

Terminology Planning and Policies in Minority/Minoritized Languages

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Loanwords in lesser-used languages

While all languages borrow words from other languages - sometimes quite extensively – this feature does not always diminish the integrity of the borrowing language. English is an obvious example of a language which has borrowed rampantly and yet continues to develop vigorously. Many major languages exhibit less positive results when viewed in terms of loanwords, especially from English. The minor or lesser-used language is even more vulnerable and it is probably true to say that the Irish language is the one with the greatest experience of daily exposure to English influence.

We in the EAFT are aware of rising levels of anxiety among various European language communities in relation to increased use of English as the main language of instruction in technical areas and as a source language for terminology. This feature, naturally, is leading to domain loss in many hitherto vigorous languages. It has been suggested that the minor or minoritized languages have more experience defending their corner and may have developed some novel strategies. For this reason, we decided to focus on the policies employed by some 'smaller' languages to see if there were some patterns or pointers which might be helpful to other language communities. Several language communities presented their terminology policies at a seminar held in Dublin in July 2007, including Welsh, Catalan, Basque, Roma, Ladin, Slovenian, Amazigh (Berber), and Irish. We also heard a case study about terminology planning for the official languages of South Africa. The presentations showed that the circumstances and approaches in each language community were quite different. For this reason, it was difficult to form an immediate overall impression which was to be the topic of this talk. We plan to review the material at a later date, and carry out some further discussion and research with a view to placing the material in context. Thus, I propose to present here one example of an aspect of terminological practice which has been incorporated in national terminology planning. This is a study of the historical development of loanwords in my own language, Irish, and how we have incorporated these features into our approaches to term formation.

The nature of loanwords

A loanword is a word which is "adopted from another language and completely or partially naturalized"¹. There may be various reasons why a language community opts to borrow a foreign word. We might expect that the primary reason would be that the concept is foreign to us and that we cannot readily find an equivalent in our own language for it.

Another reason for borrowing seems to have to do with status or fashion, in that the community perceive the incoming words as being more fashionable or having a higher status than equivalents in their own language might have. The fashion of using French terminology on menus in English is a

¹*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*

clear example of this motivation, although the first reason mentioned above may come into play in some instances.

Although terminological theory holds that concepts are independent of language, it seems that this is often not the case. This is because languages conceptualize differently, and these differences are not always evident to members of a language community encountering a foreign word for the first time. Thus, they may translate the foreign terms they hear in a literal way, which often does not convey the meaning of the concept satisfactorily in their own language, or else they may simply borrow the foreign word or term as it stands. In the latter case, depending on phonetic differences between the two languages in question, the term as loanword may sound somewhat different to the original. Furthermore, it may need to be spelled quite differently, depending on the orthographic rules of the languages in question.

General approach to term formation

When we come to name new concepts we need to know the relevant languages at a deep level and not simply translate the words. We need to identify the underlying concept for which the incoming term stands, and also the related concepts. Ideally, we need to construct a concept system and analyse the relationships between the concepts. We need to discuss the new concept and propose candidate terms. Then we need to reach consensus among specialists on the ideal candidate term. Finally we need to have an effective method of disseminating the new term. All this activity requires a system, and to operate the system we require training and resources. This implies that there be awareness, prioritization and planning at management level.

Revisiting history

There are no blank slates in terminology work, for there will always be history, there will always be related concepts, previously agreed terms, and similar terms if not synonyms. It is our duty as terminologists to examine the history to identify the patterns already established and to be true to these patterns in the formation of new terms. Thus, we need to develop a system based on existing patterns, and to be ready to update or modify the system as circumstances change. Much as we would like our terminology to be stable, the reality is that terminology and language, like life, are ever in a state of flux. Not all terminology, of course, is liable to change but we must bear in mind that fashions come and go, new concepts are conceived and others become obsolete, some terms become politically incorrect and need to be replaced with more acceptable terms (we no longer talk of a person being 'mentally handicapped' but as having an 'intellectual disability'), some terms are deemed old-fashioned (women wear 'dresses' nowadays rather than 'frocks') and are replaced by more fashionable ones, and some other terms were clearly wrong for one reason or another ('trans-Plutonian planet' now needs to be revised in light of recent astronomical discovery) and need to be replaced.

