only very weakly clusters with other dialects from East Ulster, appearing to be slightly further from Inishowen than Inishowen is from Omeara, a remarkable fact given the proximity of the Inishowen and Fanad peninsulas. One might expect that a marked similarity with the dialects of Argyll would be evident in the networks in chapter 2, given the Argyll origins of Clann Suibhne. In fact, this should not be expected; a traditional analysis of the dialect might uncover some shared features, but the case of Achill, discussed in chapter 2, indicates that we should not expect this relationship to be evident in the dialectometric analyses.

used judiciously, the east/west classification of Ulster dialects is quite robust and useful for descriptive purposes.

6.6.3.2 *Inishowen and East Ulster*

Evans (1969) provided a comprehensive account of the linguistic features common to Inishowen dialects and other East Ulster dialects. Evans (1969: 81) emphasised that his paper was not ‘an attempt to “prove” that Inishowen is an East Ulster dialect’. The underlying assumption in that account, however, is, overwhelmingly, that ‘East Ulster features’ had penetrated, intruded upon, or otherwise influenced the dialect of Inishowen:

two clear instances of the East Ulster feature **penetrating** into the Irish of north-east Donegal [i.e. Inishowen] (Evans 1969: 83).

the following set of forms shows quite clearly that the East Ulster feature has **penetrated** into the [Inishowen] dialect (Evans 1969: 88).

Inishowen provides us with yet a further instance of the **influence** of East Ulster Irish on its dialect (Evans 1969: 92).

Inishowen *iorball* [ɔrəbəl] ‘a tail’ is an **intrusive** East Ulster feature – of Scottish Gaelic origin (Evans 1969: 93).²⁹¹

It is immediately obvious that Evans’s (1969) reading of the evidence has been heavily influenced by O’Rahilly’s invocation of ‘Scottish influence’ in explaining many of the features of Ulster Irish.²⁹² O’Rahilly’s theory of Scottish influence on Ulster Irish was used to explain ‘most of those features in which Ulster Irish is in agreement with Scottish [Gaelic] and in disagreement with the Irish of the rest of the country’ (O’Rahilly 1932: 168–9). As pointed out by Ó Buachalla (1977; 2002), however, this assumption is both unnecessary and unscientific. Regardless of what one chooses to call the larger dialect group to which Inishowen belongs, it is clear from the quantitative analysis that Inishowen is to be included along with the East Ulster dialects in any objective classificatory schema of Ulster dialects.

²⁹¹ Incidentally, Evans (1969: 85, 93) also accepts that a number of the features shared by East Ulster dialects with Scottish Gaelic are Scottish imports (as per O’Rahilly 1932).

²⁹² Ó Buachalla (1977: 96, n. 9) calls Evans’s (1969) article ‘the most extreme application of the theory [i.e. O’Rahilly’s ‘influence’] in recent years’.

From the time of the initial expansion of Cenél nÉogain out of Inishowen in the early sixth century until as late as the twelfth century, ‘the peninsula [of Inishowen] was not merely a part, but an essential part’ of the kingdom (Simms 1980: 187). When this historical fact is set beside the quantitative dialect data there is a sufficiently close correspondence for one to associate the two sorts of evidence and tentatively conclude that the dialect area developed in the second half of the first millennium in connection with the rise of the Cenél nÉogain. Doing so frees scholarship from the need to invoke ‘East Ulster influence’ or ‘dialect penetration’ to explain the dialect affinities of Inishowen; they are part of the same historical dialect area (cf. A. J. Hughes 1994: 613). Their affinities with other Donegal dialects are to be expected inasmuch as neighbouring dialects can, of course, share specific features; but the quantitative analysis makes it clear that their major affinity is with the East Ulster, or ‘Cenél nÉogain block’.²⁹³ Further, this scenario is supported by a sociolinguistically robust model of dialect formation; the scenario advocated by Evans has no such model to support it.

6.7 Variation in Munster

6.7.1 Centre and periphery in Munster?

The second major dialect area for which there are sufficient socio-historical data and sufficient modern linguistic data is the greater Munster area.²⁹⁴ Following the observations of Andersen (1988: 39) that ‘central and peripheral parts of a speech area typically develop differently’; Ó Sé (2002) has argued for a centre/periphery-based classification for twentieth-century Munster dialects. This model of the classification of Munster dialects has been cited approvingly by Hickey (2011: 340–2). The peripheral area of Munster outlined in Ó Sé (2002) includes the dialects of the Déise,²⁹⁵ the southeast Cork coast,²⁹⁶ the southwest Cork coast,²⁹⁷ parts of the

²⁹³ It seems likely that those scholars who have talked in terms of ‘intrusion’ and ‘penetration’ meant to associate these supposed features with historical population movements in the thirteenth century or later, i.e. the period which O’Rahilly (1932: 248) believed to be most formative.

²⁹⁴ Although Kilkenny is counted as part of the modern province of Leinster, it is to be understood that the term ‘greater Munster’ here refer also to Kilkenny dialects surveyed in *LASID*.

²⁹⁵ = *LASID* points 1–5.

²⁹⁶ = *LASID* point 7.

²⁹⁷ = *LASID* points 8–12, and 14.

Kerry coast,²⁹⁸ and Clare.²⁹⁹ Seven of the defining features of what Ó Sé calls the ‘peripheral area’ of Munster are set out in Hickey (2011: 341):

1. /ʃ/ realised as [s] in syllable onsets before [k], e.g. *scéal* realised with [sk], rather than [ʃk].
2. Pronominals *sae*, *suí* for *sé*, *sí*.
3. Raising /o:/ → /u:/ in proximity to a nasal.
4. Epenthetic /t'/ after word-final /(:)ʃ/ e.g. *bheidist*, *aríst*.
5. Use of *thá* [ha:] for *tá* in both relative and non-relative position
6. Retention of historical dative plural endings in use as nominatives, e.g. *fearaibh*
7. Realisation of second plural preterite ending *-abhair* as [əvɪrʲ], rather than as [u:rʲ]

It is not clear that this is the most significant division to be observed in twentieth-century Munster dialects, however. Certainly, it does not indicate that the periphery formed a cohesive dialect area. In fact, it simply highlights the fact that Ó Sé’s central area is characterised by relative homogeneity. In what follows, I will argue against a central and peripheral split, suggesting that an alternative classification is in fact more significant in a synchronic context, and that this synchronic classification has more satisfying diachronic implications.

Not one of these features outlined above is common to the whole of the peripheral area. Further, one cannot exclude the possibility that some features, such as the permanent lenition of the substantive verb *thá* [ha:] in both relative and non-relative position, have arisen independently in different parts of the periphery – as they have in Scottish Gaelic. One striking property of the features outlined is the fact that many of them belong either to an area north and east of Ó Sé’s central area (i.e. Clare and Waterford), or to one directly south of it (i.e. *LASID* points 8–14), so that it might be more useful to speak in terms of a southern and northern band of dialects in terms of certain features, with a central area between them. Another set of features connects Corca Dhuibhne with county Clare and in some instances Déise dialects. There are very few features connecting the Déise and Corca Dhuibhne which do not also occur

²⁹⁸ = *LASID* points 13, 18, 20.

²⁹⁹ = *LASID* points 22–4.

in Clare. Before going any further, it is expedient at this point to discuss the occurrence of some of these features in Corca Dhuibhne, as they raise issues of import.

6.7.2 *The position of Corca Dhuibhne*

Dialectal evidence presented in *LASID* was collected from the village of Dunquin at the western end of the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula partially cut off from the rest of the peninsula by a mountain ridge. A number of linguistic features are shared by the Dunquin (*LASID* point 20) with the coastal regions of counties Clare and Galway. These include the raising of /o:/ to /u:/ in proximity to a nasal and the realisation of the consonant cluster <ng> as /ŋg/ rather than /ŋ/ as in other Munster dialects.³⁰⁰

Hamp's (1971) analysis of the occurrence of the lexical item *meach* 'bee' in Corca Dhuibhne, a form only otherwise found in Connacht, concluded that it could only be explained as an intrusion introduced into the dialect of the area via the sea, rather than as an archaic retention or shared development. In light of this conclusion, it is worth suggesting that a number of the features outlined by Ó Sé (2002: 489) may also have been introduced to this part of Corca Dhuibhne via sea from Clare. These linguistic features may find a parallel in the material culture of Corca Dhuibhne in the form of the boat known as the *naomhóg*. The model on which the *naomhóg* was based was taken from Clare; Ó Sé (1998: 20) has tentatively suggested that a similar sort of diffusion could explain a good number of the linguistic features in question.

By way of corroboration, the fact that a number of these Corca Dhuibhne features are shared not only with the coast of Clare but also with areas on the Galway coast is important. In the case of nasal raising of /o:/ to /u:/, Ó Sé (2002: 478) suggests that this feature may have spread to the Connacht coast from Clare by means of contact between fishing communities.³⁰¹ Phenomena of this type are attested elsewhere in the Gaelic world (cf. Wagner 1958: 12). The suggestion is, of course, supported by the fact that it is only attested in areas of the southwest Connacht coast (see Figures 48 and 49 below).

³⁰⁰ For a fuller account of these features see Ó Sé (1998: 19–20; 2002: 148).

³⁰¹ That this nasal raising is indeed intrusive may be supported by the hypercorrect forms immediately to the east of Dunquin, in the townland of An Ghráig (cf. Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 485).

It seems, then, that from the point of view of Dunquin, one can talk about a significant affinity with the coastal dialects of Clare. Further, this synchronic dialect affinity appears to be linked to the southward coastal diffusion of certain dialect features from Clare. These features are otherwise unknown in the other dialects of Kerry and West Cork. This relationship is highlighted in the network below (Figure 43), which shows clear reticulations between Dunquin and Kilbaha. These reticulations are shared between these two points to the exclusion of others, most notably the nearby points 21 and 23, clearly indicating that Dunquin's affinity to Kilbaha is greater than to any other Clare dialect. It appears that further investigation of social interactions between these two peninsular coastal communities may shed light on the diffusion of these features. If these features shared between Dunquin and Kilbaha are to be thus explained in terms of coastal diffusion, however, it simply draws further attention to the salience of the relationship between the dialects of Clare and the Déise for which no such theory of coastal diffusion can account. This dialectal relationship will now be examined.

