‘NOTHING’ OR ‘ANYTHING’: TERMS IN IRISH AND SCOTTISH GAELIC

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Abstract. This paper constitutes an analysis of those terms which supply the concepts ‘nothing’, ‘anything’, as employed in negative, interrogative or conditional statements in the Gaelic branch of Celtic. The study, based on data published in the *Linguistic atlas and survey of Irish dialects* (1958-69) and supplemented by a small number of additional sources, categorises the results into 2 main classes. One of these consists of inherited terms of diverse origins, such as pronominal and adjectival forms, while the other is based on human activity of various types, including the use of the senses, coinage and other measures, as well as movement and creativity generally. The terms in question may also be qualified by numerous adjectival or adverbial phrases – some quite striking – in the sense of ‘any, at all’. The picture which emerges serves to indicate the great range and variety of expression involved.

0.1. The concepts of ‘nothing’, or ‘anything’, as employed in negative, interrogative or conditional statements, feature in a number of answers to the 1,180 item questionnaire posed for Irish and Scottish Gaelic dialects in the 1950-60s by the late Professor Heinrich Wagner. These data were published (together with data excerpted from an earlier source for the language of the Isle of Man (Manx) in vols ii-iv of his *Linguistic atlas and survey of Irish dialects* (henceforth *LASID*). The items in question are reproduced at the end of the present article. It is proposed to analyse here the nature of the terms employed by informants at the various *LASID* points. There are 86 Irish points in the atlas, together with material from 3 supplementary points, indicated by an ‘a’ following the numeral of the main associated point. Since, however, Wagner employed a reduced version of his questionnaire at a number of points and collected from only 7 points in Gaelic Scotland – none of these in the east of the country – it is intended to supplement the overall material through the use of a small number of additional sources. (Those headwords taken from *LASID* are rendered here throughout in bold typeface.) In the Gaelic dialects of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man (see Figure 1) the non-plural sense of ‘nothing’ or, in negative, interrogative or conditional or sentences, ‘anything’ may be rendered by means of one of a large number of lexemes. One method features a noun used with pronominal meaning[1],

[1] For a discussion of these forms, cf. Watson 2002.

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such as Irish *ceann* ‘one’, lit. ‘head’, *duine* or *té* ‘person’, the latter also in Scottish, *tè,* but here with fem. reference. Scottish employs *gin*, originally ‘offspring, creature’, with common reference and *fear* ‘man’ with masc. reference, as do some N.Irish dialects. These latter also employ *bean,* lit. ‘woman’, with fem. reference, cf. O’Rahilly (1972: 230). Dialects of this language also use forms of the first ordinal numeral *aon* with common reference. Forms of the foregoing pronominal type, unlike the majority of the terms discussed below, can also normally be used in positive sentences (cf. English *I have one* versus **I have any*) and so are excluded from discussion. Also excluded are expressions signifying ‘anything else’ as distinct from merely ‘anything’, as well as the range of terms employed in the expression ‘not worth a (button, bean)’ etc, together with various strategies which render the notions in question without the use of a particular substantive lexeme, such as by means of *gan/ gun* ‘without’ (except in the expression signifying ‘gratis’) or the prefixation of *deagh-* ‘good’ as qualifier to the substantive negated by the verb, as exemplified in Wentworth (2003: 521). The items remaining to be discussed here may generally be classified in two groups. One of these refers ultimately to certain of the senses or relates in some way to human activities, while the other, which is more in the nature of a catch-all, contains inherited words of diverse origins. Lexemes employed in these various classes may be qualified adjectivally or adverbially with the sense of ‘any, at all’ and such qualifiers are dealt with under the headword. Phrases used to this end are fairly numerous – many of them quite picturesque – and no attempt is made here to enumerate them all. What will be seen to emerge overall is the great range and variety of expression used in signifying the concepts in question.

1.0. This second group of terms referred to above will be dealt with first.

1.1.1. ***ní****:* this is the commonest term in this category and signifies ‘thing, object’. The substantive in question originated as the neuter gender equivalent of the indefinite personal pronoun *nech* ‘someone, anyone’, cf. Thurneysen 1961: 311. In common with the majority of the words under discussion, it is normally found in combination with a qualifier so as to give the sense of ‘any at all’. Such qualifiers include the first cardinal numeral *aon* in the sense of ‘any’ (which gives rise to orthographic forms such as *éinní, aoinní*, cf. McKenna (1935: 45, 893); and *air bith* (Scottish *sam bith*), literally ‘in the world’. Other well-known intensifying expressions, such as (following) *go Dia* (‘unto God’), (preceding) *dheamhan, diabhal* ‘devil (the one’) in Irish, cf. McKenna (1935: 893), *donas* (‘evil’) etc, in Scottish Gaelic, signifying ‘not a single one’, cf. colloquial English *not a damned one!* have not been recorded in *LASID* in connection with the terms under discussion. Within Ireland the form in question, *ní,* is indicated by *LASID* as commonest in the southern province, where 61 occurrences are recorded. It appears but rarely in the west (Connacht) and north (Ulster), in each of which

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provinces only a single instance is recorded. It does, however, also occur in Scottish Gaelic where *LASID* notes it as being quite common in the south and southwest. Other sources, however, record its use in northern and eastern areas of Scotland also[2].

