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Brian Ó Curnáin, *The Irish of Iorras Aithneach, County Galway*. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 2007. i–lviii + 1–2,706 pp., €200. Hb. ISBN 978-1-85500-204-3.

Even though I derive pleasure from reading books concerned with phonology and dialectology I must admit that this is one of the most intimidating books I have ever set myself to review. I hasten to add, however, that the initial feeling of apprehension is not due to the author's presentation nor to a lack of clarity in his argument, quite the contrary; it is simply due to the mind-boggling intricacy of the subject matter which he tackles. Indeed, the utter complexity that is revealed in this work is a result of an unblinking look at the sheer variety of competing forms contained in a linguistic conglomerate that would otherwise be accounted 'a system' and recognized as 'a naturally delimited dialect'. We shall return to this below when dealing with the author's avowed Labovian approach.

The peninsula of Iorras Aithneach in County Galway can be fitted into a diagonal quadrangle 12 km by 14 km wide. The peninsula is windswept and rocky, dominated by the rugged 354 m Cnoc Mordáin in the north-east, with the oikoumene snaking along the coastline and no dwelling lying further than 2 km from the nearest shore. It is the area which under the name Carna, its central 'agglomeration', has been renowned of yore – amongst Irish folklorists and aficionados of traditional Irish song alike – as the richest reservoir of the living Gaelic tradition. The strength of the native Irish language here can be superficially explained by its being the part of the coastal Gaeltacht furthest from the anglicizing influences of

Galway town (though, as so often in Ireland, the next peninsula to the west has long shifted to the use of English as the vernacular). Though there were numbers of Gaelic monoglots in this area within living memory the population was largely diglot in Gaelic and English by the time the research was begun in the 1980s with English increasingly intruding into the lives of its native inhabitants.¹

The only way to approach this work of over 2,500 densely written pages is to break it down into digestible chunks (I have indulged in some reordering of these chunks).

1. 16 pages: Introduction, methodology and sources (I.35–50);
2. 434 pages: Phonology (I.37–42, 67–495);
3. 1,344 pages: Morphology and syntax (I.496–657, II.659–1344, III. 1345–842);
4. 197 pages: Vocabulary (IV.2177–373);
5. 76 pages: Sample texts (IV.2,101–176) accompanied by an audio CD;
6. 8 pages: Dialectal context (I.46, 51–7);
7. 10 pages: Social variation (I.57–66);
8. 71 pages: Higher register (I.49–50; III.1843–911, 1997–9);
9. 144 pages: Loans (III.1912–2055);
10. 45 pages: Onomastics (III.2056–100).

Thus, the core of the work consists of some 2,345 pages of material and discussion with the remainder consisting of reference apparatus (henceforth I shall refer only to page numbers).²

The author, a native of Dublin, became immersed in the local language from the age of eleven onwards – we are in 1976 – and spent prolonged periods living and working with a local family in Maínis, south of Carna. His formal researches into the dialect began in 1982 when he started collecting vocabulary, in 1984 with the first phonetic transcriptions, and in 1987 with the first recordings. Following a first degree in French and German at University College Dublin and a travelling scholarship to Edinburgh and Amsterdam Universities where he studied phonetics he got a post as a researcher at the Dublin School of Celtic Studies in 1993. He then embarked upon an intense period of research on the dialect of Iorras

Aithneach and was awarded a doctorate for this work by his old university in 1996. The research continued as late as 2006 and is condensed in this book (43, 45, 48 & pers. comm.). The catalogue of speakers whose speech he has directly studied reaches 336 individuals born between 1852 and 1995 (a time depth of 143 years which is, by far, a record among dialect studies of any Celtic language).³ Throughout the work, most dialectal forms cited are ascribed to one of these individuals. Each speaker quoted is given a code based on their birth year, thus a speaker born in 1889 is noted as **889** whereas one in 1911 is noted **11** (to distinguish individuals with the same birth year these codes are followed by one or a few capital letters representing their names, thus **870B** represents Beairtle Guairim whilst **870C** represents Colm Ó Cúláin). This is an ingenious feature which immediately allows the reader to place the cited linguistic form in a temporal context.⁴