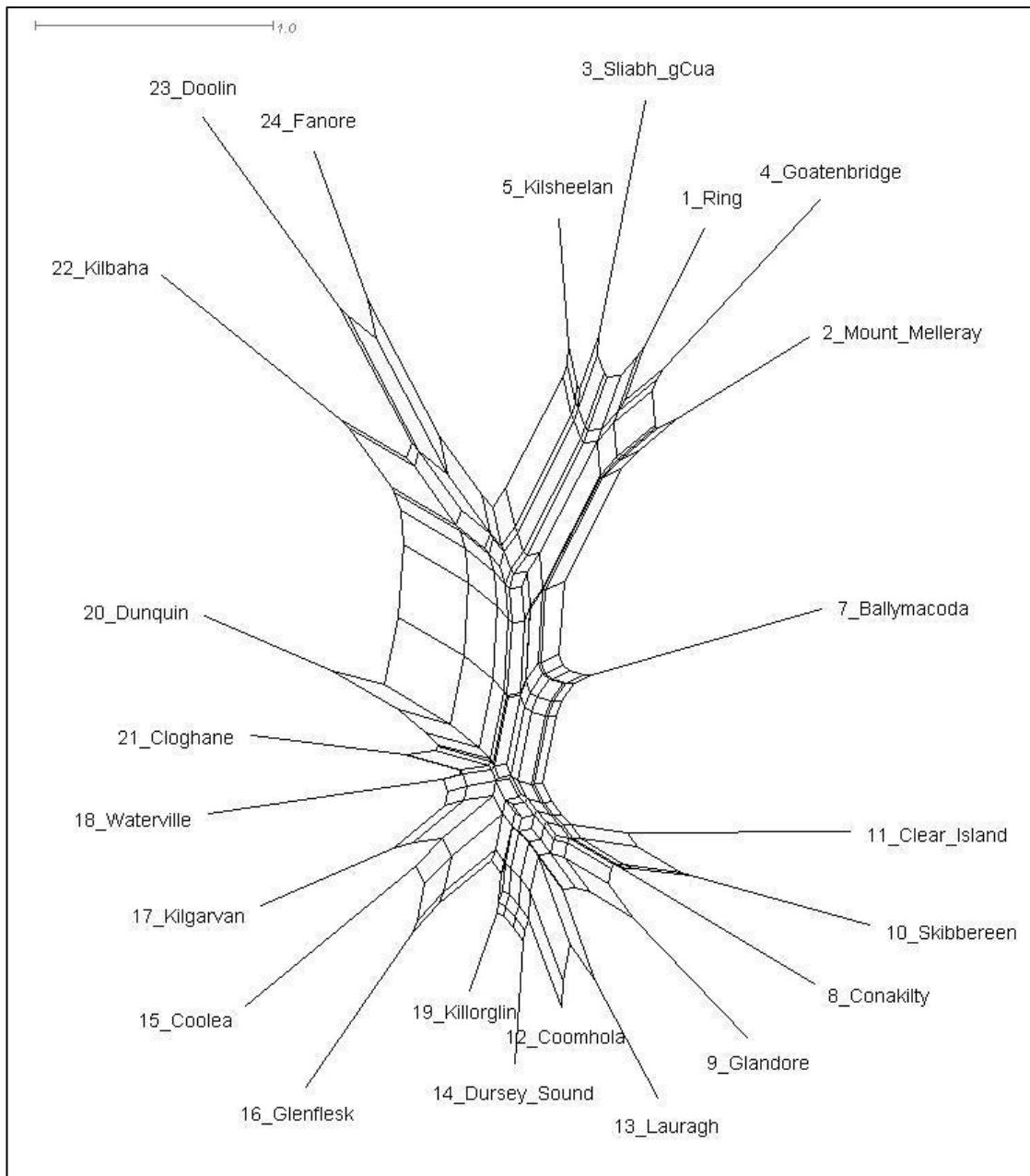


Figure 43 LD analysis of Munster dialects in LASID, based on Kessler (1995)

6.7.3 *The relationship of Clare and the Déise*

If those features shared by Clare dialects and Dunquin (to the exclusion of other dialects) are to be explained as having diffused via sea-contact from Clare, then the relationship between the dialects of Clare and the Déise become all the more important. This section will discuss some of those linguistic similarities between Clare and Déise dialects.

Phonological features

A number of phonological features are shared by the two twentieth-century dialect groupings of Clare and the Déise.

1. Raising /o:/ → /u:/ in contact with a nasal

As far as Clare is concerned, this sound change is valid throughout, ‘except in the areas in which Galway Irish is spoken and in some parts influenced by this form of Irish’ (Holmer 1962a: 54).³⁰² An identical development also occurs in Ring (R. B. Breatnach 1947: 118).

2. Diphthongisation

Holmer (1962a: 52) says of the connections between the dialects of Clare and Waterford that they ‘agree [...] in regard to the evolution of certain diphthongs’. The diphthongisation of vowels is a strong, and long-established, feature of the Déise dialect. Before a nasal, for instance, dialects in both Clare and the Déise may sometimes show a long vowel being diphthongised, especially in south Clare (Holmer 1962a: 56): *tinn* ‘sick’ [t’əinʲ] cf. Déise [b’ainʲ] *binn* ‘melodious’ (R. B. Breatnach 1947: 22).

3. <-th> → /x/

R. B. Breatnach (1947: 137) reported that final <th> in monosyllables is generally realised as [x], e.g. *sgáth* /sga:x/, *gaoth* /ge:x/, *liath* /l’iəx/, *dath* /dax/, *ciath* /k’ux/, *leath* /l’ax/, etc. Ua Súilleabháin (1994: 487) noted the same feature in the Déise, further observing that there were ‘some examples’ of this feature in Clare. Here Ua

³⁰² Hickey (2011: 337) claims nasal raising was not a feature of the Clare speakers recorded by Doegen in the 1930s but see Figure 48 and 49, based on information from *LASID*.

Súilleabháin's 'some examples' may be an understatement, since all Clare dialects surveyed in *LASID* report final /x/ in *gaoth* 'wind' and in *snáth* 'spun thread' while other lexemes show variation, indicating that this is likely to be a case of lexically conditioned allomorphy in the case of Clare Irish.

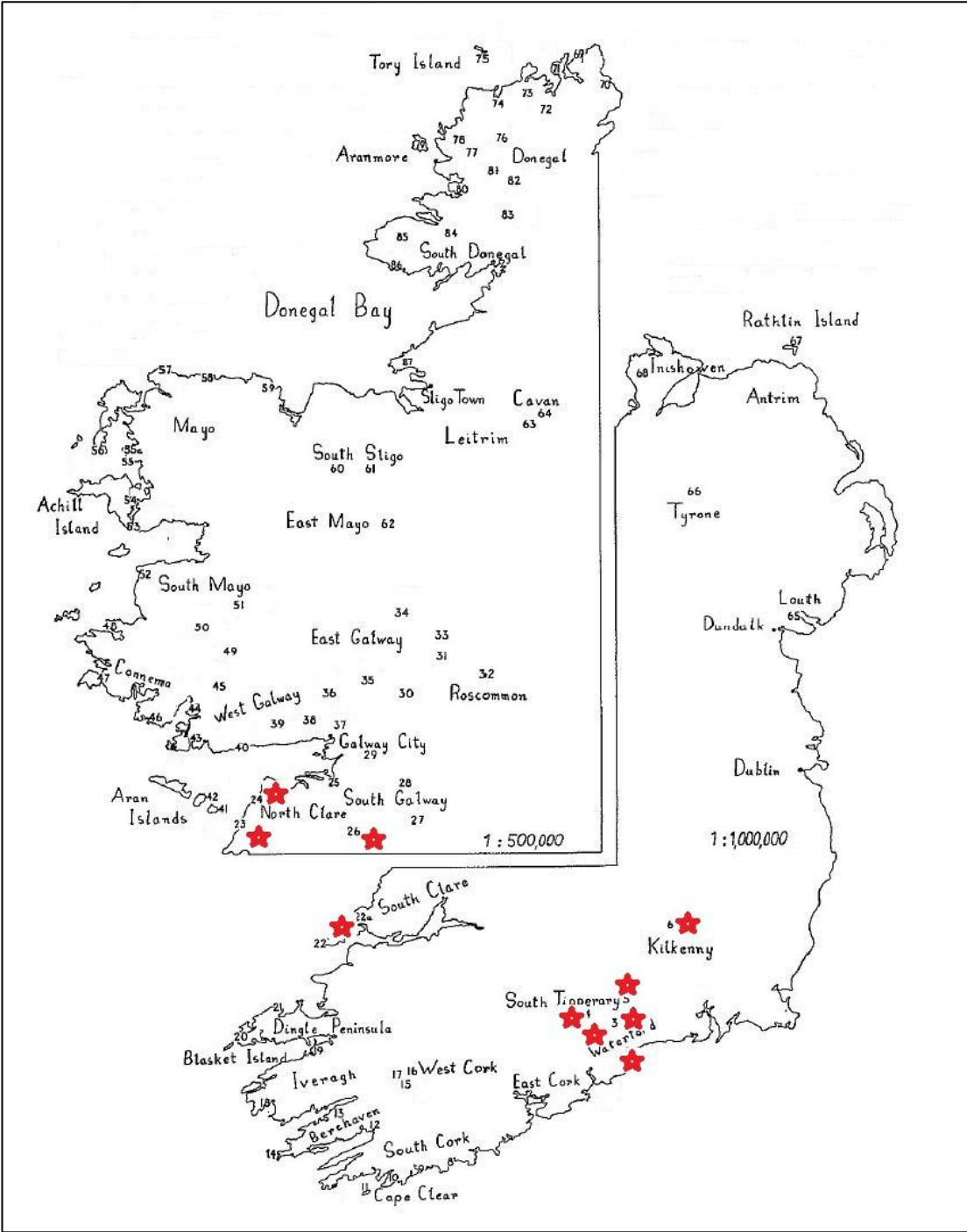


Figure 44 LASID i, map 223, instances of goath with final /x/

Non-phonological features

There are, moreover, a number of other, non-phonological features which occur in the Irish dialects of Clare and Ring, to the exclusion of all other Munster dialects, e.g.:

1. The exclusive use of the indirect relative particle a^N , rather than the particle go^N used in the rest of Munster:

einne [...] a mbeadh leathshúil ina cheann (Ussher 1945: 5)

rud a mairidíst air (Ó Duilearga 1981: 2)

2. The use of preverbal *fé* with the meaning ‘before’, unknown in other dialects of Irish:

fér imi’ sé ‘before he left’ (Sheehan 1944: 24)

fé ndúisídíst ‘before they used to wake up’ (Ó Duilearga 1981: 27)³⁰³

The presence of phonological, morphological, morphosyntactic and lexical³⁰⁴ features, not found in other dialects, have led scholars to postulate a band running from Waterford through the south and west of Tipperary, across Limerick and into south Clare, and continuing for some features at least as far as the northwest of county Clare (cf. Ó Cuív 1951: 71; Hickey 2011: 332). These qualitative affinities may now be compared with the quantitative data.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis based on LD, as shown in the Gabmap-generated dendrograph in Figure 45, is consonant with the qualitative affinity between the dialects of Clare, the Déise, and the Kilkenny dialect surveyed in *LASID*.

³⁰³ See also *LASID* i, 121 where *fé* and the more usual *sula* have been combined to form *sulfé* in some Clare dialects.

³⁰⁴ The claim as to lexis is based on the etymon identity analysis discussed in chapter 2 (cf. Wagner 1958: 22).

