

Irish

AILBHE NÍ CHASAIDE

Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland

Irish, or Gaeilge, is a Celtic language which is spoken as a mother tongue in certain parts of Ireland, known as Gaeltacht regions. It is closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx, and more distantly to Breton, Welsh and Cornish. There are three main dialects of Irish, and although there is a written standard form there is no spoken standard accent. Written records in Gaeilge date back to the eighth century, with a literary tradition continuing in manuscript until the mid-nineteenth century, when published books became commonplace. The spelling system remained relatively unchanged from around the twelfth century until a government-sponsored reform in the mid twentieth century, but even so, orthographic forms can be rather archaic. There is on the whole a poor correspondence of letter to sound, as will be evident from the orthographic version of the text below. This phonetic opacity, however, confers the advantages of morpho-phonological transparency, and helps the written form bridge divergences between the modern-day dialects, being relatively equidistant from the spoken forms. The description and sample text given here is based on the speech of a native of Na Doirí Beaga, Gaioth Dobhair, one of the Gaeltacht areas in County Donegal, situated in the north west of the country. She is a teacher in her thirties, working in Dublin.

Consonants

Consonant quality: The most striking feature of the consonantal system is the phonological opposition of a series of palatalized and velarized segments. This is accommodated in the table by subdividing the rows and placing the velarized series above the palatalized. Consonants which do not enter into the opposition, such as [h], are placed in the middle of a cell. The palatalized-velarized opposition serves not only for lexical differentiation, but may also express certain grammatical functions, such as case and number marking on nouns, e.g. [ɔ^lʲ] *ól* 'drink' (nom. sg.) [ɔ^lʲ] *óil* 'drink' (gen. sg.); [b^væɟʲ], *bád* 'boat' (nom. sg.) [b^væɟʲ] *báid* 'boat' (gen. sg., and in some dialects, nom. plur.). Word internally, consonants in a cluster typically agree in terms of quality. The customary term velarization is used although the secondary articulation may be further back (in the uvular or upper pharyngeal regions) than strictly implied by the term velarization.

The phonetic distinctions between palatalized and velarized pairs of consonants may involve more than secondary palatalization and velarization. In the case of the labial consonants, the velarized segments are additionally labialized. For pairs such as /tʲ, tʲʷ/, both primary and secondary features are involved. The former is a palatalized lamino-postalveolar, which will here be referred to as alveopalatal, and the latter is a velarized

apico-dental with contact extending onto the alveolar ridge. In the case of palatals and velars, for example /c, k/, where the primary place of articulation coincides with the secondary articulation characterizing the phonological series, the realizations are transcribed in terms of primary articulation differences alone.

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Alveolo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p ^v b ^v p ^j b ^j	t ^v d ^v		t ^j d ^j	c ɟ	k g	
Fricative/ Approximant	f ^v w f ^j v ^j		s ^v	ç	ç j	x ɣ	h
Nasal	m ^v m ^j	ɳ ^v	n	ɳ ^j	ɲ	ŋ	
Tap			r ^v r ^j				
Lateral Approximant		l ^v	l	l ^j			

