

The Growth of Irish (L1) / English (L2) Literary Code-mixing, 1600-1900: Contexts, Genres and Realisations

Liam Mac Mathúna
(*University College Dublin*)

1. Introduction

Intriguing as they undoubtedly are, the early sixteenth-century lists of books in the Earl of Kildare's library may well have inadvertently helped to lull scholars into visualising a rather idealised picture of language balance in multilingual late medieval Ireland. The lists reflect a society in which the four languages, Irish, English, Latin and French, vied as scholarly media and where the outcome in the Earl's library was a four-way photo-finish. The number of volumes in each of the languages was recorded as follows: Latin, 34; French, 35; English, 22; Irish, 20 (Mac Niocaill 1992: 312-314).¹

But of course the multilingual contact situation in Ireland had always been quite dynamic, both at vernacular and at scholarly levels, following the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169. Although French continued to be employed in official documents into the second half of the 15th century, it had already ceded its vernacular role to English in the towns of the colonists prior to the drawing up of the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366. These Statutes, composed in Norman-French, the primary language of English law at the time, provide an earlier snapshot of the language situation within the areas under English jurisdiction, as they sought to compel the colonists to desist from adopting Irish as a community vernacular. Ironically, no mention is made of Norman-French in the Statutes themselves. It is clear that what was at issue was a contest for supremacy between Irish and English as the principal vernacular among the colonists. It was not until the late 15th century that the role of English as a suitable medium for recording official matters became secure:

¹ The figure for Irish is from an earlier list, for which see Mac Niocaill (1992: 355-356).

French was used in acts of parliament from 1310 to 1472, alternating occasionally with Latin. It is only after 1472 that English came to be used in acts of parliament. Prior to that date, government documents generally as well as municipal records, statutes and ordinances are either in French or in Latin. ... When French came to be replaced by English, that language was at first used concurrently with Latin, as Norman French had been previously; after 1450 the use of Latin declined, and by 1500 the use of English had become normal (Bliss & Long 1993: 714).

Thus Irish and English were left vying with each other as community languages.

The interplay of the four languages at a scholarly level also resulted in significant developments. From about 1475 on English began to complement Latin both as a source of new material and as a medium through which international learning came to the attention of Irish speakers. This influence may be seen, for instance, in Finghin Ó Mathghamhna's translation of "The Buke of John Maundeville" (Stokes 1898). Further, it was from an English version, itself translated from the French, that Ó Mathghamhna translated "Leabhar Ser Marco Polo" (Stokes 1897). A death-notice in *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* ("Annals of the Four Masters") under the year 1496 describes Ó Mathghamhna as *saoi eccnaidhe illaidin & i mberla* ('a learned man, skilled in Latin and in English'). Another scholar, Uilliam Mac an Leagha, translated a number of works from English. Among these were "Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás," translated from *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*, apparently published in 1474, which had been translated from the French (Quin 1939; Carney 1993: 706-707).

The romantic tales "Guy of Warwick" and "Bevis of Hampton" are two further examples of Mac an Leagha's translations from English (Robinson 1908; Carney 1993: 707). All in all, there is considerable evidence for English cultural and scholarly impact on Irish from the end of the 15th century. James Carney summarised his appraisal of the evidence as follows: "In all this literature of entertainment and information there is a consistent picture of increasing external influence on Irish from at least the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards; the impact of English is direct and that of French indirect" (Carney 1993: 698). Thus, it is interesting to note that the intellectual impact of English preceded the strengthening of its administrative role under the Tudors in the sixteenth century.

The ancillary role of English as a code-mixing agent in certain Irish-language literary texts from c. 1600 onwards reflects the extension in the use of English in Ireland, following the English conquest, initially as the medium of colonial administration and law, and later as an expanding community language. Bilingual interaction in the texts successively involves (1) native-born English, (2) inhabitants of the Irish Pale, for whom English was their native tongue, and (3) native Irish speakers, who were acquiring English as a second language. The varieties of English presented in the texts reflect the authors' perceived competencies of the various communities, viz. the fluency of Eng-

lish-born native-speakers and native Hiberno-English speakers, the competent English acquired by some Irish speakers, and the very basic English learned by the majority of native Irish speakers.

The principal genres which facilitated this code-mixing included legal documents and parodies of the legal system, political poems and satires, and creative disputations between speakers of Irish and English. These latter allowed burlesque composition to draw not only on the rich resources of both languages, but on the metalinguistic awareness fostered by societal bilingualism. The realisations of English to be found in these works accordingly range from the straightforward imparting of information and opinion to virtuoso *tour-de-force*, precursors of the prose of Myles na gCopaleen and James Joyce.

The widespread community bilingualism to be found in Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries provided complex communicative challenges which encouraged verbal dexterity and creativity, ultimately leading to instances where compositions could send different messages to various segments of an audience simultaneously.

