

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: 26		
Title of case study: Rediscovering Ireland's Past in Words		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Gregory Toner Sharon Arbuthnot	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Irish Research Fellow	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2011-date 2011-2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact The <i>Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> is a historical dictionary that reveals the development of the language over a millennium. This online dictionary has enabled researchers, archivists, journalists, students and the public to engage with the historical language in innovative, non-linear ways, and its rich content offers unique and surprising insights into the worldview of the people of medieval Ireland. The Dictionary has had 200,000 unique users over the last five years with nearly 3,400,000 million page views and has a truly global reach. An ancillary publication aimed at a non-academic audience, <i>A history of Ireland in 100 words</i> (2019), has sold over 6,000 copies in hardback and was nominated for the Irish Book Awards.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research The <i>Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> (eDIL) is a fundamental resource for the study of medieval Gaelic. It is a historical dictionary covering the period c.700-c.1600. Each entry is accompanied by supporting citations (thousands in the most complex entries) which contain important historical and cultural information. In its original print format, the Dictionary was published in 23 separate fascicles between 1913 and 1976, running to over 2200 pages. It was digitised by Toner (as PI) in an AHRC-funded project at the University of Ulster (2003-2007).</p> <p>By 2007, the publication of new scholarly editions of texts, together with advances in our understanding of the medieval language, meant that the original Dictionary was in serious need of revision. Therefore, between 2007 and 2013, Toner led (as PI) an AHRC-funded project which revised the electronic Dictionary, incorporating insights from an exhaustive search of secondary material. In January 2011, Toner, with research fellows Bondarenko and Arbuthnot, moved to Queen's University Belfast (QUB) where the team undertook research into a further 1375 entries and edited the entire collection of over 4000 entries. As a result of this research, a new edition of the electronic Dictionary was published online in 2013 (3.1).</p> <p>Toner subsequently led (again as PI) a further five-year (2014-19) AHRC-funded project, this time with the aim of examining recent editions of book-length primary sources in order to further progress the range and quality of entries (3.2). This project produced a further 4000 revisions to the <i>Dictionary</i>, including hundreds of new entries, many for words which had been overlooked previously. Ní Mhaonaigh (University of Cambridge) also contributed as CI; Arbuthnot (at QUB) and Wodtko (at Cambridge) compiled draft entries and Theuerkauf replaced Wodtko during the final proofing and checking stages.</p>		

The *Electronic Dictionary* has now superseded the print version, and is an indispensable guide for scholars working on Gaelic literature and its language. By providing the most up-to-date scholarship to users in a readily searchable format, it has enabled research to be conducted on a more secure foundation than ever before, and has made the results of current research generally available to a wide range of related disciplines. The *Dictionary* is arguably the most frequently cited source in the discipline. Evidence of its impact on the field is demonstrated by the fact that the *Dictionary* has had nearly 3.4 million page views since November 2015 (see 5.1 below).

The generation of new or more precise definitions throughout the *Dictionary* and the flexibility offered by its search engine have been a catalyst for the examination of the worldview(s) encoded in the language and these facilities have enabled the tracing of concepts and meanings across otherwise unconnected texts.

Toner, together with Arbuthnot and Ní Mhaonaigh, researched the development and significance of a selection of words of broader social and linguistic interest. The results of this study were published in *A history of Ireland in 100 words* (2019) (3.3). This book builds on the contents of the *Dictionary* to provide a more detailed and sustained account of selected words in the Irish language relating to key concepts. This includes words and phrases used in religious, intellectual and political life in the Middle Ages, as well as fashion, technology and food. In particular, the book helped to shed light on previously neglected aspects of daily life during this period, by including terms related to everyday activities and objects, such as washing practices, dancing and clothing.