p ^v	p ^v ir ^v ah	<i>Paorach</i>	(family name)	p ^j	p ^j ɲ ^j	<i>píghin</i>	'penny'
b ^v	b ^v i	<i>buí</i>	'yellow'	b ^j	b ^j i	<i>bí</i>	'be' (imp)
t ^v	t ^v ɪd ^v ə	<i>taoide</i>	'tide'	t ^j	t ^j i	<i>(ar) tí</i>	'about to'
d ^v	d ^v ɪn ^j i	<i>daoine</i>	'people'	d ^j	d ^j i	<i>dí</i>	'drink' (gen)
k	ki ^v	<i>caol</i>	'thin' (masc)	c	ci ^v	<i>ciall</i>	'sense'
g	gi ^v	<i>gaol</i>	'relative'	ɟ	ɟi ^v	<i>giall</i>	'hostage'
f ^v	f ^v i	<i>faoi</i>	'under'	f ^j	f ^j i	<i>fí</i>	'weaving'
w	wi	<i>mhaoiigh</i>	'boasted'	v ^j	v ^j i	<i>bhí</i>	'was'
s ^v	s ^v i	<i>suí</i>	'sit'	ç	çi	<i>'sí</i>	'she is'
x	xi ^v	<i>chaol</i>	'thin' (fem)	ç	çi ^v	<i>(mo) chiall</i>	(my) 'sense'
ɣ	ɣi ^v	<i>(mo) ghaol</i>	(my) 'relative'	j	ɟi ^v	<i>(mo) ghiall</i>	(my) 'hostage'
h	hi ^v	<i>(le) haol</i>	(with) 'lime'				
m ^v	m ^v i	<i>maoiigh</i>	'boast' (imp)	m ^j	m ^j i	<i>mí</i>	'month'
ɳ ^v	ɳ ^v i	<i>naoi</i>	'nine'	ɲ ^j	ɲ ^j i	<i>nigh</i>	'wash' (imp)
	l ^j ɛn ^v	<i>léann</i>	'education'		l ^j ɛn ^j	<i>léinn</i>	'education' (gen)
ɲ	ɲi ^v	<i>(a) ngaol</i>	(their) 'relative'	n	en	<i>éan</i>	'bird'
				ɲ	ɲi ^v	<i>(a) ngiall</i>	(their) 'hostage'
l ^v	l ^v e	<i>lae</i>	'day' (gen)	l ^j	l ^j ɛj	<i>léigh</i>	'read' (imp)
	ga ^v	<i>Gall</i>	'foreigner'		ka ^j	<i>caill</i>	'lose' (imp)
				l	lej	<i>leí</i>	'with her'
					gɪl	<i>(ag) gail</i>	'boiling'
r ^v	m ^v ær ^v ah	<i>'márach</i>	'tomorrow'	r ^j	kær ^j ah	<i>cáireach</i>	'dirty'

Since both velarization and palatalization are generally indicated, the symbolization in the chart is over-specified, except for palatals and velars (as mentioned above) where primary and secondary features coincide, and /c/ and /w/ where the secondary articulation is also implicit in the symbol. In phonological terms, it would be sufficient to mark only one member of the opposition (traditionally the palatalized one), but this over-specification draws attention to the auditorily striking presence of phonetic velarization in the non-palatalized series. Strong on/off glides are generally found between velarized consonants and adjacent front vowels.

Alveolar laterals and nasals, and glottal fricatives, are a potentially problematic area in this dialect. Here it appears that an earlier opposition of palatalized/velarized segments has been lost, or at least is in the process of being lost. As produced by the present informant, these segments have a rather neutral quality and take their colouring from the adjacent segments. The case of the nasals and laterals is discussed more fully below.

In some phonological treatments, a separate series of voiceless nasals and liquids has been posited. As such sounds occur only in certain grammatical morphemes, they are probably best treated as sequences of nasal (or liquid) plus /h/, an analysis suggested by Sommerfelt (1964).

Plosives: The voiceless series is strongly postaspirated and devoicing of the voiced series is fairly widespread, especially in non-intervocalic contexts. The voiceless series are slightly preaspirated. Nasals and liquids before and after voiceless plosives are devoiced. The alveopalatal plosives /tʰ, dʰ/ are affricated, as are the palatal plosives /c, ɟ/, though to a lesser degree.

Fricatives: /v, w, j, ɣ/ may be realized as approximants or as fricatives. The fricatives and approximants are grouped together because of their close relationship with their stop congeners. An important morphophonological alternation between word-initial stops and fricatives/approximants in Irish expresses certain grammatical functions such as present vs. past tense, gender marking on adjectives, and case marking in certain noun phrases. In the Gaith Dobhair dialect, the voiceless velar fricative /x/ tends to occur only in initial position. Where it occurs non-initially in other dialects, Gaith Dobhair usually has /h/.

