

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 26		
Title of case study: The Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL) and the <i>Gersum</i> Project: increasing awareness of linguistic and cultural heritage in Britain and Ireland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: April 2014–November 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sharon Arbuthnot Richard Dance Máire Ní Mhaonaigh Brittany Schorn	Project Research Associate Professor of Early English Professor of Celtic and Medieval Studies Project Research Associate	June 2020–present January 2001–present October 1995–present January 2016–October 2019 November 2019– present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2015–November 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This wide-ranging lexicographical work enables people to discover, explore and celebrate the varied and multicultural nature of the languages of Britain and Ireland. It increases speakers' understanding of and pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage, building on the intimate association between language and identity. The key impacts are: (1) informing the work of professional lexicographers; (2) increasing understanding and inspiring the general public about their language and its history; (3) improving the content of the primary and secondary school curriculum and supporting teachers in its effective delivery. The geographical focus of the <i>Gersum</i> Project is Northern England and the focus of the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL) is Ireland (and to a lesser extent Scotland).</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research conducted as part of the interlinked <i>Gersum</i> and eDIL projects investigates the origins, meaning and usage of words in Middle English and medieval Gaelic (the language of Ireland and much of Scotland in the medieval period). The research is linguistic and etymological, but its results are of historical and cultural significance, since knowing where words came from, what they meant and how they were used illuminates the history of earlier times.</p> <p>Scandinavian influence on British life, language and culture is informed by the research of the <i>Gersum</i> Project, a joint project between the Universities of Cambridge and Cardiff (2016–2019). The PI (Dance) and RA (Schorn) are based in Cambridge, and the Co-I (Pons-Sanz) in Cardiff. <i>Gersum</i> is the fullest survey ever undertaken of the Viking heritage of English (comprising about 600 common words in Standard English). It analyses Old Norse loanwords in a corpus of Middle English alliterative texts, including some of the great literary monuments of the English language, such as <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>. The project team applied an innovative, field-defining methodology developed by Richard Dance (in [R1] and [R3]), which enabled the <i>Gersum</i> team to reassess and classify the etymological evidence for every word in the corpus that had been identified or suggested as Norse-derived by previous scholars. The broader application of this methodology has facilitated new research by members of the team on the process of adaptation of Old Norse loans and the narrative technique of poets. <i>Gersum</i>'s findings were made publicly available through an online database (www.gersum.org) in late 2019 [R2]. The database (hosted by Sheffield's Digital Humanities Institute) contains detailed entries for 915 lexical items, fully searchable by form, meaning, distribution (regional and chronological) and etymological information, and linked to electronic texts of the poems analysed; it is a groundbreaking resource, of direct significance to anyone interested in English lexicography, etymology, semantics, dialectology, language contact, and medieval literary language. Follow-On AHRC Funding (2019–20) has supported the development of activities and resources for primary and secondary school teachers and pupils, and for cultural heritage institutions (especially the JORVIK Viking Centre).</p> <p>Research on eDIL took place as a joint AHRC project between Queen's University Belfast and Cambridge in 2014–19; the Co-I (Ní Mhaonaigh) and one Research Associate</p>		

(Wodtko, 2014–18; Theuerkauf 2018–19) were based in Cambridge, from where the project's impact activities were directed. Follow-On AHRC Funding (Cambridge, 2020–21, with Ní Mhaonaigh as PI and Arbuthnot as Researcher) is supporting further work in educational contexts and among the general public to deepen awareness of the role of words in cultural heritage. The result of the eDIL research was made available digitally in a much expanded, revised version of the electronic Dictionary of Medieval Irish in August 2019 (at www.dil.ie) [R4]. The Dictionary encompasses 1,000 years of Gaelic words and their meanings, from 600 to 1600 AD, focussing mainly on Ireland, but also covering parts of Scotland and the Isle of Man. The research involved analysis of more than 100 text editions published since the original print version of the Dictionary (1932–86), making c. 5000 changes to Dictionary entries as a result. Changes include: new words; new meanings for existing Dictionary entries; the addition of early attestations of words; as well as the deletion of incorrect meanings and ghost-words. The research is embedded in the published Dictionary and aspects of it are explored in the form of published articles (for example [R5]) and in a jointly authored book [R6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All references are peer-reviewed with the exception of the AHRC-funded database and dictionary entries under [R2] and [R4]. These were reviewed by the projects' Advisory Boards.