1.1.2. *nithinn*: in Scotland are also found a number of forms which, though clearly based on *ní,* have not had their origin satisfactorily explained thus far, except insofar as it can be said that they do not appear to contain a familiar Gaelic diminutive suffix such as *–an, -ein*. *LASID* shows instances of the form in question, namely *nithinn* [N´ix´ən] at one Scottish point. To this may be compared instances from other sources, such as /nix´ɪn/, / nix´ən/, / niən / from an eastern mainland dialect (Ó Murchú 1989: 380). A comparable form, namely [N´ixĕ], which lacks the final nasal, is recorded for south-western Scotland in *LASID.* This, if correct, may point to a plural form as origin.

1.2. *a bheag*: the second term under discussion in this class consists of the adjective *beag* 'small, little', Early Irish *bec,* cf. Welsh *bychan,* of unknown origin, cf. *LEIA* (: B-24) in substantival usage, thus 'a small amount', preceded by 3 sg. m. poss. adj. *a,* used here with common gender reference, i.e. 'of it/ that (/anything)'. This same sense of *beag* is recorded in the proverb *D'aigne ní aithním a bheag* (lit. 'Your mind I know not its little') 'I don't know your mind at all'; and the usage should be compared to expressions such as *ní beag sin* 'that's enough' *cá beag sin?* 'isn't that enough?' (Ó Dónaill 1977: *s.v. beag*) in which the adjective signifies 'a sufficiency', hence 'some', or, when negatived, 'nothing'. The expression in question, *a bheag* 'any', has been recorded in a number of Scottish dialects and in the Isle of Man, *veg,* cf. *LASID* (: 173), McCone et al. (1994: 720) and is also familiar in north-eastern Ireland, cf. Watson (1984: 98). In Connacht and Munster it is often found in the expanded form *a bheag ná a mhór* lit. 'neither a little nor a lot (of it)', cf. McKenna (1935: 45).

1.3. *cineál*: signifying 'kind, type', Early Irish *cenél,* (cf. Lat. *re-cens,* Gk καινός, *LEIA* (: C-64-5, C-103), this term is found qualified by *ar bith* 'any' and occurs in *LASID* at one point in Connacht. This latter expression which will be encountered on numerous occasions in the following discussion signifies literally 'on earth [world]', and an alternative expression, which involves another word for world, namely *domhan,* is found in other sources.

2.0. The second major classification of the terms in question consists of a number of categories based on human activities, the majority of these concerning

[2] Wentworth (2003: 27); Watson (fieldnotes); Ó Murchú (1989: 379)

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the senses. The first of the categories to be dealt with consists of words which we may say are loosely based on the sense of touch, inasmuch as the terms in question involve spatial existence.

2.1. ***dada, tada*** etc: by far the commonest collection of terms used in the entirety of the dialects under consideration comprises those in *dad-, tad-,* forms of which occur in dialects of each of the Irish provinces considered, with comparable ones being general in Scotland. The commonly accepted origin of the forms in question is that they derive from a learned medieval Lat. borrowing, *atomus*, Middle Irish *adom[h],* cf. *LEIA* (*:* D-7), to which an unhistorical initial dental has been prefixed. Forms with this initial *d-* are found in *LASID* materials in the Irish provinces from south to north in the following proportions: Munster 12; Connacht 60; Ulster 34. The Gaelic system of initial mutations[3] has worked analogically on the form in question, giving rise to a separate form in initial *t-*. The western province, Connacht, appears to be the focus for this form where *LASID* records no less than 97 instances, while Munster shows a single case and Ulster, like Scotland, has none at all. *Dad-* forms have evolved final [i], or [u], either as reinforcement of final unstressed *–a* or by analogy with substantival morphology – though the [u] may possibly represent original *–amh* – while those in *tad-* have likewise final [ə] or [i]. The latter forms are recorded in *LASID* without accompanying qualification – though de Bhaldraithe (1959: 480) cites *tada ar bith* – whereas those given in *LASID* for *dad-* may be preceded by *aon,* or succeeded by *ar chor ar bith* 'at all' (lit. 'under any condition').

2.2. ***rud****:* the second major term in this category involves the modern reflex, *rud,* of Early Irish *rét* 'wealth, possession', cf. Sk *rátnam* 'riches', *LEAI* (: R-22). This is either qualified by preceding *aon,* or following *ar bith/ sam bith*. In Connacht and Munster the phrase can be completed by the adjective *beo* 'alive' as a further qualification, while in northern Irish dialects the qualification may be extended by *cothrom,* indicating 'just, fair'. *Rud* is also familiar in the modern languages in a quasi-pronominal sense 'which', which introduces relative clauses. As elements of this type are less prominent in terms of sentence stress, such usage may well account for the loss of historical vowel length and quality in the case of this word. Expressions signifying 'anything, nothing' in which *rud* figures are common in all three Irish provinces, as also in Scottish Gaelic and Manx. The proportions in Ireland in the *LASID* materials in this instance are: Munster 19; Connacht 50; Ulster 13.

[3] For details concerning the operation of these mutations, see Watson (1997).

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2.3.1. *neamhní:* this compound involving *ní* (v. 1.1.1) plus neg. prefix, is given by McKenna (1935: 894) for Connacht and Munster with the general sense of 'nothing (existing)' or of ' (bringing or getting) nothing'. It is also cited by Lane (1922: 1088) where the expression *níl ionnaibh ach n.* 'ye are but nought', is from an archaic, literary source.