Cognates

Whatever languages we speak, they all have history and part of that history is that they are descended from some, usually now extinct, ancestral language. Most European languages, for

instance, are descended from Indo-European and inherited a core of cognate words or terms. Many of these cognates have to do with personal family relationships (father, mother, brother, sister, me, you) – here are some examples:

<i>Irish</i>	máthair	athair	bráthair, deartháir²	trí	mé
<i>English</i>	mother	father	brother	three	me
<i>French</i>	mère	père	frère	trois	moi
<i>Spanish</i>	madre	padre	hermano	tres	me
<i>Italian</i>	madre	padre	fratello	tre	me
<i>Portuguese</i>	mãe	pai	irmão	três	
<i>German</i>	Mutter	Vater	Bruder	drei	mich
<i>Dutch</i>	moeder	vader	broer	drie	mij
<i>Norwegian</i>	mor	far	bror	tre	meg
<i>Ícelandic</i>	móðir	faðir		þrír	
<i>Lithuanian</i>	mater	tėvas	brolis	tri	manen
<i>Latin</i>	mater	pater	frater	tres	me
<i>Greek</i>	meter, μητέρα	πατέρας	αδελφός	treis, τρία	me
<i>Sanskrit</i>	matar	patar	bhrator	tri	me

As can be seen from the table, most of these cognates carry across several far-flung European languages and come from an Indo-European ancestral language. Those marked in red are words which clearly have alternative roots.

The origin of loanwords

Loanwords arise from contact between one language community and another. This contact may arise from members of a language community going forth to foreign destinations, whether in the form of trading, other professional involvement, travel, living abroad, emigration, or through exposure to foreign media in the form of news, literature, art, film, the Internet or some other format. On the other hand, contact may arise due to incoming influences, be they in the form of travellers, traders, missionaries, settlers, colonizers or incoming media. These types of contact may be sporadic, spontaneous or chance happenings. On the other hand, an accelerated influx of loanwords into a language usually accompanies major sociopolitical, sociocultural or socioeconomic change. With

² In Modern Irish, a blood-brother is referred to as *deartháir* < O.I. *derbráthair* < *derb-* + *bráthair*, *derb* meaning 'sure, certain, genuine', while *bráthair* is reserved for brothers in a religious community.

intensity of contact over a prolonged period, the absorption of loanwords intensifies. Thus, the study of loanwords can reveal historical fault lines.

Loanwords and Irish – a brief history

An overview of the main historical developments in Ireland over the past sixteen centuries reveals the interconnectedness of history, geography, economics and language:

- AD 432: the arrival of Christianity → borrowings from Latin;
- AD 795: the arrival of Viking invaders → borrowings from Old Norse;
- AD 1169: the arrival of Norman invaders → borrowings from French;
- 15th/16th centuries: British colonization → borrowings from English;
- 17th century: conquest or flight of the native ruling class → English becomes dominant language;
- 17th – 19th centuries: Irish becomes the language of the marginalized, intensified by famine and emigration;
- 20th century: independence for three quarters of the island leading to governmental engagement to preserve the language → terminology needed for textbooks, legislation, media;
- 21st century: Language Act, EU status, leading to a major translation industry.

Historical and linguistic fault lines in Irish history

With the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century, Irish absorbed loanwords from Latin, many concerning concepts related to writing and learning, and to religious matters. In the table below the words in red show that some of these languages did not make the same borrowings, or that they did not develop in quite the same ways.