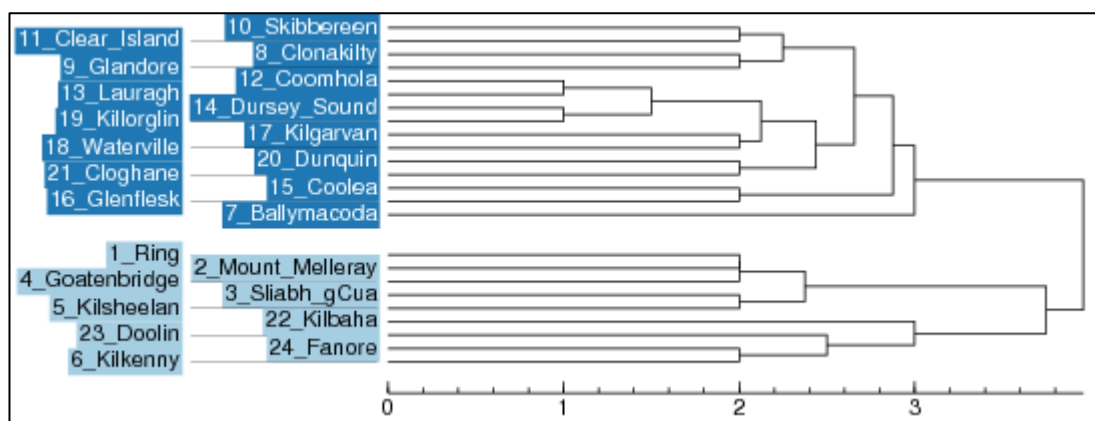


Figure 45 LD-based dendrograph of Munster dialects, generated by Gabmap

The dendrograph suggests that the dialects of the Déise and those of county Clare are, on the whole, more similar to each other than they are to any other dialect grouping in Munster. However, the dendrograph also shows that the similarity linking Clare and the Déise is less than the similarity linking other Munster dialects. It is clear that once the dendrograph is compared to the geographic location of the relevant points the linguistic distance between the Déise and Ballymacoda is of great importance. The geographic proximity of Ballymacoda to Ring (see Figure 46) might lead one to expect a greater degree of similarity than the dendrograph indicates. Despite its relative proximity to the Déise, the southeast Cork point of Ballymacoda (*LASID* point 7) is linguistically closer to other Cork dialects surveyed in *LASID*, all of which are located to the west of Cork City. Within the greater context of Cork dialects, however, Ballymacoda is remarkable for the large number of ‘Déise-type’ features in the dialect (cf. Hickey 2011: 339). This fact is reflected in the position of Ballymacoda in the dendrograph; although it is classified here along with other Cork and Kerry dialects, it is clearly the dialect point within the Cork/Kerry block which has the greatest affinity with the Clare/Déise block. The point to be extrapolated from this reading of the dendrograph, in tandem with the geographic position of the two areas in question, is an important and unusually tight bundling of isoglosses between Ring and Ballymacoda perhaps associated with the mouth of the Blackwater.

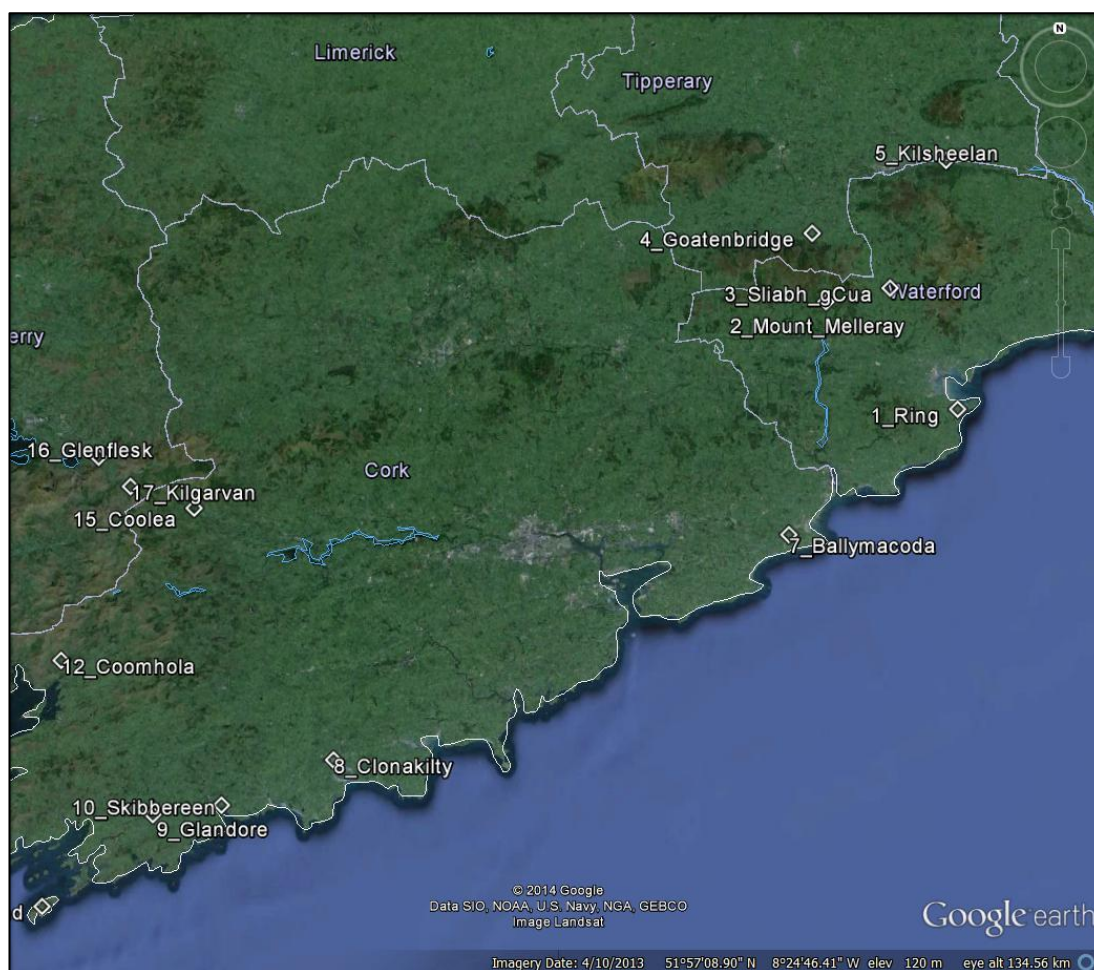


Figure 46 Some Munster dialect points surveyed in LASID

Historical connections

There is no obvious sociolinguistic explanation for the close linguistic relationship between Clare and the Déise, at least not in recent historical terms. The Clare and Déise points surveyed in *LASID* are not part of the same modern counties. Further, although both Clare and the Déise form part of the ecclesiastical province of Cashel, they are not in the same diocese, or even in adjacent dioceses. There is one further observation to be made on the linguistic relationship between Clare and Déise dialects before the historical sociolinguistic situation is examined: most of the features shared by Déise and Clare dialects are regular in Déise dialects but are somehow conditioned in Clare dialects.³⁰⁵ This fact was also observed by Ó Cuív

³⁰⁵ The clearest example is the realisation of <-th> as /x/ which is regular in the Déise but seems to be lexically conditioned in Clare dialects, only occurring in certain lexical items such as *gaoth* ‘wind’.

(1951: 37) when he noted that ‘the Déise element became more diluted according as one went northwest’. I suggest that this pattern of linguistic variation can be usefully read in light of earlier patterns of settlement in Munster, settlement which occurred during the Old Irish period.

Déisi origins and expansion

Ogam inscriptions dating from the fifth century record unique first names associated with the kings of the regional kingdom of Déisi Muman, confirming the existence of the medieval kingdom in the area now known as the Déise (Mac Cotter 2008: 245). The population group collectively known as Déisi extended beyond the bounds of the kingdom of Déisi Muman, however. The earliest reference to *In Déis Tuaiscirt* ‘the Déisi of the north’, an east Limerick kingdom, is that contained in the medieval Irish legal agreement *Cáin Adomnáin* (circa 697). Here, among the other notable subscribers to the law, is *Andelaith ri in Deissi Tuaiscirt*. From the seventh century onwards this people, In Déis Tuaiscirt, are ‘associated with an extensive expansion into Co. Clare from their original settlement area in Limerick (Mac Cotter 2008: 187).³⁰⁶ By the middle of the eighth century *In Déis Tuaiscirt* was expanding further into Clare, this time at the expense of the *Corca Modruad* (Ó Corráin 1972: 7). This expansion is recorded in *AU*:

Foirddbe Corcu Mu-Druadh don Deiss (AU 744.8)

Destruction of Corcu Mo-Druadh by the Déis

Ó Cathasaigh (1971: 77) has referred to this as the annexing of county Clare to Munster, a process undoubtedly facilitated by the weakening of the Éoganachta in the area along with the eighth-century decline in the fortunes of the south Connacht kingdom Uí Fiachrach Aidne (Ó Cróinín 2005a: 225). This annexation, however, was not as simple as subsuming the territory into Munster. Their newly won territory of the Déisi was to some extent independent of any overlordship (cf. *CGH*: 207).

³⁰⁶ For the settlement of the Déisi in north Clare/south Galway by their Éoganachta allies in the sixth century see Ó Cróinín (2005a: 224).

The result of the expansion of the Déise kingdoms from the seventh century onwards has been summarised as follows by Pender and Byrne:

[T]he Déisi territories form a continuous belt from Waterford Harbour to the Barony of Burren in Clare and to the adjacent bounds of Connacht (Pender 1947: 209).

The Déisi Muman, whose name simply means ‘the vassal peoples of Munster’, formed a continuous block running from the south-east to the north-west of the province with the Déis Becc or ‘little Déis’ of east Limerick and Clare (Byrne 2001: 181).

In at least the initial stages of this expansion there seems to have been some degree of political unity among the Déisi. In the years 638 and 734, for instance, Uí Rosa kings are recorded as ruling all of the Déisi (MacCotter 2008: 189).

Subsequent divergence

The increasing political success of the Déis Tuaiscirt in the early tenth century presented a serious problem for their contemporary historians and genealogists. As already mentioned, in origin the Déisi were a client people of the Éoganachta and so precluded from holding the overkingship of Munster (Ó Corráin 1972: 76; Ó Cróinín 2005a: 224).³⁰⁷ In order to overcome this problem, and to justify their newly-won position of political dominance in Munster, a new origin legend was required, which would present them in a completely different light. As Byrne (1969: 10) has eloquently put it, they felt ‘the weight of tradition to be so strongly arrayed against them that they invented a prehistoric claim based on a fictitious pedigree’. With this pedigree the Déis Tuaiscirt were grafted onto a branch of the Éoganachta genealogical schema (Ó Corráin 1972: 76), and reinvented as the Dál Cais, the descendants of Cormac Cas, an alleged brother of the mythical Éogan, ancestor of the Éoganachta (cf. Johnston 2013: 81–2). The earliest historical reference to the Dál Cais is in *AI* (934); a record of the death of the cleric-king Rebachán.

The prime manifestation of this legend is in the eleventh-/twelfth-century Middle Irish text *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh*, which outlined the conflict between the Dál

³⁰⁷ The position of the Déisi is somewhat analogous to that of the Airgíalla in the hegemony of the Uí Néill in that regard.

Cais king of Munster and the Vikings. This text claimed, completely ahistorically, that the kingship of Munster had alternated between Dál Cais and the Éoganachta but that the agreement had been broken by the Éoganachta before now being reasserted by Dál Cais (for discussion see Jaski 1995: 342). It is even asserted that Cashel was the Dál Cais ‘place of origin and their ancient birthright’ (cited in Jaski 1995: 342). This Dál Cais propaganda was a success, so much so that ‘the Déisi origin of the Dál Cais was almost completely obliterated’ (Byrne 1958: 21). Their political and dynastic success from that point on gives us an example of the type of rapid proliferation we can envisage as taking place during the expansion of the Uí Néill also:

[T]he royal and aristocratic kindreds multiplied rapidly due to polygamic marriage. Discarded segments of the ruling houses, unless they were successful in carving out a lordship for themselves (and even this, at best, accommodated only a few families), slipped downwards in Irish society as in other similar societies, and ultimately displaced the freehold farmers and other commoner classes. [...] A pertinent example to point is the Dál Cais in east Clare. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, excluding the ruling O’Briens, who were themselves highly prolific, there were some 200 Dál Cais families in the same area, each bearing an individual surname. We can take it that each surname represents at least ten individuals. This gives us a rude statistic of about 2,000 persons which must be added to when we consider it is highly unlikely that the genealogists record all the families which existed. A figure of 2,000 and upwards, given the nature of the Irish economy and the relative poverty of the area, must represent a large proportion of the total population of the area and a sizeable section of the better class of farmer. It is clear that this process was in operation all over Ireland, and that there was in progress at all times a slow but constant revolution in the ownership of the soil, and a constant replacement of the personnel of the lower orders of society (Ó Corráin 1972: 44–5).