2. *Individual Loanwords and Code-Mixing: The Flight of the Earls and Beir mo beanocht go Dún Dalck*

The departure of the Ulster chiefs Aodh Ó Néill, Earl of Tyrone, Ruairí Ó Domhnaill, Earl of Tyrconnell, and Cúchonnacht Mag Uidhir from Fermanagh, for continental Europe in 1607 was a pivotal event which may be taken to mark the transition from a self-confident Irish-language culture to one where the existence of English was to become an ever-increasing foil of “otherness”. Two contemporary and contrasting texts – both composed on mainland Europe – serve to apprise us of the range of loanwords current in Irish at the time, and to introduce code-mixing. They have accordingly merited close examination. The first of these describes the event conventionally known as *Teitheadh na nIarlaí* or “The Flight of the Earls” (Walsh 1916). It is a travel-diary maintained by Tadhg Ó Cianáin, a member of one of the traditional learned families, who accompanied the Ulster leaders on their journey to Rome. This may serve as a baseline standard to indicate the extent of vocabulary borrowing into Irish at the start of the 17th century.

In his seminal study of language contact Uriel Weinreich observed that “the vocabulary of a language, considerably more loosely structured than its phonemics and its grammar, is beyond question the domain of borrowing par excellence.” (Weinreich 1963: 56). It therefore comes as no surprise to find that Ó Cianáin has recourse to a high level of novel words in order to describe the new environment in which he and his companions found themselves on their fateful journey from Lough Swilly to Rome.²

² However, the actual identification of particular borrowings is not unproblematic. There seems to be a very practical difficulty in that the words which members of a language com-

Ó Cianáin's diary allows us also to confirm the accuracy of Osborn Bergin's observation "that the classical poets had no scruple about using the foreign word to denote the foreign thing" (Bergin 1970: 49). Ó Cianáin uses many interesting loans from English, which are indicative of the wealthy aristocratic and religious circles in which the Earls and their entourage moved on the continent, e.g. *teinis-cúirt* 'tennis court,' *galari/galeri* 'gallery,' *stuití* 'study,' *futcloc, fudcloc* 'foot-cloak / foot-cloth,' *runntápla* 'round table' and *supmission* 'submission'. Sometimes Ó Cianáin provides the only evidence for quite a number of words. Other borrowings he shares with contemporary early 17th-century texts. Interestingly, a number of the lexical items reflect the Germanic and French language environments, in which the Earls found themselves, e.g. *státús* 'town-hall,' *bourgomáigistir* 'burgomaster,' *dorp* 'village,' *alteiss* 'Highness,' *maior dommo* 'major dommo,' *Susser* 'Swiss man' and *paspart* 'passport'.³

Among the principal lexical fields which attract loanwords in the diary are those of TITLES (both lay and clerical), RELIGION, MILITARY AFFAIRS, ADMINISTRATION, COMMERCE, and PAST-TIMES.

The second introductory work is rather different in nature and purpose. Apparently composed in Louvain in the winter of 1607/08, it is a poem attributed to Richard Weston, a Palesman and close associate of Ó Néill (Ó Fiaich 1970).⁴ This poem beginning *Beir mo beanocht go Dún Dalck* presents a playful juxtaposing of the benefits of being in Aodh Ó Néill's company in Louvain and the poet's regret that he is not with his wife Margaret Cashel and their son Risteard Óg in Dundalk. Much of the poem is composed in morphologically incorrect Irish, and contains many English words and expressions, but all is not quite what it seems. For, as Tomas Ó Fiaich shrewdly observed, the poet can use English and Irish equivalents, *heart* or *críde*, *dog* or *cú*, *By my faith* or *Dar mo bhriathar*, as he wishes. It is noteworthy too that the incorrect Irish is consistent throughout, thus feminine pronouns refer to males, masculine ones to females, while the genitive and nominative cases switch functions. When the poem is examined, it can be seen that the two languages have in fact been expertly manipulated in order to bring conscious creative regularity to the interlanguage of an individual learner:

Adeir Mairéad leis a clann
As olc an feall do rin mo fear
Acht cia tá mo croidhe bris,
Do rin mise very well.

munity identify synchronically as loans or borrowings are really those which have not yet been assimilated phonetically and semantically into the systems of the new language. This is not the occasion to review the history of such borrowings into Irish, but suffice it to say that it is a phenomenon which can be attested in Irish more or less from the beginning of transmission.

³ Of course, these words may have passed into Irish by way of English.

⁴ It is Weston who is credited with providing the young Aodh Rua Ó Domhnaill, later Earl of Tyrconnell, with the rope which allowed him to escape from Dublin Castle in early 1591.

Do gheibh mise aig Í Néill
Mass inné is *Mass* inniu,
 Ní déara Mineistéir liom,
 A Ristird Buistiún Come to Church. ...

Truagh gan an Sráidbaille a bhus
 In áit Lobháin annso amuigh,
 Is Clann Caisil air an sráid
 In áit na bhfear a deir Dutch.