[R1] R. Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: An Etymological Survey* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), ISBN 978-1-1195-8002-7, [DOI](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781119580027)

[R2] *Gersum Project Database* [link](http://www.gersum.org) ed. R. Dance, S. Pons-Sanz and B. Schorn (2019).

[R3] R. Dance, 'The Horns of a Dilemma: Finding the Viking Influence on Medieval English Vocabulary', in *Textual Reception and Cultural Debate in Medieval English Studies*, ed. M. J. Esteve Ramos and J. R. Prado-Pérez (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), pp. 101–28. ISBN: 978-1527506527

[R4] 'Text and Meaning: Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language' (www.dil.ie), ed. G. Toner, M. Ní Mhaonaigh, S. Arbuthnot and D. Wodtko. This is accompanied by *A Companion to eDIL 2019: Significant Additions and Corrections* ed. G. Toner, M. Ní Mhaonaigh [link](http://www.dil.ie)

[R5] M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Verbal Play in Medieval Ireland', in *Il gioco nella società e nella cultura dell'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 20–26 aprile 2017*, 2 vols (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, 2018), vol. 2, pp. 605–24. ISBN: 978-8868091606

[R6] S. Arbuthnot, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and G. Toner, *A History of Ireland in 100 Words* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2019) (ISBN 978-1-911479-18-5).

Details of funding:

Gersum: Dance, *The Gersum Project: The Scandinavian Influence on English Vocabulary*, AHRC, January 2016 – October 2019, RG78616, GBP340,234; Follow-on Funding AHRC, G101809, GBP80,177; November 2019 – October 2020.

eDIL: Toner (PI), Ní Mhaonaigh (Co-I), *Text and Meaning: Contributions to a Revised Dictionary of Medieval Irish*, AHRC, April 2014 – August 2019, RG72296, GBP787,031 (Cambridge GBP326,785); Ní Mhaonaigh (PI), *Spreading the Words*, AHRC June 2020– April 2021 GL105267, GBP79,880.44

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impacts on lexicography professionals and dictionary users

The findings of both projects are of great significance to lexicographers working on dictionaries of English, Irish and Scots Gaelic. Lexicography professionals have drawn upon the words analysed by *Gersum* and eDIL to create new or revised dictionary entries dealing with the etymologies, meanings and broader histories of the words analysed by the projects. These beneficiaries have generated further impact as their work reaches a broad range of dictionary users and increases their understanding and engagement with the meaning and history of these words. The impact is ongoing as lexicographers continue to create and update entries drawing in part on the research findings of both projects.

The findings of *Gersum* are of direct relevance to commercial English lexicographical projects. The most significant of these is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), arguably the world's most important historical dictionary project. *Gersum* is collaborating closely with the OED

team via its Deputy Chief Editor (who is a member of *Gersum*'s advisory board) and his colleagues [E1]. The *OED*'s editorial team have been given immediate access to the project's findings for the 915 words analysed in the working database, which they are continuing to use when drafting entries for the ongoing third edition of *OED*. *OED* has consulted the *Gersum* database in drafting approx. 60 new entries so far, and will do so for 'dozens more words over the coming years' [E1]. The new, online edition of *OED* reaches a large readership through institutional subscriptions (in the HE, public and commercial sectors), through public libraries and individual subscriptions. *OED* has a wide user base, with sections devised to appeal to students and teachers, and its findings reach an even wider audience through broadcasts, print and online media, including a Twitter with over 200,000 followers [E2]. As *OED*'s Deputy Chief Editor remarks, 'outputs and results from the *Gersum* project will benefit *OED*'s worldwide audience of scholars, researchers, and general readers, now and for many years to come' [E1].