Linguistic Links

The link between the distribution of the Déisi in the Old Irish period and the affinities between the twentieth-century dialects of Irish is suggestive, but establishing how best to relate them to one another is not easy. There are essentially two problems: the first pertaining to time and the second pertaining to space. There is a huge chronological gap in the evidence between the Old Irish period and the twentieth century. Secondly, the disappearance of Irish from the intervening areas

makes it difficult to verify a dialect band running between the dialects of Clare and Waterford. There is no direct way of getting around these problems, but onomastic evidence may help to fill the geographic and chronological lacunae in the evidence.

Geographic distribution of <th> →/x/

While the realisation of <th> as /x/ is attested sporadically in numerous dialects of the twentieth century,³⁰⁸ it is only in the dialects of Waterford, Kilkenny, South Tipperary and Clare that it can be described as having occurred more generally.³⁰⁹

The place name element *Áth* ‘ford’ in the nominative case, unqualified by the definite article, is usually rendered *Ath* in English, as in *Athleague* (< *Áth Liag*, Co. Roscommon), *Athgarvan* (< *Áth Garbháin*, Co. Kildare). In these cases the initial element is often pronounced [aθ], a pronunciation based on the Anglicized written form (Mac Aodha 1987).³¹⁰ In what appears to be a fairly well-defined geographic area, however, the element *Áth* is consistently Anglicized as *Augh-*. This area consists of Kilkenny,³¹¹ Waterford, Tipperary,³¹² Limerick³¹³ and parts of Clare.³¹⁴

Carrigan (1905: 1) notes that the Kilkenny place name *Aughaviller* (*Áth an Bhiolair*) in Irish it is pronounced as though *Auchavillerzh*, a spelling which indicates clearly that the element *Áth* was realised with a final unvoiced velar fricative /x/.³¹⁵ That

³⁰⁸ It has become lexicalised in the phrase *go bráth* /gə bra:x/ in all living dialects of Gaelic (O’Rahilly 1932: 207).

³⁰⁹ This feature is also attested in the eighteenth-century in Kilkenny (Quinn 1964–6: 109).

³¹⁰ It is also sometimes rendered simply *A*, as in *Adare* (*Áth Dara*, Co. Limerick), or by *Ah*, before a vowel, as in *Ahascragh* (*Áth Eascrach*, Co. Galway).

³¹¹ *Aughaviller* [*Áth an Bhiolair*]:

<<http://www.logainm.ie/Viewer.aspx?text=%C3%A1th+an+bhiolair&streets=yes>>.

³¹² Examples from Waterford and South Tipperary can be found in Power (1952), eg. *Aughnacloghduff* [= *Áth na gCloch Dubh*], *Aughnacostia* [= *Áth na Cóiste*], *Aughnalicka* [*Áth na Lice*], *Aughnacurraveil* [= *Áth na gCorramhíol*], *Aughnagaul* [= *Áth na nGall*], etc.

³¹³ See Ó Maolfabhail (1990, s.v.v.): *Áth an Bheithin* [= *Aughavaheen*], *Áth an Dá Each* [= *Aughadagh*], *Áth an Phúca* [= *Aughafooka*] etc.

³¹⁴ *Aughboy* [= *Áth Buí*]: <<http://www.logainm.ie/Viewer.aspx?text=aughboy&streets=yes>>

³¹⁵ Carrigan (1905: 1) seems to have been under the mistaken impression, undoubtedly due to the retention of this final /x/, that the element in question was not *Áth* at all but *Achadh* ‘field’. Compare the place name *Áth na gCeann*, transliterated by Carrigan (1905: 7) as *Auchnagceoun*, in the same parish, which specifically refers to a ford on a river. There are other possible examples in this dialect area where place names have been assumed to contain the element *Achadh* but may in fact contain *Áth* with final /x/. The place name known in English as *Aughatubbrid* is given the official Irish form *Achadh Tiobraide* at <www.logainm.ie>. The correct form of this place name may be *Áth na Tiobraide*, however, as suggested in the handwritten notes <http://www.logainm.ie/Iomhanna/Ref%2086d/26541_1.jpg>. It would certainly appear that spelling

Carrigan's spelling represents a serious attempt to capture a /x/ here is supported by his spelling *-rzh* to represent /r'/, realised in this dialect as [ʒ], the voiced palato-alveolar sibilant.³¹⁶ Place names in South Tipperary which highlight that <th> was realised as /x/ include *Áth Mhéaraí Láidir* [a:x,v'ɛ:r:i'la:Dir'], *Áth Mheachair* [a:x'v'axir'], etc. (Ó Cíobháin 1964–5) and it can be seen in Clare *Áthán* [a:'xa:N] (Ó Cíobháin 1968–9: 43).

A quick survey of the place name element *áth* 'ford', supplemented by occurrences of *ráth* 'ring-fort' and *cath* 'war', and *liath* 'grey' in earlier records for Co. Limerick shows that this change is not recent (all of the references below are from Ó Maolfabhail 1990, s.v.v.):

| | | | |
|--------------|------|--|-------------------|
| Áth | 1287 | Achlecagh | [An t]Áth Leacach |
| Ráth | 1525 | Rachsyrdan | Ráth Shiurdáin |
| Cath | 1655 | Clone Cagh | Cluain Cath |
| | 1840 | Clouncagh ³¹⁷ | |
| Liath | 1650 | Killeagh | Cill Liath |
| | 1840 | Killiagh (understood by fieldworker as <i>Cill Fhiach</i>) ³¹⁸ | |

of initial *au* in English better represents the long vowel /a:/ of *áth* than the short vowel /a/ of *achadh*, the initial segment of which is more often anglicised as *agh*.

³¹⁶ For further comment on this realisation of /r'/ in the Irish of Kilkenny see Henebry (1898: 67) and Ó Tuathail (1939–40). For numerous examples from one of the last speakers of Kilkenny Irish see R. A. Breatnach (1992: *passim*).

³¹⁷ See, however, Toner and Ó Mainnín (1992: 117), where it is implied that the final *-gh* in this form represents /h/ rather than /x/. This, however, is unlikely, in my opinion, given the evidence provided below.

³¹⁸ The fieldworker's transcription of the place name as *Cill Fhiach* confirms the final /x/ in the second element of the place name. We can compare this north-eastern Limerick *Cill Liath* (with final /x/) with an identical place name recorded in the southwest of the county. The historical record of the south-western place name is taken from Ó Maolfabháil (1990: 102): 1617: *Killeay*; 1753: *Killea*; 1840: *Killea*. This place name was misinterpreted by John O'Donovan in his field notes as being the Irish *Cill Aodha*, which we would imagine to be approximately /kil'e/, confirming the total vocalisation of the final of the second element *liath* suggested by written sources from the seventeenth century. This allows us to posit the existence of an isogloss between the *Cill Liath* of northeast Limerick and the southwest *Cill Liath*. Further investigation of these elements might locate this isogloss more precisely but is outwith the scope of the present study.

Figure 47 displays the following: a) those points in *LASID* which realised *gaoth* with final /x/; b) places where there is evidence for such a feature in place name evidence; c) those places cited by Ó Cuív (1951) as the limit of the ‘Déise-type pronunciations’.

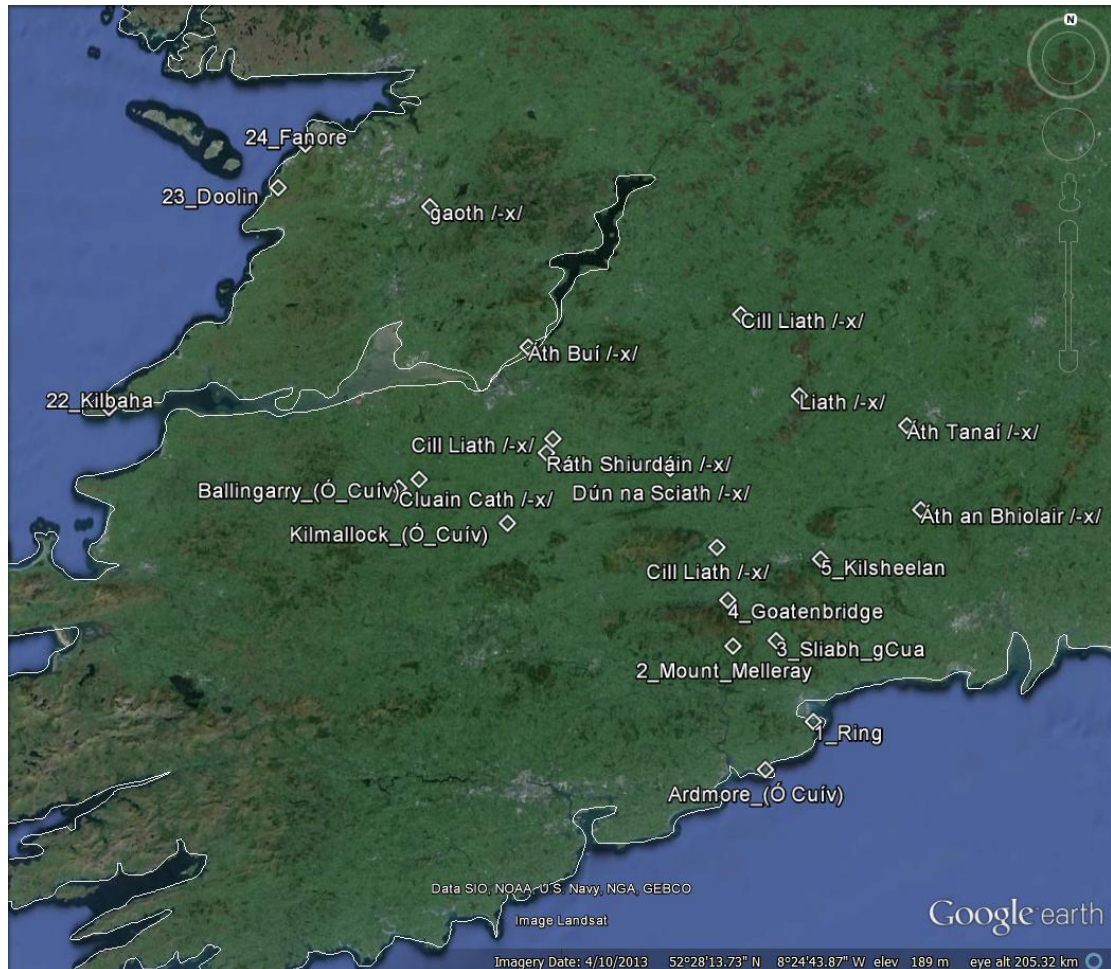


Figure 47 Evidence for the realisation of <th> as /x/

Chronological depth

The previous discussion has certified that the realisation of <th> as /x/ was indeed found in a band from the Déise northwest to the coast of Clare, although apparently conditioned in Clare. This evidence settles the geographic difficulty, at least for this very salient feature, but the issue of the chronological depth of this feature remains

Hickey (2011: 347, n. 215) comments, without citing a source, that ‘[t]he <-th> of Irish has been mute since at least the end of the Middle Irish period (thirteenth

century)'; O'Rahilly (1932: 207) had stated that *th*, originally a dental spirant, 'ceased to be such in the thirteenth century'. The earliest example of <th> realised as /x/ cited above does indeed belong to the thirteenth century. However, there is good evidence which indicates that the phonological change in question had occurred at least two and a half centuries earlier than the occurrences cited above.

