

SNAPSHOT OR SIGNPOST?
THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN TADHG Ó NEACHTAIN'S
EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPTS

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0. Synopsis

Seán Ó Neachtain (c. 1640-1729) and his son Tadhg (c. 1671-c. 1752) were at the centre of an extensive circle of Gaelic scholars in the city of Dublin in the early part of the eighteenth century. Seán Ó Neachtain composed a broad range of creative literature. Although primarily written in Irish, his works include examples of Irish/English code-mixing as well as pieces composed entirely in English. His son, Tadhg Ó Neachtain, is credited with having written over 25 surviving manuscripts. He makes considerable use of English sources and of English itself in a number of these manuscripts, which are either pedagogical in nature, devoted to geography and history, or are characterised by frequent commonplace entries referring to contemporary events. This paper examines the interaction of the two languages in these manuscripts, exploring (1) the use of English language sources (textbooks and Dublin newspapers), (2) the content of the English portions of the manuscripts in question, and (3) the relationship of the English material to the Irish in the immediate compositional context. The paper seeks to assess whether the permeating bilingualism of these manuscripts is merely indicative of the contemporary socio-linguistic milieu in which the Ó Neachtains functioned, or can be regarded as harbinger of the subsequent community language change from Irish to English.

1. Introduction

At the outset I would like to situate this paper in the context of the progressive stages of 'communicative shift' advanced by Tom McArthur in his 1986 book entitled *Worlds of Reference. Lexicography, Learning and Language from the Clay Tablet to the Computer*. This offers a big-picture view of the ways in which humankind has communicated and transmitted information throughout the ages. McArthur (1986: 4-5) posits four major stages in the development of human interaction:

- a) advent of speech, which may have happened between 50,000 and 100,000 years ago
- b) writing, c. 5,000 years ago
- c) printing, c. 500 years ago
- d) computing and other media, c. 50 years ago

With regard to the latter category, I would prefer to speak of ‘electronic’ and push its genesis back to *c.* 100 years ago. But one can leave the quibbling about dates to one side, and acknowledge the compelling explanatory power of the general proposition, as inter-human communication evolved to overcome limitations of time, space, size and record management. By encoding sound waves in written symbols, writing introduced the possibility of an endless number of permanent records, individually created. Furthermore, it reified language, bestowing on it the possibility of existing independently of interlocutors who were physically present, freeing language from the constraints of time and space. With printing came the further possibility of the production of unlimited identical copies of a single work. These processes have been accelerated by the advent of the electronic media, which can recreate the sounds of speech as well as deal with the written word at a speed with which we are still coming to terms as individuals and as a society. Each successive development did not do away with the previous phenomenon or phenomena, but by introducing a new dimension, it triggered a realignment of the functions exercised by the various approaches to communication.

Nor did the move from one stage to another occur simultaneously in all languages, even in languages in close contact with one another. If we seek to apply the communicative phases of McArthur to Irish, we can speak of

- a) ancestral speech, *c.* 50,000 years ago
- b) writing, *ogham c.* AD 300, *viz.* 1,700 years ago
- c) printing, AD 1571, 430 years ago
- d) electronic media, sound recordings *c.* AD 1900, *i.e.* *c.* 100 years ago

Print came rather late to Irish, in 1571 as against *c.* 1455 for German, 1471 for English, 1474 for Polish, 1546 for Welsh and 1567 for Scottish Gaelic. The first book to be printed in Dublin was the *Book of Common Prayer*, in English, produced by Humphrey Powell in 1551 (Lennon 2006: 63). Socio-political circumstances saw to it that the embedding of print in Irish written culture was very fitful and protracted, and really didn't become firmly established until the onset of the Gaelic Revival Movement at the end of the nineteenth century. This meant too that newspapers and journals in Irish did not appear for quite some time, the first journal being *Bolg an tSolair*, published in Belfast in 1795 (Uí Chollatáin 2004: 25-7; 2008). The manuscript tradition of Irish, stretching back to *c.* AD 500 lived on until 1900 or so. The two-way relationship in Irish between manuscript and print (both operating alongside and within a vibrant oral culture and tradition) has become the object of increasingly intensive study in recent decades (Ó Ciosáin 1997; Ní Úrdail 2000; Ní Mhunghaile 2008, 2009). The manuscripts of Tadhg Ó Neachtain are particularly instructive as they represent a considerable development *vis-à-vis* the traditional role of scribal activity. And it is within this wider context that his use of English has to be understood.