Ó Curnáin is a dialectologist of the Labovian school, interested in internal variables within a defined speech along with the dynamics of change and as a result of his research has a number of interesting remarks to make concerning variation within Iorras Aithneach Gaelic (46). He distinguishes the traditional speech of the earlier generations from the ‘nontraditional’ or ‘post-traditional’ speech of individuals born after 1960. The reader is nevertheless informed that the work focuses on the speech of those born before 1930 which leads to interrogations as to the status of the speech of those speakers born in the period 1930–60. Since 1995, when the main field work was completed, nontraditional speech is stated to be ‘far more in evidence’ (60) and is deserving of further study.⁵ Notwithstanding it being a generalization, the distinction between traditional and nontraditional is distinct enough for the author to the point that he is willing to foresee that around 2050 ‘there will be no fully traditional speakers left alive.’ He hypothesizes that the reasons for this marked change in speech have to do with rapid social change and the increasing intrusion of the media ‘especially since the 1960s and again more intensively since the 1990s’ (59). This has made

much of traditional adult speech irrelevant to many children; even if the adults are interacting within earshot of children, which they are of course to a far lesser degree with the weakening of neighbourly

intercourse, it may seem as background noise to the more stimulating television and other modern media and in some cases to the more relevant peer group speech. (59)

Whereas Ó Curnáin has repeatedly noticed that older siblings tend to have a greater number of older variants than their younger siblings (58), the specific phenomenon of grandparent transmission, in the case of grandchildren living in close proximity to their grandparents and how such ‘generation-jumping’ transmission might account for an extended survival of older variants amongst – perhaps unrepresentative – individuals, does not seem to have been developed as much as I suspect it could have been (even if the phenomenon of ‘anachronistic usage’ is mentioned on page 61, but in this case in relation to other studies rather than to this actual study). In obsolescing vernaculars – such as Breton – transmission amongst the ultimate native speakers can be solely through grandparents, but otherwise such ‘generation-jumping’ transmission might have to do more with particular personal circumstances and attitudes. In the case of Cardiganshire Welsh, which is not obsolescing much, I know of at least two instances in which individuals (born in the mid 1960s) have identified particularly with a grandparent or a grand-uncle and have carried out an ‘esthetic rebellion’ against their parents by adopting variants from the speech of the preceding generation and thus sounding more like old-fashioned farmers than their immediate age and background would imply.

Ó Curnáin goes as far as to discern language death, a process which has accelerated ‘especially since the 1980s’. Whilst Gaelic was still in 2000 the common language of children in two primary schools (Maínis, An Aird Thiar), the surrounding areas being considered the only ‘true Gaeltacht areas’, the status of the language was uncertain in one school (An Aird Mhór) and English-dominant in another three (Cill Chiaráin, Carna, Maíros). In 1994, only a third of the children in the area’s secondary school, near Carna, had Gaelic as their home language and the use of English was intruding strongly in Cill Chiaráin and Carna, not least due to incomers. Many children and teenagers were being brought up in English, and even if many others were still being brought up in the native language they were acquiring more English than Gaelic (36). This had

implications on the quality of the Gaelic of the remaining younger speakers:

Nontraditional peer groups tend to exert an influence of lowest common denominator on their members so that the most extreme instances of reduction or nontraditional usage become prominent. (59)

More specifically Ó Curnáin states that nontraditional speech typically regularizes, simplifies and reduces (59), and that as a phenomenon it ‘is comparable to that of a reduced, deficient or impaired second-generation language acquisition which is common in immigrant communities ... either of the so-called ethnic language or of the majority language or of both languages’ (60). Thus the language of the younger generations born since 1960 is an example of language attrition and Ó Curnáin recognizes some semi-speakers among his informants, a category which he defines after Dorian (36, 46). An interesting and intriguing conclusion of Ó Curnáin’s is that:

The first generation of post-traditional speech as a whole shows a greater range of variation than traditional speech, although nontraditional speech typically has less intraspeaker variation. (59–60)

Of course, the distinction between traditional and nontraditional varieties of the same dialect touches upon a general debate amongst linguists as to whether (apparently rapid) change in a particular speech is simply a function of normal evolution or a sign of the impending ‘death’ of that speech.⁶ There certainly is a common tendency amongst commentators – some of them being authors of studies – to exaggerate intragenerational differences in situations where a particular speech is receding before another. In a number of places, Ó Curnáin can give an example among the traditional speakers of what is otherwise a characteristic feature of nontraditional speech, for example the losing of the sandhi-induced rule by which a final verbal <-dh> [x] is changed to <-t> before pronouns and demonstratives beginning with <s->, e.g.

bheadh + *sé* **vex** + **je**: > *bheadh se* **vst je**. The non application of this rule is displayed by one of the earliest speakers born in 1875 (475) and even if it is quite untypical of that generation it surely is an example of a structural readjustment which was ‘pregnant’ within traditional speech until it was enabled to be ‘born’ as social ties slackened after the 1960s.

