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## Corpus Planning for Irish – Dictionaries and Terminology

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### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Irish language and its fortunes have changed considerably since 750 AD, when an anonymous Irish student in Germany made his contribution to lexicography in the Würzburg Glosses. This article describes the evolution and current situation of corpus planning for Irish, which includes dictionaries, terminology and corpora.

Writing in Irish was still partially transmitted through the manuscript tradition until the late nineteenth century. In just over a hundred years, the language has embraced large-scale print transmission and more recently the internet. Lexicographical methodologies everywhere have also been transformed by new technologies. From the middle ages until the late 1980s, the old craft of dictionary-making was centred in the power of tradition and rarely innovative. It involved excerpting extracts by hand from printed and manuscript sources, recording on paper slips in massive archives, and laborious drafting of dictionary entries manually for print publication.

In just over twenty years, a metamorphosis has taken place in dictionary design, production and use. Lone scholars have been replaced by project teams working with corpora and computational linguistics software for publication in print, CD, and the internet. The success of dictionary projects today depends on project management, matched with technological and linguistic expertise in multidisciplinary teams. Some of the individual enthusiasm for the imaginative creativity of words and their uses has invariably been lost in this process, as on-line databases are queried by quick-clicking translators working to deadlines on reports required by language legislation.

Once used extensively as a language of literary and spiritual expression, Irish under colonialism during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries became primarily an oral language, albeit with a rich lexicon of oral literature and song, in rural and maritime communities. When the

inevitability of irreversible language loss became ever more clear in the late nineteenth century the new revivalists grappled with determining written forms, and how script, dialects, orthography, and a written standard and grammar, might be moulded for modern use. Alongside this came the challenges of developing lexicography and terminology for a new age. The revival process provided the impetus for new literature, journalism and publishing, and established a literacy base.

Starkly contrasting trends emerged which affected development of the lexicon. The Gaeltacht heartlands have continued to contract, although revival policies and incentives have slowed the pace of decline. The ever-decreasing native-speaker base throughout the twentieth century and the accelerated modernization of the Irish economy and society, have resulted in major domain loss in Irish in its heartland, where the language was strongest and best able to develop new forms and expressions and assimilate borrowings. In parallel with this, revival policies expanded the learner base through education, which in turn generated development of communications, literature and use of Irish in legislation and public administration.

The literacy base expanded considerably as each cohort progressed through school and readership peaked around the late 1960s, if sales figures of newspapers and periodicals can be taken as evidence. Since the 1970s, the main emphasis in education has shifted to speaking the language and acquiring the most basic skills in reading and writing it. The literary texts studied become fewer and less challenging linguistically as each decade passes with a consequent decline in written standards. The sustainability of any meaningful literacy is now in question.

In quantity if not quality, learners gradually overtook the native speakers and this gap continues to widen. As the revival programme ran parallel to a process of language loss in Gaeltacht areas, the native-speaker base diminished, accompanied by loss of irreplaceable domains in everyday speech. In contrast with this, Irish was being introduced to a huge range of new domains through the media and education, and the need for modern dictionaries and terminology increased exponentially.

Meaningful implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003 and the status of Irish as an official working language of the European Union

from January 2007 is directly dependent on provision of adequate lexicographical and terminological resources. This requires a long-term strategy, looking ahead at likely needs over two to three decades, and providing for both electronic and printed resources, probably in this order from now on.

Dictionary and terminology development in Irish must be seen in its own historical context and in comparison with other languages. Despite the weakened political, economic and social status of Irish under colonial rule, a series of scholarly individuals made distinctive contributions to lexicography in Irish, both in manuscript and in print since Ó Cléirigh's glossary was published in 1643. Several of the following displayed in their work a knowledge of their predecessors' contributions: Pluincéad (ms.1662); Lhuyd (1707); Ó Beaglaoich and Mac Cuirtín (1732); Ó Neachtain (ms.1739); Ó Briain (1768); Connellan (1814); O'Reilly (1817, 1821, 1864); Ó Conaill (ms. 1826); Coneys (1849); Mac Ádhaimh (ms. c.1850); Foley (1855); Albe (1903); and O'Neill Lane (1904, 1918). This work constitutes a substantial contribution to Irish lexicography before the foundation of the state.

It is no historical accident that the era of great dictionary-making in late nineteenth-century Europe coincided with the height of colonial ambition. Dictionaries were statements by great nations about the supremacy of their languages and cultures. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1858-1928) was established in direct response to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* of the brothers Grimm (1838-1961) and Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue Française* (1841-73).

