

Semantic Differentiation of Old Irish Terms for Bodies of Water



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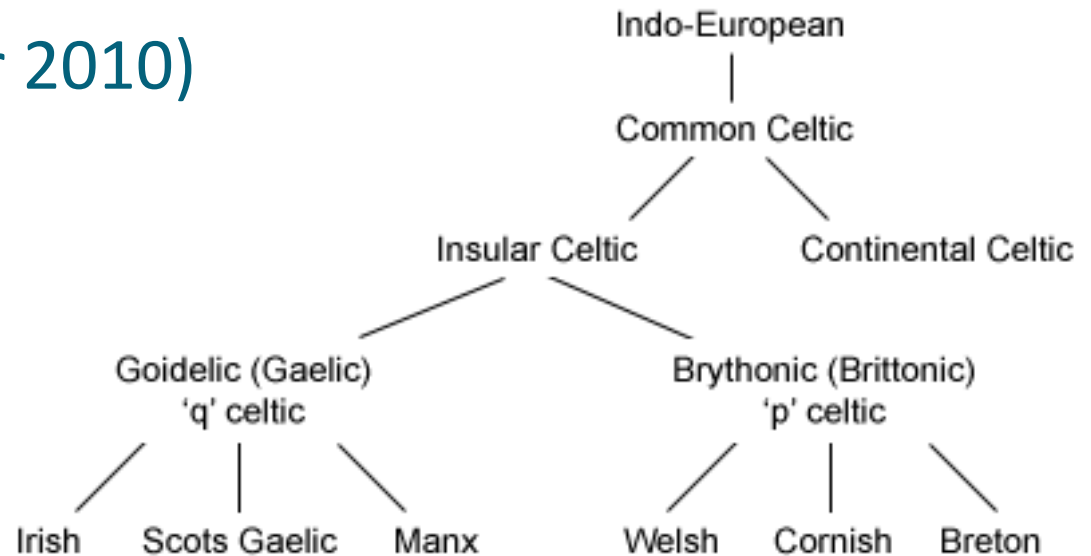
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What is the difference between terms with (almost) identical dictionary definitions?

What do these terms *really* mean?

Old Irish (Stifter 2010)

- Celtic Language
 - Insular Celtic
 - Gaelic/Goidelic
- Early Irish
 - **Old Irish (8th – 9th cent.)**
 - Middle Irish (10th – 12th cent.)
- Modern daughter languages
 - Modern Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx



The Medieval Irish Landscape

- Agricultural Society
- Importance of Bodies of Water (Bhreachnach 2014)
 - Water for drinking and bathing
 - Rivers as boundary markers
 - Sea allows for trade with external kingdoms
- Semantic Investigation of Old Irish Bodies of Water
 - Liam Mac Mathúna (1987): based on dictionary citations

Historical Semantics

- Interdisciplinary approach – social, cultural, historical, political context (Biggam 2012)
- Corpus Linguistics
 - Semantics inferred from collocates (co-occurring words)
 - Limitations of Old Irish corpus: combine qualitative and quantitative methods (Lash, Qiu, Stifter 2020)
- Semantic Differentiation
 - Words do not create meaning in isolation (Durkin 2009)
 - Avoid multiple words with exact same meaning and context of use (Kay & Allan 2015)

Methodology I

- Identify relevant terms in dictionary (*eDIL*)
- Search for terms in corpus
- Corpus of electronically available texts (*CELT* + *TLH*)

Genre	Words	% of corpus
Narrative literature	161 878	58.7%
Genealogies and historical writing	58 066	21.1%
Ecclesiastical writing	35 257	12.8%
Legal texts	14 370	5.2%
Poetry	5 670	2.1%
Scholarly writing	476	0.2%
Total	275 717	100%

Table 1: Corpus and Sub-Corpora Size (in Words)

Methodology II

- Collocates collected manually and grouped into categories
 - natural world: ‘other landscape features’, ‘part or motion of the landscape feature’, ‘wildlife’, ‘vegetation’, ‘other natural elements’
 - human related: ‘travel’, ‘violence’, ‘dwelling’, ‘domestic animals’, ‘other’
 - navigation and landmark: ‘location’, ‘direction’, ‘prepositions’
 - other: ‘descriptions’, ‘figurative uses’, ‘vision’, ‘supernatural’
- Close reading of text passages for disambiguation and confirmation

'sea': *muir* vs. *fairge* vs. *ler* |

	human use	violence	landmark	description	other
<i>muir</i>	TRAVEL, ANIMALS	plunders, attack, host	DIRECTIONAL TERMS, PREPOSITIONS	POSITIVE (clear, fair, glorious); COLOURS (bright, blue); NEGATIVE (terrible)	VISION; SUPER- NATURAL
<i>fairge</i>	fish-filled, boat, journey	---	DIRECTIONAL TERMS, PREPOSITIONS	beauty, blue- surfaced	---
<i>ler</i>	ship, ship- frequented	---	---	wide, raging, aggressive	---