2.3.2. *náit:* this word, which should be compared in sense to the foregoing, is a borrowing of English *naught.* According to McKenna (1935: 893) it is an exclusively Munster term and may be employed in wide range of expressions, e.g. in the sense of nothing being *ar* 'on' a person, i.e. as an affliction, cf. 5.3.2.

2.3.3. *puinn:* this term recorded by Ó Dónaill (1977: 975) in the senses of 'nothing being wrong with one', or 'gaining nothing of advantage'. It is a borrowing of French *point, DIL* (s.v. *poind*)*, LEIA* (: P-11). The latter, earlier, form is reported from the 13th cent. in the sense 'profit, avail'. As a term it is also recorded in the literature of the era with the meaning 'particle, small amount, minimum', very often in negative sentences, and it continues in this use in the dialects of Munster, cf. O'Rahilly (1972: 243) and Ó Cuív (1944: 122) to the present day, e.g. *níor shiúlas puinn* 'I walked none', *ní chodlainn puinn dí* 'I slept none of it (the night)'.

2.4. ***seo(i)d****:* the final term to be mentioned in this connection is found at one *LASID* point in Munster, *gan seod,* in the sense of 'without anything' i.e. 'gratis, for no payment'. The word (Early Irish *sét* 'brooch, jewel', an *i*-stem substantive) may derive from native *sét* 'treasure, wealth, possession', itself an *o*-stem < **swanto*- (cf. Welsh *chwant* 'desire'), if not a borrowing of Lat. *fībula,* cf. *LEIA* (: S-99). It is also recorded by McKenna (1935: 893) in the expression *ní raibh seoid air* 'there was nothing [amiss] on him', and by Lane (1922: 1088) *níl seoid aige* 'he has nothing'. McKenna (1935: 894) also indicates for Munster dialects that the word may be qualified by *an bharra* 'of profit'. Though somewhat like the English *jot,* the dissimilar vowel length, together with the existence of a – no doubt related – form in Scottish Gaelic, *seud,* with identical meaning of 'nothing', makes it likely that both descend from *sét* 'jewel, precious thing'. Buck (1949: 442) connects this word to Lat. (originally Gaulish) *sentis* 'thornbush', which is an interesting suggestion in view of another jewellery term, namely Early Irish *delg,* Modern Irish *dealg* which has the sense both of 'thorn' and 'brooch'.

2.5.1. ***pioc****:* this is the first of a small number of items in this section which are clearly English loan-words. *Pioc,* cf. English *pick,* though not recorded by *LASID* outside of Munster and Connacht, is clearly well known in these provinces, with 14 and 22 appearances respectively. As with most of the previous terms, it may be qualified by *aon* or *ar bith.* Nor is it unknown in a similar sense in

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Scotland, since there is an instance recorded in an eastern dialect (Dorian 1978: 101) in the phrase *cha d'ith mi pic* [sic] 'didn't eat anything'.

2.5.2. *bit:* unrecorded in *LASID* but well-known from other sources, are a number of further terms which should be mentioned. Some of these are fairly restricted in distribution and a few are English loanwords. The first of these, a borrowing from English *bit,* appears in a number of Scottish dialects, cf. Wentworth (2003: 26).

2.6. *fríd:* 'tiny amount, trace', cf. Ó Dónaill (1977: 581) *fríd an gháire* 'faint smile', lit. 'trace of the smile'. This form, whose alternative and original meaning was a 'flesh-worm', is mainly found in the gen. as a qualifier of some of the other terms cited here, cf. 3.2, 6.4.1, so as to denote a still smaller amount. However, it does also occur independently with *oiread* 'amount' in the phrase *oiread na fríde* 'the amount of a mite, cf. McKenna (1935: 893) and Ó Dónaill (1977: 581). The corresponding Early Irish form of the word is *frigit* 'flesh-worm' for which MacBain (1982: 181) would propose a connection with the same IE root as English *wriggle.*

2.7.1. *giob:* a similar usage noted for the south and west by McKenna (1935: 108) involves this word in the sense of '[not a] stitch of clothes'. The lexeme in question is related to *gioball* 'rag' and is probably to be referred to Early Irish *gob* 'beak' (without etymology, but cf. Dan. *gab* 'mouth'), hence a 'shredded item'.

2.7.2. *luid:* within the same semantic field lies a word recorded by both McKenna (1935: 108) in the sense of 'nothing' with reference to 'money, clothes etc' and also by Lane (1922: 1088) in the expression *oiread na luide* (lit. 'the amount of nothing') referring to clothing. *Luid* appears to be the word which signifies, both in Irish and Scottish Gaelic, a 'rag'. Its etymology seems best regarded at present as undemonstrated, since MacBain's (1982: 236) suggestions linking it to the same root as Gk λύω etc do not appear to be substantiated.

2.8. *heat:* this term is recorded for a north-western Scottish dialect by Wentworth (2003: 27). Its usage appears to be in the context of 'not achieving anything'. The word in question is known to be Scots, cf. *DSL* (: *s.v. haet)* and originates in the substantivisation of the verbal phrase *ha' it,* abbreviated from *([Let] the Devil) have it!* It is, thus, comparable in origin and development to English *damn* 'nothing', cf. *damn it! > a damned thing > a damn!*

2.9.1. *pingin:* Early Irish *pinginn,* is a borrowing from Old English *penning,* English *penny,* cf. *LEIA* (: P-9). The term in this case, as noted from a Connacht

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dialect,[4] has the sense of 'getting nothing', and makes reference to a unit of coinage still employed in the United Kingdom and also used in Ireland prior to the introduction of the euro in 2001.