When Irish is positioned in this landscape we see the burgeoning of literacy and lexicography across Europe at the weakest period in usage of the language outside the traditional heartlands. When Irish readers and writers could be counted in dozens, the OED could boast in 1880 of 754 readers on its voluntary reading programme, who had recently read 924 books and returned 361,670 quotations. Great national dictionary projects which commenced as ambitious and pioneering scholarly ventures became more relevant and commercially viable over time as mass literacy became a reality in major European languages. We also see the scale of commitment necessary over generations to sustain and complete lexicographical work.

The remainder of this paper examines the range of activity undertaken since the foundation of the Irish State in 1922 and the current position of corpus planning for lexicography, corpora and terminology in Irish. We begin with the monolingual historical dictionary, followed by dialect lexicons, bilingual dictionaries, corpora and terminology work.

#### IRISH DICTIONARIES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Monolingual historical dictionaries form the corner-stone of dictionary provision in all established languages, where the art of lexicography is nurtured and transmitted over generations despite changes in workplace technologies. An English dictionary to most people means a monolingual one, probably a concise version extracted, even if indirectly, from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. However, an Irish dictionary invariably means a bilingual dictionary, usually English-Irish as translation is predominantly into, rather than out of, Irish. This perception arises because we have never had an historical dictionary of modern Irish, and we are now unlikely to see one.

Upon completion of its *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (1913-76) based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials, the Royal Irish Academy embarked in 1976 on Foclóir na Nua-Ghaeilge, an historical dictionary of modern Irish for the period 1600-2000, based on two quite different strands. The first of these comprised literary and linguistic sources for the period 1600-1882 prior to the revival movement when general publishing and modern language applications began. The second encompassed language sources from the revival period onwards, including works by writers in all dialects and various forms of official publications and print media. Tomás de Bhaldraithe was General Editor until his retirement in 1994. To date this project has produced a CD-ROM and booklet (2004) entitled *Corpas na Gaeilge / The Irish Language Corpus 1600-1882*, which contains some 7.2 million words. Eight volumes of dialect lexicons by individual scholars were also published by the project between 1981 and 1989.

Two major external factors militated against completion of this dictionary as envisaged. Economic recession in the 1980s prohibited recruitment on the scale required for any meaningful progress. A strategic decision at that time would have recognized the impossibility of completion under these circumstances. The second external factor inhibiting progress was the arrival of computing technologies and the

revolution in lexicographic methods as corpora displaced mountains of paper slips, over a million records in the case of Irish. Dictionaries in early to mid-cycle with no publication stream in flow, were particularly affected as new skills and mindsets were needed to implement radical changes and lead modern technological projects. Many of the old scholarly institutions across Europe which housed creaking national dictionary projects found themselves in difficulty. Progress became bogged down in many instances, particularly where management structures more appropriate to an era of individual scholarship failed to implement the radical change management required for forging dynamic interdisciplinary teams.

Irish is not alone in its lack of an historical dictionary. Similarly troubled histories affected the Norwegian and Romanian dictionaries, commenced in 1930 and 1959 respectively, and not yet completed. By comparison, the Danish dictionary, established in the new corpus-based era took just twelve years to complete and appeared in 2003. When national dictionaries run into difficulty, however, governments are reluctant to reform or abandon them.

Upon de Bhaldraithe's retirement in 1994, and eighteen years into the Irish-dictionary project, the Royal Irish Academy redefined the objectives as 'the creation within the next seven years of a computerized dictionary archive of Modern Irish.' The outcome was published ten years later as the CD-ROM and booklet discussed above, in which reference to future outputs is vague.

Work on general bilingual dictionaries, dialect lexicons and terminological dictionaries, was undertaken throughout the twentieth century to service real needs. Besides the large native-speaker base of some half million in early century, users were predominantly teachers and learners in the education system. These students were concerned with broadening their vocabulary and deepening their grasp of the native idiom in hope of acquiring a near-native competence in their chosen dialect, while striving to understand and appreciate the highly textured language of Irish literary texts. Several dialect lexicons like *Caint an Chláir* (Mac Clúin 1940), and *An Béal Beo* (Ó Máille 1936), although seldom used today, were once studied assiduously by generations of students.