Margaret says to her children
 Bad is the treachery which my husband did
 But although my heart is broke,
 I have done *very well*. ...

I get in the company of Ó Néill
 A Mass yesterday and a Mass today,
 No Minister will say to me,
 'Richard Weston, *Come to Church*'.

It is a pity that Dundalk is not here,
 Instead of Louvain outside here,
 And the Cashel family on the street,
 Instead of the men who say *Dutch*.⁵

(Ó Fiaich 1970: 284-285)

The language of this work finds an echo one hundred years later in a poem beginning *Tabhair mo bheannacht, a pháipéir*, which Seán Ó Neachtain, scribe and scholar, composed in Dublin about 1711 for a number of Catholic priests who were imprisoned in the Black Dog tavern in the city.⁶ It contains a number of verses addressed to a priest called *An Díomsach* or *Charles Dempsy*. Among the interlanguage features of these verses are the use of unmotivated English words (*blessing, moaning, shedding*), incorrect use of an Irish word (*Gaoidhil* "Irish people" instead of *Gaoidhilge* "Irish language"), and disregard for grammatical categories (as exemplified by *tríd seisean* for *trídsin*, *le seisean* for *leisean*, *gur táim-si* instead of *go bhfuilimse*, *saoilim-si is maith* instead of *saoilim-si gur maith*), the whole being characterised by the influence of English.

The light-hearted fun arises from the kind of Irish attributed to the priest, a native speaker of English, whose Second Language Acquisition of Irish had evi-

⁵ The translation is by this writer and seeks to reflect the non-standard forms and syntax of the Irish.

⁶ However, it has to be said that there are rather few of these code-mixed poems, where interlanguage is to the fore. The earliest seems to be by the Franciscan preacher Eoghan Ó Dubhthaigh, dated about 1580, in which he assails the apostate, larger than life, Maol Muire Mhág Craith. However, this poem employs just a half dozen English words (*dog, instrument, seduction, corruption*) and one phrase (*by God*), evidently with the aim of identifying the new religion with the alien language and culture (see Mhág Craith 1967: 127-151).

dently become fossilised at an early stage in the kind of foreigner-talk often met with in language-contact situations:

Ó nach dtuigeann an Dīomsach
teanga dhílis mo mhāthar,
a nGaoidhil fudar fadar
tabhair beannacht don fáitir.

Tabhair mo blessing dōsan;
innis do fós gur táim-si
tríd seisean lān móning
seding deora mar sāile.

Gheobhair blessing 'na mhalairt;
saoilim-si is maith an connradh;
's fearr aon bhleissing le seisean
nā mīle bleissing liomsa.

Since Dempsy does not understand
the faithful language of my mother,
in a mess of Irish(men)
give my blessing to the *father*.

Give my *blessing* to him;
Tell him as well that I am
through him full of *moaning*
shedding tears like sea-water.

You will get a *blessing* in exchange;
I think it is a good bargain;
One *blessing* by him
is better than a thousand *blessings* by me. (Mhág Craith 1967: 277)⁷

3. Law and Administration⁸

As one might expect, it is in the legal and administrative sphere that English begins to make its impact in Irish texts composed in Ireland itself. The spectrum of English-language influence in the areas of Law and Administration ranges from the pragmatic in some legal documents, through the rhetorical in political

⁷ The translation is by this writer and, while it attempts to reproduce the non-standard syntax of the Irish, this has not been possible where the Irish distinguishes between independent and dependent verbal forms in relative clauses. It is to be noted that, despite the repeated use of the English word *blessing* in the second and third stanzas, the Irish equivalent *beannacht* occurs in the first.

⁸ The exercise of Common Law in place of the native Brehon system was the cornerstone of the administrative apparatus established in Ireland following the English conquest. Common Law imposed a new system of inheritance and facilitated the transfer of land to new owners.

poems, to the literary in the *Barántas* or Warrant genre. The initial pragmatic code-mixing is to be found in a number of documents from County Clare, which were published by Gearóid Mac Niocaill (1970). Primarily composed in Irish and covering the period from 1576 to 1621, these documents allow us to trace the growing presence of English loans in Irish and the small but increasing amounts of English text, particularly in the final section, where the documents were signed and sealed.

Although the personal names of those involved are cited in Irish only in the body of the 1592 document, the witnesses signed their names in two ways: (1) in Irish, *Ualgharg Mac Bruadeadha* and *Diarmaid Mac Bruaideadha*, and (2) in anglicised versions, *Teig Gryffin* and *Hirle Gryffin*, juxtaposed to the forms *Tadhg mac Seain Í Ghribhtha* and *Urrthuile mac Seain Í Gribhtha* of the text proper.⁹ Only a few English words appear in these texts without undergoing Gaelicisation. Among them are *composition* (1600), and a phrase reference to the surrender of land, *maille rena reuersion ocus rena reuersionoibh ocus rena remainnder* “with its reversion and reversions and its remainder” (1621).