Ó Curnáin has found over 120 major or non-trivial variables⁷ within traditional speech and a further 20 within nontraditional speech (64) but these variables are not actually gathered *together* anywhere in the work.⁸ One can speculate why this is not so, perhaps a listing might give grist to the mill of mere mathematicians who could then simplistically misinterpret the numbers to their satisfaction. What is nevertheless interesting here is the implication that the amount of variation in the traditional speech of the monoglot and (quasi-)monoglot Gaelic society of Iorras Aithneach was far from being negligible, indeed the variation in the dialect is described by him as ‘multidimensional’ (46). Intriguingly – though without demonstrating it for Ioras Aithneach Gaelic – he suggests a scenario inspired by the quantitative work done on New Zealand English by Trudgill (1998) which holds that the period of ‘chaotic’ change represented by the earliest generation of nontraditional speakers will show even more variation than the subsequent generations as the speech focuses or settles on a new order (64). Ó Curnáin warns the reader of the bias he adopts for his study:

Given that nontraditional speech was not the main focus of my work and that nontraditional speech has become far more in evidence since 1995 when my main field-work was completed and that the term represents a wide spectrum of language use, much further research on this subject remains to be done. (60)

Ó Curnáin can demonstrate family-specific variants in every family and, interestingly, the connection of variants with age ‘often appears consistent within families only’ (60).

He sees the geolinguistic situation of the traditional Gaelic dialects of Conamara as constituting a relatively wide interstitial speech zone with differing degrees of admixture of northern and southern varieties of Irish. Furthermore he comments that: ‘This geolinguistic situation, combined with the sociological changes which are seismic in proportion, results in a

dialect with much variation and change' (46). In a wider perspective, we can speculate as to whether Irish Gaelic may prove to be a more accurate instrument in measuring contemporary intergenerational attrition than either Welsh or Breton since, in so many aspects, it is undeniably more complex than the latter two, e.g. the existence of cases, personal emphasizing clitics, twice as many consonantal distinctions, etc.

Ó Curnáin discusses the emphases of his work as well as its limitations (37). However, he does not point out clearly what for me is the major accomplishment of this work which is to establish and illustrate the complexity of variation, not to say contradictions in forms inherent in a traditional dialect of Gaelic.⁹ This – upon consideration – should not be a cause of surprise since competition between variant forms constitutes one of the factors which drives the evolution of language. Ó Curnáin is not satisfied with the traditional label 'free variation' for variation in speech and it is in the analysis of these variables – which would be otherwise be passed over as free variation – that one finds the pioneering novelty and potency of his work (48). In this, his work stands in marked contrast to another recently published monumental dialect description, that of the Welsh of Nantgarw by Ceinwen Thomas (1993). A difference in the situation of the two dialects described is that Welsh in Nantgarw, less than 15 km from Cardiff city centre, was on its last legs succumbing to the anglicizing urbanizing environment, a fact which had as a consequence that Thomas was restricted to the resources of a reduced number of speakers. However, what she – a native speaker of the dialect – did with these resources (unlike Dorian in a similarly restricted environment) was to attempt to rescue a picture of the traditional dialect in all its glory. This was an act of piety which informed her scholarship and it is probably not a coincidence that Thomas was an evangelical Christian and that her search for perfection in religion was matched by a search for perfection in her dialect. The dialect of Nantgarw is presented by her in a 'canonical' form with concessions to some obvious variants, but more usually with one variant preferred at the expense of another and no mention of such phenomena as English influence or competence reduction among weaker speakers.¹⁰ In the 1960s and the 1970s she directed a series of university theses on the obsolescing traditional Welsh dialects of south-eastern Wales. Forms that betrayed literary influence tended to be edited out in

this series, an approach which resulted in a ‘sanitized’ picture of how ‘pure’ these dialects had remained at the time of collection (pers. comm.). My own ongoing researches into the Welsh of Lampeter, a much more vital dialect than that of Nantgarw, agrees with the complexity and contradicting phenomena Ó Curnáin shows are inherent in the dialect of Iorras Aithneach and which, as I have said, one should expect in any living variety of speech.