Two names stand tall above all others in twentieth-century Irish-language lexicography, Pádraig Ó Duinnín and Tomás de Bhaldraithe. The former published the main edition of his dictionary, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*, in 1927. It is interesting to note that it was the poetry of Aogán Ó Rathaille which first awakened his interest in words and lexicography. In 1901 he inherited 12,000 dictionary slips from the Irish Texts Society to form the basis of an Irish-English Dictionary which was intended to be ‘a cheap handy pocket dictionary for use of students of the modern tongue’ and the first edition was published in 1904. His much expanded 1927 edition, discussed by de Bhaldraithe (1983), is a testament to lexicography as art, a repository of literature, learning and native traditions, drawing as he claims in his preface on ‘the folklore, habits and beliefs, the songs and tales, the arts and crafts of the people.’ Much satirized in the work of Myles na gCopaleen, he captured as none other before or since the capacity for figurative expression in Irish, listing as he does several hundred headwords for types of people for example, like these three from a short section beginning with st-:

*stipéar*, one standing a long time;  
*storc*, the corpse of one who dies in an upright position;  
*stocalach*, a person standing like a pillar in the road.

The incongruity of his listings juxtaposed with his own comments and his use of all verbs in the first person, can be just as unintentionally humorous:

*sagairtín*, a small priest, a small inedible periwinkle, *préachán* (*faochán*)  
*dubh* is the edible variety;  
*coin-riocht*, a werewolf, wolf-shape, *teighim i gcoin-riocht*, I become a wer-wolf.

Apart from Lane’s *Larger English-Irish Dictionary* (1916), only two further English-Irish dictionaries appeared in the twentieth century, McKenna (1935) and de Bhaldraithe (1959), and both bearing the title *English-Irish Dictionary*. With English as source-language, their purpose was to find Irish equivalents for current English expressions, and the opportunities for presenting the full range of Irish idiom were limited. De Bhaldraithe’s work gained him international status as a lexicographer and his dictionary is significant in prioritizing standard above dialect forms and in undertaking large-scale development and integration of new terminology, to which subject he devoted over half

his short preface (1959: v):

But with the inception of the movement for the preservation of the Irish Language, and more particularly with the founding of the State, the need for the extension of the vocabulary became more urgent, in order to meet the new demands made on the language, in fields in which it had been formerly neglected.

... The ways in which these demands have been met, during a period of abnormal development of the language, have created certain problems for the lexicographer. A new word has sometimes been coined where an equivalent (here placed in brackets) was already well established in traditional speech, e.g., *ciabhdhealg*, hairpin (*biorán gruaige*); *tuailmeá*, spring balance (*ainsiléad*); *forionar*, pullover (*geansaí*); *seilbhscríbhinn*, lease (*léas*); *gnáthcheannaitheoir*, customer (*custaiméir*)...

Modern technical terms have been coined by different authorities and individuals, with the result that, in some fields there existed a superabundance of conflicting terms.

De Bhaldraithe's dictionary served the needs of mid-century Ireland very well. It is no reflection on his work that it became the mainstay of teachers and students for far too long as, incredibly, no action was taken to replace it until Foras na Gaeilge embarked on its New English-Irish Dictionary (NEID) in 2002.

Lexicography in Irish is a testament to the dedication and achievement of individuals operating in a policy vacuum. Dictionaries have been commissioned much too late considering the timescale invariably required to complete them. The decision to place statutory responsibility for dictionaries and terminology on one body, Foras na Gaeilge, in 1999, was clearly a step forward, although clarification of the relationships with the Royal Irish Academy (historical dictionary/corpus) and the Translation Section of the Houses of the Oireachtas (official standard) was unfortunately not specified.

One occasional paper on corpus planning (Nic Phóidín et al, 1999) was published by Bord na Gaeilge at this time, and the decision to press ahead immediately with the most urgent task, the NEID, is to be commended. However, individual dictionaries and projects are best planned and executed within a published national strategy. A full programme of cyclical bilingual dictionary renewal, both English-Irish and Irish-English, including pocket and school-dictionary derivatives, updated or replaced each fifteen to twenty years, in both

electronic and print formats, is the essential minimum requirement for a language whose status is guaranteed by legislation both in Ireland and the European Union. Individual dictionary projects, however commendable, do not constitute a strategy for corpus planning which includes lexicographical resources, corpora and terminology. A clear policy for links and interactions between these strands is essential, bearing in mind that synergies are not easily achieved when resources are owned and managed by different organizations.