C. Breatnach (1990) has drawn attention to the occurrence of the place name *Dún na Sciach* in *AI* as *Dún na Sciach*, i.e. with the change from monosyllabic final <th> to /x/ observed in twentieth-century dialects of Waterford, South Tipperary and Clare:

AI 1031.6: Dún na Sciach

AI 1095.13: Dune na Sciach

The occurrence of this form of the place name in two distinct scribal hands suggests that this was not a mere idiosyncrasy on the part of one scribe, but rather reflects a more common linguistic feature. Mac Airt (1951: xxviii) had noted the evidence points to *AI* entries until 1130 having been made 'to the order of the Lismore monastery'. Lismore is the monastery which gives its name to the ecclesiastical diocese almost identical in its extent with the modern county of Waterford.³¹⁹ In this regard we can contrast the reference to the same place name in later entries in *AI*, entries which correspond to the chronicle's time in southwest Munster:

AI 1168.1: Duin na Sgiath³²⁰

This sliver of evidence suggests that the realisation of final monosyllabic <th> as /x/ was established in the area in question by the early eleventh century.

Another diagnostic feature of the Irish of Waterford, South Tipperary, Kilkenny and Clare, when compared with other Munster dialects, is the raising of /o:/ in proximity to a nasal (R. B. Breatnach 1947: 118; R. A. Breatnach 1992: 33, *passim* Holmer

³¹⁹ *AI* shows clear evidence of other linguistic features associated with the area in question. A pertinent example, and one which was very confined in the twentieth century, is the realisation of <ll> as /ld/. This feature was limited to the area around Ballymacoda (*LASID* point 6) in the twentieth century (Ó Cuív 1951: 67; C. Breatnach 1990: 484–5). The monastery of Lismore was located at the interface of the Déise with the area around Ballymacoda.

³²⁰ This entry is in the form of a gloss and is not contemporaneous with the year 1168; nonetheless, it was written when the chronicle was kept in west Munster (Mac Airt 1951: xxxiv–xxxv).

1962a: 54).³²¹ While Ua Súilleabháin (1994: 485) does not discuss the realisation of historic /o:/ in proximity to a nasal in the area between the Clare and Waterford/Tipperary/Kilkenny groups of dialects, one can say a little more about the earlier distribution of this feature. It would appear that it occurred in a region broadly similar with that in which we have seen evidence for the development <th> →/x/. The place name *Móintín*, just south of Limerick City, was recorded by a field worker of the Ordnance Survey in the mid-nineteenth century as *Múintín* (Ó Maolfabháil 1990: 222; cited also in Ó Sé 2002: 478). This development does not occur in the western part of the county (N. Breathnach 1945–7: 206, *et passim*; Ó Snodaigh and Ua Súilleabháin 1997: 517; Ó Coileáin 2003: 61, *et passim*). It is attested, sporadically, as far north as north Kilkenny (Ó Conchubhair 1945–7: 275–8, *et passim*), this apparently being the northeast extreme of the distribution of the feature.

The cumulative effect of these wisps of evidence is to provide a measure of reassurance that the dialect area clearly highlighted by the twentieth-century evidence was also of historical relevance.

³²¹ It appears to have occurred as a lexically conditioned allomorph, *nó* ‘or’ /nu:/ in the speech of Amhlaoibh Ó Loingsigh (Ó Cuív 1944: 100), but is not mentioned for this dialect, even in this context, by Ua Súilleabháin (1994). The extent to which it had occurred in Clare does not appear to have been appreciated by O’Rahilly (1932: 195); of all Munster dialects, the Irish of Clare was apparently the one with which he was least familiar

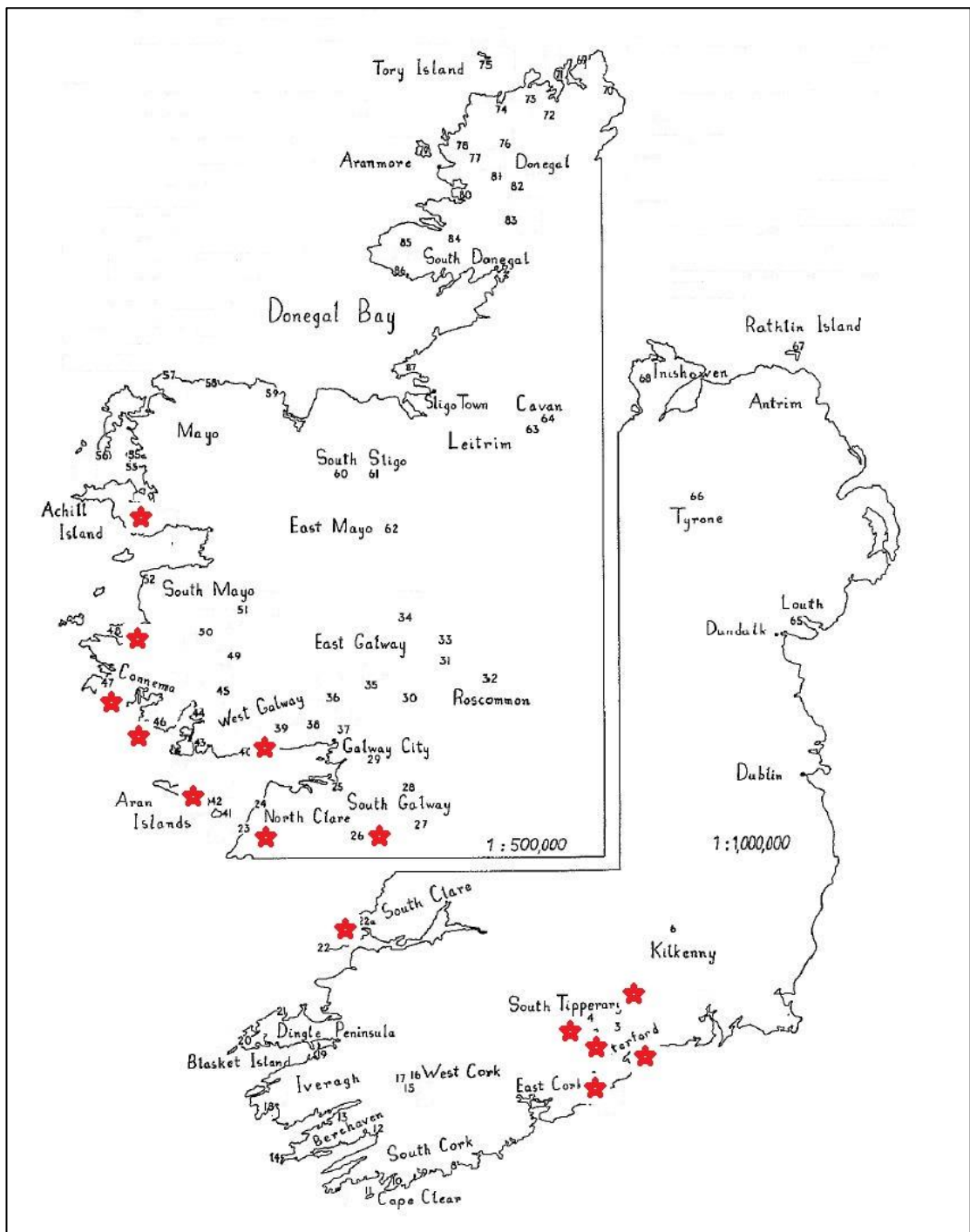


Figure 48 Evidence for /o:/ → /u:/ in *rómhar*, LASID i, map 65

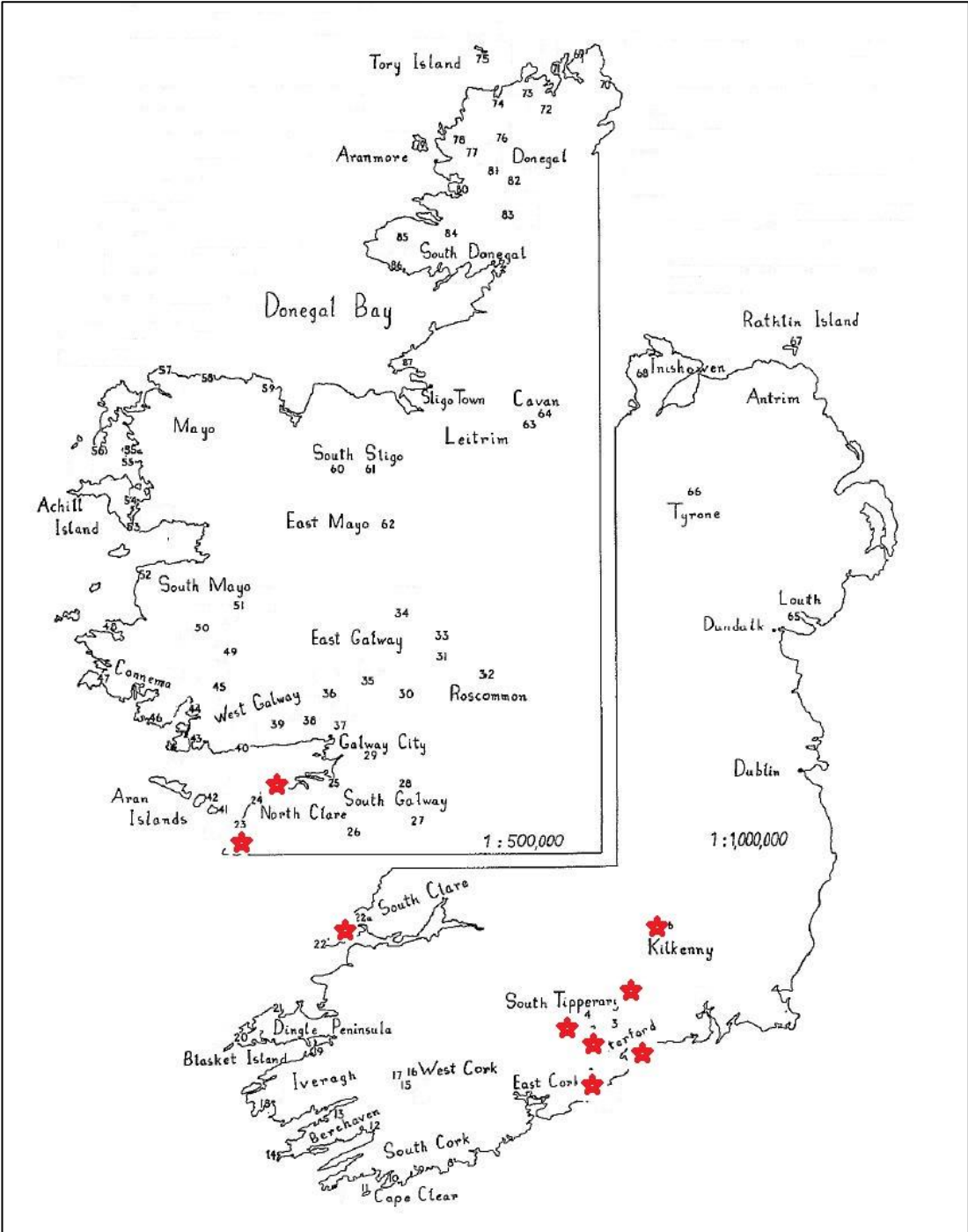


Figure 49 Evidence for /o:/ → /u:/ in *fuinneógáí*, LASID i, map 151

Ó Cuív's (1951) survey of Munster dialects remains the most important account of dialectal variation in Munster Irish. His synopsis of the relationship between dialects of Clare and Waterford is worth quoting in full:

Now pronunciations of the Déise type are found west along the Waterford coast to Ardmore and extend up into Tipperary. From there they can be traced into Limerick, where they seem to have been current around Kilmallock and Ballingarry. I could mention other points where we find agreement in Clare and Limerick with Waterford.