Ó Curnáin explains the description by Tomás de Bhaldraithe (1945) of the Cois Fharráige dialect as ‘homogeneous’ as due to the smaller territory and fewer speakers investigated (46). Indeed, but I suspect that the difference between the heterogeneity of Iorras Aithneach and apparent homogeneity of Cois Fharráige has much to do, not only with the deeper temporal scope of Ó Curnáin’s study and the weaker intrusion of English in De Bhaldraithe’s time, but also with the different preoccupations of De Bhaldraithe and Ó Curnáin as researchers. In the area of Gaelic dialects, only Nancy Dorian (1971, 1981, 1994, 1996), Cathair Ó Dochartaigh (1982), Nancy Stenson (1991, 1993a, 1993b), have previously published research on intergenerational variation.¹¹ He himself points out to the reader, that this is an approach to dialect descriptions which Sommerfelt had advocated as long ago as 1941 (48).¹²

Ó Curnáin explains that he employed three major methods of collecting material: natural interaction in conversation, elicitation through direct queries, analysis of recorded material (45).¹³ Only in one exceptional instance did he ask a speaker to read Gaelic, a point which reminds me of what I view as an important lacuna in the background sociological description of the speakers: what was the state of literacy in Gaelic amongst the inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach? The general story in Ireland is clear enough, with the exception of a few wholly exceptional individuals the Gaelic-speaking population of the late nineteenth century was illiterate. This situation began to change with the valorization of the language from 1900 onwards and especially after its establishment as the language of primary education after 1922. The orthographies of Gaelic, which its speakers are likely to have come into contact during the period 1850 to 2000, range from the anglicized nineteenth-century catechisms, to the old standard (in Gaelic font) established at the beginning of the twentieth century, replaced after 1958 by the new standard (the modern-

day ‘Caighdeán’). For an outside observer there is a puzzling dichotomy in the existence of Irish-medium education since the 1920s and of the preponderance during most of the same period of English-language gravestones in even the strongest of Gaeltacht areas. From this work the general reader is left with no way of knowing how much schooling the speakers of different generations may have had in their native language.¹⁴

Literary forms do not seem to have had much influence on traditional Iorras Aithneach Gaelic. In the absence of a widespread habit of reading Gaelic, traditional speech shows ‘a high degree of tolerance of most variation’, to which Ó Curnáin provides some instances (66). Nevertheless, there was a tendency for certain traditional speakers to produce more formal forms (accounted ‘correct’ or ‘older’) in elicitation than in speech – a tendency which, Ó Curnáin informs us, was nevertheless weak due to ‘the absence of a clearly codified or recognized prestige norm’ (45).

Having condensed the background to Ó Curnáin’s study we may move to specific aspects of the descriptive part of the work (and it can only be a selection).

Ó Curnáin in this work has a basic inventory of 42 consonants and 22 vowels (a number which can vary according to the differing criteria employed, as we are shown, but I do not agree with the author – even if it pays to study them as bonded segments, just as with consonant clusters – that diphthongs and triphthongs should be analysed on the same level as phonemes thus giving 33 vowels) (67–8). The work generally does not deal with allophonic phonology or with phonotactics (37) but there is an extensive chapter covering sandhi phenomena and collocational conditioning (434–95). A refreshing innovation – usually not found outside reviews – is that Ó Curnáin is willing to assess and criticize the transcriptional efforts of predecessors in some detail: these being a number of mid-twentieth-century folklorists (44), Heinrich Wagner (416–33), recent descriptions of English loans (1912–13) and, especially, in a section entitled ‘Previous descriptions and inconsistencies’ which concerns the transcription of nasalization in a whole slew of previous works where he does not hesitate to point out linguists who have a deficient analysis of nasalization (325–33).¹⁵

And, indeed, Ó Curnáin pays a lot of attention to the feature of nasalization neglected in many of the previous descriptions of Connacht Gaelic which interpreted the nasalization heard as conditioned by a neighbouring nasal consonant (291–361). He demonstrates that nasalization does constitute a phonemic opposition in Iorras Aithneach where *mhí*, the lenited form of *mí*, is /vĩ:/ as opposed to *bhí* which is /vi:/ (326), but qualifies this by pointing out that the nasalization is ‘often weaker or more diffuse than the well-known nasalization of standard French’ (332) and talks of ‘the advanced state of the loss of phonemic nasalization in Cois Fharráige’ (326). Furthermore, he demonstrates, over the course of the hundred years spanning 1870–1970, that nasalization has ceased to be a consistent categorical phonemic feature of the dialect of Iorras Aithneach (295–6, 333–61). Many other phonological features are discussed in the section on phonology but here I would simply like to bring attention to the candid reflexive piece where the author discusses the evolution of his transcribing skills over the years, most especially concerning nasalization whose comprehensive understanding he had not yet reached before 2001, a factor that has left inconsistencies due to the under-representation of nasalization (48–9).

For clarity’s sake, Ó Curnáin regularly glosses phonetic transcriptions, whether individual words or sentences, with renditions into Irish orthography which take cognizance of dialectal features. Despite the complications involved, the Irish spelling of varied secondary sources is respected (40–2).

My own proclivities as well as restrictions of space that this review entails will lead me to dispense with commenting on the main piece of Ó Curnáin’s work: the 1,344 pages on morphology (with some attention to syntax). With regards to it, I shall just mention the adjectives impressive and exemplary.