eDIL has analysed over 10,000 words and revised around 5,000 definitions. This research is a resource for other lexicographical projects, including the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, but particularly the Dictionary of Modern Irish, *Foclóir Stairiúil na Gaeilge*. The two teams co-operate closely: two eDIL researchers are on the Board of the modern Dictionary (Ní Mhaonaigh and Toner) and the outgoing Chair of the Modern Irish Dictionary project was a board member of eDIL. eDIL is described as 'a central part' of the Dictionary of Modern Irish, providing 'the starting point for many new entries' [E3]. Impact will continue to be generated in the longer term, as further Modern Irish entries are drafted. The Northern Ireland Place-names Project makes extensive use of eDIL in increasing awareness of linguistic and cultural heritage in Britain and Ireland through its research and engagement work, and researchers from the two projects have collaborated in a schools' workshop (Belfast, August 2019) and in events for the general public (February and July 2020) [E3].

Cultural impacts - engaging diverse audiences with research on their linguistic heritage.

eDIL and *Gersum* have hosted events in Britain and Ireland, which have changed the way audiences think about words. The events have inspired and informed schoolteachers, pupils and the general public about the histories of their languages, celebrating their diverse linguistic and cultural heritage and helping to redress prejudices about 'correctness', prestige and regionalism.

The *Gersum* project has had considerable reach at both national and local levels. First, it has introduced audiences to the significance of the Scandinavian element in the English language and its importance to Britain's multicultural heritage. Second, it has celebrated the local language of the North of England, and its role in some of the great literary monuments of the Middle Ages. The project has its own website (www.gersum.org) and a lively presence on social media (with 1,465 Twitter followers as of October 2020) [E4] (p4). The project has run a series of 19 successful and well-attended public events across Britain, at venues as diverse as the Jorvik Viking Festival in York (2016, audience of 100), the British Library (2016 and 2018, audiences of 75 and 250), the Museum of Cambridge History Festival (2017, audience of 60), Sutton Hoo (2017, day-long audience of 35), the Yorkshire Dialect Society (2017, audience of 60), the 'Bringing Vikings Back to the East Midlands' event in Nottingham (2018, audience of 187) and the annual Helen Thirza Addyman lecture at York (2018, audience of 40). As well as live audiences which filled the venues, accompanying media coverage has had a wider reach (including an interview on BBC Radio York and two interviews on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire) [E4] (p5-7), and an online podcast of the Nottingham talk has been viewed approximately 6,500 times on YouTube. Feedback from participants signals changes in attitudes and perceptions about northern dialects, and an increased understanding of and pride in these speakers' linguistic heritage. Responses include 'I feel like English is so much richer now and it will make me think about the words I am using' [E4] (p50) and 'I was also delighted about *gormless*, which is a word that I was brought up to know, in East Lancashire, and will no longer feel embarrassed about' [E4] (p26).

The eDIL project website engages the public with its research via posts on its Twitter account (5,011 followers, as of November 2020) and its 'Word of the Week' feature which forms part of its Facebook account (2,106 followers, as of November 2020) [E5] (p1-2). The feature presents interesting words, highlighting information such as earliest attestation, changes in meaning, foreign influence, and relation to everyday society. Statistics suggest that these are very widely read and discussed on Facebook and Twitter, exploring many aspects of the words

and their sources. For example, the Facebook entry for the word *Nathair*, meaning snake, reached over 13,000 people, was shared 102 times and received 43 comments, revealing the level of engagement with the research on social media [E5] (p8-9). Over the course of the project, 247 words were presented involving 2,001 tweets.

