
Dearcadh na nDéise – Representations of Gaeltacht na nDéise in Dineen’s Bilingual Irish-English Dictionary (1927)

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Abstract

Dictionaries are a written manifestation of the world, but the selection of words is a reflection of society at a particular time from one or more viewpoints. Irish dictionaries are largely uncharted territories in terms of lexicographic research and contain important regional and national narratives that reflect the ever-changing Irish cultural landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The creation of the independent Irish state in the early part of the twentieth century and increasing demand for bilingual Irish-English dictionaries at this time heralded a beginning of a new area of activity in European lexicography. One of landmark editions from this period is *An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* by Patrick S. Dineen. The aim of this paper is to explore a regional variety of Irish, Gaeltacht na nDéise, found in the South-East of Ireland and examine some of the socio-cultural narratives behind Dineen’s choice of entries to depict this regional dialect. Based on a recategorisation of the empirical work of Nyhan (2006), a brief discussion of three prevalent socio-cultural themes, namely; anger, anxiety and poverty, recurring in some Gaeltacht na nDéise-specific entries found in Dineen’s work is presented. These offer an interesting window into how the lexis of this particular region was represented and potentially contributed to its regional identity in a national context.

Keywords: Bilingual Irish-English Dictionaries; Socio-cultural narrative; Regional Dialect

1 An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla and Gaeltacht na nDéise

An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla by Reverend Patrick S. Dineen stands as the most iconic works in the comparatively short history of bilingual Irish-English lexicography. The early editions of this pioneering work came at a time of upheaval as Dineen sought to encapsulate the regional and national linguistic identities of the newly-liberated Irish State. A substantive part of Dineen’s narrative of the Irish language engages in what Hartmann (2001) refers to as a ‘personal-biographical’ account of the

language¹, but this was tempered with a widely representative account of regional dialects and a conservative acceptance of borrowings. In the preface, Dineen stresses his efforts to flavour his dictionary with as many dialectal words as possible, most notably from Connaught and Aran, North and Mid-Ulster, West and North Kerry, South and South-West Cork, Meath, Omeath, Clare and West Limerick and the Comeragh District of Waterford. The regional specific lexis offers an interesting panorama into the linguistic sub-cultures in Ireland, but is also productive in highlighting particular values, identities and struggles pertinent to those areas at this point in Irish history. In the preface of *An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* Dineen lists Fr. Mícheál McGrath and Riobaird Bheldon (1838-1914) as one of his lexicographical sources². While not mentioned as a source in the first edition (1904) of the *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* the 1927 edition contain 96 entries from this ‘Cm.’ source. The absence in the 1904 edition may be explained by the fact that Bheldon’s poetry was only first published in December, 1903 - just months before the first edition of the dictionary was published. Dineen himself admits that the 1927 edition was “practically a new work” and “an effort has been made to secure much representative provincial Irish in word and phrase as possible” (Dineen, 1927: vii, xi). Bheldon and McGrath as immersed as they were in the language, literature and culture of the Déise Gaeltacht region of Waterford, and its surrounding hinterland, proved suitable sources of the living Irish language in south east Munster. The words in *An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* denoted by “Cm.” are examples of the living language as spoken in rural county Waterford at the turn of the twentieth century. While the actual provenance of this collection of words might not be certain we are left in no doubt has to Dineen’s reasons for including them in his *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*:

an effort has been made to net the chief living elements of the language while there was still time. The materials for the work have been drawn from the living language of Irish-speaking Ireland as well as from the written remains of the modern literature (Dineen, 1927: vii)

2 The Work of Riobaird Bheldon

Bheldon was a relatively little known poet until the publication of *Riobard Bheldon, Amhráin agus Dánta* (1995) by Pádraig Ó Macháin³. Ó Macháin (1995:125) mentions that Bheldon was an acquaintance of Fr.

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- 1 The first edition was, to a considerable extent, compiled from memory. A large percentage of the illustrative phrases were taken from living expressions, conversations, etc, stored up in my childhood’s memory; so that many of them have the vividness and directness characteristic of the spoken word. In this edition still further use has been made of this source; and the meanings and applications of key words, somatic terms and other important expressions have been considerably expanded (*An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* [Second Edition], 1927:vii).
 - 2 Cm.- a list of words from the Comeragh district of Waterford compiled by the late Fr. McGrath (P.P. of Ring) and the late Riobárd Ueldon, the poet (*An Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* [Second Edition], 1927:xxiv).
 - 3 Pádraig Ó Dálaigh published *Riobard Bheldon: File an Chomaraigh* in 1925. Bheldon was also the subject of (or merely mentioned) in a small number of articles in newspapers and journals.