I do not say that the Irish of Clare and Limerick was the same as that of Waterford; indeed it is probable that what I might call the Déise element became more diluted according as one went north-west. But the correspondences that I have mentioned do seem to suggest that the people in an area which extended north-west from Waterford to Clare had a certain amount in common linguistically which they did not share with the area to the south and west. It would be farfetched, perhaps, to connect this fact with the suggestion that the Déise people formerly occupied territory in Limerick, but I am sure that a full knowledge of local history would throw much light on the linguistic facts (Ó Cuív 1951: 37).

The lecture on which Ó Cuív's (1951) published paper was based was delivered in 1949. He was, therefore, writing at a time when it was commonly accepted that diatopic variation did not exist in Gaelic before the thirteenth century.³²² His conclusion, that 'it would be farfetched, perhaps, to connect' the linguistic relationship between the dialects of Waterford, Limerick, Tipperary and Clare with 'the suggestion that the Déise people formerly occupied territory in Limerick', was, in light of contemporary scholarship, reasonable.³²³ Since the delivery of Ó Cuív's lecture, however, the 'suggestion' that the Déisi occupied parts of Limerick has

³²² Ó Cuív (1951: 71) approvingly cites O'Rahilly's (1932: 248) opinion that 'the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries [were] the formative period of our modern dialects'.

³²³ Ó Cuív (1951) is based on a lecture delivered in Dublin in 1949. Why Ó Cuív did not mention the Dál Cais connection with the Déisi is not clear. It is not possible that Ó Cuív was not aware of Mac Neill's (1932) revelation of the identity of Dál Cais as the Déisi Tuaiscirt. It is possible that Ó Cuív's knowledge of Clare Irish was not sufficient to allow him to expand further at that time, or that he simply wished to confine himself to the dialects of Munster proper. Holmer's study of the dialects of Clare was not published until 1962; some points at which O'Rahilly (1932) himself seems to have been ill-informed on the dialects of Clare have already been discussed.

become increasingly certain and their relationship and essential historical identity with the Dál Cais has become clearer.³²⁴

In sociolinguistic terms, the work of Trudgill (1986; 2004), Tuten (2003) and Penny (2000) has greatly enhanced understanding of dialect contact, its outcomes, and its role in historical linguistics. Ó Cuív's tentative suggestion has become less and less 'far-fetched', to the point where the settlement of the Déisi in Clare is likely to be at least part of the explanation of the linguistic affinities between twentieth-century dialects in Waterford and Clare.

6.7.4 A new schema for dialectal variation in Munster?

The various threads discussed above may now be drawn together so as to present a new dialect geography of Munster. At one point, before the emergence of the Dál Cais in the early tenth century, 'the Déisi territories form[ed] a continuous belt from Waterford Harbour to the Barony of Burren in Clare and to the adjacent bounds of Connacht' (Pender 1947: 209). For at least one feature characteristic of these dialects, the realisation of <th> as /x/ in monosyllabic final position, we have evidence going back to the early eleventh century. Other attested features, such as the raising of /o:/ → /u:/ in proximity to a nasal³²⁵ and the development of certain diphthongs³²⁶ may also be of an early date.

While it has been shown that this band of dialects shows features not shared with other Munster dialects to the south and west, discrepancies have also been noticed in the incidence of certain features. For example, the realisation of <th> as /x/ appears to be lexically conditioned in Clare dialects but there is no such lexical conditioning in the Déise. Similarly, occurrence of preverbal *fé*, although attested in both areas, appears to be noticeably more common in Waterford.

All of the linguistic features discussed above were present in the speech of the twentieth-century storyteller Stiofán Ó hEalaoire (1858–1944), who was born in the

³²⁴ The historical context for the transformation of the Dál Cais from their Déisi origins has been the subject of much re-examination by Ó Corráin (1972), Byrne (1958; 2001) and others.

³²⁵ If the vocalisation of intervocalic <mh> was underway by the end of the eleventh century in some dialects of Munster (C. Breatnach 1990: 483), then this raising in words such as *rómhar* (cf. *LASID* i, 65) may be very early indeed.

³²⁶ See *Taúadmuman* for *Tuadmuman* in *AI* (1099).

barony of Corcumroe in the northwest of Clare. The only other dialect in which all these features were found in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were that of the Déise. This serves to remind us once again of the potential significance of the following entry from *AU*:

Foirddbe Corcu Mu-Druadh don Deiss (AU 744.8)

Destruction (and conquest) of Corcu Mo-Druad by the Déis

The apparent directionality of diffusion, from southeast to northwest, is important in developing an understanding of the social and demographic processes involved. The tenth-century efforts of the Dál Cais to create an identity distinct from their Déisi origins would not have been conducive to the type of linguistic diffusion suggested by the linguistic data. Neither do the eleventh or twelfth centuries provide a suitable historical context for the large-scale diffusion of linguistic features from southeast to northwest: Mac Cotter (2006: 59) remarks that these centuries were characterised by ‘centrifugal forces working on the political scene’ to reduce the number of important polities. The area of the Déise and what now constitutes county Clare were subject to very different centrifugal forces at this point. The former was part of the semi-provincial kingdom of Desmuma (later Desmond) and the latter was the centre of the successor of the Dál Cais polity of Tuadmumu (later Thomond). The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which O’Rahilly (1932: 248) considered ‘the formative period’ of modern dialects, are even less suitable in explaining the relationship between Clare and the Déise from a sociolinguistic perspective given the political and cultural fragmentation of the area at the time.³²⁷ Sociolinguistic factors set to one side, the date envisaged by O’Rahilly is untenable because it quite obviously post-dates the emergence of a number of the most important Munster-internal dialect features (cf. C. Breatnach 1990: 486).

It is the contention of this chapter that affinity between the modern dialects of Clare and the Déise may be much older than hitherto appreciated, and that the occurrence of certain features in the twentieth-century dialects of Clare may be a result of

³²⁷ During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the area in question encompassed territory held by the Gaelic O’Brien lords as well as the Hiberno-Norman FitzGerald earldom of Desmond and the Butler earldom of Ormond.

eighth-century dialect contact in the area. A process of new-dialect formation can be postulated as having taken place in what is now Clare in the eighth century when the dialect of the Déisi Tuaiscirt came into contact with the variety already spoken in the area. It is not suggested that the dialects of Clare and Waterford were at any point identical, but that they both contained a substantial common element.

6.8 A dialectology of the Old Irish period(?)

This chapter has sought to synthesise the results of quantitative investigations outlined in chapter 2 with the available historical sociolinguistic situation of a number of areas in Ireland. Ultimately, however, and perhaps ironically, we return to the weakness of traditional dialectology dealt with and criticised in chapter 1, i.e. the inherent subjectivity involved in the interpretation of the data. The question is: do these correspondences present a case for seeing the emergence of Irish dialects as having their genesis in the Old Irish period? Ó Buachalla (2002) implied as much, but failed to relate the synchronic patterns to any type of historical sociolinguistic framework. While one must always be cautious of projecting the known onto the unknown, there is a striking correspondence between some of the more prominent dialectal distinctions in early twentieth-century dialects and those patterns of settlement which emerged before and during the Old Irish period itself.

The salience of Ulster as a dialectal region in the modern period has been the subject of much of this thesis, and it is this salience which offers the strongest support for tracing dialectal differentiation to the Old Irish period. What few insights are available indicate that, historically, dialects of Ulster formed part of a larger dialect continuum roughly coextensive with an area formerly under the hegemony of the Uí Néill. Confronted with these two points, it would be unwise for scholarship to continue to fail to engage with the dialect relationships of Gaelic in the early medieval period, most especially in relation to what was the most extensive, stable, and enduring polity of medieval (or early modern) Ireland. From the perspective of historical sociolinguistics, it would be extremely difficult to place the sort of large-scale dialect contact and new-dialect formation that I have argued for here in the period post-900. That is not to say that the dialect geography of Irish remained static thereafter; this is undoubtedly not the case, but that the requisite sociolinguistic

conditions did not subsequently exist for the restructuring of dialect relationships on a comparable scale.

The evidence of other linguistic situations indicates that it would barely have been possible for the sort of socio-cultural and demographic change which took place in the early part of the Old Irish period (and described above) not to have left a significant mark on the dialect landscape of Irish. Parallels with other languages indicate that earlier patterns of dialectal variation often affect modern dialect relationships.³²⁸ Some of these illustrative parallels will now be explored.

6.8.1 Linguistic parallels

The first of these parallels is the case of English:

[T]he standard division of English dialects into northern, north-midland, mid-land, south-western and south-eastern varieties [is] the basic dialect distribution which Old English data also attest (Toon 1992: 413).

The case of the historical development of English dialects is slightly more complex than Toon's rather bare statement might lead one to believe.

While the dialect areas of Old English do broadly correspond with those of the twentieth century, few of the differentiating features of Old English dialects are retained in the twentieth century. Among those which are retained are the voicing of initial voiceless fricatives (such as [v] in *farmer*, [z] in *six*). This feature, already apparent in West Saxon dialects by the tenth century (Hogg 1992: 92), is still characteristic of south-western dialects of English in the twenty-first century (cf. Wakelin 1972: 92–3). Another Old English dialectal development, the effects of which are still audible in modern dialects, relates to differences in lengthening. About the ninth century, high short vowels, when followed by a liquid or nasal plus homorganic voiced consonant eg. /mb/ and /nd/, were lengthened (i.e. Old English *grund* became *grūnd*), but only in dialects south of the Ribble-Humber line (Hogg 1992: 118). This resulting long vowel in non-Northern dialects was diphthongised much later during the Great Vowel Shift, giving a diphthong in contemporary

³²⁸ Old Welsh, a language for which there are notoriously few sources, has instances of medieval dialectal variation which correlate with patterns of variation in the modern language (Charles-Edwards 1995: 727–8).

Southern *ground*; the short vowel, however, can still be heard in dialects of northeast England and Scotland today (Wakelin 1972: 90). Yet another dialectal divergence during the period involves Old English [ɑ:]. Through the eleventh and twelfth centuries this vowel became fronted north of the Ribble-Humber line to [a:], but became rounded and raised south of this line to a low-mid round long vowel (Lass 1992: 46–8). This emerges, after the Great Vowel Shift, in Scots-type pronunciations such as *hame*, *stane* (with [e:]) for (southern) *home*, *stone* (with [o:]) (Aitken and Macafee 2002: 9–10).

The correspondences between dialectal features in Old and Modern English are not immense, but they are there. Political divisions were evidently crucial in the development of dialects of Old English (Trudgill 1990: 35; Toon 1983; cf. Charles-Edwards 1995: 728). While the individual differentiating features are often no longer discernible, the larger impact of Old English dialectal divisions is still clear in the Middle English period. Old English dialectal variation profoundly influenced the outcome of the complex sociolinguistic processes which accompanied the Norman Conquest, so that although many of the individual distinctive features have changed, the primary dialectal divisions largely remain the same. In short, whether we speak of the linguistic upheaval of the Norman Conquest of England or the Great Vowel Shift, the differing dialectal inputs to these processes affected the differing outputs. While it is not until the Middle English period that one starts to see a large range of dialectal *features* (as opposed to divisions) with which we are familiar from traditional modern varieties (see Laing and Lass 2006), the origins of dialectal divisions must be traced further back in time, so that the primary dialectal boundary in English dialectology, that which defines the ‘North’, ‘still follows, up to a point, the Anglo-Saxon dialect boundary between the old kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia’ (Trudgill 1990: 35).