The section on registers (49–50; 1843–911; 1997–9) concentrates on the higher register of the traditional dialect, based on the language of tales, verse (both songs and rhymes) and prayers. There is an interesting discussion as to whether a distinctive lower register exists, which tentatively concludes that it did to some extent in realizations used in comical contexts (1845). As I have said above, the question of the relationship between higher register and literacy is not developed – ‘will

not be discussed' (1844) – although the author does know of examples of tales or songs learnt from written material, often at second hand, through having heard them read aloud (1843). The sentence 'For the purposes of this study I have generally avoided material that seems heavily influenced by spelling or "school learning"' (1844) offers tantalizing prospects for further research regarding the interaction of twentieth-century Gaelic literacy promoted in the schools with the traditional speech. Here I will make some comparisons with Welsh and Breton. Literacy is so high amongst Welsh speakers that it would be harder to ignore the literary component that has lodged itself in the traditional vernacular when attempting to analyse any living dialects. For that reason in my forthcoming description of Lampeter Welsh, more attention will be paid to literary influence than in the work under scrutiny here. Nevertheless a definite traditional, non-literary register does exist in all Welsh-speaking areas and, with priorities of research in view, as with Ó Curnáin's research, it is fundamentally important to establish 'canonical' traditional forms of speech amongst older speakers before attempting to chart the growing influence of literacy and anglicization. The situation of Breton is more akin to that of Gaelic in Ireland. Indeed the degree of literacy is as low or even less in my own central Breton dialect than it is in Conamara Gaelic. Even so there did exist literary intrusions that had filtered down to the everyday speech. Examples of higher register certainly existed when addressing priests for example and most clearly in song where the accentuation is at odds with that of the vernacular.¹⁶

There are some specific features of pronunciation restricted to song in Iorras Aithneach, well known to enthusiasts of sean nós singing, for which the district is so famous, including the intrusion of non-organic nasal consonants. The increasing nasalization associated with song is discussed and illustrated by songs from two speakers (1860–4, 2118–19).

The section on loans and language contact (1912–2055) concentrates on the more 'conservative' features derived from English which are common in the traditional speech. He points out that 'the range of pronunciations is by now so large that a complete description of the Hiberno-English of the area would be needed in order to incorporate the many possibilities.' (1912). Nevertheless, on occasion, he does note examples of anglicization amongst the nontraditional younger

generations, salient examples being English [ɹ] replacing the traditional [r] with speakers born since the 1970s and the greater use of a velarized [ɹ̠] amongst speakers who had spent some time in the USA (1912). In a preliminary general section he pays attention, amongst many other phenomena, to the diachronic aspect of loans attested synchronically, interference, the apparently needless repetition of phrase, gender differences, the effect of bilingual contexts on the greater use of loans (1912–28). Thereafter there are sustained accounts of phonology, stress, intrusion, morphology, mutations, etc.

The fifty pages dedicated to onomastics are divided between 27 pages on personal-names (2056–82) and 18 pages on place-names (2083–100). The section on place-names is simply an alphabetical list of place-names ‘noted more or less at random’ (2083) with a little addendum to illustrate the names of fields and is comparable to a number of studies of local toponymy though without the inclusion of precise locational references which is a matter of displeasure to toponymists and historians.¹⁷ In contrast, the section on personal-names constitutes an almost unique comprehensive description – as well as a model of analysis – of the naming tradition in a Gaelic-speaking area.¹⁸ Apart from the linguistic analysis (phonological reduction, inflection, morphology, number, syntax) of personal names, Ó Curnáin also describes the varied usages regarding the establishment and abbreviation of patronymic strings, membership of kin groups and the use of English versions of Gaelic surnames for individuals from the outside (even when they come from a neighbouring Gaelic-speaking area). This last phenomenon probably explains why varying degrees of anglicization are attested for the same name, e.g. *Mac Con Raoi* (2070). The whole is supplemented by lists of surnames, first names, appellations and nicknames as well as references to traditional Fenian heroes.

The differentiation between *mac* as a hereditary surname and in its lexical meaning as part of a patronymic string, i.e. ‘X son of Y son of Z’, is well thought out but the terminology used – respectively ‘patronymic’ (= surname) against ‘non-patronymic (i.e. not in the surname)’ – is likely to mislead as ‘patronymic’ is generally understood as being in opposition to hereditary surnaming systems (2056).¹⁹ Nevertheless, terminology aside, his research is a revelation in showing how and when – at least in

this district – the patronymic strings dropped 'ac (the reduced lenited form of *mac*). This occurred in the early nineteenth century when they were superseded by patronymic strings comprising only lenition of the genitive forms, i.e. 'X son of Y son Z' > 'X Y-lenited Z-lenited' (2057). Ó Curnáin's method has therefore succeeded in dating a process identical to that which occurred in Wales, albeit a little earlier, before about 1700, when *ab* (the reduced lenited form of *mab*) was dropped from patronymic strings; see Wmffre (2006: 160–4).