This fairly neutral documentary deployment of English makes way for the fierce rhetorical invective of the well-known collection of mid 17th-century poems, *Five Seventeenth-Century Political Poems*, edited by Cecile O’Rahilly (1977), which give Gaelic perspectives on the legal process and the implementation of the outcomes. The literary device of code-switching to English conveys well the frenzied nature of an archetypal assault on some of the native Irish:

Le execútion bhíos súil an chéidfhir,
costas buinte ’na chuinne ag an ndéanach.
Transport, transplant, mo mheabhair ar Bhéarla.
Shoot him, kill him, strip, him, tear him,
A Tory, hack him, hang him, rebel,
a rogue, a thief, a priest, a papist.

The first man hopes for *execútion*,
 the later wants the means of exaction against him.
Transport, transplant, my mind on English.
Shoot him, kill him, strip, him, tear him,
A Tory, hack him, hang him, rebel,
a rogue, a thief, a priest, a papist. (O’Rahilly 1977: 90, lines 127-132)¹⁰

The *Barántas* poems, composed in Munster in the 18th and early 19th centuries reflect a situation where the Common Law legal system was accepted as given by the population at large and provided a framework for satire and banter. Some 83 such works have been brought together by Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, in *An*

⁹ On the other hand there is only one instance of an anglicised or English name being used in a main text, namely *Maistir Risedard UUsingfiede* “master Richard Wingfield” (52, 53), where the occurrence of the title *Maistir* before the name and surname, corresponding to the English “Master” is also to be noted.

¹⁰ Translation by this writer.

Barántas I (1978).¹¹ A typical satiric warrant includes a summary deposition by the informant and a statement of the crime committed.

With regard to language, it should be noted that many warrants have no English component whatsoever, omitting even the introductory initial word *Whereas*. *Whereas* serves to introduce 35 warrants, with its Irish equivalent *De bhrí* occurring in 11 instances. Nonetheless, the Warrant is the only genre in Irish where code-mixing is a standard and staple ingredient. English is already to be found in what is believed to be the first example of the genre, attributed to Aogán Ó Rathaille and dated 13 September 1717.¹² Of the 83 examples of the genre contained in the collection edited by Ó Fiannachta,¹³ four are truly macaronic with almost all of their lines divided between English and Irish.¹⁴ In all four cases the pattern is that of English followed by Irish. The minimal prose introduction and two verses from one of these may be cited as illustrative of these macaronic warrants:

Contae Chorcaí le Donnchadh Gógán .i. aon do bhreithiúnaibh na héigse agus d'uaislibh na síochána san gcontae réimhráite.

Whereas this day do réir réim chirt an chalandair,
I received information le héifeacht go dearfa,
The warrant I gave, much le faobhar chum an fhairceallaigh,
He's got a supersedeas le *means* chum é sheachaint air. ...

To all bums and bailiffs ó Bhéarra don Mhainistir,
Constables, gaolers, is gach éinne dhen aicme sin,
Let none take his orders barántas ná atharach,
Atá a theideal ar lár óm' láimhse gan dearmad.

County Cork by Donnchadh Gógán i.e. one of the judges of poetry and nobles of the peace in the aforesaid county.

Whereas this day according to the course of justice of the calendar,
I received information with import positively,
The warrant I gave, much with energy after the lump (of a man)
He's got a supersedeas with *means* to avoid it against him. ...

To all bums and bailiffs from Beare to Mainistir,
Constables, gaolers, and everyone of that class,

¹¹ This collection includes texts which relate to the *cúirteanna éigse* 'poetry courts' of the poetic confraternity as well as the satirical warrants, the common thread being the use of legal terminology and framework.

¹² The English used in this warrant is fairly minimal: it consists of the introductory *Whereas*, *Whatsoever* and the phrase *And for so doing*.

¹³ Just one of the examples is totally in English (no. 58), while another (no. 56) is composed predominantly in that language.

¹⁴ These are nos 8, 57 (ii), 66 (i), 66 (ii).

*Let none take his orders warrant or alternative,
His title is wanting from my hand without mistake.*¹⁵ (Ó Fiannachta 1978: 205-206)

As one enters the 19th century the *Barántas* displays some intriguing extensions in the use of English. For instance, no less a person than Clíona from the otherworld, speaks in English and is responded to in that language in an 1813 warrant, beginning *Whereas do tháinig / inné dom láthair / gan aon dabhta* (47) on the stealing of an English grammar from one Seán Ó hEithir:

D'éirigh Clíona
do bhí ina suí
is do labhair go múinte,
Is d'fhiafraigh scéala
díomsa i mBéarla:
who are you sir?

*Or what made you so late
to come this way
you are not in humour?*
Do labhair léithi
go róshéimh
agus is ea dúras:

*I am no stranger
nor neither a ranger
but I come from Doolagh.
That my book was stolen
from me felonious
from the schoolhouse.
And if I could get
the vile transgressor
I would ill-use him.
And if I could make him known
he would pay sore
for his misdoing.*

Clíona arose
who had been seated
and spoke politely
and asked for news
from me in English:
who are you sir?