The situation of English, although perhaps the best documented, is far from unique. The case of French also serves to highlight the time-depth which must be considered in the ongoing and continual processes of dialect formation. Large-scale population settlements during the middle of the first millennium in what is now France brought about ‘wholesale dialectalisation’ (Lodge 1993: 54) with wide-ranging

sociolinguistic implications which continue to be reflected in modern dialectal variation:

From the linguistic point of view, this settling of the territory by peoples of various origins [primarily in the fifth century] seems to be responsible in part for the great dialectal divisions which still split the country (Walter 1994: 28).

The history of Spanish in the Middle Ages is closely connected to the continual southward expansion of the Iberian Christian kingdoms, and so differs from English, French and Irish.³²⁹ Penny (2000) and Tuten (2003) have pointed out that this southward Iberian expansion, starting in the ninth century, and continuing in bursts thereafter, along with the dialect mixture that went with it, brought about an almost continual process of new-dialect formation, the effects of which are still apparent. In this sense the dialectalisation of Spanish is much later than that of English, French, or, as I would argue, Irish. Like French and English, however, the sociolinguistic element of the processes involved are seen to be central and cannot be stressed enough (cf. Penny 2006).

6.8.2 The case of Irish revisited

It is fair to say that English, French and Spanish have all been subjected to much more system-internal sociolinguistic disruption in the last millennium than has been the case for Irish. French and English both developed a chancery language which was used for the administration of a central expansionary kingdom (cf. Penny 2006: 55). Both historically and contemporarily, the southeast of England and the area around Paris have functioned as geographically stable centres of prestige from which linguistic features have typically diffused outwards and from whence standard forms of language have emerged (Lass 1992: 32; Lodge 1993). The case of Spanish contrasts with that of English and French. The centres of linguistic gravity in the Iberian Peninsula, often more than one at a time, were continually shifting throughout the Middle Ages (Penny 2006: 55). The case of Gaelic in Ireland, however, stands in stark contrast to all of these situations; there simply were no

³²⁹ In this sense, Spanish may find a closer parallel with Scottish Gaelic, which also undergoes a later expansion and, it seems safe to assume, dialectalisation (cf. Woolf 2007: 322–40).

urban centres of population and prestige on an equivalent scale, and certainly no comparable expansion of the language community.

Further, moving beyond the Early Irish period, Gaelic popular speech appears to have been largely independent of the Classical norm of the Early Modern period (Ó Murchú 1992: 58; C. Breatnach 1990), which was never a standard in the sense outlined by Haugen (1966).³³⁰ This lack of a clear geographically focused prestige model for Irish in the later medieval period, if anything, would lead us to expect a greater degree of conservatism in Irish than is the case for English, French or Spanish. Further, the increased presence of English in Ireland, from the sixteenth century onwards (Hickey 2007: 32), involves a different type of prestige dynamic, which eventually led, not to the development of a standard (as understood by Haugen 1966), but to language shift. There is also then the question of the modern dialects to consider; Andersen (1988) has observed that central and peripheral parts of a speech area develop differently, with the so-called periphery often characterised by linguistic conservatism. There are undoubtedly problems with this sort of framework, but it is worth pointing out that in one sense Irish-speaking areas are both peripheral, in purely geographical terms, and are essentially conservative in that they have not fully partaken in the process of linguistic shift ongoing since the thirteenth century.

The conclusion of this chapter is emphatically not that dialect relationships did not continue to develop after the Old Irish period, or that they somehow remained static; this was undoubtedly not the case. Indeed evidence from Achill and Ballyhoorisky discussed above shows clearly that new dialectal developments did occur, but for clear sociolinguistically explicable reasons. I have argued that the social circumstances in which subsequent dialect contact and change happened were different; there was to be no great territorial expansion on the part of one or two Gaelic population groups after the Old Irish period. Rather, septs of the same dynasty struggled for power over the historical polities in their new post-Norman form. The correspondences between the dialectometric and dialectological data and the more

³³⁰ As already noted, it never underwent the requisite elaboration of function, nor did it receive the acceptance of the entire literate community. Of course, as a codified form of language for the specific purpose of the composition of metrically complex poetry (McManus 1994: 335), this is hardly surprising. Classical Irish, therefore, is best described as a standardised language of the sort described in Smith (2000: 128–9), rather than a standard described by Haugen (1966).

pronounced settlement patterns of the early medieval period are highly suggestive and are sufficient to conclude that there is at least a *prima facie* case for associating the two.

In a description of the political and socio-cultural geography of early medieval Ireland, Charles-Edwards has noted:

Provinces, such as Leinster and Munster, were not [...] just fragile pyramids of royal clientship, kept in being only by personal agreements between kings. They were long-enduring entities fortified by a great accumulation of common loyalties, common traditions and common conceptions of the shape of their world (Charles-Edwards 2000: 15).

It would be remarkable if this ‘great accumulation of common loyalties, common traditions and common conceptions of the shape of their world’ did not find a linguistic parallel. Certainly, these provinces are precisely the sort of ‘culture areas’, which Weinreich (1954: 397) recognised as often being linguistically significant. Indeed this seems to be the case; Wagner (1982: 104) states the obvious when he notes that ‘the geographical borders between the old Irish provinces are also important linguistic boundaries’. Labov’s (1974a) observation that the present is the best tool for explaining the past has an obvious corollary for the influence of the past on the present. Accepting this hypothesis for the moment, but explicitly acknowledging it as a hypothesis, it would not be accurate to describe the language of the Old Irish period as homogeneous and therefore unique. Rather the text language of the Old Irish period presents us with an unusual situation, but one which has been shown to be explicable in sociolinguistic terms and worthy of much further study. I have argued that, in certain respects, the linguistic situation of Irish may find parallels in the earliest stages of English, French and Spanish. What the discussion of these languages has highlighted is that dialect development and formation is a continuous process which does not ‘start’ at any one point in the way envisaged by O’Rahilly (1932) and Jackson (1951).

7. Conclusion

While much headway has been made in terms of the documentation of individual Gaelic dialects in the last century, little has been made in terms of dialect geography more generally,³³¹ and even less has been made in terms of historical dialect geography. This thesis has attempted to address these gaps by synthesising innovative quantitative methods of linguistic analysis with a historical sociolinguistic framework. The use of these methods in Gaelic scholarship is completely innovatory but has proved profitable. The use of modern patterns of dialectal variation in examining the situation of earlier stages of the language, although not completely innovatory in Gaelic scholarship is atypical. One of the things this thesis has shown, however, is that this combination allows scholarship to at least move towards a better understanding of the history of Gaelic dialects by challenging a consensus based on outdated or weak reasoning.

Two specific research questions were outlined at the start of this thesis:

1. What are the synchronic relationships of modern Gaelic dialects to one another?
2. What was the nature of dialectal variation in the Old Irish period and why is it not apparent in the written record?

The synchronic relationship of modern Gaelic dialects to one another has been considerably elucidated by the application of quantitative methods of linguistic analysis (and a fresh approach to their presentation) in this thesis. Not only does the analysis contained in chapter 2 confirm the obvious, that Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx can be validly regarded as separate languages (cf. Gillies 2009), it has also served to answer more vexed questions about dialect relationships more generally. The most pertinent of these questions is the relationship between the ‘provincial’ dialects of Irish. Until this point there was a degree of uncertainty as to the relationship between synchronic dialects of Irish (cf. O’Rahilly 1932; Williams 1994a; Ó Buachalla 2002). This thesis offers the most objective response thus far to

³³¹ The most notable exception in this regard is Ó Dochartaigh (1987).

this issue. In doing so, it identifies the twentieth-century dialects of Ulster as the most distinctive of all Irish dialects. In other words, the twentieth-century dialects of Connacht and Munster appear to be linguistically closer to each other than either is to Ulster. This internal cohesion within Ulster dialects as geographically disparate as Teelin, Inishowen and Omeath was found to be striking, so much so that Ó Buachalla's (2002: 8) suggestion that the isogloss bundle separating Ulster from the rest of Ireland is a reflex of a dialectal difference in an earlier stage of the language must be taken seriously. Taking cognisance of the political and social factors not considered by Ó Buachalla, this suggestion was explored under the second research question.

We have seen that much has been made of Old Irish as a unique and remarkable linguistic entity in medieval Europe due to its apparent lack of dialectal variation (Charles-Edwards 1995: 727–8; 2000: 512; Schrivjer 2009: 205). Instead of taking this apparent lack of variation in the text language at face value, I have sought to explain it by recourse to sociolinguistic principles (as per Labov 1974b: 225). I have argued that the northeast of the Gaelic world played a prominent role in all of the processes (as outlined by Haugen 1966) which contributed to the emergence of a standard text language during the Old Irish period. I have suggested that although Iona and Bangor may have had a formative role in the earliest stages of the development of this text language, the role of Armagh was pivotal in the latter stages of its emergence, particularly in elaborating function and inducing acceptance of the text language. The role of Armagh as the most visible and prestigious participant in the scholarly networks of the Gaelic world endured from the seventh century right through the Early Irish period. It has been suggested that the 'emergence' of Middle Irish can be usefully related to a large-scale restructuring of the social networks which had maintained the text language of Old Irish in relative stability over the period 600–900.

Having accounted for the lack of variation apparent in Old Irish, an attempt has been made to gauge how well modern patterns of dialectal variation can be related to what principles of historical sociolinguistics would lead us to expect in terms of dialectal variation during the Old Irish period. Although speculative, the fact that the primary

dialectal division in twentieth-century Ireland correlates well with the expected outcome of the new-dialect formation posited for the Old Irish period is significant and finds parallels in the case of English and French. As outlined in the introduction, I have followed Trudgill (2010: xii) in trying to solve a historical-sociolinguistic puzzle, based on the evidence available. If nothing else, it has allowed for the formulation of a hypothesis which may be tested more fully in the future.³³²

Future research directions

As well as the obvious desirability of testing the hypothesis forwarded in the previous chapter, this thesis has opened up a number of avenues for further research. Three of the most significant areas for future research are outlined below.

1. Relating pre-Old Irish to Old Irish

This thesis raises important questions about the relationship between Old Irish and pre-Old Irish forms of Gaelic, most significantly between the language of the Ogam inscriptions and that of the Old Irish Glosses. Scholars of the historical dialectology of English acknowledge that:

Because of the geographical distribution of surviving Old English texts, there is no well-attested corpus ancestral to the modern southern standard – which in any case did not begin to emerge until the fourteenth century. The bulk of the ‘Classical’ Old English texts are in dialects (loosely) ancestral to those of the modern south-west and southwest midlands (Lass 1992: 33, cf. Laing and Lass 2006: 421).

This frank acknowledgment allows one to avoid the sort of ‘inappropriate questions and overly ambitious interpretations’ which, according to Spencer (2000: 8), hamper the primary aim of historical linguistics as outlined by Labov (1994: 11), ‘to make the best of bad data’.