2.9.2. *ás:* this word is cited by Dinneen (1927: *s.v.*) in two instances, one without attribution, and the other from a 19th cent. Connacht source, where it occurs in the phrase *ás ar bith,* in the context of 'gaining (nothing at all)'. The latter is also given by Lane (1922: 1089). The term, also known from 18th cent. Ulster vernacular poetry, is clearly a borrowing of English *ace,* which itself derives from Old Fr. *ace* 'unity', based on Lat. *as,* the Roman copper coin.

2.9.3. *bonn:* this term is cited by Lane (1922: 1088) in the expression *níl bonn screas[a] aige* with the meaning 'he has not (a scraped coin', i.e.) anything. *Bonn,* a common term for 'coin', perhaps from Lat. *pundus,* according to MacBain (1982: *s.v.*), is here qualified by the gen. of verbal noun *scrios* 'to destroy, scrape', the derivation of whose verb stem, Early Irish *sceirt-,* is obscure, but for which a connection with English *squirt* has been proposed, cf. *LEIA* (: S-39).

2.9.4. *sciúrtóg:* this is recorded (as *sciurtóg*) by McKenna (1935: 894) with the meaning of (having) nothing of monetary value. The word in question falls, likewise, into the category of coinage, since the basic reference is to a 'valueless coin'. It is, moreover, recorded as a 'coin of little value' by Ó Muirithe (1996: 169) for an English dialect of N. Connacht. Dinneen (1927: *s.v.*) cites it in Connacht Irish as being a coin to the value of a quarter of the lowest denomination of coinage in use in Ireland in the early 20th century and derives it from *sciorta* (from English *skirt*) 'skirt, border, edge'. The implication here would be that the coin in question has been trimmed of some of its value. An alternative etymology, however, could connect it with *sciúr* 'to scour, scrub'.

2.9.5. *screapall:* this is a term which is noted by McKenna (1935: 108) for each of the Irish provinces. The sense given is of 'not (possessing/ asking for) monetary possessions' and, no doubt, as in the case of *pinginn* (2.6.2), the reference is to a measure now obsolete. Ó Muirithe (1996: 172), cites the variant form *sgreatall* for Munster, as does Lane (1922: 1088) in the expanded version *sgreatal na ngrás,* lit. 'of grace(s), i.e. 'not a blessed thing'. Ó Dónaill (1977: 1064) selects *screatall* as standardised form with the meaning in question and under *screapall* one is referred to another variant (: 1063), namely *screaball* which has the sense of 'tiny bit, morsel, shred', though, unlike under *screatall,* no illustrations of negative sentences are provided. The origin of the terms in question, is Lat. *scripulus,* (*DEL: s.v. scrūpus)* borrowed into Early Irish as *screpul,* also

[4] I am grateful to my colleague and friend, Prof. Séamas Ó Catháin, UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore and the National Folklore Collection, for this information.

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screbull, cf. *LEIA* (: S-53-4) signifying one twenty-fourth of an ounce, cf. Kelly (2000: 584).

3.0. The second category to be discussed in this class pertains to the sense of sight and the number of terms in this particular section which have become generalised in their usage is noteworthy.

3.1.1. ***dath****:* the basic meaning of this first term is 'colour', Early Irish *dath,* 'colour, flash', cf. Lat. *fax, facis* 'torch, flame', cf. *LEIA* (: D-26). This word may have come into prominence in expressions of the kind being discussed on account of its phonetic similarity to *dada* (see above 3.1). As an expression it is particularly favoured by the northern Irish province (Ulster) where *LASID* cites 68 instances, with only 2 from Connacht and none each from either Munster or Scotland. It is often preceded by *a* which may either represent the poss. adj. referred to previously or, alternatively, represent a reduced form of the numeral *aon* (cf. Wagner 1959: 216). Whether or not preceded by *a,* it can be qualified *ar bith/ ar chor ar bith* with the sense of 'at all', but is not so qualified when preceded by an unreduced form of the numeral. The system of initial consonant mutations, referred to at 3.1, has led to variant forms in initial *g-,* e.g. *gath,* while developments in the vowel quality of the word have resulted in forms with palatalised initial, viz. *geath, gheath*. McKenna's dictionary (1935: 45) records the expanded forms *a dhubh ná a dhath, dubh ná dath,* lit. 'its black or colour', as well as similar variants as being typical of Connacht or Munster dialects, while Lane (1922: 1088) cites an instance of the heightened poetic expression *dath na ríogh ruadh* (lit. 'the ruddy kings' colour').

3.1.2. *lí:* this word is recorded by McKenna (1935: 45, 108) for Connacht and Munster in the phrase *lí na léithe* with the sense 'nothing (left)', lit. 'the colour of greyness', as well as *lí léithe* for Connacht (: 894), cf. also Ó Dónaill (1977: 781), *ní raibh lí na léithe agam* 'I had not the slightest thing'. Lane (1922: 1088) records an alternative expression *ní raibh lí lé ortha* 'there wasn't the least thing on them', with reference to clothing. *Lí* is referred by Lewis and Pedersen (1961: 7) to Lat. *līuor,* while MacBain (1982: 228) connects *liath* 'grey', from which the abstract noun *léithe* derives, with Sk. *paliták* 'grey (through age)' and Lat. *pallidus,* cf. *palleō* (*DEL: s.v.*) to be connected with terms signifying 'pale, pale-blue' in I-E languages, e.g. Old Slav. *plavŭ* 'λευκός'.

