

Irish Terminology Policy

Helena Ní Ghearáin

The conscious, top-down planning of new terms for the Irish language, mainly for use within the education system, has been ongoing for more than eighty years. This article presents an overview of the specific context of Irish terminology planning and details the authorities who engage in terminology work in Irish.

Schlagwörter

Irish terminology planning, terminological authorities, language contact, domain loss, acceptance of planned terminology

Introduction: terminology planning for a lesser-used language in a majority English-speaking context

The case of Irish terminology planning provides an interesting example of top-down terminology planning within a very specific context. The context, which will be examined within this article, presents particular obstacles to both the smooth running and the success of the planning activity. Irish is a lesser-used language which is used in a primarily English-speaking environment. Indeed, almost all speakers of Irish in Ireland are speakers of English, the majority being native English speakers for whom Irish is a second language. Thus, Irish terminology planning is aimed for the most part at bilinguals whose competence in English in most cases exceeds their competence in Irish. New concepts enter the Irish-language community's consciousness via their English-language designations. Among the reasons for this are the limited domains in which Irish is used, the lack of specialist communication in Irish and the all-encompassing influence of the English-language media. The official agents of Irish terminology planning, An Coiste Téarmaíochta (the Irish Terminology Committee), are not impervious to this situation and thus concede that their approach to terminology work is necessarily term-, rather than concept-focused, and therefore at odds with the approved method in international terminological standards and practice. In sum, Irish terminology planning is in a perpetual state of catch-up in relation to English terminology and for this reason 'planning', in the sense of preparing for the future, is made all the more difficult. This article will first present an overview of Irish terminology planning and relevant issues and will then provide a more detailed account of the authorities engaging in terminology work in Irish at present.

Terminology planning in the service of language revitalisation

The needs of language revitalisation rather than specialist communication have provided the primary motivation for terminology planning in Irish in the last one hundred years. Official terminology planning, since its inception, has been driven by the needs of the education system, i.e. the teaching of Irish and of subjects through Irish. Another significant stimulus for terminology work was the requirement set down in 1922 that all legislation passed in Ireland is made available in bilingual form, thus instigating legislative translation from English into Irish which has been ongoing ever since. In more recent times, the Official Languages Act (2003) has increased the translation obligations of public bodies, thus creating yet more terminological needs (see Ní Ghearáin, forthcoming).

A diverse target audience for new terms

A striking aspect of the Irish situation is the heterogeneity of speakers, in terms of linguistic background, competence and usage of the language, and language ideology, which constitute the Irish language community. The education policy, mentioned above, has resulted in the peculiar situation whereby L2 speakers of Irish outnumber the L1 community (though of course they may differ greatly in terms of the degree and context of their usage of Irish). Furthermore, this latter group consists of both speakers living in the traditional Irish-speaking areas (an Ghaeltacht) and speakers living in mainly English-speaking areas. The stated target of official terminology planning is the education system, with terms being disseminated through specialist dictionaries, textbooks and other educational materials. This has been the case since the first terminology committee was established within the Department of Education in 1927 and indeed in retrospect,

has had the lamentable result that the use of modern or technical terms in Irish has come to be associated with education alone. However, the reach of An Coiste Téarmaíochta has extended in recent years in response to growing terminological needs among different sectors of the population, the reasons for which will be discussed later. The question of usage and/or acceptance of planned terminology is a contentious one in the Irish case. Anecdotal evidence suggests that L1 speakers in the Gaeltacht are not always amenable to official efforts to develop the language, but due to a lack of empirical data, it is virtually impossible to comment on the overall success of Irish terminology planning. This is so when we frame success, as this author does, in terms of acceptance and usage. Alternatively, if we frame success in terms of productivity, we may conclude that official terminology planning has been successful in modernising the corpus of Irish and in so doing, has improved the status of the language also [3].