It has been argued in this thesis that the text language of Old Irish is largely the product of a sociolinguistic process which was centred on the northeast of the Gaelic

³³² One of the ways in which this hypothesis could be tested further is by means of a comparison with historical dialectology based on step-wise bottom-up reconstruction. This has not been done in the present thesis due to space restrictions but it can also be noted that with the exception of the writings of Ó Maolalaigh (1997; 2001), this sort of approach in Gaelic historical dialectology has been the exception rather than the rule.

world, and reliant, in its latter stages at least, on both the success of the Uí Néill hegemony and the prestige associated with the language of the scriptorium of Armagh. In contrast, the Ogam inscriptions are primarily associated with an area at the opposite, southwest, end of the island of Ireland (McManus 1991: 45). Further, these Ogam inscriptions are associated with the period before the sort of sociolinguistic restructuring of Gaelic dialects we assume to have been brought about by the large-scale political and cultural transformations of the sixth and subsequent centuries. While the chronological gap between the two is not great, the linguistic distance is. Indeed Watkins (2008: 47), thinking in linear terms, has called the transition from Ogam to Old Irish ‘the period of the greatest change of the language itself’, going so far as to say ‘Irish probably changed more drastically and dramatically between roughly 400 and 600 than from Indo-European to 400, or from 600 to present’ (cf. Koch 1995: 39). A reconsideration of how scholarship may best conceptualise the relationship between the language of the inscriptions and that of the glosses is highly desirable in light of the issues raised in this thesis, all of which serve to stress the fact that language history is not linear (Penny 2006: 59; Ó Buachalla 1982: 429).

Much of this thesis has been concerned with the exogenous factors involved in language variation and change. J. Milroy (2003: 148) observed that specifying the exogenous factors in change also helps to clarify those aspects of change which are endogenous. This issue extends beyond the language of the Ogam inscriptions, however, to sources such as Ptolemy, not to mention the results of comparative reconstruction. Russell notes that there is:

a surprising lack of correspondence between Ptolemy’s names and those attested later in Old Irish sources. There may be an element of textual corruption involved in Ptolemy’s text, but this discrepancy may also be indicative of substantial tribal movements and changes in the balance of power in the intervening period [i.e. between the first century AD and the Old Irish period] (Russell 2005: 410).

2. Middle Irish and Early Modern Irish as an insight to Old Irish dialects

This thesis also highlights the extent to which systematic knowledge of dialectal variation in Middle Irish and Early Modern Irish remains very sketchy. It appears,

however, that a systematic approach to the manuscript evidence available could provide a basis on which to work backwards. C. Breatnach (1990) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008) show the potential of locatable texts which might, if others were available, allow for the development of a fuller picture of dialectal variation, not only during the Middle Irish period, but also in the Old Irish period itself. In terms of recent scholarship on the dialectology of Old English, Hogg notes that:

over the last few decades there has been a renewed interest in the study of Old English dialects. Much of the impetus for this has arisen from a source external to Old English, namely the work of McIntosh, Samuels, and Benskin on later Middle English, culminating in the production of *LALME* (Hogg 2006: 413).

The production of a dialect atlas based on Gaelic manuscript material, for any period, would be likely to greatly facilitate scholarly understanding of historical variation in Gaelic dialects. It may also allow for the testing of some of the hypotheses of this thesis.

3. The (historical) dialectology of Scottish Gaelic and Manx

The diachronic portions of this thesis have been mostly concerned to elucidate the historical dialectology of Gaelic in Ireland. The primary reason for this focus is a lack of suitable evidence, at this stage, to allow for the formulation of a hypothesis on Scottish and Manx varieties. This Irish-focused portion of the thesis retains a pan-Gaelic import, however, in that it presents a framework which may be usefully applied to Manx and Scottish Gaelic contexts in the future.

The quantitative type of analysis undertaken by Kessler (1995) and analysed above was of limited value for Scottish Gaelic because of its less than ideal coverage in Scotland. The published phonetic records of *SGDS* provide a huge amount of raw data which would be particularly suitable for the sort of LD analysis developed by Kessler (1995) and discussed in chapter 2. An analysis of the *SGDS* material on this basis would provide a clearer picture of dialect relationships in twentieth-century Scottish Gaelic. As this thesis has shown for Irish, such an analysis may also allow for a clearer picture of historical variation in Scottish Gaelic. The Scottish context, as already mentioned, differs for a number of reasons, not least because sufficient data

for the early medieval period are not available. Even if such data were available, however, it is not altogether clear that the situation of Scottish Gaelic and Irish would be directly comparable. The relatively late (and chronologically staggered) expansion of Gaelic in Scotland (Woolf 2007: 322–40; Clancy 2010) presents us with a very different sociolinguistic situation from the one found in Ireland.

The situation of Manx, although covering a small geographic area, is particularly interesting for a variety of reasons. In historical linguistic terms, it is perhaps the Gaelic variety least suited to the strait-jacket of the Darwinian tree-model in which it has traditionally been analysed (O’Rahilly 1932; Jackson 1955; Broderick 2009). Given the mix of extremely archaic and innovative features one finds in Manx, along with its historical and geographic position as a centre, for a period at least, of traffic between Ireland, Britain and the Scandinavian north, it provides an interesting test case for an array of sociolinguistic theories discussed in this thesis. Most especially, it appears that Manx could be usefully analysed in terms of medieval new-dialect formation.

Beyond the research questions addressed in the thesis and future research questions which have been highlighted, it is also appropriate to attempt to situate this thesis in the larger framework of Gaelic linguistic scholarship. A number of elements distinguish this thesis from others which have discussed the dialect geography of the Gaelic languages. First of all, there is the combination of the medieval and modern elements. Another is the application of dialectometric methods to linguistic data in an attempt to assess the synchronic dialect relationships in Gaelic. Although the data discussed in chapter 2 have been available for up to three decades, this is the first attempt to analyse it in a way which informs our understanding of synchronic dialect relationships. Building on this new and more robust understanding of synchronic dialect relationships, and acknowledging the relevance of these relationships in the explication of variation at earlier periods, an attempt has been made to find a sociolinguistic solution to the ‘problem’ of Old Irish. Going tentatively beyond the ‘text language’ has also proven useful.

The title of this thesis, at first sight, may be thought to invite comparison with O’Rahilly’s *Irish dialects past and present*, but the ground-breaking and pioneering

nature of that work, despite its many faults, render any such comparisons invalid. It might be more useful to stress the contrast in approach between *IDPP* and the present thesis; they largely go in opposite directions. O’Rahilly’s focus, in many respects, was on a purer homogeneous past and moves on to what he often appears to believe to be a messy and heterogeneous present, to which he gives only limited attention (cf. Ó Dochartaigh 1987: 204). This was the framework which underlay much of Gaelic dialect scholarship in the twentieth century. This thesis started at the opposite end of the chronological spectrum, with a detailed dialectometric analysis of the heterogeneity of the present, moving backwards in time with the support of the methodologies and intellectual framework of sociolinguistics.

The Neogrammarian contribution to our understanding of the historical development of Gaelic has been immense. However, it is not inaccurate to say that it has been the dominant, if not the sole paradigm within which the history of the Gaelic languages has been framed. As a result, many of the questions and problems which can only be answered by moving beyond a linear understanding of linguistic history have until now been left unaddressed. McMahon and McMahon (2005) stress that dialectometric methods are not meant to replace more traditional approaches to language but rather are intended to complement, qualify and challenge them. In a similar vein, this thesis has sought to add an additional perspective on the linguistic history of the Gaelic languages – one which might prompt reflection on old debates and stimulate new ones.

Bibliography

Bibliographic abbreviations

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| <i>AI</i> | <i>Annals of Inisfallen</i> (Mac Airt 1951) |
| <i>AU</i> | <i>Annals of Ulster</i> (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983) |
| <i>BST</i> | <i>Bardic Syntactical Tracts</i> (McKenna 1944) |
| <i>CG</i> | <i>Common Gaelic</i> (Jackson 1951) |
| <i>CGH</i> | <i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> (O'Brien 1962) |
| <i>CIH</i> | <i>Corpus Iuris Hibernici</i> (Binchy 1978) |
| <i>Corpas</i> | <i>Corpas na Gaeilge</i> (Uí Bheirn 2004) |
| <i>CUP</i> | Cambridge University Press |
| <i>DIAS</i> | Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies |
| <i>DIL</i> | <i>Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials</i> (compact edn Quin 1983) |
| <i>EUP</i> | Edinburgh University Press |
| <i>GOI</i> | <i>Grammar of Old Irish</i> (Thurneysen 1946) |
| <i>IDISD</i> | <i>Irish Dialects and Irish-speaking Districts</i> (Ó Cuív 1951) |
| <i>IDPP</i> | <i>Irish Dialects Past and Present</i> (O'Rahilly 1932) |
| <i>IGT</i> | <i>Irish Grammatical Tracts</i> (Bergin 1916; 1921–3; 1926–8; 1946; 1955) |
| <i>LASID</i> | <i>Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects</i> (Wagner 1958–69) |
| <i>LF</i> | <i>Lucerna Fidelium</i> (Ó Súilleabháin 1962) |
| <i>LHEB</i> | <i>Language and History in Early Britain</i> (Jackson 1953) |
| <i>LU</i> | <i>Lebor na hUidre</i> (Best and Bergin 1929) |
| <i>ODNB</i> | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| <i>OUP</i> | Oxford University Press |
| <i>RIA</i> | Royal Irish Academy |
| <i>SGDS</i> | <i>Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland</i> (Ó Dochartaigh 1994–7) |
| <i>Thes.</i> | <i>Thesaurus Palaeo-Hibernicus</i> (Stokes and Strachan 1987 [1901]) |
| <i>VC</i> | <i>Adomnan's Life of Columba</i> (Anderson and Anderson 1961) |

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Appendix 1

The following list of lexical items is the word list used by Elsie (1986) in eliciting lexical items in the Gaelic languages. Lexical items deemed unsuitable for a Gaelic survey and therefore excluded by Elsie are marked below with an asterisk.

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| *all | dust | head |
| and | ear | to hear |
| animal | *earth | heart |
| ashes | to eat | heavy |
| at | egg | here |
| back | eye | to hit |
| bad | to fall | *to hold |
| bark (of tree) | far | horn |
| because | *fat | how (interr.) |
| belly | father | to hunt |
| big | to fear | husband |
| bird | feather | I |
| *to bite | *few | ice |
| black | to fight | *if |
| blood | fire | *in |
| to blow | fish | to kill |
| bone | five | knee |
| *breast | to float | to know |
| to breathe | to flow | lake |
| to burn | flower | to laugh |
| child | to fly | leaf |
| *claw | fog | left |
| cloud | foot | leg |
| cold | four | to lie (on a bed) |
| to come | to freeze | to live |
| to count | fruit | liver |
| to cut | full | long |
| day | to give | louse |
| to die | good | man |
| *to dig | grass | *many |
| dirty | green (of grass) | meat |
| dog | guts | moon |
| to drink | hair | mother |
| dry | hand | mountain |
| dull (of knife) | he | mouth |

| | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| name | to sew | this |
| narrow | *sharp | thou |
| *near | short | three |
| neck | to sing | to throw |
| new | to sit | to tie |
| night | skin | tongue |
| nose | sky | tooth |
| not | to sleep | tree |
| *old | small | to turn |
| one | *to smell | two |
| other | smoke | to vomit |
| person | smooth | to walk |
| to pierce | snake | warm |
| *to play | snow | to wash |
| to pull | *some | water |
| to push | to spit | we |
| rain | to split | wet |
| red | to squeeze | what (interr.) |
| right (side) | to stand | when (interr.) |
| right (correct) | star | where (interr.) |
| river | stick | white |
| road | stone | who (interr.) |
| root | straight | wide |
| rope | to suck | wife |
| rotten | sun | wind |
| round | to swell | wing |
| to rub | to swim | to wipe |
| salt | tail | with |
| sand | *that | women |
| to say | *there | woods or wood |
| *to scratch | they | worm |
| sea | thick | *ye |
| to see | *thin | year |
| seed | to think | yellow |