3.2. ***ceo****:* with the literal meaning of 'mist', Early Irish *ceó* 'fog, mist', cf. Goth. *hiwi* 'appearance, Old English *héow, híw* 'appearance, face, colour', *LEIA* (: C-68-9) and qualified by *aon* or *ar bith*, is an expression found in Connacht alone in the *LASID* materials. *Ceó* may be related to the adj. *cía* 'dark brown', cf. *LEIA*

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(: C-69, 95) with connections to the same I-E root as Old English *hár* 'grey'. The word is found at a number of points in the western province and *LASID* furnishes us with no less than 19 instances from dialects of the western province. McKenna's dictionary (1935: 107) shows this (along with by-form *sceo*) and usage cited includes 'eating,' and 'doing'. With reference to sight only, apparently, the same source (: 893) quotes an expanded form from Connacht and Ulster *beo ná ceo,* lit. 'living being nor mist'. The same source also notes that that *ceo,* like *faic* (v. 6.4) can also be qualified through the addition of the substantive phrase *na fríde* (v. 2.6) lit. '[to the degree] of a (the) mite'.

3.3. *seó:* the English loan-word *show* in the sense of 'spectacle' as found in the expression *aon seó* puts in an appearance in a context without reference to 'seeing' at a single *LASID* point in Connacht.

3.4.1. *leus:* the lexical collection from a north-western Scottish dialect previously referred to furnishes our two final examples in this category. The first of these is *leus* 'light, blaze' (Wentworth 2003: 790). It is used exclusively in this instance with reference to sight. The Early Irish form in question is *lés* for which a connection to Old Norse *ljós* has been proposed, cf. *DIL* (s.v.*lés*).

3.4.2. *poidhs:* similarly restricted to the sense of 'anything, nothing' with regard to vision is the word given orthographically in the collection as *poidhs* (Wentworth 2003: 790). I have encountered the same word in a similar context in a related eastern Scottish dialect during fieldwork and would suggest that it may represent a by-form of *foillse* 'light, manifestation', as cited by Dwelly (1977: 446) from Armstrong's dictionary. The initial consonant would have been altered through hypercorrection resulting from the effects of the system of initial mutations (see above 3.1). *Foillse* is in origin the abstract noun of adj. *folas,* Early Irish *follus* 'clear' < **fo-* *ṡolus,* based on *solus* 'light', which *LEIA* (: S-169) analyses as a compound of **su-* 'good, well' and *lés,* v 3.4.1 above). Lewis and Pedersen (1961: 104), however, would derive *solus* from **su-* and **luks-*, in respect of which cf. Lat. *lūx,* Gk *λευκό,* Sk. *ruc-,* Old English *leōt.*

3.4.3. *scaile:* also to be included here, it would seem, is another term recorded in McKenna (1935: 893) where it is used to signify 'nothing' with reference to news, information or doing a piece of work. It is listed here on the basis that the word in question is *scal* (gen. *scaile*) a 'burst, flash', which the palatal final would render likely, cf. also Scottish *sgail* 'splendour, brightness; flash, flame', obsolete according to Dwelly (1977: 812). On the other hand, the possibility should not be ruled out that the word is, in origin, a variant of Early Irish *caile* 'spot'.

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3.5. *steama:* the concluding item of this section is recorded in the collection from a north-western Scottish dialect made by Wentworth (2003: 27, 525), where it is used in the sense of 'not (achieving) anything'. The non-Gaelic dental stop in the source in question indicates unequivocally the foreign origin of the term and its origin is clearly the Scots word *stime,* cf. *SND* (: *s.v.*), with variants *stym(e), stem(e),* which apparently developed in this language from the sense, in negative sentences, of '(not being able to see) anything' which developed, via the meaning of a 'least visible appearance', to signifying more generally 'the least particle of anything, a jot or atom'. The word in question may possibly be connected with the similar Scots form *stim* 'haze, mist, e.g. on the sea' which is referred by the same source to Swedish dialectal *stimba, stimma* 'steam, fog'.

4.0. The next category arises from the sense of hearing.

4.1. ***sian****:* this, together with the following entry, would appear to be the only terms whose use has been extended beyond the semantic range indicating 'hearing'. In the sense of 'anything, nothing' the word is usually spelt *sìon* in Scottish Gaelic. As such, it has been recorded at 2 locations in *LASID,* but is attested to in a number of other dialects also. Wentworth (2003: 755), for example, quotes *chan fhaigh thu sraing air sìon* 'you won't get string for nothing'. The spelling *sìon* connects the word in question to a lexeme signifying 'weather', which is MacBain's (1982: 324) preferred etymology. In my view, however, the sense of 'scream, shriek' and, by extension, 'voice', cf. related Irish *siansa* 'strain, melody', *siansán* 'humming, whistling; cry, clamour', provides a preferable point of departure for the development in question, especially in view of the similar usage involved with *seinm, dùrd,* etc below. The Early Irish form *sian* 'chant, musical air' from which the word in question derives has no established etymology.