3. References to the research

1. Toner, G., Bondarenko, G., and Arbuthnot, S. *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (2013). Electronic output. <http://www.dil.ie/2013edition> (Submitted to REF 2014)
2. Toner, G., Ní Mhaonaigh, M., Arbuthnot, S., Wodtko, D., and Theuerkauf, M.-L., *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language 2019* (2019). Electronic output. <http://www.dil.ie> (Submitted to REF2021)
3. Arbuthnot, S., Ní Mhaonaigh, M. and Toner, G., *A history of Ireland in 100 words* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2019). ISBN-13: 978-1911479185. (Shortlisted for Best Irish Published Book in the Irish Book Awards 2019 sponsored by An Post).

Peer-reviewed research funding:

4. PI Toner: 'A supplement to the Dictionary of the Irish language'. AHRC AH/E002293/1 Value £807,000 (2007-13)
5. PI Toner: 'Text and Meaning: Contributions to a Revised Dictionary of Medieval Irish' AHRC AH/L007428/1. Value £787,000 (2014-19).
6. PI Toner: 'Dating of Medieval Texts through Regressive Analysis', Leverhulme Trust RPG-2015-089. Value £229,000 (2015-18).

4. Details of the impact

The impact arises from the research for the second and third editions of the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (2013, 2019), and the research for the book, *A History of Ireland in 100 Words* (2019). Research on the Dictionary has also reached beyond those engaged directly with its main outputs through media coverage, a travelling exhibition and a banner display in central locations in Dublin.

Impact on public understanding and knowledge

The *Dictionary* has achieved substantial reach well beyond the academic audience for which it was originally designed. Statistics gathered by Google Analytics show that, between November 2015 and December 2020, the *Dictionary* received more than 200,000 visitors (measured by new users). They conducted more than 500,000 sessions and visited just

under 3,400,000 million pages in total (measured by page views) (5.1). The data demonstrates that the *Dictionary's* reach is global. While 24% of users were from the Republic of Ireland and 15% came from the UK, 25% of visitors were from the United States. In addition, during the period in question, there were more than 4,000 visitors from each of the following six countries: Canada, Germany, India, France, Russia and Australia.

As the number of users during this period greatly surpassed the number of academics globally who specialise in medieval Gaelic studies, it is likely that the vast majority of these visitors were non-academic. This is confirmed by the findings from an online survey conducted by the research team in 2019 in which 63% of the 113 survey respondents identified themselves as 'non-academic', a term defined for the purposes of the survey as including students (5.2).

The survey findings also indicate that the *Dictionary* had been of great value to many visitors. Of the non-academic respondents, 81% reported that they had learned some words that they did not know before, while over half (54%) said that it had helped them with their work. Many respondents reported that they had gained new knowledge and insight. For example, 54% said that they had learned how the language changed over time, while 30% said that they had gained insight into how people used to live. One user from North America, describing themselves as 'Someone with a serious, however nonprofessional, interest in Celtic Studies' testified that they used the dictionary for 'everything from finding words in Old Irish to translating names and phrases in Irish myth.'

The survey data also suggests that the *Dictionary* inspired a large proportion of non-academic visitors to learn more about the Irish language and its history; 85% of non-academic respondents said they would like to find out more about words and terms used in Irish in the past. Nearly three-fifths (58%) said that they would like to learn some Old Irish because of their visit, while 37% that they would like to learn Modern Irish. For some, the impact of the *Dictionary* was transformative; one Irish respondent wrote 'It has connected me in a different way to how I am, what I know'.

Extensive press coverage followed the launch of the third edition of the *Dictionary* in August 2019 (3.2). The following Thursday, an article about the *Dictionary* appeared on *BBC News Online* (5.4) and was picked up by other news outlets, notably the *Times* (circulation 370,005), the *Sunday Times* (633,458), the *Daily Star* (282,723), and the *Irish Daily Star* (45,520) (5.5). This led to a spike of 1734 *Dictionary* users on the day of publication of the BBC item, 86% of whom were new users (5.1). Previously, in March 2020, an item featuring little known words from the *Dictionary* was published on the *Brainstorm* blog of Irish broadcaster, RTÉ. *Brainstorm* is designed to showcase academic research and ideas to the public. Two weeks after publication, the article still appeared among RTÉ's 'most read' items (5.3).