Breandán Ó Buachalla (1991-92: 35) has noted that there are at least 25 manuscripts in existence which were written by Tadhg Ó Neachtain in the years from 1704 to 1752. Ó Buachalla draws attention to the significant differences between much of Ó Neachtain's work and that of other scribes. Unlike most other earlier and contemporary scribes who copied traditional material for patrons, Ó Neachtain wrote mainly for himself, and his manuscripts remained in his possession. His manuscripts include his own original verse compositions, translations of history, geography and devotional texts, and, most strikingly of all, contemporary news and commentary on current affairs. Some of these manuscripts are in the nature of commonplace books. They include NLI G 132 (Ní Shéaghdha 1977: 56-63), NLI G 135 (*ibid.*, 69-79),¹ RIA 24 P 41 (Ó Concheanainn 1970: 3611-28) and TCD 1361 (Abbott & Gwynn 1921: 192-9). In these manuscripts Tadhg Ó Neachtain often drew on Dublin newspapers such as *Harding's Dublin Impartial News Letter*, *Walsh's Weekly News-Letter*, *Faulkner's News Letter* and *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, all of which he mentions by name (Ó Buachalla 1991-2: 35; 1996: 372). The discussion in this paper also treats of NLI G 198 (Ní Shéaghdha 1979: 72-3) and KIL 20 (de Brún 1972: 59-63).

One of the features of the Ó Neachtain enterprise which stands out is the interaction with a circle, fraternity or brotherhood of scholars, which, for example, linked the evolving, traditional Gaelic scholarship with the library repository of Trinity College Dublin. Although it could not be explored in the context of this paper, it would seem that there is a *prima facie* case for drawing a parallel between this nexus of scholars and the contemporary phenomenon of club-forming intellectuals throughout western Europe at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, as described by Peter Burke in his work *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot*. In this Burke observes, "The eighteenth century was a great age for voluntary associations of many kinds, many of them devoted to the exchange of information and ideas", and he includes the founding of the Dublin Society for the Improvement of Husbandry in 1731 as one of three examples from the 'British Isles' (Burke 2000: 47).²

¹ This manuscript is also the source of the text discussed in Buttimer (1990) where the author insightfully explores the links between Ó Neachtain's account and contemporary newspaper evidence.

² Earlier the Dublin Philosophical Society, formed in 1683, under the leadership of William Molyneux, had 'three incarnations' until its final demise in 1709 and was "perhaps the most formal example of the connectedness of some elements of the Protestant elite with the wider European enlightenment project" (Twomey 2009: 56).

2. Code-mixing

It is important to stress at the outset that Tadhg Ó Neachtain's extant manuscripts are predominantly in Irish. However, the Irish material is complemented by other matter, both in English and Latin. Even in the six manuscripts being drawn on in this paper, Irish is predominant. Nonetheless, the challenge is to identify the dynamics of the relationship between English and Irish in these particular manuscripts.

In a number of publications I have examined the nature of the use of English in a number of literary works by the Ó Neachtains which contain Irish/English code-mixing (Mac Mathúna 2003, 2007, 2007a). These range from the 1706 *Cath Bearna Croise Brighde* of Seán Ó Neachtain, where English merely extends to one stanza and lends verisimilitude to the English-speaking faction from Fingal in North Dublin, to a poem addressed to one Fr Dempsy, then imprisoned in the Black Dog tavern (1708), which pokes light-hearted fun at the heavily anglicised Irish spoken by this middle-class cleric heralding from the midlands. By far the most ambitious creative encounter with English is that of *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléire*, in which a young boy professes to be barred from speaking Irish, but then proceeds to speak a kind of English which only someone learned in Irish could understand, as its punning assault on English is a forerunner of James Joyce and Myles na gCopaleen. However, *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléire* reflects an alertness not only to the creative potential of the spread of bilingualism in Leinster, but an awareness of the unfolding sociolinguistic scenario, whereby English speakers opted for a monoglot state. This is reaffirmed in a searingly insightful analysis of Tadhg's from the 1720s, which notes that the upper echelons of Gaelic society were abandoning Irish, but retaining their Catholic religion. This will be returned to later.

3. Books

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the public sphere in Dublin was lived almost exclusively through English. The native Irish polity had been utterly defeated as a result of three great conflicts in the 1600s. Penal laws were in place to ensure that the native Catholic population would be ground down. Nonetheless, perhaps some 25% of the population of Dublin in the early part of the eighteenth century were Irish speakers. It is part of their story which is being explored here.

Tadhg Ó Neachtain's engagement with the public sphere in Ireland and further afield, through the press and other printed works, is attested time and time again in the principal commonplace manuscripts mentioned above, as in other manuscripts of his. English may make a direct appearance, as, for example, when the only surviving broadsheet copy of an English-language elegy on 'On the Unfortunate, tho' much Lamented Death of James Cotter Esq., who was Executed at Cork on the 7th of May 1720 for Ravishing Elizabeth Squib a Quaker' is to be found inside one of the Irish-language manuscripts he wrote, namely the