*Or what made you so late
to come this way
you are not in humour?*
I spoke to her

¹⁵ The translation is that of this writer.

most gently
and what I said was:

*I am no stranger
nor neither a ranger
but I come from Doolagh.
That my book was stolen
from me felonious
from the schoolhouse.
And if I could get
the vile transgressor
I would ill-use him.
And if I could make him known
he would pay sore
for his misdoing.*

(Ó Fiannachta 1978: 163, lines 229-252)¹⁶

In another warrant dated 1832 the poet calls on some six priests and fourteen other acquaintances to join in the hunt for the culprit. The surnames of each of the six priests are given in anglicised form, whereas all the others have both Irish first names and surnames. The names of each of the priests are preceded by the title *Dochtúir* ‘Doctor’. The priests’ surnames are *Collins, Fitzgerald, Foley, Conway, Downes, and Moore* (Ó Fiannachta 1978: 175). Interestingly, this practice of the Catholic clergy was noted over a hundred years earlier by John Dunton in *Teague Land or a Merry Ramble to the Wild Irish* (1698), who met “One Father Gowan or Smith as he called himself, *a la mode de Angleterr*” (Dunton 2003: 112). By the early 19th century the expectation had also grown that the poet should be expert in English as well as Irish, as one sees in a warrant from 1819, where Tadhg mac Finghín Mheic Cárthaigh, described as a “*Hiberno-waterlouse*”, is charged by Diarmaid Ó Riain with being a wandering schoolmaster who was “ag milleadh, ag míchóru ’s ag maslú Béarla agus Gaeilge,” that is “ruining, deforming and insulting English and Irish” (Ó Fiannachta 1978: 148).

It is clear that the *Barántas* genre depended for its effect on the legal institutional framework being well-known to both the poets and their audience.

4. Prose Burlesque

In prose, too, English came to be harnessed as an additional creative resource in Irish composition. While the second part of the 17th-century satirical prose text *Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis* makes far greater use of English loanwords, it is the earlier first portion, which contains the celebrated conversation dealing with the purchase of tobacco from an itinerant English monger called Roibín an Tobaca. This passage is noteworthy in that it presents two different varieties of

¹⁶ It may be observed that this particular warrant contains a higher than usual number of English words and loans, including *handbasket, peeler, halldoor, fairplay, sleais, scoop, silence, scheme*.

English – the fluent, native-speaker English of Roibín and the tentative efforts of the Irish-speaker Tomás. The dialogue between Roibín and Tomás, the would-be purchaser on behalf of a group of virtually monoglot native Irish, reaches its commercial climax in the following passage:

Do labhair Tomás 7 as eadh adubhairt: ‘*What the bigg greate órdlach for the what so penny for is the la yourself for me?*’ Adubhairt Roibín: ‘*I know, Thomas, you aske how many enches is worth the penny*’, agus do thóguibh a dhá mhéar mar chomhartha, 7 adubhairt: ‘*Two penny an ench*’. ‘Dar láimh mo chairdios Críost, maith an cunnradh’, ar Tomás. ‘Créad é?’ ar Diarmuid Dúr. ‘Órdlach ar an dá phinginn’, ar Tomás. ‘Déana tacuigheacht oruinn’, ar cách. ‘Do-dhéan’, ar Tomás 7 adubhairt: ‘*Is ta for meself the mony for fart you all my brothers here*’. Adubhairt Roibín: ‘*I thanke you, honest Thomas, you shall command all my tobacco.*’ ‘*Begog, I thanke you*’, ar Tomás. Fuair Tomás an tobaco ar a fhocal 7 tug do chách é.

Tomás spoke and said: ‘*What the bigg greate órdlach for the what so penny for is the la yourself for me?*’ Roibín said: ‘*I know, Thomas, you aske how many enches is worth the penny*’, and he raised his two fingers as a sign, and said: ‘*Two penny an ench*’. ‘By my godfather’s hand, it’s a good bargain’, said Tomás. ‘What is it?’ asked Dour Diarmuid. ‘Two pence an inch’, said Tomás. ‘Act on our behalf’, they all said. ‘I will’, replied Tomás, and he said: ‘*Is ta for meself the mony for fart you all my brothers here*’. Roibín said: ‘*I thanke you, honest Thomas, you shall command all my tobacco.*’ ‘*Begog, I thanke you*’, said Tomás. Tomás got the tobacco at his word and gave it to everyone. (Williams 1981: 40, 97)¹⁷

The importance of the role of English in the early 18th-century tale *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléire* (‘The History of Éamonn Ó Cléirigh’) has been a matter of some controversy. Whereas James Hardiman contended in the 19th century that the work was written by Dublin-based Seán Ó Neachtain “for the purpose of turning into Ridicule persons learning the English language” (Ó Neachtain 1918: ii), Cathal Ó Háinle has interpreted the tale as reflecting linguistic reality:

Furthermore I would argue that Ó Neachtain, though quite capable of using language problems to comic effect, as is clear from other works by him, in this case is more concerned to give a true portrayal of the behaviour of many of his contemporaries who were abandoning a good command of rich Irish and acquiring in its stead an unsure competence in threadbare and inaccurate baboo English. To Ó Neachtain this was tragic rather than funny, and he does not seek to ridicule; therein lies the realism of his projection of the situation. And this realism is only one small part of the overall realism of his fiction in this work (Ó Háinle 2004: 142).