The sample texts (2101–76), accompanied by an audio CD, give a sample of 32 speakers, which helpfully cover each decade since the 1850s in a progressive sequence, from a speaker born in 1852 to two born in 1990. Apart from containing his own findings, the vocabulary (2177–373) is intended as a supplement and a correction to previously published vocabularies by De Bhaldraithe (1985) and Hartmann (1996).

Ó Curnáin's preoccupations are clear: once a variable in speech has been noticed it is worth establishing whether one of the variants is recessive and whether the other is expansive; whether one is older and the other more recent; and whether a real-time chronology can be established for the change from the one variant to the other through an apparent-time study of its incidence amongst different age cohorts (such a scenario being, of course, more complicated whenever there are more than two variants).²⁰ This attention to the relationship between variants in the same speech is one of the fundamental bases of dynamic synchronic descriptions advocated by the functional school of linguistics whose initiator was André Martinet. And whilst it is not an important omission for the purposes of the work he has set himself, it is worth mentioning Martinet in passing, for even if it is clear that, in his linguistic methodology, Ó Curnáin is directly inspired by the work of William Labov, we should keep in mind that Labov was a 1964 PhD student of Uriel Weinreich, who was in turn a 1951 PhD student of Martinet (all at Columbia University, New York). Martinet was very much interested in the extent of variants in any given speech. Imprisoned in Germany after the fall of France, he collected data on the pronunciation of French officers in 1941 which was published in his 1945 *La prononciation du français contemporain*. By showing the extent of variation in individual pronunciations, this study shattered the long-cherished conviction that

there existed one correct pronunciation common to all well-educated Frenchmen – excepting persons from the Midi – a misleading belief that had reinforced the idea that French, above all other languages, was an exceptional instrument of reason, logic and *clarté*.

But even Martinet had antecedents and it is, I think, also worth the while to bring Father Pierre-Jean Rousselot (1846–1924) to the attention of the reader. This pioneering French phonetician authored the first scientific description which established beyond doubt – and in detail – the existence of linguistic variables even within a single family (his own), in the principal and secondary theses of his doctorate (respectively: ‘Les Modifications phonétiques du langage étudiées dans le patois d’une famille de Cellefrouin (Charente)’ and ‘De vocabulorum congruentia in rustico Cellae Fruini sermone’) submitted and accepted at the Sorbonne in 1891–2. His findings were some of the first which substantiated – through direct examination of actual samples of observable speech in a community – Hugo Schuchardt’s contention in 1885 that the model dominant at that time of absolute regularity in language change, championed by the so-called ‘Junggrammatiker’ or Neogrammarian school of comparativists, was simply untenable under real observed conditions.²¹

Working in this august scholarly tradition, Ó Curnáin has not only wondered about variables and the relationship between variants but has methodically striven to investigate the geographical, temporal and social incidence of features which would suggest the place of each variant in the evolutionary history of the language. This involves quantitative analysis, and whilst he may disclaim any statistical robustness to his analysis, the corpus he has assembled in order to propose solutions and conclusions is nothing if not impressive (49).

On the first encounter, one is likely to be intimidated by this work and it is an indication of its scale that, for those desiring to learn the language seriously, I should recommend approaching the reference material on Conamara Irish in the following order: initially Ó Siadhail (1980), then for more detail De Bhaldraithe (1945, 1953), and finally for even more detail to have recourse to Ó Curnáin (2007) (not forgetting, obviously, the need to listen to native speakers, whether through recordings or through personal interaction). The dialects of Munster and Ulster – not to say those of other Celtic languages – can only look with envy at the published

material available describing Conamara Gaelic. Whispered criticisms that the work contains too much detail for one publication are simply the heretical bleatings of those whose powers of curiosity have dwindled to a pitiable apathy: as protracted as it is, Ó Curnáin's work contains no waste or superfluity. Science is indebted to the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies for having published a work which disseminates so much new knowledge, in its material, in its conclusions, as well as in its methodology. All the same, a pared-down version *de haute vulgarization* alleviated of the mass of 'raw' data would do much to disseminate the interesting conclusions found in every second page of this work amongst a much wider reach of users of Irish.