Given the profound changes in lexicographic practice and poor transmission of editorial skills in Irish, a gap of almost sixty years may well occur between de Bhaldraithe's dictionary (1959) and publication of its replacement. Ironically we see the biggest gap between dictionaries under native government.

One commendable strategic decision was the preparation of an Irish-English dictionary immediately after publication of de Bhaldraithe (1959), thus enabling valuable skills to be retained and developed. This comprehensive modern dictionary appeared as *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* by Niall Ó Dónaill (1978). This effectively replaced Dineen's work for the general user and presented the modern language in the Roman script. A cursory glance at Dineen's dictionary today, however, reveals the sad extent of domain loss in our own time, as very few Irish-speakers now would have even a passive knowledge of most of the vocabulary contained there.

Ó Dónaill's dictionary contained a great deal of new terminology, and wore well, as dictionaries do, for a period of twenty years or so. It too is now showing its age, and its scope for use in education is becoming limited, considering the explosion in new terminology which has entered everyday use in newspapers and the classroom in the three decades since it appeared. Considering the lack of expansion in other aspects of the native lexicon since 1978, a case could be made for updating the existing dictionary by a process of revision and inclusion of all new terminology in current use in schools and the general media. This work could be completed in the short term over five years or so. The strategic vacuum and the project-by-project focus in lexicographical planning is once again apparent. The fact that this dictionary is overdue for revision has passed without comment due to the more urgent and pressing need for an English-Irish dictionary.



## DEVELOPMENT OF CORPORA FOR LEXICOGRAPHY

Modern dictionaries are corpus-based, and future Irish dictionaries will be as comprehensive and reliable as the corpora on which they are based. The historical language as it existed up to 1882 in published and manuscript sources has been captured in the Royal Irish Academy corpus (2004), which can be drawn on for lexicography, particularly when Irish is the source language of the dictionary. A more user-friendly interface would make this a more attractive tool, but this could easily be rectified.

Provision for the period post-1882 is more complex. When the NEID project commenced Foras na Gaeilge acquired existing corpus materials from the EU PAROLE project carried out by ITÉ (Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann) before its abolition, including additional material amounting in total to some eighteen million words, at various stages of processing. This was incorporated into the New Corpus for Ireland (NCI) for the new dictionary.

NCI contains two strands, one is Irish and the second is Irish-English, or English as used in Ireland. Space does not permit a detailed discussion here of corpus design and compilation and this has already been published (Kilgariff et al 2006). Although this corpus is not currently available to the public, it is a major resource for lexicography in Irish. The Irish-language strand contains thirty million words drawn from:

- books imaginative 7.6m
- books informative 8.4m
- newspapers 4.5m
- periodicals 2.6m
- official publications 1.2m
- broadcast material .4m
- websites 5.5m.

It is therefore an excellent source for examples of contemporary Irish and terminology in use. Most of the material, however, was clearly produced by learners of Irish, non-native speakers. Since even the imaginative books section is restricted to works available electronically from publishers, including a few recent texts by Gaeltacht authors, the bulk of native-speaker materials created by the giants of twentieth-century literature is not represented and not yet available in any corpus

as a resource for lexicography. This is regrettable and will need to be rectified particularly before any new Irish-English dictionary is undertaken. It highlights once again the need for a national strategy for corpus planning for the language.

#### TERMINOLOGY

The major area of expansion in Irish since the revival project commenced over a century ago was terminology, and its growth has masked to some extent the huge domain loss in the traditional lexicon of native speakers. Creation of new terms became a social pastime and a preoccupation of the early print media in Irish in the late nineteenth century. Coinages appeared in the weekly newspaper *Fáinne an Lae* (1898-1900) like *leictiúr* (lecture), *feadán cainte* (telephone), and *ardscoil* (university), and well-known authors contributed lists of terms for parts of the bicycle and other modern inventions.

Under native government, the education system became the main driver of term creation, and for many years it was envisaged that the general bilingual dictionary could continue to be the main organ of dissemination. Term creation and usage remained quite random and uncoordinated for decades, as de Bhaldraithe states in his preface (1959: v)

For example, the prefix hydro was variously Gaelicized as follows (all examples are from text-books or examination papers): *hydro-*, *hídho-*, *hidro-*, *hudro-*, *íor-*, *íodhro-*, *-udar*, *údró-*, *udró-*, *udra-*, *uidr-*. Apart from these, use was made of native prefixes, e.g., *dobhar-*, *bual-*, *uisce-*, *fliuch-*, *leacht-*. ‘Telescope’ was variously rendered: *cianarcán*, *cianamharcán*, *ciannarcán*, *ciandarcán*, *ciandearcán*, *cianradharcán*, *ciandracán*, *fadradharcán*, *fadamhrcán*, *faidearcán*, *radharcghloine*, *súilghloine*, *súil-fhiodán*, *gloine fadradhairc*, *gloine fhéachaint*, *telescóp*, *tealoscóp*, *teileascóip*.