Maynooth manuscript MN B 9 (Ó Buachalla 1996: 368-9). Rather more frequently, the English sources have been translated or adapted into Irish, e.g. from the Dublin daily newspapers. For instance, in 1724 Tadhg Ó Neachtain translated one of the penal laws (RIA 24 P 41: 286; Ó Buachalla 1996: 375). He reports on sermons delivered in Protestant churches, which alleged that Catholics intended to murder all the Protestants and English in the country (NLI G 132: 92, TCD 1361: 521; Ó Buachalla 1996: 376). He also provides the English text of a sermon given by a Franciscan brother called Bonaventura Ua Baoidhilleán on Passion Sunday, 1736, in response to a Protestant bishop who had preached in St Catherine's Church of Ireland church the same day. This sermon had resulted in a successful collection to provide schooling for Catholic orphans with the intention of getting them to renounce the ancestral Catholic religion (KIL 20: 219; Ó Buachalla 1996: 376). High politics was an ever-present concern of Tadhg Ó Neachtain's, evidenced time and again. For instance, he transcribes an English poem on the death of Charles I, introducing it with the words (also in English): *after the bloody murder of his sacred majesty of blessed memory, K. Charles the first* (NLI G 132: 27; Ó Buachalla 1996: 377). Both Tadhg and his father were school-teachers, and history remained a central interest of Tadhg's. For instance, he translated a history of Scotland, entitled 'Albuin', beginning with Mary Queen of Scots and tracing subsequent events down to 1724 (NLI G 198: 303-95; Ó Buachalla 1996: 377-8). This is contained in NLI G 198, a manuscript mainly written before 1729, which is a miscellany of geographical and historical works (Ní Shéaghda 1979: 72-3).

One of its texts focuses on Poland. Headed 'Poland', it includes some 12 pages of a history of this country, mainly relating to the seventeenth century (NLI G 198: 551-23; Ní Shéaghda 1979: 73). This is followed by a history of Hungary (NLI G 198: 523-50). This manuscript also contains a history of Turkey to 1683, in the form of a conversation between Seán Ó Neachtain and his son Tadhg. This is headed 'Turceadh' (its running title is 'Turceis') and begins:

Athair chátuidh an é an Turcach an táirdrigh is cumhachtuidh san chruinne? Is é go deimhin.

(NLI G 198: 551-609)

Esteemed father, is the Turk the most powerful high-king in the world? He is indeed.

Furthermore, this manuscript includes a geography of Canada, Newfoundland and New England (NLI G 198: 611-22), also written in the form of a conversation between Seán Ó Neachtain and his son Tadhg (Ní Shéaghda 1979: 73).

Yet another important work in this manuscript is *Eólas ar an Domhan* (NLI G 198: 1-154), a textbook on world geography, probably written about the year 1721, but certainly before 1729 (Ní Chléirigh 1944: vii). It was edited by

Meadhbh Ní Chléirigh, who points out that Ó Neachtain derived much of his information from *A Most Compleat Compendium of Geography* by Laurence Eachard (1691) and *Geography Anatomized* (1699?), although he added material of his own (or perhaps of his father, Seán) (Ní Chléirigh 1944: vii-ix). Written in the form of a dialogue between Tadhg and his father Seán, *Eólas ar an Domhan* also includes a description of Poland, from which we may quote the following, with English translation:³

POLAND (.i. SARMATIA)

Cā gné tíre í?

Funn coram aoibhin, saidhbhir a mianachuibh luaighe, stáin, airgid, etc., a n-arbhar is a ttorthuibh oile, ionnus go ngoirid gráinnseach na túatha dhi, 7 í áitighthe rē fuireann chródha chneasta fhiall bháidheamhuil dhílis.

(Ní Chléirigh 1944: 84)

POLAND (.i.e. SARMATIA)

What kind of country is it?

A pleasant, level land, rich in mines of lead, tin, silver, etc., in wheat and other crops, so that they call it the granary of the people, and it populated by a brave, kind, generous, sympathetic and faithful band.

4. Newspapers

The publication of newspapers spread to Dublin early in the eighteenth century. These were of course in English and were originally aimed at the Protestant and upper echelons of society. However, the picture was changing as early as 1717:

It appears that readers of the lower social strata were starting to subscribe in large numbers to the periodical press and, from 1716 or 1717 onwards, were beginning to make their needs known as subscribers and as advertisers.

(Munter 1967: 132)

One might assume that these Dublin papers would deal largely with local affairs, but this was not the case. These newspapers did not concern themselves exclusively, or even predominantly, with matters Irish. They paid considerable attention to international affairs, but of course were largely dependent on London as the source of their reports.⁴ Their range is indicated by the subtitle of *The Dublin Intelligence*, viz. 'A Full and Impartial Account of the Foreign and Domestic News' (Ó Buachalla 1996: 370) and *Whalley's News-Letter*,

³ This English translation and others below, accompanying the Irish originals, are by the present author.

⁴ Writing of the *Dublin Gazette*, *Dublin Courant*, *Dublin Intelligence* and *Flying Post* in 1707, Brendan Twomey (2009: 58) states: "Foreign and British news provided at least 75% of the copy and Irish news and advertisements/notices usually less than 25%".