© Detlev Müller/PIXELIO

History

We may trace modern terminology planning in Irish to the altruistic and mainly unsystematic efforts of the language revivalists of the late nineteenth century who attempted to prepare the Irish lexicon for the new communicative demands posed to it by the revival. Though the terms 'corpus planning' or 'status planning' would not enter the discourse of language planning for another seventy years or so, it seems that the early Irish revivalists understood the importance of corpus development for the success of status planning initiatives. If Irish was to be proffered as a viable and credible means of communication for domains in

which it had never been used or which had been conquered by English in the recent past, its lexicon and terminology would have to be developed. In the following years, valiant efforts in language modernisation would be made by lexicographers, language revivalists and in particular, by the burgeoning Irish-language media and creative writers working through Irish. When the Irish Free State was established in 1922, at a time of nationalist fervour in which the Irish language and its revival played no small part, the task of terminological elaboration fell to the new government, in particular the education system, as Irish was now to be taught in all national schools as part of the revival effort.

Corpus planning in the service of status planning

Corpus planning most often complements status planning, easing the execution of status planning initiatives and preparing the language for new uses. This is also true in the case of Irish terminology planning. There are three areas within the direct remit of the government where it sought to improve the status of Irish in the twentieth century: law, education and administration. Understandably, terminological development was also necessary in these three domains and this was carried out through the establishment of two main agencies: Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, a legal translation team established in

focal.ie

Bunachar Téarmaíochta
Terminology Database

Cúrsa Scileanna Foclóra
Dictionary Skills Course

Eolas faoi focal.ie
About focal.ie

SONRAÍ Á SEICEÁIL AR BHONN LEANÚNACH
CONTINUOUS DATA-CHECKING IN PROGRESS

Bunachar náisiúnta téarmaíochta don Ghaeilge, arna fhorbairt ag Fiontar, DCU le maoiniú ó Foras na Gaeilge • The national terminology database for Irish, developed by Fiontar, DCU with funding from Foras na Gaeilge

	Cuardach Tapa Quick Search	Cuardach Casta Advanced Search	Liostaí Aibíteacha Alphabetical Listings
Téarma • Term:	<input type="text"/>		
Scríobh téarma Béarla nó Gaeilge. • Type a term in English or Irish.			
			Cuardaigh • Search

Conas an suíomh seo a úsáid • How to use this website

Teagmháil • Contact: focal@dcu.ie

Inneachar reatha an bhunachair
Current database contents

146,856 téarma Gaeilge
Irish terms

141,837 téarma Béarla
English terms

5,680 téarma i dteangacha eile
terms in other languages

Téarma Tráthúil • Featured Term

11/01/2008

icicle s

- coinlín *fir4* reo

Foclóir Tíreolaíochta agus Pleanála mar aon le Téarmaí Seandálaíochta/Dictionary of Geography and Planning incorporating Archaeological Terms 1981

Buaiteoir
An Duais Eorpach do Theangacha
An Lipéad Teanga



Winner
European Award for Languages
The Language Label

Staitisticí úsáide/Usage statistics | Torthaí ar shuirbhé/Survey results

Sonraí téarmaíochta: © 2006 Foras na Gaeilge
Réiteach teicniúil: © 2006 Fiontar

Foras na Gaeilge

DCU



Bunchéimeanna agus iarchéimeanna trí Ghaeilge **FIONTAR** Undergraduate and postgraduate degrees through Irish



1922, and An Coiste Téarmaíochta, established by the Department of Education in 1968 but with predecessors dating back to 1927. Though Rannóg an Aistriúcháin's primary remit is law, and An Coiste Téarmaíochta's education, they are both government agencies and accordingly influence the terminology used by the administration.

Terminology in education

The need for official intervention in Irish terminology first came to light in the 1920s when textbooks and other such materials had to be produced in Irish. The provision of texts was hampered on the one hand by a lack of suitable Irish terms and on the other, by an abundance of synonymous Irish terms where only one English term existed. However, prior to 1968, the structure for terminology planning within the Department of Education was somewhat ad hoc, with committees established and charged with meeting the terminological needs of the education system as they arose, the most significant of which was a committee established in 1928 which functioned for just over a decade. This committee produced nine terminology resources for the school subjects being taught through Irish at the time, e.g. science, history, commerce, and set down the first principles for terminology work in Irish [4]. The principles prioritised indigenous rather than foreign sources, an approach which is still favoured today, e.g., (1) the formation of compounds from indigenous words, (2) the formation of compounds by suffixing and prefixing indigenous words, (3) the gaelicisation of foreign terms, (4) the revival of words from Old

and Middle Irish, changing their meaning where necessary. While the principles are commendable, in practice they were not strictly followed, decisions being made on a term-by-term basis. The situation today is not very different in this respect.