<i>Latin</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
<i>legendum</i>	léann	learning	savoir	conocimientos
<i>schola</i>	scoil	school	école	escuela, colegio
<i>penna</i>	peann	pen	plume	pluma
<i>liber</i>	leabhar	book	livre	libro
<i>scribere</i>	scríobh	write	écrire	escribir
<i>littera</i>	litir	letter	lettre	letra
<i>sacerdos</i>	sagart	priest	prêtre	cura
<i>episcopus</i>	easpag	bishop	évêque	obispo
<i>ecclesia</i>	eaglais	church ³	église	iglesia
<i>crux</i>	cros	cross ⁴	croix	cruz
<i>templum</i>	teampall	temple	temple	templo
<i>infernium</i>	ifreann	hell	enfer	infierno

Sometimes loanwords were imported more than once and have survived with different meanings, in other words, they have been borrowed as different concepts or applied to different concepts. For instance, in the eighth century the Latin word *oratio* was borrowed into Old Irish as **ortha** meaning (a) prayer, esp. a formal or memorized one, whether recited or sung; (b) an incantation, spell, charm), and the latter meaning survives in Modern Irish. The same word was borrowed again during the ninth century as **óráid** meaning (a) prayer (prob. a ritual prayer rather than an extempore one); (b) a speech, oration, and retains the latter meaning only in Modern Irish. Other borrowings from Latin include **Nollaig** (*Christmas*) < O.Ir. *notlaic* < *la natalicia*, **Cáisc** (*Easter*) < O.Ir. *cáisc* < *la pascha*, **abhlan** (*wafer, altar bread*) < O.I. *obla(e)* < *la oblatio*, **scéimh** (*beauty, appearance*) < O.Ir. *scíam*, **scéim** < *la schema*. This last loanword is an example of Irish borrowing the same word more than once, this time at a considerable remove. The early borrowing of *schema* (in Latin, shape, figure, form) meant in Old Irish a figure of speech; form, appearance, guise; beauty, and is retained in Modern Irish as *scéimh*, meaning beauty of face or form; look, appearance. A more recent borrowing, *scéim*⁵, meaning a plan or scheme, came via the English form of the word, *scheme*.

³ But English retained *ecclesia*, *ecclesial*, *ecclesiarch*, *ecclesiastic*, *ecclesiastical*.

⁴ *Cross* is an example of a Latin loanword borrowed into Old English via Old Norse from Old Irish. Interestingly, the original Latin word was later borrowed unchanged into English as *crux*, apparently from Medieval Latin *crux interpretum* (commentator's torment, i.e., a difficult passage in a text).

⁵ This is the only Irish example cited throughout the article which was borrowed later than the year 1700.

Since our forbears had neither the benefit of standardization nor of mass communication, many different spellings of some loanwords can be found in ancient sources. Here are the instances of the Latin loanword *ecclesia* (church) found in early Irish sources:

**eclis eclais eclas eglais æclis ęclais eagluis eglas ecailse æcailse ecalsé ecalse ecailsi ecalsi eagailse
eagailsi eguilsu eclaise eaglaise eagluise e(a)gluisci eglaisi ecolso ecolsa æcolsa æccalsa æccalsa
ecalsa egalsa eaccalsa ecalsæ æcilso eccailsi eagluiseadhe eagluiseacha eagalsa eclasae eculsa
ecailsib eagailsibh egluisibh ecalsuib eaglas eagluiseadh eagalsadh eclais, eclas**
i, ī, ā, f. (eccles-) **ns.** eclis [Wb 16 d 6](#). ind eclais [Tur. 60](#). (ind) eclas [SR 4421.4923](#). [LU 116 a 38](#). [Fél. p. 4](#). [BB 341 a 45](#). [PH 3423](#). [6896](#). an eglais, [O'Dowley 15.11](#). **vs.** a eclais [MI 65 d 14](#). [66 c 1](#). **as.** æclis [Wb 28 d 26](#). ęclais [MI 65 d 5](#). eclais [SR 4440](#). eagluis 1 Cor. xvi 19. eglas [YBL 154 b 22](#). **ds.** æclis [Wb 11 d 16](#). [28 d 24](#). eclais [MI 64 c 5](#). [66 c 2](#). [SR 4484](#). **gs.** (a) (inna) ecailse [MI 65 d 1](#). [Tur. 48](#). [LU 30 a 25](#). æcailse [Wb 22 c 20](#). ecalsé [SR 4242](#). ecalse, [Cáin Ad. § 39](#). [§ 45](#). ecailsi [IT i 186.15](#). [SR 4924](#). [Trip. 16.31](#); [28.13](#). ecalsi, [Cáin Ad. § 34](#). [Trip. 2.18](#). eagailse, [TSh. 3475](#). eagailsi, [Studies 1919, 439](#). eguilsu, [Fl. Earls 20.27](#). (b) eclaise, [Laws iii 10.16](#). eaglaise, GF, [Ir. Monthly 1919, 623 § 15](#). eagluise, Acts viii 1. Rev. ii 1. [Luc. Fid. 389 z](#). e(a)gluisci, Rom. xvi 5. 2 Cor. i 1. eglaisi, [O'Dowley 15.15](#); [20.20](#). (c) ecolso [Wb 13 a 3](#). ecolsa [11 d 6](#). æcolsa [12 b 18](#). [13 a 27](#). æccalsa [9 c 7](#). æccalsa [7 c 8](#). ecalsa, [Lism. L. 2459](#). [2553](#). [Acall. 2888](#). [Ériu ii 204.20](#). [Arch. iii 307 § 17](#). egalsa, [Cáin Ad. § 53](#). eaccalsa, [Studies 1921, 75](#). ecalsæ, [BColm. 26.2](#). æcilso [Wb 22 c 11](#). **np.** (a) ecailsi [RC xxvi 38.9](#). eccailsi, [Cáin Ad. § 31](#). ecalsi, [Laws v 14.10](#). [Cáin Ad. § 30](#). (b) eagluiseadhe [sic] 1 Cor. xvi 19. eagluiseacha, Rom. xvi 4. Rev. i 20. (c) ecalsa [Lism. L. 3923](#). eagalsa [RC xxvi 38 n. 9](#). **ap.** (a) ecailsi, [Trip. 110.18](#). (b) eclasae [122.2](#). (c) eculsa, [Fél. 4.17](#). **dp.** (a) ecailsib, [Trip. 8.2](#). [Maund. 50](#). eagailsibh, [Keat. iii. 310](#). (b) egluisibh, Rev. ii 13. iii 22. (c) ecalsuib, [Lism. L. 36](#). **gp.** (a) eclas [PH 5589](#). [Todd Lect. v 58.11](#). (eclaise [PH 1663](#), etc. is not written out in the MS.) eaglas [IGT, Decl. § 130](#). (b) eagluiseadh, Rev. i 20. [IGT, Decl. § 127](#). eagalsadh [§ 130](#).⁶

The rows of words in bold at the top show the variant spellings of the loanword in Old and Middle Irish, and the entries in blue refer to the sources in which they can be found. The Modern Irish spelling is 'eaglais'.

Loanwords from Old Norse

As a result of the Viking invasions which began towards the end of the eighth century leading to widespread Viking influence over the following two centuries, many loanwords entered Irish from Old Norse. Being primarily traders, merchants and seamen, the Norse legacy to Irish is characterized by loanwords to do with these fields of endeavour.

⁶ eDIL (electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language), www.dil.ie

Old Norse	Irish	English	French	Spanish	Danish	Norwegian
<i>knappr</i>	cnaipe	button	bouton	botón	knap	knapp
<i>bátr</i>	bád	boat	bateau	barco, barca, embarcación	båd; fartøj	båt, fartøy
<i>ey</i>	í, inis, oileán	island	isle	isla	ø	øy
<i>poki</i>	póca	pocket	poche	bolsillo	lomme; -lomme; lomme-	lomme
<i>bogi</i>	bogha	bow	arc	arco	bue; flitsbue	bue
<i>marked</i>	margadh	market	marché	mercado	marked; markedsplads	markedsplads, torg
<i>porskr</i>	trosc	cod(fish)	cabillaud	bacalao		torsk
<i>vindauga</i>	fuinneog	window	fenêtre; vitrine	ventana, ventanilla	vindue; udstillingsvindue	vindu

Loanwords from French

The Norman invasion of Ireland began during the latter half of the 12th century and some French influence prevailed into the 14th century. The examples below show that Irish borrowed some loanwords in the fields of food and clothing, while others relate to administrative and social affairs, and still others to literary matters.