Laterals and Nasals: Historically, there was a four-way opposition of laterals and nasals in the dental to alveopalatal region. This system is widely reported in the dialect literature for Ulster (e.g. Quiggin 1906; Sommerfelt 1922; Ó Searcaigh 1925) and seems to have involved an opposition of palatalized and velarized alveolar segments, contrasting with a velarized dental and a palatalized alveopalatal segment. However the present-day situation, particularly among the younger generation in Gaith Dobhair, is that one of the alveolar segments has more or less disappeared, leaving a robust three way contrast, with the possibility for some speakers of a marginal fourth phoneme. The latter was not reliably produced by this informant. In the case of the laterals, the velarized alveolar has tended to merge with the velarized dental /l̥ˠ/ (see Ní Chasaide 1977, 1979). In the case of the nasals, the situation is more fluid: the palatalized alveolar has tended to merge with the palatalized alveopalatal nasal /ɲˠ/. In lexical items which have retained the (original) alveolar pronunciation, there does not appear to be a contrast with the (originally)

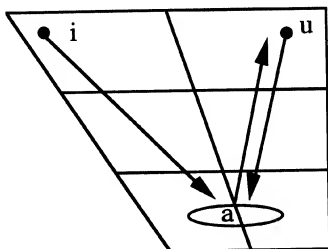
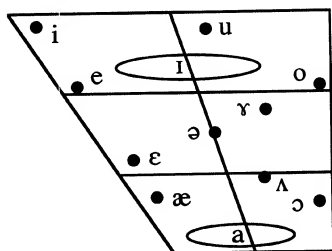
velarized alveolar.

The remaining single alveolar lateral and nasal consonants have a fairly neutral or slightly clear quality, and tend to coarticulate freely with the quality of adjacent segments (see Ní Chasaide 1977). In prepausal position, the alveolar lateral and nasal segments tend to be devoiced, and to clip a preceding short vowel making it over-short. As the alveolar nasal does not occur in initial position, illustrations of the dental, alveolar, and alveopalatal nasals and laterals in word-final position are included in the consonant word list.

Rhotics: An older four-way distinction among rhotics has been reduced to a two-way distinction in Gaoth Dobhair. Initially, the /r^v, r^l/ distinction has been neutralized to a voiced post-alveolar approximant [ɹ], which takes its colouring from the following vowel. In non-initial position, the velarized member can be realized as either [r^v] or [r^v]. The historical palatalized /r^l/, which in most other dialects is a palatalized tap or apico-postalveolar fricative, may also appear in Gaoth Dobhair as a voiced palatal fricative [j] in non-initial position. For both palatalized and velarized taps, there is often incomplete closure with considerable frication.

Vowels

Vowels fall into long and short sets, with long vowels (/i, e, æ, ɔ, o, u/) typically shown in the orthography with an acute accent. Since long and short pairs of vowels are qualitatively distinct, the transcription does not mark length explicitly. Long vowels have short allophones in unstressed syllables and before /h/. Schwa occurs only in unstressed position. The close rounded vowel is often realized with only weak lip rounding.



Allophonic realizations: The locations of vowels marked on the charts represent a fairly high degree of abstraction, since consonantal quality exerts major influences on the quality of adjacent vowels. For all vowels, clearly audible on/off glides appear when their frontness or backness conflicts with the secondary articulation of the consonant with which they co-occur. Thus, a velarized consonant preceding a front vowel gives rise to a strong diphthongal glide of velar origin, and conversely, a strong palatal glide is audible between a palatalized consonant and a following back vowel. The wide range of steady state realizations of short /ɪ/ and /a/ are illustrated by large ellipses.

i	bʲi ʲvəh	<i>baolach</i>	(to be) 'feared'
e	e ʲvi	<i>éalaigh</i>	'escape' (imp)
æ	æ ʲvɪ̃j	<i>álainn</i>	'beautiful'
ɔ	ɔ ʲvə̃j	<i>ólann</i>	(he) 'drinks'
o	o ʲvən	<i>amhrán</i>	'song'
u	u ʲvi	<i>úllai</i>	'apples'