‘Containing a Full and Particular Account of Foreign and Domestick News’ (6 November 1714). The accepted formula was for the bulk of the copy to be made up of news from London (the hub of the nation), and world news, that is, Continental and colonial, since “reporting anything further afield was considered rather exotic” (Munter 1967: 116). It was customary at the time to summarise the overall contents on the front page and the wide-ranging international concerns of these newspapers is illustrated for instance by the following extract from *Whalley’s News-Letter*, 13 June 1716 (Ó Buachalla 1996: 370-1), which, as it happens, includes a reference to Poland:

From Dantzick, Hamburg, The Hague and Paris of the King of Sweden’s Progress, his Continuance, and being Reinforced in Norway. The dismal State of Affairs in Poland. The Death of the Elector Palatine. The Miseries and Poverty of France. The Late Lord Bolingbroke’s being still in Paris, in disgrace with the Pretender. The Reducing of the Rebels in Scotland, and the Indightment Tryals and Conviction of several more of ’em at London, and his Friends. Recalling the British Seamen from Foreign Services. The Confinement of the Imperial Envoy by the Turks, and a Battle in Hungary with the Turks. The Names of the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates. The Disposition of the Pretender etc.

Tadhg translated material from these contemporary Dublin newspapers and entered it in his manuscripts. The subject matter tended to centre on (1) current affairs, political and social happenings in Ireland, usually in Dublin, (2) meteorological phenomena in Ireland and Britain and (3) international affairs, with particular attention being paid to the fortunes of the Stuarts as pretenders to the English throne. The commonplace manuscripts contain quite a number of explicit references to particular newspapers, as for instance in Section (a) of RIA 24 P 41, which contains translations from Hardings’ *Dublin News Letter*, with the following introductions:

Seon Harding na Nuadhuigheacht. Dia Máirt. Iún 23, 1724.

Iún, 13. Hurt Green a Sussecs a Sasana, timchioll a haondeug ar maidin do conacas na néultuibh ag cruinniughadh a gcion a chéile.

(24 P 41a: 74)

John Harding in his News. Tuesday. June 23, 1724.

June, 13. Hurt Green in Sussex in England, about eleven in the morning the clouds were seen gathering together.⁵

Eoin Harding ionna Nuadhuigheacht. Dia Sathuirn, Iuin an 11, 1724.

Yorc. Iún an 26. Ar mbeith do phriomheagluis na háites da aththogbhail

(24 P 41a: 74m)

⁵ Contains a description of hurricane.

John Harding in his News. Saturday, June the 11, 1724.
York. June the 26. As the cathedral of this place was being rebuilt.⁶

Section (c) of this manuscript has translation of a news item from Faulkner's *Dublin Journal*, headed:

1725. Bealt. II. Seorsa Falcner ionna Nuadhuigheacht. Leopal Ab: 25.
1725. May. II. George Faulkner in his News (On an apparition in the sky).
(24 P 41c: 207)

Breandán Ó Buachalla has shown that one news item has been translated (almost) 'word for word' from Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* (Ó Buachalla 1996: 380-1). This is an account an audience granted on 14 November 1725 by Pope Benedictus to the Pretender ("*don treas Seamus righ Sacson*", 'to James the third, king of the English') who was accompanied by his son ("*oighre an tSeamuis*", 'James's heir'):

His Holiness continues constant in his devotion, watchings and fastings and on all occasions seems sensible of the nothingness of this world; and tho' the clergy here, as well as in other parts, are wishing for a new conclave, yet his Holiness is in as good a state of health as can be expected for one who is upwards of 76 years of age... The Chevalier de St. George, his spouse and eldest son, had lately an audience of the Pope...

(*Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 18/12/1725)

Áth Cliath Dia Sathurn Dec. 18. 1725
Nuadhuigheacht

Róimh Nov. 14. Ní thochtann an Pápa Benedict oidhche nó lá ó throsca cráidhbhadh nó urnuighthe acht ag gnáithbhreathnughadh dísbegadh neamharthannuidh an tsaoghúil si; 7 gi beith dó corra 7 76 bliadhuin daois tug éisteacht bháidheamhuil don treas Séamus rígh Sacson bhí ar deoruigheacht san Róimh fon amso agus do theagasg é re briathraibh caoin agá aisge bheith foighideach a nannródhaibh, agus na dhiaighsin glacan oighre an tSeamuis suas idir a ghéaga re áilgeas cumainn agá bheannughadh agus agá rádh ris: 'Go ndéana an tigearna coidheagna codhchródha re hathair tú agus go dtugadh rialughadh cumann dísléacht agus cneastach do shinnsear dhuit' . . . Seorsa Falcnar an clodhuighthe.

(RIA 24 P 41: 221)

Other happenings from abroad which are considered worthy of mention in the same manuscript are translation of the King of Poland's farewell address to his daughter in 1725, headed: *Comhairla Stanislaus righ Poland da inghean*

⁶ Describes a discovery of undecomposed remains of a bishop.

Bainriaghan Francg ag ceillebhradh dóibh re ar oile Aug. 1725, ‘The advice of Stanislaus, king of Poland, to his daughter, queen of France, as they take leave of each other in Aug. 1725’ (RIA 24 P 41: 211), and translation of a news item describing the visit of a Persian plenipotentiary to the court of Peter the Great (RIA 24 P 41: 219).