The fact that Irish borrowed *garçon* and *épouser* suggest the influence of new social mores. Of the words previously favoured for 'boy' - *mac* meaning 'son' and (loosely) a male descendent, *macaomh* meaning 'beloved son', and *buachaill* meaning 'cowherd' - the last is still in use, but *garsún* or *gasúr* are dominant, so much so that the latter variation by metathesis has come to mean child of either sex in the most densely populated Irish-speaking region.

The loanword *plúr* is bidimensional, in that it was an early borrowing from O.Fr. *flor* (which later became *fleur de farine* – in the sense of the finest part of the wheat - and in Modern French abbreviated to *farine*). But not only does it still signify 'flour' in Irish, but it also carries the metaphorical sense demonstrated in 'fleur de farine', in that a beautiful woman is often referred to poetically as 'plúr na mban' (the flower of all women). The O.Ir. word *bláth* is still used as the normal word for 'flower', but is not used metaphorically in quite the same way.

French, O.Fr.	Irish	English	Spanish	Norwegian
<i>bacon</i> < <i>bacoun</i>	bagún	bacon	tocino	bacon, (salt) flesk
<i>orange</i> < <i>orenge</i>	oráiste	orange	naranja	appelsin
<i>farine</i> < <i>fleur de farine</i> < <i>flur</i>	plúr	flour	harina	(hvete)mel
<i>raisin sec</i> < <i>raisin</i>	risín	raisin	uva pasa	rosin
<i>baron</i>	barún	baron	barón	baron
<i>garçon</i>	garsún, gasúr, buachaill	boy	niño	gutt
<i>épouser</i>	pós	marry, espouse	casarse	gifte seg (med), bli gift
<i>boucle</i>	búcla	buckle	hebilla	spenne
<i>robe</i>	róba	robe	manto	lang kâpe, *kjole, *drakt
<i>goune</i>	gúna	gown	vestido largo	(fin)kjole
<i>cave voûtée</i> < <i>vou(l)te</i>	boghta	vault	sótano; bodega	hvelv, kjeller
<i>forêt</i> < <i>forest</i>	foraois	forest	bosque	skog
<i>nature</i>	nádúr	nature	carácter; naturaleza	natur; art, type, beskaffenhet
<i>region</i>	réigiún	region	región	område, region
<i>raison</i>	réasún	reason	razón	fornuft, forstand, dømmekraft
<i>texte</i>	téacs	text	texto	tekst
<i>terme</i>	téarma	term	termino	faguttrykk, vending

Loanwords from other languages

Irish also borrowed from Welsh (once our nearest linguistic neighbours), Greek (usually via Latin), and occasionally from other languages. The examples below from Welsh are suggestive of a storytelling context, the Spanish example of trade, the Hebrew of a biblical context and the Greek of glosses on religious manuscripts. The last example below, *fordécsid*, is not a borrowing in the normal sense but a calque or loan translation, where the Greek components $\square\pi\square$ and $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\varsigma$ have been literally translated by the Irish components *for-* and *décsid*⁷.

⁷ From *O'Mulchonry's Glossary*, an Irish etymologicon which has been dated to before the mid-eighth century and contains almost 200 citations of Greek words.

<i>Irish, Old Irish</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Greek</i>
óinmhid < óinmit	fool	ynfyd			
nós	custom	naws			
murúch < muirmorú	mermaid	morforwyn			
réal	sixpence		real		
seiceal < cicle	shekel			sheqel	
dia- < díá-	dia-				δια-
eo- < eó	eu-				ε
deichniúr, decaid	decade (<i>set of ten psalms</i>)				δεκάς
onagri	wild ass, onager				ναγρός
fordécsid	overseer				π σκοπος

Loanwords from English

It would appear that the borrowing activity outlined above did not unduly disturb the integrity of the language. This was not to be the case with the influence of English, however. By far the greatest amount of loanwords in Irish came from or via English. There was some overlap with the period of Norman influence during the 12th-14th centuries, when some words were borrowed from French and some from French via English. With the decline of French influence in the 15th century, the influx of loanwords from English into Irish became the norm and has remained so ever since.