Michael McGrath and that, “le cabhair Riobaird dhein an sagart cnuasach de chaint an Chomaraigh a sholáthar don Athair Pádraig Ó Duinnín” (With the help of Riobard the priest, i.e. Fr. McGrath, supplied a collection of words from the spoken Irish of the Comeragh region to Fr. Dineen). Fr. McGrath was an Irish-speaking priest in west county Waterford at the time. It has been suggested that Bheldon may not have been able to read or write in the Irish language (Ó Macháin, 1995: 8-9). One could infer, then, that the task of integrating Bheldon’s input to Dineen’s dictionary may have fell on McGrath. While it cannot be determined with any level of certainty what was the actual origin of the list one can surmise that it not only contained a collection of words and phrases from the spoken language of the region, but also examples from Bheldon’s poetry. It is interesting to note, however, that in his *Sean-chaint na nDéise*, Bishop Michael Sheehan seems to suggest that the list was primarily of McGrath’s making:

A valuable list of Déise words and phrases was supplied to Dr. Dineen by Fr. Michael McGrath which he took down while curate in Kilrossanty (Comeragh) parish. They are indicated in the dictionary by “Cm.” Fr. McGrath later became P.P. of Ring, and died in 1919. Many of his notes, not used by Dr Dineen, are in my possession, and may appear, I hope, in a future edition of this book (Sheehan, 1944: 216).

3 A Recategorisation of Gaeltacht na nDéise Entries in Dineen’s Dictionary

The following sections present a narrative account of socio-cultural aspects of the Comeragh dialect contain in Dineen’s *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*. This analysis is founded upon the work of Nyhan (2006), who identifies 355 entries in Dineen’s work that have provenance in this particular region. A small number of these entries have been selected, which depict emotional states (anger and anxiety) and social class (poverty).

3.1 Anger

Dineen’s 1927 dictionary includes 15 entries from the Comeragh specific dialect that have connotations of acts of anger, dispute or violence (see Table 1). There are no evident regional factors explaining the choice of these particular words, apart from the backdrop of a national unrest in Ireland against foreign occupation. However, a closer inspection of Dineen’s entries in this particular lexical set communicate certain feelings of regional tension, for example, *reaping with a swing round killed the Munsterman* found in the entry **baic** or in the agricultural endeavours strongly associated with the region, *the dog made a drive at me* in **ablach**. Most interesting is the finality or permanency associated with the acts of violence that are narrated through certain listings, such as *I will give you a lasting wound* (**cio-na-sheicean**), *He injured him for life/He is permanently marked or injured* (**faic**) and *you have finished him*

with that blow (**mart**). The explicit description of physical aggression, particularly referencing males, appears to be a strong theme in anger-specific lexis and could be connected to the powerful autocratic role of the Catholic Church in Ireland during this period, particularly given the religious background of Dineen and his named contributors.

Headword	Source Language Entry	Target Language Translation
<i>Baic</i>	<i>buaint tar b. do mhairbh an Muimhneach</i>	Reaping around with the sword killed the Munsterman
<i>Ablach</i> [2]	<i>Thug an mada a. orm</i>	The dog made a 'drive' at me
<i>Ciona-sheicean</i>	<i>In phr. cuirfead c. ort</i>	I will give you a lasting wound
<i>Cofach</i>	<i>c. chum troda atá ort</i>	You are spoiling for a fight
<i>Donagar</i>	<i>A thuilleadh donagair chughat</i>	May more misfortune be thine
<i>Failc</i>	<i>Chuir se f. ann Ta. f. ann</i>	He injured him for life He is permanently marked or injured
<i>Faimin</i>	----	A blow
<i>Fuarpadh</i>	---	One in a rigid or unconscious state after a blow
<i>Giolcadh</i>	<i>Fuair sé g. maith ón máighistir</i>	The teacher gave him a good beating
<i>Liath-shúil</i>	<i>Thug sé l.orm</i>	He eyed me bitterly
<i>Máiglid</i>	<i>Ag m. Le n-a chéile</i>	Act of wrangling, disputing
<i>Mart</i>	<i>Tá sé 'na mb. agat leis an mbuille sin</i>	You have finished him with that blow
<i>Pliastrail</i>	<i>Ag p. ar fuaid an tighe</i>	Knocking things about the house
<i>Rámhghail</i>	----	Ranting, raving, medley
<i>Sméideadh</i>	<i>ní leomhfá s. air</i>	You dare not wink at him

Table 1: Entries denoting Anger, Dispute or Violence.