Elsewhere, we get a mixture of second-hand reporting and first-hand diary-keeping of a rather cryptic nature of events which took place in Dublin:

1727. Jun. 19. Áth Cliath. Nuadhuidheacht ó Londuin a gcathair Osnaburg. Jun. 14. Fuair an chéad Seorsa rígh Sacson bás ionna príomhport Hannover go tobann is é anois 68 do bhliadhna 7 do fuagrath a mhac an dara Seorsa 'na rígh. An 20 lá annso bhí Tadhg Ua Neachtain, Uiliam Aeirs 7 fídhche eile mar aon riu idir Binn Éadair 7 Bulog nó Dalcaidh san muir ag iascaireacht 7 ag marbhadh éanlaith a noiléan Dalcaidh.

(TCD 1361: 524)

1727. June 19. Dublin. News from London in the city of Osnabruck. June 14. George the first, king of England, died suddenly in his main dwelling of Hannover in his 68th year and his son George the second was proclaimed king. On the 20th here Tadhg Ua Neachtain, Uiliam Aeirs and twenty others along with them were fishing in the sea between Howth and Bullock or Dalkey and killing birds in Dalkey island.⁷

More commonly we get entries such as the following, sometimes attributed to a particular paper, frequently not, so that it is difficult, if not impossible, in relation to Dublin events, to be certain as to whether Tadhg is retelling something he had read, or reporting at first-hand on what he had witnessed himself. RIA 24 P 41: 222 contains a translation of newspaper report of storms and flooding in Dublin: ‘Eight shipwrecks (with great loss of life) in the bay. Bodies washed up and despoiled’ and is dated (O.S. and N.S.) ‘Áth Clíath Dec. 31/Jan. 12’ [1725/6]. RIA 24 P 41: 223 contains reports of bad weather, shipwrecks, flood in Dublin and Cork, loss of harvest. It begins: *Dubhlinn Dec. 31 Jan. 1 Do batha 30 longa ar imlibh na mara so*, ‘Dublin Dec. 31 Jan. 1 30 ships were sunk on the edges of this sea.’

Be they attributed explicitly to a particular source or be it merely implicit in the content, the vast majority of Tadhg Ó Neachtain’s news items are versions in Irish of English language originals. This seems to be especially true for the years 1724 to 1747. Entries directly transcribed in English are usually quite late, with just one occurring in 1726, explicitly taken from *Faulkner’s Newsletter*: ‘Falkner’s news letter. 1726. Ap. 26. says that Dean Swift entering Chester wrote

⁷ The point being made here seems to be the opposite of pathetic fallacy, that is that the elements were out of sympathy with the fortunes of the House of Hanover; see the discussion in Ó Buachalla (1991-2: 49-50).

these verses with a diamond pencil on a pane of glass in a church there” (NLI G 132: 25). Otherwise they seem to date from 1738/9.

Ó Buachalla (1991-2: 59) provides us with Ó Neachtain’s interesting abridgment of the following excerpt from *The Dublin Journal* of 7 June 1726:

Dublin June 7th. This morning the following men were taken by two Tide Waiters, on the long strand and delivered into the custody of two sergeants and 24 men between 3 and 4 o’clock, this morning and now lie prisoners in the Castle. They had several things about them, as for a voyage viz. shirts, stockings, etc. A pistol was fir’d by some of ’em late last night, on each side of the water as a signal, by which they were suspected and apprehended. Their names are as follows

Brion Cavenoch Patrick Duggan, Piper
 Den Coul Patrick Kennion
 James Hand James Doyle
 John Hurly John French
 Mathew Duggan

It is intriguing to see how Ó Neachtain (who himself had no compunction about using *Naghten*, an anglicised form of his surname) provides Irish originals (or at least re-Gaelicised versions) of the names in a somewhat briefer rendering (which includes one Matha Brún, wanting from the English account):

1726 Iún 7. Do gabhadh ar chaladh Átha Cliath Brian Caomhánach, Donnchadh Ó Cothbhuidh, Séamus Ó Láimhe, Matha Brún, Eoin Hurleidh, Pádrúic Ó Dubhagán píobuire, Pádrúic Ó Cionán, Séamus Ó Dubhghaill, Eoin Frenc, Matha Ó Dubhagán tré a mbeidh ag dul tar sáile re cathaibh Gaoidhuil san bhFraingc do líona nó do mhéadughadh.

(NLI G 132: 115)

1726 June 7. Brian Caomhánach, Donnchadh Ó Cothbhuidh, Séamus Ó Láimhe, Matha Brún, Eoin Hurleidh, Pádrúic Ó Dubhagán píobuire, Pádrúic Ó Cionán, Séamus Ó Dubhghaill, Eoin Frenc and Matha Ó Dubhagán were arrested in the port of Dublin because they were about to go abroad to fill or to increase the Irish battalions in France.’

Ó Neachtain’s own testimony is particularly significant with regard to the bitter weather and subsequent famine of 1741:

1741 Tug cruatan ar an iomad ar feadh iomlán na hÉireann bás dfhagháil et go mórmhór san Mumhain 7 a gConnachtaibh, a gCorcadh amháin do feartadh a naonchlais 160 pearsaibh . . . a gConnacht . . . bhá an tinneas fiabhrasach codh ainspiadhantadh sin 7 codh coitcheannn go ndruidtuídh na toighthibh ionna mbí amhuil aimsir plághadh.