Although Brian Ó Cuív felt that the work provided evidence for the spread of English in the east of the country, he thought that it made fun of the learners’ attempts, laden as they were with L1 transfers:

¹⁷ The translation is that of the editor, N.J.A. Williams.

Ó Neachtain ridiculed the efforts at English made by some Irish-speakers whose instinct was to translate literally from one language to another. Thus he put into the mouths of his characters such phrases as “I leave with my testament he would take laughing out of the dogs itself would be hearing [with] him,” which can be comprehended only by reference to the perfectly normal Irish sentence Fágaim lem udhacht go mbainfeadh sé gáiridhe os [na] madraidhe féin do bheith ag éisteacht leis (I swear that it would make the dogs laugh to be listening to him) (Ó Cuív 1986: 395).

Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléire tells of Éamonn Ó Cléirigh’s struggle to overcome his addiction to alcohol. The first of three extended passages in English occurs some time into the tale when the (anti)hero Éamonn meets a young boy who felt compelled to speak in English only (*‘glas Béarla’*). Names play a prominent part in the cross-lingual exercise in non-communication. When Éamonn came to the boy’s house, he enquired where *bean an tí* was and the boy replied: “She is go ’pon market”. The conversation continued:

What market? ar Éamonn.
The market of Newford, ar eisean.
Arú what market is that? ar Éamonn.
The market Nuadh-Átha in Irish, ar eisean.

What market? said Éamonn.
The market of Newford, said he.
Well what market is that? said Éamonn.
The market Nuadh-Átha in Irish, said he. (Ó Neachtain 1918: 31)¹⁸

The boy shows that he is engaged in translation from the Irish, when Éamonn fails to realise in one case that the English offered represented a proper name at all:

But who is the husband of the woman that uses to be in the house? ar Éamonn.
Mandark from two swan, ar eisean.
Arú, ar Éamonn, what is it in Irish?
Feardorcha Ó Dála, ar eisean.

But who is the husband of the woman that uses to be in the house? said Éamonn.
Mandark from two swan, said he.
Now, said Éamonn, what is it in Irish?
Feardorcha Ó Dála, said he. (Ó Neachtain 1918: 31)¹⁹

The Irish personal name *Feardorcha* is deconstructed as *fear* ‘man’ + *dorcha* ‘dark,’ which are duly rendered into English, the normal order of Irish, where the adjective follows the noun being carried over into the English *Mandark*. The addition in English, *from two swan*, indicates that the Irish surname *Ó Dála* was understood as comprising the preposition *ó* ‘from’ and *Dála*, a compound based

¹⁸ This writer’s translation.

¹⁹ This writer’s translation.

on the Irish *d(h)á* ‘two’ + *eala* ‘swan’. The Irish practice of using the singular after the number ‘two’ was maintained in the English version.²⁰

The second portion of the tale opens with more plays on Irish/English nomenclature. The left-hand column below gives the anglicised translation forms which the young lad first presents as quasi-riddles, the right-hand column the original Irish forms which are given subsequently by way of explanation:

upon the luckmouths of baldslow	: ar adhbhéil na Maoláirne
odd hog son foal	: Cormuc mac Searraigh
in the house of your carr handsome seldom hundred sick	: i dtigh do chárdeas, Anna Céidtinn
brown battle from head armour	: Donnchadh Ó Cinnéide
out of the county of the board	: ó chontae an Chláir
Brigid’s page from Cornelius	: Giolla Bríde Ó Conchubhair
out of the county of flax seed hurl	: ó chontae Roscomáin
in the province of pissing	: i gcúige Mumhan (Mahon 2000: 148-149) ²¹
short joint sell lamb	: Gearalt Díoluain

(Ó Neachtain 1918: 52-53)

But far from being central to the tale, one feels that the bilingual passages remain essentially discrete subsections which the author fails to integrate into his overall work.

One must conclude, it seems, that *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléire* bears testimony not only to an author who had mastery of both English and Irish, but to an intended audience who would appreciate the interlingual semantic nuances being brought into play. Any ignorance there is feigned. It is useful to remind ourselves of de Bot’s contention that “a distinction needs to be made between CS [code-switching] that is used as a meaningful discourse strategy and CS that results from lack of knowledge” (de Bot 2002: 293). In this literary work, it seems to me that one is clearly dealing with what de Bot calls “‘motivated’ switches” (de Bot 2002: 291).