While the *Dictionary* is a scholarly work which has been embraced by adventurous lay people, *A history of Ireland in 100 words* (3.3) was written with the aim of presenting early Irish life through the words people used. Its publication, in October 2019, has contributed to an enhanced awareness and appreciation of early Irish language and society, and an increase in knowledge of early Ireland and its language. By December 2020, the book had sold more than 6,000 copies in hardback, a figure its publisher believes was adversely impacted by bookshop closures necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Six months after publication, it was listed on Amazon.co.uk as #1 among Irish Gaelic books (5.6). The book was shortlisted for Best Irish-Published Book in the high-profile Irish Book Awards 2019, sponsored by An Post (the Post Office service in Ireland) (5.7). It also featured as the cover story in the weekend magazine supplement for the *Irish Times* (5.8), Ireland's most prestigious mainstream newspaper (circulation 79,000). The three-page spread featured a selection of words illustrating daily life and encounters with foreign cultures in the Middle Ages which were described as 'old Irish words that encapsulate the history of our country'.

The book was enthusiastically reviewed. The poet and journalist Pól Ó Muirí praised the way each entry 'coaxes from the reader knowledge, wonder, laughter and gratitude', and demonstrates the 'living connection between the old and the new' (5.9). The well-known critic and translator, Michael Cronin, argued that the book demonstrates the need for the

foundation of a museum of the Irish language where he could 'take curious schoolchildren who want to know more about the immensity of that inheritance.' (5.10).

An exhibition, based on *100 Words* and curated by the research team, was launched on 4 March 2020 in Pearse Street Library, Dublin. It featured ten display panels based on entries in the book. Following its launch, the exhibition moved to Dublin City Council Civic Offices, where it was scheduled to be on display for three weeks (5.11). However, due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the imposition of related restrictions, the exhibition was open at the Civic Offices for just over a week.

The touring exhibition was booked to appear at Raheny Library (Dublin), Lexlcon (Dun Laoghaire), and the Linenhall Library (Belfast). The director of Lexlcon, Ireland's largest public library, estimates that nearly 36,000 visitors had an opportunity to see the exhibition during approximately six weeks in September and December 2020 when the library was open (5.12a). The exhibition opened for a short time in the Linenhall Library, Belfast; according to the Library's programme manager, it would have been seen by 20,000 visitors in normal circumstances but newly introduced restrictions meant the library was closed for all but 12 days of its scheduled run (1 October-27 November 2020) and it was seen by around 360 people (5.12b). The authors of the book gave online public talks, organised by Lexlcon and the Linenhall Library respectively. These talks coincided with the planned showings and each attracted an audience of more than 50 people. The exhibition prompted further media interest including a major item on the online channel, Meon Eile (5.12c).

Following the publication of the book, Dublin City Council supported a campaign featuring bilingual banners on lampposts in city-centre locations in the lead up to the city's St Patrick's week celebrations in March 2020 (5.13). Ten banners featuring words from *100 Words* were displayed in prime city-centre locations including O'Connell Street (outside the famous GPO building), Pearse Street, and Merrion Square (home to Government buildings, the National Gallery and the Natural History Museum). An associated Twitter competition, organised by the Royal Irish Academy, which asked users to submit their favourite word, attracted 235 entries in just under two weeks (5.14).

Educational impact on young people

Website user figures and survey results indicate that the *Dictionary* considerably enhanced the education and general knowledge of many school and higher education students. Of the non-academic respondents to our survey, 43% identified as school or university students, of whom 40% came from Ireland, 13% from continental Europe, and 23% from North America (5.2). Four out of every five students stated that they had visited the *Dictionary* website at least six times in the previous twelve months. The vast majority of student respondents (80%) reported that the *Dictionary* helped them with their work, with even more (85%) saying that they would like to find out more about the early language as a result of visiting the site. Nearly a third (30%) said that the site gave them an insight into how people used to live, while 77% expressed the desire to discover more about medieval Irish history and society.