(NLI G 135: 28)

Hardship caused very many to die throughout all of Ireland, and especially in Munster and in Connacht, in Cork alone 160 people were buried in a single pit . . . in Connacht the fever sickness was so abnormal and so common that the houses in which it was were shut as in the time of plague.

Mar is feasach mé féin, do chonairc deighirc laothamhuil Gaill 7 Gaedhil do bhochtáin Átha Cliath 7 na gcríoch coimhneas óir tugadar go deontach ór 7 airgead, min 7 gual re cothughadh truagháin gan fhéachaint do Protastún ná Páipis acht do réir a chéile 7 tug feilmeoiribh cead sceachadh a gcloidheachadh do ghearra 7 do losgadh. Ó carrannacht os gach carrannacht.

(NLI G 135: 28)

As I myself know, who saw the daily charity of the English and the Irish to the poor of Dublin and the nearby districts for they willingly gave gold and silver, meal and coal to nourish the wretched without regard to whether he was Protestant or Papist but as they were and farmers allowed the bushes of their ditches to be cut and burned. O, charity above all charity.

As to language medium, entries directly transcribed from English (or composed by Tadhg himself in that language) are quite late, as mentioned already. RIA 24 P 41: 286 contains Irish translation of an act against Roman Catholic religion (*a naghaidh fás páparaibh*), including its date of proclamation (*1723/4 Ian. 18. Londuin*).

1738-9. Feb. 1. London.

There was taken at Preston ferry a monstrous fish, with four eyes, its head like a Jack, two arms like a child, pawed like a Bear, clawed like an Eagle, and tailed like an Eel, a crown on its nose, and the Creature six foot long.⁸

(TCD 1361: 557)

NLI G 135: 8 has a quotation in English from ‘Gowan in his Supplement August the 4th 1742 Wednesday’ about a groaning tree which could be heard for miles around, followed by other entries in English:

1743/4 Jan. about the 7 or eight of the new moon or the 9th or 10th of the month was seen in the county of Dublin a blazing star or comet with a tail like the rainbow . . . it continued a month or six weeks in the evening in the west and in morning in the east.

(NLI G 135: 8)

⁸ This creature was probably a seal.

1743/4 Feb. the 10th. The Roman clergy was taken up and imprisoned and two days before the French ships in the River Dub: was arrested...

(NLI G 135: 8).

1749 May 23 two suns was plainly seen (about 4 a clack in the morning) by those in Dublin.

(NLI G 132: 54-6)

1750 March the 31 a sample of seed...

(NLI G 135: 169)

In NLI G 135: 186, there are two medical recipes and an unfinished entry of "September Thursday 1752. The new stile commenced". There is even a reference to Bengal, India (NLI G 135: 19). Otherwise, a lot of the English material transcribed directly is literary in nature, typical pieces being notes in English on Chaucer followed by poems by Leland, Thomas Occleve, Jane Lidgate, Spenser, John Hardin, Robert Fabian, Robert of Glocester, Francis Quarlos, Robert Herick. Thomas Randolph (KIL 20: 169-76), B. Jonson's verses on the Countess of Pembroke (TCD 1361: 7). They can also be more popular in nature, e.g. a drinking song (English) in praise of October ale: "How void of ease / He spends his days" (TCD 1361: 4).

The interplay of the two languages, along with Latin, in the scientific sphere is also noteworthy, cf. KIL 20: 151-169, containing a glossary of plant and herb names, arranged alphabetically by Latin names, with corresponding name in English and Irish, apparently based on Threlkeld's *Synopsis stirpium hibernicarum alphabetice dispositarum...*, published in Dublin in 1727.

This demonstrates how aware Tadhg was of the works being published in Dublin, be it in English or Latin. Compare 'The Names in English, Irish, and Latin; of Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Reptiles, or Insects, which are known and propogated in Ireland. Alphabetically', arranged in three columns (English, Irish, Latin) (KIL 20: 221-36).

Evidence for the use of English by Catholics in Dublin is of particular interest, as giving an indication of the participants and context of language shift, and the timing thereof. KIL 20: 203-19 (dated Passion Sunday, 11 April 1736) contains English sermon delivered by Fr Bonra Boylan (Bonaventura Ua Baoidhilleán) in response to sermon delivered on same by Anglican bishop, as explained in Irish.

For all its involvement with newspapers and contemporary international affairs, the Ó Neachtain world-view continued to give high status to the noble genealogical status of the great, and it is in this context that we find another reference to Poland, namely in relation to Searlaus Euidird (born 1720) and his brother Éinrígh Benedict Euidird Alfreád Leuis Tomas (born 1725), described as *Clann Shéamuis an tagarach re Maria Clementina ingean Shéamuis Sobiesci Prionnsa i bPoland*, 'The children of James the pretender and Maria Clementina

daughter of James Sobieski Prince of Poland’ (RIA 24 P 41b: 127; cf. Ó Buachalla 1996: 377). However, the increasing normalisation of English is attested in its inclusion, even in the midst of an extended set of traditional genealogies as a contribution to the historical information being offered:

According to the book of Carrack ffoylid wherein all the tribes of each and singular of the Irenian race is inserted with their coats, crests and mottos, which Book was truly transcribed and corrected by the O Dineen.