Responsibility for the development of the written standard and orthography as well as the creation of legal and statutory terminology in Irish has been in the Translation Section of the Houses of the Oireachtas since it was established in 1922. The definitive work establishing standard spelling and grammar *Gramadach na Gaeilge agus Litriú na Gaeilge: An Caighdeán Oifigiúil* was published in 1958, with very minor revisions in the 1960 and 1979 editions. This remains the written standard for Irish. The Acts translated by the Section are

now available on [www.achtanna.ie](http://www.achtanna.ie) and constitute a valuable linguistic resource. A databank of terms and other phrases used in legislation is contained as an ancilliary resource on [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie).

A strategic issue has arisen from the division of responsibility which placed lexicography and terminology in Foras na Gaeilge, while Rannóg an Aistriúcháin retained custodianship of the written standard and grammar. Several minor but significant differences have emerged in practice, particularly in the use of aspiration, or *séimhiú*, and modern dictionaries as far back as Ó Dónaill (1978) are not entirely in line with *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*. This emerging divergence has been extensively discussed by several researchers, such as Ní Mhurchú (1981), Ó Baoill (1999) and Ó Ruairc (2007). Criticism has been coupled with calls for a revision of the written standard to also take account of changes and simplification of forms used in contemporary native speech.

Although these concerns impact only marginally on the general public or the education system, this anomaly needs to be strategically addressed as a matter of urgency, because of its obvious implications for all corpus resources produced. As indicated in the *Irish Times* (13 October 2007), implementation of EU status is now proving to be a catalyst for decision-making, and progress on revising the written standard, while contentious, is now awaited with interest.

External pressures arising from international status should not be underestimated. Under accession arrangements for Ireland to the EEC in 1973, Irish was granted treaty status only and a restricted number of documents were therefore translated into Irish. The principal work generating term creation in other languages, the *Acquis Communautaire*, was never translated into Irish, and the number of Irish terms in the publicly accessible EU database IATE ([iate.europa.eu](http://iate.europa.eu)), is consequently only 13,427, on a scale spanning from 2,859 in Maltese to 1.5 million in English at time of writing, in September 2007. Delivery of translation and interpreting services as required under the status provision requires a radical increase in the provision of terminology in Irish in this database, work currently being undertaken by Fiontar, Dublin City University.

Unlike other aspects of corpus planning in Irish, development of

terminology in Irish has derived major benefit from interaction with international bodies formulating best practice. The merits of compliance with ISO requirements and UNESCO guidelines in this field are invaluable, and create an international framework for development of resources.

Earlier in the twentieth century, terminology in Irish was developed in response to demand from education, the media and creative writing. A massive corpus of translated material was generated by the literary translation scheme of An Gúm, the government publishing branch, established in 1926. By 1939, some ninety-nine novels mainly of English literature, had been translated by Irish-language authors including such works as *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells, with a consequent use of new terminology.

The broadcast media have also contributed enormously to the creation and dissemination of new terms in Irish, with its impact increasing steadily throughout the twentieth century as new media came on stream and the number of active broadcasters and journalists increased to several hundred in recent years. It is unfortunate that no on-line live support service exists for the media in Irish where terms could be created immediately, validated and circulated on-line throughout the sector.

Official structures were established quite early to support terminology work. A terminological committee was set up by the Department of Education in 1927. Interrupted by World War II, it functioned again on an *ad hoc* basis until 1968. During this period some thirteen domain-specific dictionaries or lists were compiled. A new syllabus for post-primary schools, requiring new terminology, was due for introduction in 1968 and the Terminology Committee was then established by the government on a permanent basis. Structures and practices have remained largely unchanged since, with committees meeting on a voluntary basis, supported by a small full-time secretariat. Dozens of dictionaries and lists were published ranging from Astronomy to Telecommunications to Biology. Many other domains were provided for by typewritten or handwritten lists. As terms were largely created in response to specific demand, principally in education, communications or public administration, the balance of terms in particular domains is different from that in languages where terms emerge through usage *in*

*vivo*. Subjects studied in school tend to be strongly represented while poor provision is made for sport and other leisure activities, medical and related domains, or industrial manufacturing.