Fractured personal relationships are also communicated through Dineen's content with some of these relating to formal social structures, such as school, *the teacher gave him a good beating* (**giolcadh**) or towards individuals in the wider regional community, for example, *he eyed me bitterly* (**liath-shúil**) or *you dare not wink at him* (**sméideadh**). Collectively, these entries express a certain malaise experienced by Dineen either in childhood or on the behalf of those who contributed examples of the Comeragh dialect to his dictionary.

3.2 Anxiety

Another subset of Comeragh dialect words recorded by Dineen convey a measurable sense of anxiety (see Table 2), which appears to be connected to personal, relating to geographical surroundings or associated with a recent personal loss. A particularly strong emotive theme is the portrayal of being un-

settled in a particular place, which makes possible reference to the region. This can be found in the entry **connuighim**, which includes the listing translating as *he was sad enough until he became familiar with the place*.

Headword	Source Language Entry	Target Language Translation
Cásnach	----	Full of concern
Connuighim	<i>Bhí sé diachrach go leor gur chonnuigh sé léis an áit</i>	He was sad enough until he became familiar with the place
Deighreán	<i>Ag déanamh deighreain dó</i>	Giving him anxiety
Diadhánach	----	Lonesome, as a cow bereft of her calf
Diúdaireacht	<i>chuirfeadh sé d. ar mo chroidhe</i>	It would rejoice my heart
Dorn	<i>dhein an ghaoth d. dubh orn</i>	The wind did me a bad turn
Fógla	<i>f. chum imthighthe</i>	Anxiety to depart
Iolchaing	<i>In phr. Tàim ar i. chum</i>	I am anxious to get at or be at
Ionnas	----	Expectation
Sonntaighe	<i>thuig mé go raibh mo dheirbhshiúr atá curtha le bliadhain lem ais agus tháinig s. orm</i>	I understood my sister, a year buried, was beside me and I became unnerved
Stiugaighil	<i>Ag s. les an mbás</i>	In the throes of death

Table 2: Entries denoting Anxiety.

3.3 Poverty

Certain entries chosen by Dineen in his account of the Comeragh dialect make a discernible reference to poverty and lower social class as being associated with its regional identity (see Table 3). These typically centre on the quality of food available and the culinary expectations of Comeragh people. In the case of the former, the entry **gannaire** clearly communicates the state of the social class stratum of this region by their choice of food. Another example of a clear statement of poverty can be found in the entry **beaindin** containing the citation *the tap of the cream vessel through which impoverish milk is withdrawn*.

Headword	Source Language Entry	Target Language Translation
Beaindín	----	The tap of a cream vessel, etc, through which the impoverished milk is withdrawn
Cearbh [1]	<i>Cuirim c. mo shúl ann</i>	I regard it with a covetous eye
Cuthaigh	<i>biadh c.</i>	Stimulative food
Forthain	<i>cead f. den bhiadh a dh'ithe</i>	Permission to eat enough of the food
Gannaire	<i>iosfaimíd an g.</i>	We will eat the poor food
Lóta	<i>lótaí na phócaí</i>	Scraps in his pockets
Molaim-mo-lámhadas	<i>Is dóigh le muinntir an ch. gur m. arán agus gruth</i>	The Comeragh people think that bread and curds make the finest of food

Table 3: Entries denoting Poverty.

4 Conclusion

The socio-cultural narrative of the Comeragh region in Dineen's *Foclóir Gaedhilge-Béarla* (1927) depicts a regional existence characterised by feelings of anger, anxiety and an acute sense of poverty. Although the thematic areas under analysis represent only a small proportion of Dineen's account of this particular Irish dialect, they allow an exploratory insight into the lexicographical portrayal of this geographical area, contextualising its emotional disposition and social stratum. Together, these contributed to shaping its regional identity of this early twentieth century period within a larger national context.

5 References

5.1 Dictionaries

Dineen, P.S. (1927) *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*. Second Edition. Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland Ltd.

5.2 Other Publications

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