(RIA 24 P 41b: 53, ‘On the family of the Callans’)

This is effectively an instance of code-mixing, the need for translation into Irish, even for the sake of homogeneity, is seen as superfluous and dispensed with.

5. Original compositions in English

Original compositions in English include the following: table of contents of the *Great Book of the College of Dublin, 1726*, followed by a corrected copy (TCD 1361: 1-2). The book seems to be the *Book of Ballymote* (now RIA 23 P 12), which would show that it was still here in 1726. TCD 1361: 13 (cf. 241) contains a letter of T. Ó Neachtain to Rev. F. Laigneach on the death of George O’Reachtagan, Feb. 1725, whose reply (in English, signed “Rev. F. Leynagh”) is to be found in TCD 1361: 15.

A satiric English verse composed to revile one master Swan, a Fingalian from north Co. Dublin and ardent opponent of the Pretender, who gave evidence in some case of treason, is the focus of the explanatory *mise-en-scène* in Irish. The verse plays on the avian connotation of the surname:

Among those owls of the night
Now a Swan tho’ not white,
An evidence that swore fast and loose.
But if birds of a feather
Do still flock together
We’ll find that Mr. Swan is a goose.

(TCD 1361: 22; Ó Buachalla 1996: 377)

In TCD 1361: 227, there is a note on the “large Irish Library” in the house of the Bernardins, called La Ferté, near Châlons-sur-Saône, “and the very large books of them chained to a table there, which are the books of Munster”.

The intrusion of English administrative influence can be seen in the terse recording of the passing of his own father Seán, to whom Tadhg was especially close: “1728-9 March ye 9th Sunday morning about 9 of ye clock my father John Naghten died” (TCD 1361: 249). However, the likelihood is that this entry would be presumed at the time to carry the appropriate gravitas of the higher linguistic register. When it came to dictionary making, English was the second, target,

language: “Rough draft of O’Neachtan’s *Irish-English Dictionary* (no. 1290)” (TCD 1361). The playful ability which Tadhg demonstrated in English probably indicates not only a willingness to explore the creative resources of his competence in that language, but an at-homeness in it too: “Thadey Neactans lamentation for his strayed meares... *Ar Isebel Nui Láirín bean Thaidhg Ui Neachtuin*” (NLI G 135: 128-9). Cf. “The Shepherds answer” (NLI G 135: 130-1) and also Irish interpretation of the Punic speech in Plautus’s *Poenulus* rendered into English (NLI G 135: 151-4).

6. Circle of friends/fraternity/brotherhood

All this activity was not undertaken in splendid isolation. *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn / dá raibhe rem rae i nDuibhlinn*, composed by Tadhg Ó Neachtain in 1728/9, celebrates a circle of some 26 Gaelic scholars active about Dublin at the time (O’Rahilly 1912-13). Furthermore, Alan Harrison has traced Tadhg Ó Neachtain’s friendship with Anthony Raymond, a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, who provided an important link which afforded the Ó Neachtain circle access to works from Trinity’s library. These included the Book of Ballymote, which Raymond borrowed from Trinity in 1719 and which Tadhg held on to after his death in 1726, it remaining in Tadhg’s possession until 1743 (Harrison 1988: 78-9; 1999: 95-9). Swift’s translation of ‘Pléaráca na Ruarcach’ [O’Rourke’s Revels], attributed to the Co. Cavan poet, Aodh Mac Gabhráin, whether he received assistance or not, is just one of many instances of the social divide being bridged by music and song.⁹ Nor does the evidence for intellectual contact have to be bilingual in nature. On the contrary, Breandán Ó Buachalla’s monumental study of the development of Jacobite ideology sources which are almost exclusively in Irish, shows just how *au fait* with the development of intellectual concepts of governance and authority in Western Europe the Irish-speaking intelligentsia were (Ó Buachalla 1996 *passim*).

7. Conclusion

The Ó Neachtain sources are comparatively abundant and rich, and allow the analyses of their intellectual and cultural engagement to be developed significantly in a number of areas. Tadhg Ó Neachtain clearly interacted with contemporary English language print publications, with the newspapers being produced in the Dublin of his day, and with books of various kinds, largely textbooks in the areas of history, geography and science, works of a didactic nature. These he incorporated into a rejuvenated Gaelic manuscript tradition, alongside the more traditional copying of earlier compositions or, indeed, additions to the corpus of Gaelic Irish literature, composed by and for himself, his father, their spouses and their circle of scholarly friends.

⁹ See Ó Háinle (1986) for a discussion of the general cultural context and references.