And, as if the material presented in this monumental, exemplary work was not overwhelming enough the author reminds us in places that 'a more comprehensive description' of the dialect remains yet to be done (37) and that 'a good deal of the material collected ... remains to be analysed' (45). We await any further work on the dialect by the author with both anticipation and trepidation.

Notes

1. Whilst the term 'diglot' is rarely found in English I use it alongside the commoner 'monoglot' and 'polyglot' (as nouns or adjectives) to create a useful distinction that can be contrasted with 'bilingual', 'unilingual' and 'multilingual'. The former class (with '-glot') is meant to refer to individual *ability* and *use* whereas the latter class (with '-lingual') is meant refer to the number of languages *current* in a given society or territory (which, of course, may consist of many, if not wholly of, monoglots). In this way the phenomenon of a diglot society can be distinguished from that of a bilingual society.
2. The reference apparatus is divided in the following way: 53 pages of contents (vi–lviii); 9 pages of abbreviations and symbols (3–11); 23 pages of speakers and location (abbreviations and sources) (11–34); 22 pages of bibliography (2671–92); 297 pages of indexes of words and names (2374–670); 5 pages of index of authors (2693–7); and 8 pages of photographs of speakers (2699–706).

3. I have come to understand the author's claim of 130 years time depth (47) as reflecting a time span running from 1850 to the 1980s which encompasses the birth dates of his focal group of informants, the 'traditional speakers'. Elsewhere (59), however, the focal group is said to be the speech of those born before 1930 – presumably the class of older traditional speakers.
4. The code is sometimes dispensed with when 'items ... show no significant or relevant speaker variation in a particular context' (43).
5. Since this review was completed, Ó Curnáin has published two articles dealing with the speech of the younger Irish-speaking generations in Conamara and further afield, Ó Curnáin (2009, 2012).
6. In Ó Curnáin's terminology, 'Modern Irish' refers specifically to the dominant normified variety commonly found throughout Ireland among non-native speakers who have learnt the language mainly through the education system.
7. Given as 'over one hundred substantial linguistic variables' (46).
8. Sections of text containing sustained treatments are: phonological variables (397–415, 1999); noun morphology (726–881); verbal morphology (1227–56, 2001); prepositional morphology (1383–8, 1427–37); interrogatives (1501–4); preverbal progressive marker *ag* (1547–8), mutations (1831–42). This is only a selection and an indication of the main areas where variation is discussed, reference to variant forms literally pepper the body of the work.
9. The nearest he comes is: 'Analysis of variables forms a significant part of this book' (48).
10. Space does not permit elaboration on this point, but to illustrate my contention I shall refer to an instance where Ceinwen Thomas (1993: 1.18–19) – and *not* P. W. Thomas as was implied by faulty editing in my own book (Wmffre 2003: 245–6) – recognized variation in her dialect of penultimate <y>, ascribing the realization [ə] to older speakers and /i/ to younger speakers (her vocabulary hesitates between listing forms under [ə] or /i/, and for this reason *cynddrwg* is duplicated under pages 159 and 260 of her second volume). However, other evidence concerning south-eastern Welsh has led me to strongly suspect that her interpretation may well have been incorrect and that /i/ was the most traditional realization for penultimate <y> in those dialects, including her own, though it was

being replaced by [ə] even in the most traditional of south-eastern dialects recorded in the twentieth century (Wmffre 2003: 244–6). Thomas's research into the dialect began in the 1950s as part of a larger project initiated by Griffith John Williams, Cardiff University professor of Welsh, whose intention was to preserve a record of the disappearing traditional Welsh dialects of industrial south-east Wales, 'rescue dialectology, one might say. As I also suspect in connection with De Bhaldraithe's work on Conamara Irish (1945, 1953), since her data was collected long before its publication in 1993, she did not have to contend much with the increasing intensity of modern determinants of anglicization which followed the 1960s, e.g. television, increasing mobility, etc.

11. Gearóid Ó Domagáin was awarded a PhD in 2009 by the University of Ulster (Coleraine) for a thesis entitled 'Imíonn focail le gaoth: taifeach ar athrú agus ar mhalartú teanga i nGort an Choirce', which studies intergenerational differences in the Gaelic of Gort an Choirce, Co. Donegal (syntax, cases, the copula, and vocabulary).
12. Siobhán Ní Laoire (2000) has studied stylistic and register variation between Galway and television Irish whilst William Lamb (2003, 2008) has studied register variation for contemporary Uist Gaelic, though with no age control, a deficiency he ascribed to imposed time constraints on his study and one which he regretted (Lamb 2008: 22).
13. Aware of the danger inherent in a less than natural conversational environment, Ó Curnáin adds 'q' following speaker code if form was had as result of a query (45).
14. A short mention of the relationship of written material to some oral performances, whether tales or songs (1843–4) does not really address this issue to satisfaction. Elsewhere, however, Ó Curnáin does mention some '(post-revival)' literary influences such as the fact that schoolteachers are particularly likely to adopt such literary influences (1999), and that such influences intrude into the speech of females born in the 1950s whereas only later in the speech of males, those born in the 1960s (1996–2001). This is a gender difference that suggests of greater sensitivity of females to outside norms and a gender-divergence which Ó Curnáin judges to constitute an innovation vis-à-vis nontraditional