Table 2: Frequent Collocates and Groups of Collocates of *Muir*, *Fairge*, *Ler*
Collocates are given in lower case. Paraphrases grouping collocates together are given in upper case

'sea': *muir* vs. *fairge* vs. *ler* II

- *Ler* 'sea (poetic)': 22 tokens
 - All attestations in poetry
 - All collocates alliterate (e.g. *lonn* 'strong', *longach* 'ship-frequented')
- *Fairge* 'sea': 19 tokens
- *Muir* 'sea (basic)': 143 tokens
 - Use in place names (13 tokens)
 - Use in collocation with *tír* 'land' (e.g. *for muir agus tír* 'on sea and land')

‘lake, pool of water’: *loch* vs. *linn* I

	human use	violence	landmark	supernatural	other
<i>loch</i>	DWELLING, WASHING, boat	drowning	DIRECTIONAL TERMS; PREPOSITIONS, BORDER	CREATION STORIES; SPELLS, SUPERNATURAL BEINGS	SIZE (islands, boat)
<i>linn</i>	ANIMALS, mill, washes	battle, not safe	---	---	---

Table 3: Frequent Collocates and Groups of Collocates of *Loch*, *Linn*

Collocates are given in lower case. Paraphrases grouping collocates together are given in upper case

'lake, pool of water': *loch* vs. *linn* II

- *Loch* 'lake': 121 tokens
 - Frequent use in place names (64 tokens)
 - Larger BOW (e.g. *inis* 'island', *long* 'boat', *muidris* 'seamonster')
 - Use as landmark
- *Linn* 'pool of water': 52 tokens
 - Rare use in place names (3 tokens)
 - Smaller BOW, associated with nearby places (e.g. *muilind* 'mill')

'river': *ab* vs. *sruth* I

	human-use	violence	landmark	description
<i>ab</i>	WASHING, DRINKING, grazing	---	PREPOSITIONS; BOUNDARY LANDMARK	PLANTLIKE (branch, stem), HUMANLIKE (body)
<i>sruth</i>	---	WEAPONS	---	MOTION

Table 4: Frequent Collocates and Groups of Collocates of *Ab*, *Sruth*

Collocates are given in lower case. Paraphrases grouping collocates together are given in upper case

'river': *ab* vs. *sruth* II

- *Ab* 'river (domesticated)': 32 tokens
 - Used as place name (2 tokens)
 - Collocation with basic BOWs (e.g. *loch* 'lake', *muir* 'sea')
 - Human activity & use as landmark
- *Sruth* 'river (wild, site of conflict), current': 31 tokens
 - Used as place name (1 token)
 - Flowing quality of other BOW (e.g. *tuilid* 'flows', *lasan sruth* 'with the stream, downstream')
 - Battles in BOW (e.g. *gaé* 'spear', *Morrígan* 'war goddess')

Conclusion

- Corpus linguistics allows for semantic differentiation
- Contrast lexical items based on
 - Frequency in corpus
 - Range of contexts and uses
- What next?
 - Comparison of all basic landscape vocabulary
 - Identification of cognitive semantic categories that structure the Old Irish landscape vocabulary
 - Human-use: *ab* 'domesticated' vs. *sruth* 'wild'
 - Size and/or Landmark: *loch* 'big, landmark' vs. *linn* 'small, non-landmark'

**Thank You for Your
Attention!**

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Examples *muir* vs. *fairge* I

- Immram Brain
- *Lí na fairci fora-taí,*
- *geldod mora imme-raí,*
- ‘beauty of the **sea** in which you were,
- Bright colour of the **sea** on which you row around’

Examples *muir* vs. *fairge* II

- Tochmarc Emire
- *Gabais a coblach tasst foaib i medon na **fairci**. Ni boi ni no-d-fuaislaiciud di setaif no moinif dia cor issa trethan. Focressæ crannchor leou dús cie dib die rossed techt dia fiss fon **fairce** cid no-t-fosst Do ralæ in crannchor forsan rig feisne. Eibling ierum in ri .i. Rvad mac Rigdhuinn forsan **moir**. Diclethar fair ierum a **m-muir**.*
- ‘The fleet was arrested from below in the midst of the **sea**. Throwing jewels and precious things into the sea did not get them off. Lots where (sic) cast among them for who should go into the **sea** and find out what it was that held them fast. The lot fell upon the king himself. Then the king Ruad, son of Rigdond, leapt into the **sea**. The **sea** at once closed over him.’