Lexicography in the service of terminology

In the 1940s and 50s, the lexicographic team working on the English-Irish Dictionary (EID) (published in 1959), made a significant contribution to terminology provision for Irish. Their efforts in differentiating and standardising synonymous terms is particularly noteworthy; they sought to deal with the "superabundance of conflicting terms". For example, the introduction to the EID cited eighteen possible Irish designations for the concept telescope. This problem was tackled by consulting specialists in the relevant domains, an approach in keeping with contemporary best practice in terminology work. Although not typically the duty of the lexicographer, the EID team also developed many new terms for technical subjects and established principles for gaelicising foreign terms [4]. As testament to the relevance of the dictionary to the development of terminology in Irish, a supplement entitled *English-Irish Dictionary: Terminological Additions and Corrections* was published in 1978. What may seem as a blurred line between lexicography and terminology in the Irish situation is due to the particular sociolinguistic circumstances of the language: a lesser-used language having undergone significant domain loss with little lexicographic or terminological resources and a lack of subject specialists.

In cases such as these, the work of terminology often falls on the shoulders of linguists or non-specialists. "In practice, the terminology of revitalised and less-widely-used languages tends inevitably to be the creation of middle-class language experts rather than that of specialists ... terms are coined by linguists rather than specialists." [1]

Likewise, the work of the lexicographer may fall to the terminologist and a terminology committee may find itself working with concepts associated with the general language rather than strictly LSP concepts. This also occurs in Irish; recent lists from An Coiste Téarmaíochta provide the Irish-language equivalents for such general-language expressions and words as 'to become pregnant', 'views' (opinions), 'wannabe', 'referee' (list published in the Irish literary journal *Comhar*, July 2007).

An Coiste Téarmaíochta

In 1968, terminology work in Irish was placed on a more standardised basis by the establishment of An Buanchoiste Téarmaíochta (the Permanent Terminology Committee for Irish), and its Steering Committee, more commonly known as An Coiste Téarmaíochta. An Coiste Téarmaíochta's main workload consists in carrying out specialist terminology projects, e.g. the compilation of a dictionary of librarianship terms or a computing dictionary, and attending to one-off terminological enquiries, emanating from either the public or governmental bodies. The specialist projects are delegated to subcommittees, consisting of subject specialists and members of the Steering Committee, and their work usually culminates in the production of a bilingual dictionary. The workload involved in the terminology enquiry service has increased dramatically in recent years due to the increased presence of Irish in sectors such as the media, university education, technology and official communication. The enactment of the Official



Languages Act (2003) and the granting of official status to Irish in the European Union in 2005 have further driven the demand for terminology work.

Almost all of the members of An Coiste Téarmaíochta, fifteen at present, give their time and expertise voluntarily. The members consist of Irish-language academics, publishers specialising in educational materials and representative translators from Rannóg an Aistriúcháin and the EU. At present, the Committee has three full-time paid staff as well as a work experience placement, which is an increase in comparison to recent years. The Committee meet monthly to plan and supervise their workload and that of the subcommittees and to discuss, approve and amend term lists. The secretary of the Committee, who functions as editor, administrator and researcher, is a member of TC37 and was recently appointed as president of the European Association for Terminology.

Other authorities in Irish terminology planning

Though An Coiste Téarmaíochta is the sole official agency charged with “the production of an authoritative standard terminology in Irish”, other agencies such as Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, mentioned above, and Fiontar, an Irish-medium business school, also engage in terminological development in Irish. The media, educators and writers who communicate in Irish, including creative writers, academics or translators, represent other significant actors in Irish terminology policy, in terms of developing new terminology and influencing the acceptance or non-acceptance of particular terms. For example, a teacher who finds an official term difficult or unsuitable may decide not to teach it to her students. Likewise, an unofficial term used by a news broadcaster may gain currency among the general language community, while translators and educators may favour the official designation.