- speech, i.e. a determinant of variation which did not exist in traditional speech (62–3).
15. Readers may remember Ó Curnáin's (1999) sustained criticism of the transcriptions in another work on Iorras Aithneach Gaelic (Hartmann 1996), a composite effort by a number of individuals edited by Ruairí Ó hUiginn (Hartmann 1996: 137).
 16. The most substantial study of variation in a Breton dialect is Favereau (1984).
 17. Comparable local studies of Gaelic toponymy are listed at the bottom of (2083) though some exemplary works by An Cumann Logainmneacha (1975) and Breandán Ó Ciobháin (1978–85) are overlooked; perhaps because they did not concern Connacht.
 18. The only comparable work is that of Robin Fox (1963, 1978) on the names of the Toraigh islanders of County Donegal.
 19. Later, Ó Curnáin describes the patronymic strings as 'genealogical cognomina' (2070) which at least allows that some of these 'patronymic' strings have a matronymic component.
 20. As nominalized adjectives, the term 'variant' is more specific and concrete than the term 'variable' which is more comprehensive and abstract, thus an established variable (which can be represented by any linguistic feature) may have any number of variants (which may be phonetic, lexical, syntactic or semantic).
 21. An eloquent appreciation of Rousselot's linguistic methodology was written by the then eminent sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1898: 65) in which Rousselot's method was held as a shining example for sociologists. Tarde's reputation was later to suffer as his renown was eclipsed by that of his more influential contemporary Émile Durkheim: so much so, in fact, that his status in sociological circles is nowadays contested. Nonetheless, he is credited with having inspired some influential developments in twentieth-century sociology: the urban sociologists of the Chicago school, Everett Rogers' 'diffusion of innovation' theory and Bruno Latour's 'actor-network' theory. So that readers can judge for themselves, I give my own translation of Tarde's 1898 piece on Rousselot's work here:

If one wants to make of sociology a truly experimental science and to imprint upon it the deepest stamp of precision, one must, I believe,

generalize – through the collaboration of many devoted observers – Father Rousselot’s method in what it consists of most essentially. Let us suppose that twenty, thirty, fifty sociologists, born in different regions of France or other countries were to compile, separately and with the greatest attention and detail possible, the array of small transformations of political nature, of economic nature, etc., which they were able to observe in their small town or native village, and in the first place in their own immediate environment. Let us suppose that instead of limiting themselves to generalizations, they note in detail the individual expressions of an increase or a decrease of religious faith or of political outlook, of morality or of immorality, of luxury, of comfort, of a modification of a political or a religious belief, that has appeared under their eyes since they reached the age of reasoning, initially in their own family and subsequently within their circle of friends. Let us suppose that they make efforts, like the distinguished linguist mentioned above, to follow up the individual source of small diminutive decreases, or increases, or transformations, of ideas and of tendencies, which have disseminated themselves from there to a certain number of people and which are revealed through imperceptible changes in speech, in gestures, in grooming and in sundry habits. Let us suppose that, and you will see that from an assemblage of similar eminently instructive monographs, one could not fail to extract the most important truths, those most useful to know, not only for the sociologist but also for the statesman. These narrative monographs would differ profoundly from descriptive monographs and would be enlightening in a completely different way. It is the social changes which must be caught, on the hoof and in detail, in order to understand social conditions, whereas the inverse procedure is not applicable. Whatever the number of reviews of social conditions in all the countries of the world that can be amassed, the law of their development does not appear therein, it disappears under the weight of the piled documents. But he who would know well, in precise detail, changes of habits concerning a few particular points, during ten years, in a single district, could not fail to find the general formula of social transformations, and, thence that of social groups, applicable in every country and in every era. It

would be good, for such research, to proceed by way of a questionnaire, initially very limited: one could ask, for example, in certain rural regions of Southern France, by whom and how was introduced and disseminated amongst the peasantry the habit of no longer greeting the comfortable landholders in their neighbourhood, or due to which influences do beliefs in witchcraft, werewolves, etc., begin to disappear.

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