Contemporary understandings of Welsh, Scottish and Irish identities: Celtic characters in Shakespeare

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Celtic characters in *Henry V* (1599?): Different dialects; different characters

**Captain Fluellen**
- Pronunciation: unvoicing of initial /b/ and /v/, e.g. *pig* for 'big', *falorous* for 'valorous'
- Grammar: lack of subject-verb concord, e.g. *if there is not better directions* (III.ii.60)
- Vocabulary: Expression associated with Welsh speakers, *look you*

**Captain Macmorris**
- Pronunciation: use of /ʃ/ for /s/ or /z/ (e.g. *Chrish* for 'Christ', *ish* for 'is'),
- Grammar: unusual past participles, e.g. *I would have blowed up the town* (III.ii.85-60)

**Captain Jamy**
- Grammar: lack of auxiliary 'have' in *I wad full fain heard some question* (III.ii.112-3)
Celtic characters in *Henry V*: Different dialects; different characters

- Limited accuracy in representing the actual specific dialects of the time. (Grammatical features are not particular to these dialects).
- But features are generally distinct with respect to the London dialects, i.e. they would struck the London audience.
- Provide prompts for the actors to ham up their speech and launch into ‘stage dialect’.
- Provide cues for the relevant social stereotypes that the audience had in their heads.
Celtic characters in *Henry V*: Different characters; one nation or many?

- Tapping into contemporary debates about the nationhood.

Fluellen: Captain MacMorris, I think, look you, there is not many of your nation –

MacMorris: Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal? What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?

(III.iii.58-62)
Contemporary attitudes towards the Scottish, Irish and Welsh

- How did contemporaries of Shakespeare view the Scots, Welsh and Irish?
- How did people write about them at the time?
Method

Approach

• Usage and context of the words “Scottish/Scots”, “Irish”, and “Welsh”

• Frequency patterns on a grand scale

• Similar to, for example, Paul Baker et al.’s (2013) present-day work on Muslims and their representation in British newspapers

Data and analytical tool

• Early English Books Online – approx. 1.2 billion words

• 1580-1599 – 82,180,304 words

• cqppweb (Andrew Hardie)
Method

Spelling variants

**Scottish/Scots:** (skottysh* | scottish* | skottish* | scotish* | schotish* | scotesh* | scotisch* | scottesh* | scottisch* | scottysh* | shotish* | scottes* | scotes* | skottes* | schotes* | schottes* | schoyttis* | scoitis* | scoittis* | scotes* | scotis* | scottes* | scottis* | scottys* | skotis* | skottes* | skottis* | scotts* | scots* | scoats* | skots* | skotts*)

**Irish:** (irish* | iresh* | yressh* | yrish* | ireish* | yerish* | irich* | iriesch* | iriesh* | irisch* | irrisch* | irysch* | iyrish* | yrish* | yrisch* | yrysch* | iersch*)

**Welsh:** (welsh* | walsh* | wealch* | welse* | vellchie* | welch* | welsch* | velsh* | walyssh* | walch* | vvelsh* | vvalsh* | vvealch* | vvealse* | vvelch* | vvelsch* | vvalyssh* | vvalch*)
Method

Collocations

• Span: 5 words left and right of target item (within sentence boundaries).
• Statistic: Mutual Information (also checked LogRatio)
• Floor: Minimum of 10
Frequencies

How often do they occur?

*Scots/Scottish*: 5,407 instances in 282 texts

*Irish*: 1,160 instances in 144 texts

*Welsh*: 802 instances in 115 texts
Contemporary understandings: Scottish/Scots

Top-50 collocates
Pichtes, Thomistes, Pictish, Picts, Irishmen, Balioll, Ferguse, horssemen, Thomists, iuadeth, Quene, capteins, Pictes, Kenneth, Piers, Englishmen, Britains, Donald, Frenchmen, ioine, chronicles, Britons, Eugenius, Galled, discomfited, Boethius, yere, Danes, Cumberland, borders, Northumberland, Bruce, Marie, 60, invade, homage, Scottish, betwene, Scots, Henrie, Saxons, aid, Irish, writers, invaded, encamped, chased, confederates, bene
Contemporary understandings: Scottish/Scots

Thematic groups

Associated groups (confederates, ioine): Picts, Irish, Britains, Frenchmen, Danes, etc.

Scottish kings/queens and nobles: Malcolm, Ferguse, Kenneth, Donald, Bruce, Galled, etc.

Hostile: iuadeth/invaded, discomfited, borders, chased

Scottish histories: chronicles, writers, yere

Results for scottish alone overlap with the above, but have greater emphasis on:

Political power: nation, nobility, ambassadors, etc.