4.2. ***seinm****:* in connection with the foregoing item it is perhaps worth quoting the single instance of the semantically related form *seinm,* whose basic sense is 'playing (music)', which is recorded in *LASID. Seinm ar bith* is returned for a Connacht dialect as a response in the context of '(doing) anything'. This is the verbal noun of *seinn* 'play', Early Irish *senn-,* which MacBain (1982: *s.v. seinn*) connects with the same IE root as Lat *sonus.*

4.3. ***guth****:* the remaining terms are restricted to express the meaning only of 'hearing anything/ nothing'. The first of these is *guth* 'voice', hence 'sound'. *LASID* has a listing for this at two Scottish points, Wentworth (2003: 27) notes it in his collection and it is also familiar to me in this same sense from a related eastern dialect. Lane (1922: 1089) notes its use in Ireland also in the phrase *níor chualas*

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guth dhe 'I didn't hear word of it', which is to be connected with the usage cited by Ó Dónaill (1977: 680) *fuaireamar an guth* 'we got (the) word' [i.e. message]. The Early Irish form *guth* 'voice' has no generally accepted etymology.

4.4. ***dùrd****:* this word which signified originally 'humming' has come to mean 'sound' or 'word' in a number of Scottish dialects and, although not listed by *LASID* in the sense of ('hearing) not a/ any word', this is a meaning recorded by Wentworth (2003: 790) in his dialect study and one which is likewise very familiar to me from a neighbouring eastern variety of Scottish Gaelic. For Irish, Lane (1922: 1088) lists, with reference to speech, the expression *níor labhair sé drud (nó druid)* 'he didn't utter [a syllable or sound]', where the latter two substantives are evidently variant forms of the common Modern Irish *dord,* 'drone, hum, murmur; (deep) chant; bass', corresponding to Early Irish *dórd. LEIA* (: D-175-6) refers the latter to an IE root ***der-,*** with connections such as Hesychius δάρδα 'bee'.

4.5. *focal:* information for a N. Connacht[5] dialect indicates the use of this word to signify 'nothing' solely with reference to speech This usage is confirmed in both McKenna's (1935: 894) and de Bhaldraithe's dictionaries (1959: 480). It is generally regarded as a loanword deriving from a Lat. source in *voc-*.

4.6. *puth:* the basis significance of this word is 'puff' and it is known in this sense in Irish and Scottish dialects. It is recorded by Dorian (1978: 101) for an eastern mainland dialect of Scotland as 'nothing' in the context of hearing. As to the origin of the word, it may very likely be a borrowing from English *puff,* though it could also have arisen independently on an onomatopoeic basis.

4.7. *diog:* this word, though not familiar to me in the sense in question is, however, cited by Wentworth (2003: 525) with the meaning 'anything, nothing' in relation to the action of an item of machinery. It is clearly a borrowing from English, cf. *tick* (as of a clock), with which signification also it is used in the dialect referred to.

4.8. *cneadadh:* from N.W. Scotland, Wentworth (2003: 27) comes this instance of a particular term used exclusively with reference to having an ailment. Itself a verbal noun, of *cnead* 'groan, sigh, moan', *cneadadh* is employed as object of the verbal noun of *fairich* 'feel'. For the Early Irish substantive *cnet* 'sigh, moan' a connection has been posited, cf. *LEIA* (: C-131), with Sk. *kiknasa* 'crushed'

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5.0. The final category connected to the senses is that of taste.

5.1. *blas:*** the only instance within this category that *LASID* provides is *blas* ‘taste’, qualified by *aon* or *ar bith* and not restricted, as confirmed by McKenna (1935: 893), to food. Again the focus is the western Irish province of Connacht with 5 examples from 4 atlas points. The distribution is comparable to that of *ceo*, except that it is even more limited. The Early Irish form of this word is *mlas,* with which the only connections, cf. *LEIA* (: M-56) would appear to be Slavic forms, cf. Rus. *molsātĭ* ‘suck’, Czech *mlsati* ‘taste’.

5.2. *gráinne:* this form is cited in the sense of ‘none’ by McKenna (1935: 45) with reference, it would seem, to solid foodstuffs such as tea. The corresponding Scottish Gaelic form *gràine* is widely used in a generalised sense of ‘a tiny amount, a few’, negative ‘not a pick’, cf. Wentworth (2003: 74) *cha robh gràine ri fhaighinn* ‘there wasn’t a bit to be had’. The Early Irish form *gráinde* ‘cereal-grain’, cf. Kelly (2000: 560-1) constitutes a singulative form of *grán,* itself a borrowing from Lat. *grānum.*

5.3.1. *greim:* de Bhaldraithe (1959: 480) cites this word with the meaning of ‘not (eating) a bite’. The word is, of course, common in Ireland and Scotland in the sense of a ‘bite’. For the Early Irish is *greim(m)* with the basic sense of a ‘hold, grip’, cf. perhaps Goth. *greipan,* ON *grípa,* Buck (1949: 744-7).