ɪ	ɪlə	<i>uile</i>	'all'
ɛ	ɛlə	<i>eile</i>	'another'
a	a ʲvəh	<i>eallach</i>	'cattle'
ʌ	ʌ ʲvə	<i>ola</i>	'oil'
ɣ	ɣ ʲvu	<i>Uladh</i>	'Ulster'
ia	ia ʲvəhə	<i>iallacha</i>	'laces'
ua	ua ʲvəh	<i>ualach</i>	'burden'
au	auwɪ̃j	<i>Eamhain</i>	(place)

Suprasegmentals

Primary lexical stress is located on the first syllable of most words. The stress marks in the transcription indicate the syllables accented by the speaker in the reading of the passage. | and | indicate the ends of major and minor intonational phrases respectively.

Transcription of recorded passage

vʲi ən 'ʲi ədʲvʲuaj ɪsʲ ən 'jɾʲian əʃ 'arʲəgəl lə ʃɛlə lə fʲal əmʲvəh 'caku dʲvən
 'vʲɛrʲɪj əbʲvə 'ʃɾʲɛçə | nʲərʲvə hənʲʃ 'tʲvəçʲtʲʲalʲvi ən 'bʲalʲvəh | əgəsʲ 'kʲʲɔkə 'tʲɛh a
 xəçʲu ɛʃə || 'dʲvənʲvʲi çədʲv gərʲv ən dʲvɪ̃lə bʲvə 'ʃɾʲɛçə | ən dʲvɪ̃lə bʲvə 'ʲvuaçə ə
 'hɔrʲhu ərʲv ən 'tʲvəçʲtʲʲalʲvi ə 'xʲʲɔkə wʲvɪ̃jʲ 'dʲvɔ || mʲçm 'hedʲj ən 'ʲi ədʲvʲuaj
 xɾh 'tʲɾʲɛ̃j ɪsʲ ə 'hɾku leçə | ah a 'vʲɛdʲj ɪsʲ ə 'hedʲj çi | çə bʲvə 'ʲvuaçə ə 'hənʲv
 ən 'tʲvəçʲtʲʲalʲvi ə 'xʲʲɔkə 'harʲvʲv fʲa 'dʲvu dʲvʌ || əgəsʲ sʲvə 'dʲɛrʲju 'dʲɪrʲi ən 'ɣʲi
 ədʲvʲuaj əsʲv ən 'iarʲarʲvʲv || ənʲçm 'ʲvɾnʲvʲv ən 'jɾʲian gə 'tʲɛh | əgəsʲ wʲvɪ̃j ən
 'tʲvəçʲtʲʲalʲvi 'dʲvɔ ə 'xʲʲɔkə 'ʲvæhrʲʲah 'bʲvɾvʲv || əgəsʲ ərʲv ə 'dʲvɔj çm | bʲɛʃən dʲvən
 'ʲi ədʲvʲuaj ə 'adʲvʲal | gɾʲvəbʲj i n 'jɾʲian ə bʲvə 'ʲvædʲrʲə dʲvən 'vʲɛrʲɪj ||

Orthographic version

Bhí an ghaoth aduaidh 's an ghrian ag aragáil le chéile le fáil amach cé acu den bheirt a ba threise nuair a tháinig taistealaf an bealach agus clóca te á chaitheamh aige. D'aontaigh siad gur an duine 'ba threise an duine 'ba luaithe a thabhairfeadh ar an taistealaf a chlóca a bhaint dó. Ansin shéid an ghaoth aduaidh comh tréan is a thiofcadh léithe, ach dá mhéid a shéid sí 'sea ba dhlúithe a theann an taistealaf a chlóca thart fá dtaobh dó, agus sa deireadh d'éirigh an ghaoth aduaidh as an iarracht. Ansin lonnraigh an ghrian go te agus bhain an taistealaf dó a chlóca láithreach bonn. Agus ar a' dóigh sin b'éigean don ghaoth aduaidh a admháil gurbh í 'n ghrian a ba láidre den bheirt.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for suggestions and assistance in the preparation of this illustration to Cathair Ó Dochartaigh and Prionnsias Ó Nualláin.

Handbook of the International Phonetic Association :
A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet
International Phonetic Association, July 1999.