Terminology development in Irish embraced the technological revolution very late. Canadian terminologists in Montreal, for example, had embarked on this route in 1969. Digitization of Irish terminological data had been discussed by the Terminological Committee on several occasions since 1971 but had not resulted in any definitive action of benefit to the user. In the new century, and under the galvanizing influence of impending language legislation, some dictionaries and lists were made available on [www.acmhainn.ie](http://www.acmhainn.ie).

The practical difficulty of querying several sources for a term and the absence of an English-Irish dictionary became increasingly problematic for translators and professionals who needed to write Irish daily, following the enactment of the Official Languages Act 2003.

At this time, Fiontar, Dublin City University, requested INTERREG funding from the EU for the creation of a national database for Irish terminology 2004–7. The project was undertaken with the collaboration of Foras na Gaeilge, which partially funded the work. The result can be seen at [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie) which contains 287,000 terms, previously available in fifty-four dictionaries and lists. The database is one of the largest of its kind in the world. The work has continued since, in partnership with Foras na Gaeilge, as new domains and terms are added to the database, and data cleaning progresses.

The electronic solution has liberated Irish terminology from the constraints of printed lists, invariably out of date. The on-line resource can be expanded and updated daily, and inconsistencies removed. More valuably, it allows for dialogue and interaction with users worldwide, and new terms can be requested on an on-line form. The positive feedback since launching the resource in September 2006 has been overwhelming and the database has transformed the working environment of the Irish-language translator. Over 3.2 million searches had been recorded on the site by September 2007 ranging from Norlisk in Siberia to Dunedin in New Zealand. The editorial interface serves as a terminology management system for the Terminology Committee and has facilitated the transition of work

practices from paper to screen.

Focal.ie is queried most frequently (62 per cent) from English to Irish. The most frequently sought items are not highly specialized terms but words which may be translated in different ways depending on context: *performance*, *potential* and *project* featuring consistently on top of the list. Unfortunately, the resource is also used by many in lieu of a full English-Irish dictionary, a function for which it was not intended and is only partially suited. If learners and writers are restricted in their searches to terminological words and phrases, opportunities for enrichment of expression may be seriously curtailed.

Creation of the database focal.ie has brought corpus resources for Irish to a new threshold. It is a dynamic tool capable of further innovation and development, and is accessible without charge to users of Irish worldwide. Fiontar has adapted this technical solution for the national database of place-names to be published later in 2008 on [www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie).

#### CONCLUSIONS

However innovative, terminology databases do not replace the need for a full suite of general bilingual dictionaries in both print and electronic formats. Teachers, translators, writers and linguists need access to corpora and to full dictionary-length entries to enable creative use of the existing rich lexicon.

Corpus planning on the basis of individual dictionaries is no longer appropriate. Considering the long-term nature of investment, the strategy must look ahead and forecast needs two decades hence, providing for corpora and databases from which a suite of complementary outputs can be derived cost-effectively, and presented to the public in user-friendly formats. Coordination and integration of all these resources will bear the optimum result, where dictionaries, termbanks and corpora are developed in tandem. Development of electronic resources is maximized when the constraints of the print mindset are abandoned. We must bear in mind that data created now is not for human use initially, and must be capable of being retrieved by computers and converted in data management systems. Synergies must be achieved, where terminological, corpus and lexicographical data can be easily imported from one system to another.

The national and international status of Irish creates new opportunities for the language. It has sharpened the focus on planning for deficits in our corpus resources. It provides an incentive for young people to invest in acquiring high level linguistic and literacy skills, while highlighting the challenge in meeting the current professional skills deficits in translation and interpreting.

We are witnessing a huge shift in the type of writing activity taking place in Irish now. Translation of official documents may become disproportionate to other areas. We must ensure that production of functional text does not become an end in itself to the detriment of creative and critical work.

Focal.ie is promoted as ‘the Irish you need at speed’, which indeed it is, if a term is required at a click. We must ensure, however, that the prophecy of Yeats (Kiberd 1979: 221) remains unfulfilled, ‘It may be the language of a nation, and yet losing all that has made it worthy of a revival.’ Colonial powers and nations have come and gone, but a dictionary is still a statement by a society about itself, as each new word and meaning in its language documents a change. Corpus planning is only worthwhile in a language in which poetry is still possible.

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