Perusal of early English loanwords reveals types of words which may be roughly grouped as follows:

- Eating & drinking
béile (meal), *branda* (brandy), *bríbhéir* (brewer), *bricfeasta* (breakfast), *cabáiste* (cabbage), *candaí* (candy), *cearbhas*, *carbuaid* (caraway), *dinnéar*⁸ (dinner), *leitís* (lettuce), *liocras* (liquorice), *liomóin* (lemon), *luáiste* (lovage), *sáiste* (sage), *scailliún* (scallion), *siocaire* (chicory), *sinséar* (ginger), *suipéar*⁹ (supper)
- Clothing & furnishings
bríste (breeches), *clóca* (cloak), *cóta* (coat), *cufa* (cuff), *cuilt* (quilt), *cuirtín* (curtain), *cúisín* (cushion), *hata* (hat), *húda* (hood), *lása* (lace), *líneáil* (lining), *ómra* (amber), *pota* (pot), *scarfa* (scarf), *sciorta* (skirt), *stoca* (stocking)
- Home & hardware
bosca (box), *bríce* (brick), *cairt* (cart), *campa* (camp), *cárta* (quart, card), *cíle* (keel), *cistin* (kitchen), *clós* (close, yard), *corda* (cord, rope), *hanla* (handle), *hinse* (hinge), *laitís* (lattice), *lampa* (lamp), *rópa* (rope), *scafall* (scaffolding)

⁸ Or perhaps from French

⁹ Or perhaps from French

- Personal needs
compord (comfort), *crampa* (cramp), *dochtúir* (doctor), *poitigéir* (apothecary), *scóip* (scope), *seirbhís* (service), *sólás* (solace)
- Commerce
costas (cost), *dosaen* (dozen), *lasta* (last, cargo), *léas* (lease), *liosta* (list), *lóistín* (lodging), *pingin* (penny), *scór* (score), *sórt* (sort)

The continuum of English influence

This aspect is a subject of focus in its own right and I will not attempt to deal with it here. Let it just suffice to say that since the beginning of the seventeenth century, English has increasingly become the dominant language and, for the majority of the population, the only real language of everyday communication. There are no monoglot Irish speakers left and the speech of those for whom Irish is the mother-tongue is being noticeably influenced by English, not only in vocabulary but also in syntax.

Laying the foundation for domain gain

With the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the Government set about putting in place measures to preserve and restore Irish as the language of the Irish people. This included introducing Irish as the medium of education in primary schools, providing Irish-medium secondary education in some schools and some third-level Irish-medium education. This focus on Irish-medium education necessitated terminology planning, which in turn led to the formulation of recognized methodologies for term formation.

Much activity focussed on standardization of spelling and grammar during the 1940s and 50s, on lexicography and terminology work, on provision of textbooks, atlases, and educational aids. Bilingual signage for place-names was introduced, an Irish-medium radio was founded in 1972 and a television station in 1996, while some newsprint has been available in Irish since the late nineteenth century. The recent Official Languages Act 2003 demands the provision of bilingual services by public bodies and, in January 2007, Irish achieved full status as an official working language of the European Union. All of these activities and many others have led to a huge and growing demand for technical terminology.

General approaches to terminology provision

There are four simple approaches involved:

- Collection of existing terminology in surviving domains;
- Collection of previously existing terminology forgotten by the language community due to domain loss;
- Term formation;
- Standardization and harmonization of existing terminology;
- Dissemination of terminology in suitable and accessible resources.

Approaches to term formation

- Devising new terms using native words or parts of words;
- Calques;
- Loanwords transcribed;
- Loanwords left unchanged.

Early transcription patterns

While resorting to borrowing loanwords from English was not promoted as the primary method of term formation, it was considered necessary for scientific and technical terminology. Thus, rules for transcription of technical terms were devised. Special emphasis was laid on the etymology of loanwords, on identifying Latin or Greek roots, and on transcribing them according to the demands of Irish orthography.