While the amount of English to be found in *Eachtra Áodh Mhic Goireachtaidh* (Williams 1970), an early 18th-century Ulster tale, is quite modest, it is significant in two ways. Firstly, most of it occurs in dialogue, where it is used as a vehicle for sexual allusions, and secondly, the structure of its turn-taking involves links between each piece of conversation, a device also used in macaronic verse, as we shall see shortly. In §23 the following conversation occurs, where the giant/ghost addresses Áodh in English, and Áodh responds in Irish. The dialogue proceeds, the ghost’s English alternating with Áodh’s Irish. Áodh misunderstands the end of each English sentence, and mistakenly feels that he has to de-

²⁰ Later Éamonn is dismayed to hear that the man of the house is in *Killman* before being told that this is merely the place known in Irish as *Cill Mhana*. Then, *kill more* corresponding to Irish *Cill Mhór* is in the same vein.

²¹ This is wanting in Ó Neachtain (1918: 52-3).

fend himself for having sought out the bed of the woman of the house. The following is an example of the way the conversation goes:

“This is no time to confess,” air an taidhbhse.

“Dair DÍA dúileach,” air Áodh, “ní dearna mise feis léithe aríamh go fóill”.

“This is no time to confess,” said the ghost.

“By the creating God,” said Áodh, “I haven’t ever slept with her yet”.

(Williams 1970: 126)

The motif of the journeying poet meeting a young girl is commonplace in the macaronic songs, which became popular as the language shift gained momentum in the 18th century. The maiden is usually given the initiative in discourse, and in perhaps the majority of such cases, she addresses the poet in English. The links between the stanzas in the poem beginning *Do tharlaigh inné orm* by Liam Inglis, recall the dialogue turn links met with in *Eachtra Áodh Mhic Goireacht-aidh*:

*‘As I hope to be married a word I can’t speak
Of that silly language which makes my heart ache.
Therefore I entrust you some pity to show
For I have the colic and I cannot well go’.*

‘Ná trácht liomsa ar chailligh ní maith liom féin iad,
Oirbheart is easpa is galar is pian;
Do b’fhearr liomsa ainnir a mbeadh lasadh ina ciabh
Is dhá mhama gheala mar shneachta ar shliabh’.

*‘Don’t talk of my mama, but prithe draw near
For I am a poor creature that’s raving with fear,
Therefore I beg, sir, some token you’ll make
Whereas of English a word I can’t speak’.*

‘Is English mo shloinne is ní shéanfad go brách,
A bhruinneall na finne is a chéadshearc thar mhnáibh’.
Do rugas go cluthair is go séimh ar mo ghrá
Is do thit sise is mise in éineacht ar lár.

*‘As I hope to be married a word I can’t speak
Of that silly language which makes my heart ache.
Therefore I entrust you some pity to show
For I have the colic and I cannot well go’.*

‘Don’t mention an old woman to me, I don’t like them myself,
Prowess and want and disease and pain;
I would prefer a maiden with a shine in her hair
And two white breasts like the snow on a mountain’.

‘Don’t talk of my **mama**, but prithe draw near
 For I am a poor creature that’s raving with fear,
 Therefore I beg, sir, some token you’ll make
 Whereas of **English** a word I can’t speak’.

‘**English** is my surname and I shall not deny [it] ever,
 O fair maiden (of the fairness) and first love above women’.
 I grabbed hold of my love comfortably and gently
 And she and I fell down together. (Ó Muirthe 1980: 65)²²

One poem where the code-mixing medium facilitates contrasting messages is that beginning *As I was walking one evening fair*, composed by Donnchadh Rua Mac Conmara and situated in Newfoundland, which allowed the poet to indulge himself and his bilingual Irish-born audience at the expense of the monolingual English speakers of Newfoundland. He alternately praises and reviles the power of King George, while the gap between the two messages is even greater in regard to the women of Newfoundland (Ó Muirthe 1980: 127-128 (no. 60)).

It is worth noting here that the macaronic songs provide Irish and English versions of the same place names. For example, one finds *cuan an Daingin* alongside *Dingle Bay* (Ó Muirthe 1980: 112, lines 65, 73, in: Donncha Ó Súilleabháin’s “An Móta Glas”). Similarly, in: “A New Song Called the Flourishing States of Kilmurry,” one finds *Charleville* together with *An Ráth*,²³ *Kilmurry* and *Cill Mhuire*, *Cashel* and *Caiseal*, *Thurles* and *Dúrlas* (Ó Muirthe 1980: 92, lines 8, 16, 22, 30).