A book published by three eDIL researchers, *A History of Ireland in 100 Words* (Arbuthnot, Ní Mhaonaigh and Toner; 2019), has had profound and significant cultural impact, particularly in Ireland [E6]. The volume, described by critics as “engaging, informative and illuminating” [E7] (p18-20), provides interesting, often quirky, snapshots of medieval Irish life through 100 selected words from eDIL. Talks presenting these words to diverse audiences were given by Ní Mhaonaigh and Arbuthnot across Britain and Ireland between 2018 and 2020. Extensive media coverage accompanied the publication of the volume in October 2019, including a cover feature and three-page spread in the *Irish Times* Saturday magazine [E7] (p2-6). It reached no. 8 on the list of best-selling books in a central Dublin bookshop [E7] (p27) and went to a second print-run after around three weeks. It was an *Irish Times* ‘Book of the Day’ [E7] (p7) and was shortlisted for an Irish Book Award (for the best Irish-published book of the year) [E7] (p8-14). Press reviews underline the book’s significance and highlight: (i) its conveying of knowledge of their inheritance to schoolchildren and others, encouraging curators of museums and interpretative centres to make it central to exhibitions [E7] (p18-20); (ii) its capacity to stimulate new poems [E7] (p25); its prompting of people to think differently about well-known sports and the concept of the future itself [E7] (p15-17). Ten of the book’s words featured in a banner campaign sponsored by Dublin City Council in March 2020 and were displayed prominently on Dublin City’s streets, prompting much social media interest [E7] (p28-29). This was accompanied by a mobile exhibition which was transferred online during the pandemic, but which reopened in public in Dublin and Belfast in Autumn 2020 [E7] (p30-32). A podcast series on the history of Irish words, *Spreading the Words* was launched by Arbuthnot and Ní Mhaonaigh in Autumn 2020 in conjunction with the Museum of Literature Ireland [E7] (p32-38).

Educational impacts - informing the delivery and content of the school curriculum

Both the eDIL and Gersum projects have helped to develop research-based resources for schools, provided training for educators and engaged with teachers to help them deliver the curriculum effectively. These activities are directly informing and influencing the content and delivery of schools’ educational provision.

eDIL has contributed significantly to teacher development and learning outcomes in classrooms. The research provides a unique insight into aspects of life in an extended historical era, since its account of how words were used and changed revealed how people lived. The history encapsulated in eDIL is relevant to particular subjects taught in schools throughout Ireland and Britain (Scots Gaelic, as well as GCSE and A-level History modules). By engaging with teachers in a series of workshops and meetings (in Cork, Belfast and Dublin, 2018–19) and subsequently online, the project team have sought their ideas and input into the development of resources for use in schools, drawing on the wealth of information in eDIL. The resulting outputs include 10 classroom packages on themes which form part of the curriculum of secondary schools as well as material for topics for use in Classroom-based Assessments (Republic of Ireland) and Student Project Qualifications (UK). Some of this material has been translated for use in Irish-medium schools and the feedback from teachers has been very positive. Comments revealed how useful the resources are for introducing etymology to school pupils and for teaching them about the meaning of place-name elements and the cultural significance of words. Teachers who were consulted about the resources expressed the impact they would have on their own educational practice: “I really liked the units and I can see myself using them in September” (p4) [E8] and “this will really engage the students as it is aspects of life in early Ireland that they would not have been aware of” (p2) [E8].

The *Gersum* project’s Follow-on Funding phase (2019–20) has developed educational resources and activities for primary and secondary school teachers and pupils, on the cultural contexts of Anglo-Scandinavian England and the linguistic outcomes of the interactions between speakers of Old English and Old Norse. These objectives stem from school curriculum changes extending from A-level to Key Stages 2-4, as well as new impact opportunities arising from the *Gersum* Project’s success and public profile. This includes Anspear (formerly Pearson) Publishing’s request in 2016 for the *Gersum* Team to contribute to their ‘Anglo-Saxons’ and

'Vikings' apps, aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils. The Team's contributions included audio recordings of Old English and Old Norse texts by Dance and Schorn, preparation of basic contextual information on historical, cultural and linguistic matters related to Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian England and Viking Age Scandinavia, and a popular blog entry by Pons-Sanz [E9]. User statistics reflect the demand for such resources: as of July 2020, there have been more than 10,000 users of the apps from their launch in 2017 (The Vikings 5,123, The Anglo-Saxons 5,106), and they have brought in around GBP8,000 to Anspear as at July 2020. [E9]