Impact on researchers outside academia

Survey data indicates that a large number of relevant researchers from beyond academe were using the website and that the *Dictionary* was supporting their practice. A quarter described themselves as independent researchers, while 7% said that they were journalists, media producers, archivists, librarians or curators (5.2). One North American independent researcher wrote that they 'Found a lot of insight into Old Irish culture and ways of thinking about things'. Another independent researcher from the 'Rest of the World' declared that the dictionary 'is invaluable and at the core of everything I do', and that 'I use the dictionary to track concepts of the worldview that are associated with different words.'

Additional emergent international impact:

The research had an impact on the diplomatic engagement plans of Ireland's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade. In February 2020, the Department selected the research team to curate an exhibition on the history of the Irish language for Expo 2020, a major international exhibition which was to have taken place in Dubai during that year. However, the event was

postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Google Analytics (1 November 2015 – 31 December 2020). Screenshots of relevant data available. There were a total of 201,535 new users, 3,385,323 page views and 547,350 sessions during this period.
2. SurveyMonkey survey (data collated 13/8/2019; N=113). Data available in two Excel files. Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.
3. Arbuthnot, S. '[10 medieval Irish words we didn't know about before now](#)', 9 March 2020, *Brainstorm*, RTÉ.
4. McCann, N. '[Leprechaun "is not a native Irish word" new dictionary reveals](#)', 5 September 2019, *BBC News Online*.
5. *The Times* 06-09-2019; *Daily Star Online* (06-09-2019); *Irish Daily Star* (07-09-2019); *Daily Star* (07-09-2019); *The Sunday Times* (08-09-2019). Publication details and circulation available on file.
6. Ranking provided under Product Details at www.amazon.co.uk (accessed 21/5/20). Screenshot available. Book sales and impact of Covid-19 confirmed in an email, dated 11th January 2021, by the Senior Publications Assistant, Royal Irish Academy which published the book.
7. Irish Book Awards 2019, [Best Irish-Published Book Winner and Shortlist details](#).
8. *The Irish Times Magazine*, 9 November 2019, pp. 8-10. Copy available.
9. Pól Ó Muirí, 'Lóchrann de leabhar don Bhéarlóir agus don Ghaeilgeoir', tuairisc.ie, 5 February 2020 (...*sleachta a mheallann eolas, iontas, gáire agus buíochas as an léitheoir... léiríonn na focail bheaga seo an nasc beo idir sean agus nua*).
10. *The Irish Times Magazine*, 2 December 2019, p. 24. Copy available.
11. A History of Ireland in 10 Words Touring Exhibition: <https://www.ria.ie/history-ireland-10-words-touring-exhibition> (accessed 21/5/20).
12. a) Letter, dated 4 January 2021, from Senior Executive Librarian, Lexlcon, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin; b) Letter, undated, from Arts & Cultural Programmer, Linen Hall Library, Belfast. Lexlcon's Senior Executive Librarian said that the library had a total footfall of nearly 36,000 during that period. Hence, they had the opportunity to view the exhibition but it was not possible to count those who specifically saw the exhibition. c) Pádraig Mac Oitir, 'Stair na hÉireann i 100 focal', 20 October 2020, <https://www.meoneile.ie/cultur-agus-ealain/stair-na-heireann-i-100-focal-leabhar-agus-taispeantas>
13. Banner Campaign, Dublin City Centre: <https://www.ria.ie/history-ireland-100-words-lamp-post-banner-campaign>
14. #RIA100Words: in search of our favourite Irish words <https://www.ria.ie/ga/node/98646> and https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/100_words.pdf.