In the contrasting genre of religious preaching, Séamus Ó Gallchobhair Catholic bishop of Raphoe (1725) and subsequently of Kildare (1737), defended his recourse to English loanwords in the Introduction to his *Sixteen Irish Sermons* (1736), saying:

I have made them in an easy and familiar style and on purpose omitted cramp expressions, which might be obscure to both the preacher and hearer. Nay, instead of such, I have sometimes made use of words borrowed from English, which practice and daily conversation have intermixed with our language, choosing with St. Augustine rather to be censured by the critics, than not to be understood by the poor and illiterate, for whose use I have designed them (Ó Dúshláine 1996: 97).²⁴

Although it lacks any reference to St. Augustine, I would like to quote a further textual example of a few lines from a sermon in which Fr Pádraig de Bhál (*fl.* 1812-1833), a parish priest from County Waterford, exhorted his listeners to contribute to a collection to repair the local church in advance of a visit by the bishop. Fr de Bhál had a very clear idea of what needed to be done by way of “*repairs an tsepeil*”:

²² Translation by this writer.

²³ This source might have been used to good effect in the lengthy debate on the contested identification of *Ráth Luirc* with Charleville, County Cork.

²⁴ Quoted in Ó Dúshláine (1996: 97).

An lá deanach avi me inso, avi me a trácht air *repairs* an tsepeil 7 an *yard* sin amugh gan bala na fala leish, le mórán de vlianta, ... cahamaid, gan stad, sraih a leagaint air a bparaisde, 7 *collection* teacrach a yeana, chun an sepeal 7 an *yard* a chur in ordugh, ionus go mbeich seipeal, *yard* slachtvar aguin, le haigh an Easpuig, 7 air vaihe lena ccreiduint féin. Is fada anoish ó creanaig aorad leish a sipeal so, níor rinag aon *collection* le morán do vlianta, ach aon *chollection* avain chun collaidhe 7 ornaidigh na haltorach a cheanach, ... insa cceadait, cahamaid balla a yeana leish a *front*, piorudh 7 geata iorain a cheanach, aha na fuinguga le deisiugh 7 *shutters* a chur leoha chun na braoisfai iad, mar do rinad go minic rive seo; 7 ase in uafás ahorm, na go mbriseach aon *vlagard* og nó sean, gan scrupul air a choinsias, *pana* in aon fhuinyog a vaineach le tigh De, 7 na fuil aon *phana* yiaiv sin na cosanion 2.6., tastion urlár on *sacristy*, *drains* a houirt trid 7 trid a *yard*, chun an altoior 7 aymud na haltorach a havail, an altóir a *feintail*, y lan nihe nach ga trácht orha anoish.

The last day I was here, I was talking about the repairs of the chapel and that yard out there without a wall or a fence around it, for many years, ... we will have to, immediately, place a tax on the parish, and take up a ? collection, to put the chapel and yard in order, so that we will have neat chapel and yard for the Bishop, and for our own credit. It is a long time since anything was bought for this chapel, and no collection has been made for many years, except one collection only to buy cloth and ornaments for the altar, ... In the first place, we will have to build a wall on the front, buy a pillar and an iron gate, the windows have to be repaired and shutters put on to them so that they won't be broken, as was done often before; and the thing I fear, is that any blackguard, young or old, with no scruple on his conscience, would break a pane in any window which is part of God's house, and everyone of those panes cost 2.6, the sacristy needs a floor, drains need to be brought through it and through the yard, to the altar and the wood of the altar has to be preserved, the altar has to be painted, [and] a lot of things which need not be mentioned now (Ó Dúshláine 1996: 117-118).²⁵

This extract brings us back to the loanwords with which we started, and suggests that Fr de Bhál would not feel out of place in the Ireland of today.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, one should stress that instances of Irish/English code-mixing form a very small proportion of all Irish-language texts of the period 1600-1800. Nonetheless, they do provide an important window on the relationship between the two languages. By the 18th century much of the rancour which had adhered to the use of English within the Irish textual tradition was yielding to a mixture of pragmatism and literary exploitation, as the Irish were transforming themselves into *lucht an Bhéarla* ('English speakers'), the formerly despised "others" of poets such as Art Mac Cumhaigh (see the discussion in Watson 1988: 85). Code-mixing could serve both to gain the attention of an audience and to keep

²⁵ Translation by this writer.

that attention by deploying a creative dexterity, which at times could achieve linguistic exuberance. The thematic emphasis varied. Although the *Barántas*, for instance, was explicitly satiric, as a genre it parodied the law, subverting respect for the *status quo*. The cross-linguistic word-echoes common to a prose tale and a macaronic love-song show how compositional features could be adapted to represent realistic conversational turn-taking. The handling of place names and personal names and the monitoring of who speaks which language to whom can tell us a lot about the stresses and strains, push and pull factors of language shift from the inside. Diachronic Irish/English code-mixing is an example of the kind of research which can arise from interdisciplinary reading, but needs to be firmly grounded in the skills fostered by *Léann na Gaeilge*. Much of the evidence would seem to confirm Bhabha's judgement that "the borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual" (Bhabha 1994: 3).

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