Irish-Latin Code-switching in a Medieval Irish Commentary

by Nike Stam

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> Facilis. You take the cheese before it is too antiquum, without too much salis, and cut in cubes or sicut you like. And postea you put a bit of butierro or lardo to rechauffer over the embers. And in it you put two pieces of cheese, and when it becomes tenero, zucharum et cinnamon supra positurum du bis. And immediately take to table, because it must be ate caldo caldo.[2]

As a scholar of historical bilingualism, I am in the fortunate position that my topic may be introduced by quoting Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. In this quote, the monk Salvatore strings together numerous languages in his speech; we see that he switches between his native language, various dialects, and the Latin of the church. Perhaps, Umberto Eco realised, when writing the book, that such linguistic plurality was characteristic of medieval ecclesiastical culture, in which monasteries functioned as centres of learning and linguistic hubs. Most monks would learn Latin besides their native language from an early age and would thus, essentially, be raised bilingually. As a result, they might very well have mixed their languages in a way similar to that of Salvatore within their own communities or linguistic hubs.

This mixing of languages within a single utterance or text is called code-switching, which has often been examined from the perspective of speech. Studies on code-switching in speech find, for example, that it often has specific communicative functions in a conversation. Additionally, code-switching allows researchers to see what happens when grammars of different languages come into contact, as bilingual speakers have to navigate between two grammatical systems. As Eco's example suggests, contemporary speech is not the only medium in which code-switching may occur: as

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[1] Free download of the complete dissertation: Nike Stam, *A Typology of Code-switching in the Commentary to the Félire Óengusso* (Utrecht 2017), http://www.lotpublications.nl/a-typology-of-code-switching-in-the-commentary-to-the-f%C3%A9lire-%C3%B3engusso.

[2] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (London 1998), 220.

medieval monasteries are likely to have been characterised by bilingualism or even multilingualism, it is to be suspected that their written output shows signs of this.

Indeed, examining medieval sources from the perspective of code-switching has recently taken off as a fruitful angle of investigation.[3] Similarly, medieval sources from Ireland have been examined in this light since many of them are bilingual: prose narratives often contain phrases like *ut dixit* 'as he said' to introduce direct speech, poetry sometimes uses Latin words to complete the rhyme of metre of a couplet, and glosses frequently use both Latin and Irish to explain the text they accompany. The following gloss, for example, is taken from a commentary that accompanies the ninth-century Martyrology of Óengus - the *Félire Óengusso* in the manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B505 (R1). It explains the name of the Irish Saint Connadil in a pseudo-etymology, involving his mother adding an extra syllable to his original name Conna:

> **#0803b** CONADAIL CLI BUADACH connadil essa macc neirc hicon*n*achtaib .i. *con*na ise i*n*tai*n*m. **7tucc sua m***ate***r p***erpietatem additam*entu*m sill*ab*æ dil** .i. dil lem *con*na (f. 213r, l. 24-25)

> CONANDIL VICTORIOUS PRINCE Connadil of Ess Mac nEirc in Connacht, i.e. Conna, that is the name, **and his mother, out of love, joined the addition of the syllable** *dil* **'dear'** [to his name], i.e. dear is Conna to me.

The phrase describing this (in bold) uses an Irish verb (*tucc* 'joined') and a Latin subject (*sua mater*), object (*additamentum sillabae*), and adverbial phrase (*per pietatem*). Within the object phrase, another Irish word occurs: *dil* 'dear'. This gloss illustrates the highly bilingual nature of the commentary, which was the main reason for me to choose it as the corpus for my research into medieval Irish-Latin code-switching.

To provide a meaningful analysis of this type of language interaction, both from a communicative and grammatical perspective, I decided to use methodologies developed for spoken code-switching, like Pieter Muysken's typology of code-switching.[4] These frameworks allowed me to provide an overview of the different grammatical forms code-switching takes in the Commentary and the different functions it may have had in the text.

In general, it became clear that the preferred direction of code-switching was from Irish into Latin. This was no surprise, since Latin was the language that was held in

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[3] See, among many others, Herbert Schendl and Laura Wright, *Code-switching in Early English* (Boston 2011); Päivi Pahta, Janne Skaffari, and Laura Wright (eds), *Multilingual Practices in Language History: New Perspectives* (Berlin – New York planned for October 2017).

[4] Pieter Muysken, *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing* (Cambridge 2000); For the communicative analysis, I used a combination of theories dealing with diglossia, triggering, conversation analysis, and communication accomodation: Stam, *A Typology*, 381-426.

highest regard. Many switches consisted of inserted Latin fragments: short phrases or single words. Some of these Latin phrases appeared to be of a formulaic nature and seemed to have originated in the medieval *catena* tradition. They are often used to provide cross-references to other sources or to combine conflicting opinions on a text. These are phrases like *ut in proverbio dicitur* and *ut ferunt peritii*. Most of the language switches, however, consisted of what Muysken called alternation: longer fragments like clauses or long phrases. This type of code-switching has been linked to bilingualism in societies that are strongly diglossic, and thus suggests that the scribes compiling and writing the glosses preferred to use their two languages according to specific norms. Furthermore, the text contained many so-called visual diamorphs, or language-neutral elements. These elements could, for example, be abbreviations that may be read as both Irish and Latin. These language-neutral elements – comparable to homophonous diamorphs in speech – are known to trigger code-switching and were shown to do so in the commentary text as well.

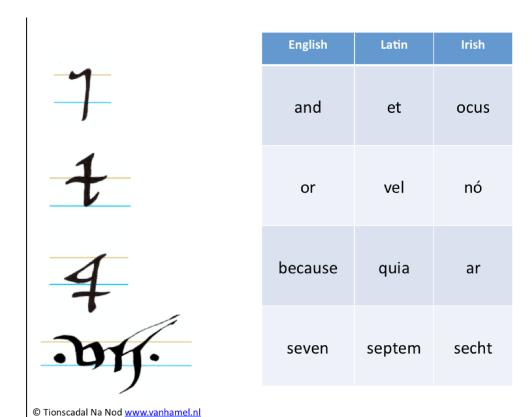| English	Latin	Irish
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Image: Visual Diamorphs

As for the communicative purpose of code-switching, an array of functions presented itself in the data: at a micro-level, code-switching may have been used to

highlight information or to structure the text. Accidental code-switching also seems to occur, especially around known triggers like visual diamorphs and names. At a macro-level, using both Irish and Latin in a text was probably used to forge and confirm a shared, learned identity among the monks.

The results of my analysis show that it is a fruitful exercise to apply theories developed for spoken code-switching to medieval, written sources, but I hope that it also shows the creativity and fluency of the scribes who created these bilingual texts: they give us a rare glimpse into a learned, bilingual community that could operate on a very high intellectual level in both their languages and did so with a healthy dose of playfulness and linguistic pride.