

Building a Searchable Online Dictionary for Old Irish Textbooks

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Introduction

This poster describes the ongoing process of developing an Old Irish-English dictionary for learners, based on the vocabulary of E.G. Quin's *Old-Irish Workbook*. While there already exist online dictionaries of Old Irish (most notably the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language, or eDIL, containing ~35,000 entries covering Irish c.700-c.1700), they are not specifically tailored to introductory course materials. At the same time, all four introductory Old Irish courses examined included specialized glossaries to aid students with vocabulary acquisition. Digital dictionaries have been found to aid students in learning foreign languages, increasing their speed and comprehension of written texts relative to print dictionaries (Rahimi & Miri 2018, Boulton & De Cock 2017). Creating an online dictionary tailored to introductory Old Irish coursework is thus a helpful avenue for future students of the language.

Step 1: Data Collection

- As a first step, a 16-page PDF dictionary of the lesson vocabulary used in Quin's *Old-Irish Workbook* was scanned using optical character recognition (OCR) to convert it to text.
- Inconsistencies in the style of the entries and manual annotations within the PDF led to the necessity of manual correction for data entry.
- Data from the PDF was then entered into a spreadsheet in Google Sheets.

Step 2: Data Structuring

- Entries were divided into headwords, English translations, and 'grammar notes' (including part-of-speech and inflectional information).
- Vocabulary items were also marked based on their source, and an additional column was created to track the lessons in which they were introduced.

Step 3: Refining/Adding Data

- In this phase, entries targeting irregular inflections were merged with the headwords they referred to. Removing these excess entries massively reduced the number of entries (from over 1100 entries to about 700).
- The process of going through lessons to identify the first appearances of words also began. This involved cross-referencing each word in a chapter with the existing words in the dictionary.
- Cross-referencing words revealed missing lexical items, which were subsequently filled in, drawing from the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL).

Step 4: Building the Interface

- The dictionary web-app was built from scratch using R's Shiny package.
- The initial search function was complemented by the ability to search within specific parts of an entry and select vocabulary within certain lesson ranges.

Current Status

- The dictionary is currently available online as a Shiny web application. Although the project is not fully complete, all entries within the dictionary for Quin's workbook are present.
- There are 697 entries, each of which contains a headword, English translation, and 'grammatical notes' including various inflected forms that a student may encounter within the textbook.
- Lesson numbers of vocabulary items have been added to entries up to lesson 8 (~170 entries).

Further Aims

Future goals for the project include:

- providing **reference links** to the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL)
- fully implementing **sorting based on lessons** in which vocabulary items are introduced
- adding **etymological information** (where available) to entries
- cleaning up the display of orthographic variations within entries
- improving the display of **inflectional information** for dictionary entries
- adding **vocabularies from other textbooks** (including Stifter's *Sengoidelc* and Lehmann's *Introduction to Old Irish*)

References

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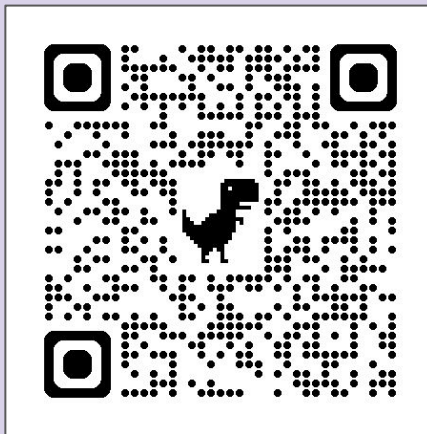
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https://antbur.shinyapps.io/old_irish/



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