The resulting commonplace book manuscripts show that for some thirty years from the 1720s on, Tadhg translated English language news items of interest to himself and his acquaintances faithfully into Irish. If not rendered absolutely literally word for word, they nonetheless stayed quite close to the originals. The main subject matter contained in them relates to Irish, primarily Dublin-centred affairs, reflecting tensions between Catholics, Jacobites and the powers that be. Meteorological phenomena at home and abroad also interested Tadhg Ó Neachtain greatly. The fortunes of the Catholic clergy and the urban poor, each vulnerable in their own way, excited his attention and sympathy. Direct transcribing of news items in English actually takes place rather late, really only occurring on an extended basis from 1738/9 on, although Irish versions continue alongside them. International politics – including, as it happens the affairs of Poland – also figure prominently in the newspaper items which found their way into Tadhg’s manuscripts.

Tadhg Ó Neachtain’s close monitoring of the high politics and attendant activities of the public sphere was complemented by the transcription of a variety of other material from English. Many of these items were drawn from literary, didactic and genealogical sources. Tadhg’s manuscripts also include a number of original English pieces, some composed by himself. The facility which the Ó Neachtains display in English is underlined by the inclusion of a sermon by Bonaventura Ua Baoidhilleán and its outcome, and even a playful poem from Tadhg to his wife. An important passage from *Eólas ar an Domhan* (before 1728/9, actually published only in 1944) shows Ó Neachtain’s awareness of socio-cultural developments taking place about him and will help us, by way of conclusion, to address the question contained in the paper’s title. Ó Neachtain shows that he was quite aware that a language shift from Irish to English was taking place among the better off native Irish at the time. He states explicitly that the nobility were turning their backs on Irish, but were steadfast in their attachment to the Catholic religion. When broaching the subject he adverts to the traditional attachment of the Gaelic nobles to the Irish language, stressing the regard in which it had been held by all classes since olden times:

Mo-nuar anois ní bhfhuil aon do uaislibh Gaoidhilfhine nach bhfhuil ag séana a tteanguibh, ag reic a n-ainimionna ⁊ mórdháil an Ghaodhuil Ghlais ⁊ fhine an Mhíle úd do thriall chuguinn ón Spáinn faoi mhóir-scleó cródhacht’, fílidheacht’, ⁊ foghlúim. Agus ar bhfhás dóibh bhí meas ar an nGaothul, ’bhus ⁊ [t]hal[1], & is gach ball, mar theanga thíorramhuil líomhtha líonmhar bhríoghmhar ghrinn ghasta bhlasta bhinn, ⁊ sin rē míltibh bliadhuin...

As so uile is inmheasta go roibhe sí fo mheas mhór ag an rīgh mar áon ris an sclábhuidh; ⁊ anois do réir an bhíle as airde di, tráth ghearrthar fo a bhun é, is uaithmhíalta troime a leagan go mór nō an rosán bheag bhíos láimh ris a’ titalamh. Do éirge an riocht cēadna do uaisle Gaoidhil co maith rena tteangan.

(Ní Chléirigh 1944: 13)

Alas now there is no one of the nobility of the Gaelic people who is not denying their tongue(s), selling off their names and the pride of Gael Glas and the people of that Míle who journeyed to us from Spain under a great shade of bravery, poetry, and learning. And when they established themselves, Irish was respected, here and yonder, and in every place as a language of the soil, fluent, abundant, lively, precise, swift, tasty, sweet, and that for thousands of years up to now. . .

And from all this it may be appreciated that it was held in great esteem by the king as well as the labourer; and now it is as the tallest tree, when it is cut under its base, its felling is much more dreadful and heavier than the little shrubbery which is close to the ground. The same fate certainly befell the nobility of the Gaels as regards their language.

Tadhg maintained that the fate of the Irish and the Jewish people was different, in that the Jews had lost their religion and their native culture, whereas the Irish still had their religion:

Óir d'imigh a gcreideamh 7 a ndúthchas uatha, 7 gĩ gur imigh a ndúthchas ó chlanna Gaodhuil, tá a gcreideamh ar marthuinn acu.

(Ní Chléirigh 1944: 12-13)

For they lost their religion and their native culture, and although the descendants of Gael lost their native culture, they have still kept their religion alive.

Thus, there was a language shift under way from Irish to English among the native Irish in the Dublin of Tadhg Ó Neachtain's day. He and the other scholars may have accommodated to it, rather than spearheaded it. They were certainly well-equipped linguistically and intellectually either to confront it or to benefit from it. The role of English in Tadhg Ó Neachtain's work is probably both snapshot and signpost, although perhaps more a video-clip than a snapshot in relation to the depiction of contemporary events. Ó Neachtain's manuscripts show us not only what the general societal situation was in Dublin in the first half of the eighteenth century, but they reveal much of the internal dynamics of the Gaelic intellectual response to the exigencies of the time. Crucially, where Catholicism could draw on institutional support at home (and abroad) and was ideologically robust (after all, it was already conceptualised as an *-ism*), the attachment to Irish was more inchoate and diffuse and came to be overwhelmed by the universality of English in the administrative public sphere. With hindsight, the role of English in Tadhg Ó Neachtain's manuscripts did turn out to be a signpost, albeit a bilingual one, on a long and winding road, which is still being travelled.

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