5.3.2. *smailc:* this is recorded by McKenna (1935: 893) for Munster in the sense of nothing being *ar* ‘on’, i.e. wrong with, someone (cf. 2.3.2). The same source also notes the use of *ceo* (3.2) in this sense. The basic sense of the word is a ‘bite, mouthful’, for it has also been recorded in use in a N. Connacht dialect[6] signifying ‘nothing’ with reference to eating, while in a neighbouring dialect of English, cf. Ó Muirithe (1996: 181) the verb *smailc* signifies to ‘eat voraciously’. This verb can also be used in the latter dialect, as in dialects of Irish, in the sense of to ‘smack’, as of children, a connection which brings into question the possibility of its being an English loanword in origin. McKenna also gives an expanded version, namely *smailc ná smáil,* the final word here, standard *smál.* Early Irish *smál, smól,* whose etymology is unclear, appears to have a primary sense of ‘fire, blaze’ cf. *LEIA* (: S-140).

5.4. *deoir:* McKenna cites this word (1935: 45, *deor*) for Connacht and Munster as signifying ‘none’ with reference to drinking, which, of course, parallels the use of *greim* (v 5.3.1) to signify the smallest amount possible of solid food. The Early Irish form is *dér* ‘tear, drop’, for which a common origin is cited, cf. *LEIA* (: D-54-5) with Goth. *tagr* ‘tear’ etc.

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6.0. The last group is somewhat heterogeneous in nature, but most items are connected with human activities, perceptions or the like.

6.1. ***cáil****:* this is a term which may be categorised here. It is recorded in north-eastern Irish dialects with the meaning of 'quantity, amount', while in Scotland, either alone or qualified by *sam bith,* it generally has the signification under discussion here, namely 'any, none'. Ó Baoill (1978: 177-78) points out that a rare instance of its use in this sense has been noted in Ulster, while an 18th century Scottish poet employs the word with the meaning commonly known in Ulster. In regard to its derivation, as noted by the same scholar, the meaning 'quantity, amount' appears to have developed at a comparatively late stage, while the primary sense would appear to be that of 'quality, characteristic'. It has, indeed, been suggested, *LEIA* (: C-10), that the word in question may, in fact, be a loan-word, deriving ultimately from Lat. *qualitas,* and, in this connection, it is noteworthy that one Ulster point in *LASID* does in fact supply an instance of *a cháilíocht* as a secondary response with the meaning of 'any', cf. 1.3 in this connection where the use of *cineál* 'type, kind', in a *LASID* response from western Ireland is noted as signifying 'anything, nothing'.

6.2. ***cruthaitheachd****:* this is another term used to mean 'anything, nothing', which is recorded for a single point among the *LASID* data for Scotland. The basic sense is 'creation, creativity', hence 'activity' and the context of the atlas question is, appropriately enough, 'doing'. The substantive in question is based on Early Irish *cruth,* for which *LEIA* (: C-256-7) proposes an IE root **k^{w}er-* 'to make, shape', cf. Sk. *karṓti,* 'makes, accomplishes', Lith. *kùrti* 'makes, builds'.

6.3. *tarbha****:*** (standard form *tairbhe)* may also be considered here. This is a form noted by me from an eastern mainland Scottish dialect. The basic meaning is 'profit, advantage' and its use in the expression in question may have derived from such idiomatic and proverbial usages as *nithe gun tairbhe* 'things without profit', or *an t-ainm gun an tairbhe* 'the name or credit (of anything) without the profit' (i.e. benefit of it), Dwelly (1977: 925). In the expression under discussion *tarbha* may be qualified by the adverb *idir* 'at all' (historically the 3 sg. m. pronominal form of the preposition *idir* 'between', thus 'between, i.e. within, it', cf. modern idioms involving the equivalent form of *de* 'of it', cf. Wentworth (2003: 525 *s.v nothing but*). Modern *tarbha* is a reflex of Middle Irish *tarba,* cf. Early Irish *torbe,* which itself derives from a verbal complex such as **to-for-ben* 'to profit', originally involving a form of the substantive verb.

6.4.1. ***faic(e)****:* a major item for consideration in this section is one which has a number of *LASID* entries throughout the south and west of Ireland (Munster and Connacht) respectively. In the former province it is listed in 14 separate entries, while in the latter it appears 5 times. In Munster it may be qualified by *in aon chor*

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'at all', lit. 'in any condition', and there are two Connacht examples of a form in final *-e,* which probably derives from an oblique case form. Though not so qualified in the *LASID* examples, *faic,* as is well known, can also be qualified through the addition of the substantive phrase *na fríde* (see above 2.6). The historical corpus of Irish, *CG,* (1600-1882), documents no instances of *faic(e)* before the late 17th century which makes likely the suggestion that the word is a loan-word derived from English *whack.* Although its use in expressions of the type under consideration is not restricted to phrases involving 'doing, making', its origin in the idea of a 'blow' or 'stroke' would be similar to the familiar phrase *stróic oibre* 'a stroke of work', cf. Ó Dónaill (1977: 1173) in which the first term is a borrowing from English *stroke*). This phrase is common in modern colloquial Irish. The following item also should be considered in the same semantic range.

6.4.2. *tap:* this term, which is clearly from English *tap,* has been recorded in a N. Connacht[7] dialect with reference to 'doing'. It would seem likely that its entry into Irish was based on a familiarity with the English expression 'not (doing) a tap (of work)'.