Features of historical loanwords from Latin were identified as follows:

- the Latin endings –um, -us, -is, -io are dropped;
- the vowel sounds are kept long or short as in the original Latin or Greek;
- the consonants are kept broad or slender as in Irish orthography
- short final vowel syllables are rendered as *a* or *e* depending on whether preceding vowel is broad or slender.

<i>Mod.Ir.</i>	<i>Mid.or Early Mod.Ir.</i>	<i>Latin</i>
criostal	< cristall (8 th C)	< crystallum
airgead	< argat (9 th C)	< argentum
ciogal	< cicul (9 th C)	< cyclus
maighnéad	< maignéit (10 th C)	< magnetum
stoidiaca	< stodiace (15 th C)	< zodiacus
éiclips	< éiclips (17 th C)	< eclipsis

Devising transcription rules

The first step in devising transcription rules is to identify criteria in order to establish which terms to transcribe. While this is not an exact science, the following criteria were adopted by terminology planners for the Irish language:

- Proper names
 - people (in general, Irish people and people famous in history and legend)
 - places (in general, important foreign placenames)
 - movements (historical, political, artistic)
 - organizations (administrative, historical, political, artistic)
 - titles (historical, administrative, ecclesiastical, military)

- acronyms (some already established, but tend to leave many acronyms in English)
- Terms
 - technical
 - scientific
 - other terms if no satisfactory solution can be found using native words, or if the borrowing is in common use in the language community

Loanwords left unchanged in Irish include many proper names (for practical reasons), acronyms (for reasons of transparency) and certain types of terms (e.g., some French culinary terms).

Transcription rules from the Latin alphabet to Irish

The rules are somewhat complex but these are the main steps:

Loanwords are transcribed syllable by syllable. The first step is to study the etymology for semantic purposes, and check the Greek, Latin or other roots for vowel length. The rules provide for consonants which do not exist in Irish or which only appear in certain positions. They also provide for diphthongs which do not exist in Irish. They indicate how and when to slenderize or broaden consonants when putting the syllables together. Common scientific endings have been standardized. Finally, the rules provide for application of lenition¹⁰ and hyphenation rules in transcribed loanwords.

Almost all new terms are presented to us in English and in the Roman alphabet. These rules have been developed over the past number of decades and applied with varying degrees of consistency. Much existing terminology has recently been collected in a national terminology database, resulting in a huge harmonization task. Because of the lack of visibility and everyday currency of terms, especially technical terms, there is no real sense of what is 'commonly in use', with the result that making harmonization decisions can be quite challenging.

Challenges in term formation

As mentioned above, there is very little visibility for technical terminology in Irish. While bilingual signage is becoming more common, the wording is not always technical, or is at least limited by the scope of the signage. Although newspapers, magazines and journals exist, they do not enjoy a wide readership so that the awareness of members of the public concerning spelling, grammar and terminology is often limited to what they remember from their schooldays. Among the community where Irish is the mother-tongue, many speakers are not interested and use English terms in preference to what they consider artificial words from Dublin. Historically, there has been little engagement by universities in the fields of terminology and lexicography, although this is beginning to change. The transcription rules are complicated and were applied and understood by language experts in the fields of lexicography and terminology. For reasons of resources, the rules had not

¹⁰ This linguistic feature is very common in Irish in many grammatical situations. It consists of softening a consonant (initial or otherwise) and is indicated by inserting the letter h after the consonant.

been finalized or published. However, due to a burgeoning translation industry in recent times, the need to clarify the rules and publish a handbook has become pressing. The handbook is in development and will be published in 2008.

Relevance of this model

It will be obvious that the approach to term formation and transcription of loanwords outlined above grew out of the specific circumstances of one language community. These circumstances may seem entirely alien in comparison to those of vigorous languages, Irish being at a very advanced state of decline. But since it is one of the oldest written European languages, it surely merits concerted efforts to secure its passage to a new generation of speakers.

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