In 2019–20, *Gersum* has collaborated closely with York Archaeological Trust's (YAT) high-profile JORVIK Viking Centre — a museum devoted specifically to the Scandinavian presence in Britain and Ireland, which welcomed over 420,000 visitors in the 12 months after the Centre's reopening in April 2017. The *Gersum* Project provided linguistic and cultural training to the Centre's new front-of-house staff via six video recordings (three lectures and three Q&A sessions), which the Centre is now using to train its staff on an ongoing basis. *Gersum* has helped to promote the Centre's physical and virtual sites through our activities, including a series of talks and interactive activities held at the YAT's Barley Hall site on 17 November 2019 as part of the 'Being Human' Festival. As the Head of Interpretation and Engagement, YAT remarks in his testimonial letter, collaboration with *Gersum* directly benefits JORVIK in a range of ways, including 'providing a new dimension in training and engagement through JORVIK for the local teaching community' and 'demonstrating to our audiences that JORVIK is engaging with and facilitating new academic research into the Viking period'. [E10]

In sum, both projects, independently and together have made a significant impact on the lexicographical and educational landscape of Britain and Ireland in terms of how modern dictionaries are produced and the past is taught. They have also raised awareness and changed understanding of aspects of the past to a significant degree in the minds of the general public, as indicated by the responses to events hosted and to popular publications.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[E1] Testimonial letter from Deputy Chief Editor, Oxford University Press, 09.12.2019.

[E2] Oxford English Dictionary online: Twitter [link](#); Facebook [link](#); OED website 'About' page [link](#)

[E3] eDIL lexicography impacts: Historical Dictionary of Modern Irish (*Foclóir Stairiúil na Gaeilge*) letter and Northern Irish Placenames Project evidence.

[E4] *Gersum* online and event feedback: webpage; podcast downloads; social media; events list including radio interviews [link](#); radio descriptions; event feedback: Jorvik Viking Festival, 16.02.2016; British Library, 07.11.2016; Cambridge Festival of Ideas, 26.10.2016; Museum of Cambridge, History Festival, 18.02.2017; The Letchworth Settlement, 04.04.2019; Royston Local History Society, 01.02.2018; Yorkshire Dialect Society and Yorkshire Archaeological & Historical Society, Leeds, 14.10.2017; Wuffings Study Day, Sutton Hoo, 22.04.2017.

[E5] eDIL web and social media information: Website [link](#); Twitter [link](#); Facebook [link](#) and selected Word of the Week discussions.

[E6] Testimonial from Managing Editor of the Royal Irish Academy 21.10.2020

[E7] *A History of Ireland in 100 Words* evidence: Cover feature and spread of *Irish Times* Magazine, Arbuthnot, Ní Mhaonaigh & Toner 09.11.2019; *Irish Times Book of the Day* 02.12.2019; Shortlisting for An Post Irish Book Awards 24.10.2019 [link](#); Titley, Comhar *Books of the Year 2019* 27.01.2020 [link](#); Cronin, *Irish Times*, *History that trips off the tongue*, 30.11.19; Grenham, *The Gloss*, *Writers Block with Catherine Ann Cullen*, 15.01.2020 [link](#); Hodges Figgis book shop; banner display social media evidence; mobile exhibition; podcast.

[E8] eDIL feedback: Email from teacher re. eDIL school resources 04.08.202 & 14.08.2020; Teachers' workshop in Belfast August 2019; Dublin Book Festival schools' workshop 15.11.2019; *Writing the Script* lecture at the Royal Irish Academy, 15.11.2019. Material for school pupil projects can be provided on request.

[E9] 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Vikings' apps and email with sales figures from Anspear 15.07.2020

[E10] Jorvik evidence: Testimonial from Head of Interpretation and Engagement, 03.12.2019; Jorvik 'about' page [link](#); visitor figures [link](#); training screenshot.