6.4.3. *car:* this word is recorded in the sense of 'nothing' in the context of 'doing' in Scottish Gaelic, cf. Dwelly (1977: 167) *cha robh car air an t-saoghal* 'there was nothing at all', lit. 'in the world', cf. *air/ sam bith* (v. 1.1.1), although it does not feature in *LASID.* In the modern language it signifies, among other things, a 'turn, spell of work', cf. *gabh car!* 'take a turn!'. The corresponding Middle Irish form is *cor* 'state, condition', which is to be referred to the verb *cuir* 'put', Early Irish stem *cuir-*. To the same IE root from which the latter may derive have been compared forms such as Gk σκαίρω 'dance', OSl. *skorŭ* 'fast'. *Cor* is, of course, the word which appears in the qualifying adverbial expressions already referred to meaning 'at all' which are noted above at various points, namely *ar chor bith,* and *in aon chor.* However, the Scottish expression here discussed does not appear in Irish sources and relates firmly to the notion of a 'turn of work' in the latter language.

6.5.1. *fionna-feanna*: one most interesting instance to be included in this category is again obtained from Lane (1922: 1089) and McKenna (1935: 893). The latter, who provides most information, cites it for Connacht in two senses: (i) 'not to leave a bit'; and (ii) 'not to have (a tap) of work to do'. Lane quotes the second sense with the fuller spelling *fionnadh feannadh.* The second word here is clearly the verbal noun of *feann* 'to skin, flay' preceded by the related noun *fionnadh* 'fur', cf. the common English idiom 'to be skint'. Both are connected via the notion of 'perception', hence 'surface [appearance]', to Early Irish *fiss* 'knowledge', cf. Lat *video,* Gk ᾽ιδεῖν McKenna also provides a variant *fionnafeanc*, where the latter element would have been influenced by *faic(e)* (v. 6.4.1).

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6.5.2. *folt:* this term, also found in McKenna (1935: 893), is noted by him for Munster where this word, signifying '(head of) hair', is employed in expressions signifying 'anything, nothing'. This usage clearly lies within the same semantic range as the preceding, since *fionnadh* may also refer to human hair. According to MacBain (1982: 162), Early Irish *folt* is to be connected to Lat. *vellus* 'fleece' *lāna* 'wool', etc.

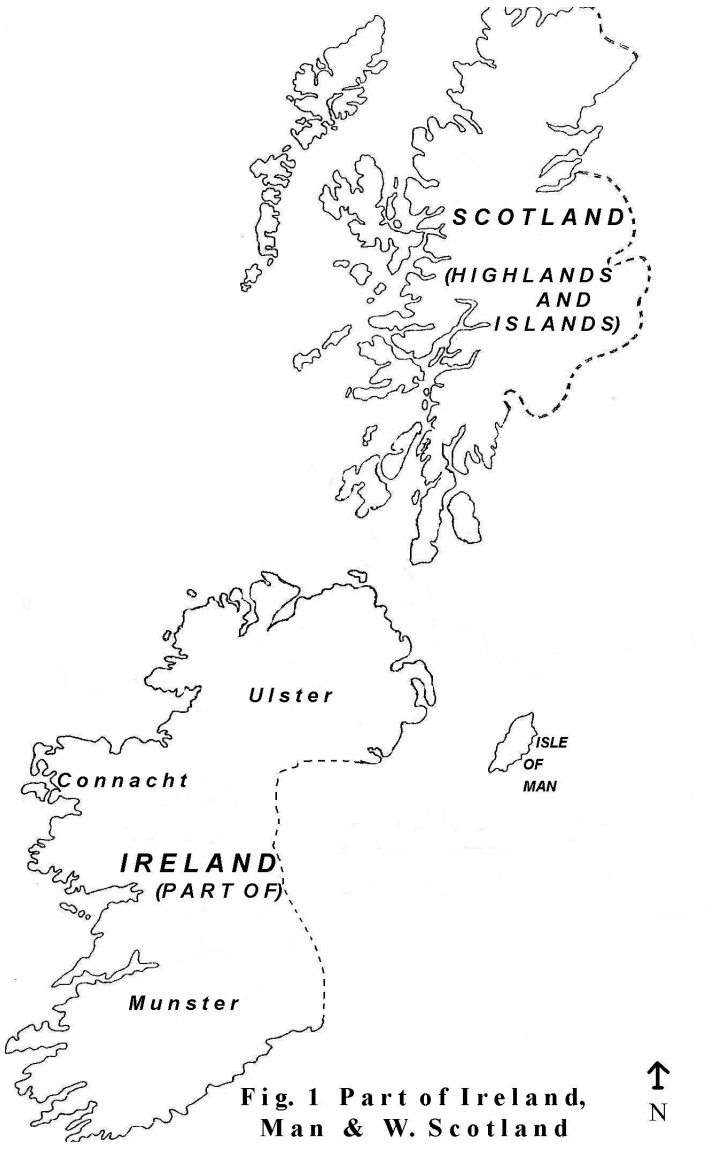


Fig. 1 Part of Ireland, Man & W. Scotland

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APPENDIX 1

Items from *LASID* containing terms 'anything, nothing'

34	*I would not chew tobacco if I got it for nothing.*
74b	*We don't need anything.*
279	*We do not get (any money).*
280	*He would not get (anything).*
281	*He did not get (anything).*
305	*I shall eat whatever you will give me.*
306	*I didn't eat anything today because I was sick.*
965	*I know nothing about him.*
996	*He does nothing at all.*
1008	*Nothing is troubling him.*
1027	*He didn't say (anything).*
1028	*Did he say (anything)?*
1040	*I didn't do anything*

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