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin

In 1922, when Rannóg an Aistriúcháin was charged with the bilingual provision of all primary legislation passed by the Oireachtas (the Irish legislature), its translators were confronted with a much-weakened language which lacked a legal register and a suitable legal terminology. Substantial terminological development was needed in order to

render legal concepts in Irish. Due to the precision demanded by legislative documents, one of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin's primary achievements has been the differentiation of synonymous terms and the allocation of specific definitions to terms that in the general language are treated as synonyms. An illustration of this is the differentiation of the terms ‘mír’, ‘alt’ and ‘cuid’ in legislation to designate respectively ‘paragraph’, ‘section’ and ‘part’, while in the general language ‘alt’ is most often used to designate ‘paragraph’ and ‘cuid’ to translate ‘section’. Rannóg an Aistriúcháin also cultivated many new terms, particularly in the early years, in order to fill the terminological ‘gaps’ which existed in Irish. Although the need to do so has naturally decreased, An Rannóg still retains the authority to coin new terminology.

In 2003, the translations carried out by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin were made available online as a terminology resource of sorts and the new national terminology database for Irish, focal.ie, launched in 2006, is now linked to this resource. This represents an improvement on the prior situation when public access to Rannóg an Aistriúcháin's terminology was limited, and An Rannóg was criticised for not ‘sharing’ its terminological work with the Irish language community [5]. Plans to develop a legal terms database by Fiontar, the team responsible for the focal.ie database, should remedy this situation.

Fiontar

Fiontar, an Irish-medium business school has driven, and engaged in, terminological development in domains such as Information Technology and Business, subjects which it began to teach through Irish at third level in 1994. Terminology had to be developed for these subjects as textbooks were not available and to this end a full-time terminologist was employed and Fiontar have since produced dictionaries for these domains in cooperation with An Coiste Téarmaíochta. However, their most significant contribution to the field of Irish terminology is the focal.ie national Irish terminology database which was launched in 2006. This work, undertaken in cooperation with An Coiste Téarmaíochta, has resulted in a free online terminology database for Irish which is both comprehensive and user-friendly (see <http://www.focal.ie/Home.aspx>).

Conclusion

As alluded to in the introduction to this article, successful terminology planning implies the usage or ‘acceptance’ of the planned terms. Research on the terminological practices of the community is therefore needed in order to engage in such an evaluation. Ideally, such research would furnish terminology planners with data such as the terms known and used by the community and the attitudes, ideologies and preferences of the community regarding terminological development. This data could enable planners to engage in more effective terminology planning, planning which is cognisant of and amenable to the practices and ideologies of the community. It is suggested that a sociolinguistically oriented planning approach would result in increased acceptance of planned terms among the language community.

Literatur

- [1] Kewley Draskau, M. J. (2001): The Sociolinguistics of Terminology, with especial reference to Less Widely-Used and Revitalised Languages. In: *Language and Society on the Threshold of the New Millennium: Results and Prospects*, Academy of Science, Moscow, Russia, October 23-26, 2001, <http://dbweb.liv.ac.uk/manninagh/sm/papers/jenniferk-d.pdf> (accessed 02/12/04).
- [2] Ní Ghearáin, H. (2007): The Irish language and the law: some status and corpus issues. In: *Cambrian Law Review* Vol. 38, 1-38.
- [3] Ó Gaora, P. (1997): Ceart na teanga agus riachtanais na hiriseoireachta. In: Máirín Nic Eoin & Liam Mac Mathúna (ed.): *Ar Thóir an Fhocail Chruinn*. Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 10-13.
- [4] Ó Floinn, T. (1981): Scéal na Téarmaíochta sa Chóras Oideachais. In: *Teangeolas* 12: 7-15.
- [5] Ó Ruairc, M. (1997): *Aistrigh go Gaeilge: Treoirleabhar*. Baile Átha Cliath: Cois Life Teoranta.

Helena Ní Ghearáin

is a Ph.D. student of Sociolinguistics at the University of Limerick and a Scholar of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Her thesis on Irish terminology planning includes fieldwork on the usage of planned terms and attitudes towards official terminology planning.



Kontaktadresse

Helena Ní Ghearáin,
Centre for Applied Language Studies,
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies
University of Limerick
Helena.NiGhearin@ul.ie