Religion: Thomistes/Thomists, communion, supper, etc.
Contemporary understandings: *Irish*

**Top-50 collocates**
Karne*, rug, slue, Mac*, Irish, Englishmen, Scottish, Scots, savage, wild, rebels, Ireland, seas, diverse, English, borne, wars, mere*, language*, history, slain, nation, tongue, sea, hundred, lords, enemies, town*, an, land, among, country, took, certain, people, sent, manner, speak, came, called, were, whom, taken, where, against, man, like, part
Contemporary understandings: *Irish*

Second position: *Irish rug*

“Show me a fair scarlet, a velch frise, a good Irish rug” (Eliot, 1595)
Contemporary understandings: *Irish*

**Thematic groups**

‘Negative prosody’

**Uncivilised**: savage, wild  
**Hostile**: wars, enemies, against  
**Ungovernable**: rebels  
**[Insignificant????: mere* (Holinshed)]**  
**Associated groups**: Scottish, Scots, English [+ e.g. rebels]

**Suppressed**: slue, hundred  
**Political power**: nation, lords  
**Language**: tongue, language, speak, called

[MacMorris: “What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal?”]
Contemporary understandings: More on *mere*

**OED. 1. c.** Of a people or their language: pure, unmixed. Latterly only in *mere Irish* and related expressions, in which *mere* is sometimes interpreted as belonging to sense 5.

First citation = 1561

1577  R. Stanyhurst *Treat. Descr. Irelande* viii. f. 27/2, *(heading)* in R. Holinshed *Chron. I* The disposition and maners of the meere Irish, commonly called the wyld Irishe.

13 illustrative quotations; 6 involve Irish
OED. 5. a. Having no greater extent, range, value, power, or importance than the designation implies; that is barely or only what it is said to be.

First citation = 1547

1594 T. Bowes tr. P. de la Primaudaye

French Acad. II. 345 The throate..being onely a meere way and place of passage, through which meates and drinkes passe to and fro.
Contemporary understandings: Welsh

Top-50 collocates
Englishmen, Britains, Danes, Wales, English, Captain, tongue, y, speaks, master, call, page, called, number, England, against, kings, came, king, name, day, word, Though, were, a, had, where, never, at, also, the, both, or, great, your, well, who, with, being, men, other, &, an, did, their, in, which, there, made, now

Thematic groups
Associated groups (collaborators): Englishmen
Suppressed: number, against, king, Danes
Welsh language: English, tongue, y, speaks, call, called, word
Where shall we finde, such dealing now adaies?
Where is such chaere, so cheape and chaunge of fare?
Ride North and South, and search all beaten waies,
From Barwick bounds, to Venice if you dare,
And finde the like, that I in Wales haue found,
And I shall be, your slaue and bondman bound.
If Wales be thus, as tryall well shall prove,
Take Wales goodwill, and giue them neighbours loue.

Thomas Churchyard, *The Worthiness of Wales* (1587)
Commonalities amongst the groups?

Shared top-50 collocates?

Scottish + Irish + Welsh = Englishmen

Scottish + Irish = Irish/Irishmen, Scottish/Scots

Scottish + Welsh = Capteins/Captain, Britains/Britons, Danes

Irish + Welsh = English, tongue, speak/speaks, call/called, came, an
And the English?

Spelling variants

(englis*|englysh*|inglish*|anglysh*|engglysh*|english*|englyss*|englech*|ynglych*|ynglyss*|inglys*|anglis*|angllis*|einglis*|ingglesh*|ingleis*|ingleisch*|ingles*|inglich*|inglis*|ynnglis*|ynglys*)

14,914 instances in 1,072 texts
Contemporary understandings: English

Top-50 collocates
Bezites, Madrigalls, Hexameters, Normanes, capteins, Hexameter, d'argent, madrigals, horssemen, d'or, ovt, translatours, foren, flete, Bibles, slated, Seminary, meter, fugitives, Welshmen, Geneua, Seminaries, translations, Flemish, translated, Frenchmen, ioine, Flemings, Englishmen, merchants, Scottish, chronicle, Rheims, Chronicles, competitors, tong, translators, Danes, Meeter, students, Fabian, Hebrue, Normans, gules, Armada, discomfited, fugitive, Rime, bible, Latin
Contemporary understandings: English

**Literary/scholarly:** madrigalls/madrigals, hexameters/hexameter, meter/meeter, chronicle/Chronicles, rime

**English translation:** d’argent, d’or, translateurs, foren, (trans)lated, translated, translators, gules

**Religion:** Bezites, Bibles, Seminary/Seminaries, Rheims, students, Hebrue

**Associated groups:** Normanes/Normans, Scottish, Flemings, Danes

**Military:** capteins, horssemen, flete, Armada

**Commerce & merchandise:** Flemish, merchants

**Hostile to others:** Discomforted, Fugitives/fugitive
Conclusion

Broad summary of stereotypical contemporary understandings:

- **Scots/scottish**: Associations with suspect groups (*Irish, Frenchmen*); hostile; strong political power and royal lineage; religion
- **Irish**: Of some economic value (*rug*); strong negative attitudes (*savage, wild, rebels*); associations with suspect groups (*Scots*), suppressed, political power, distinct language
- **Welsh**: Linguistic curiosity; collaborators (*Englishmen*); suppressed
- **English**: scholarly/cultural; English translation; religion; associated groups (*Normans*); commerce; hostile to others

In *Henry V*

Tensions beneath apparent alliance reflecting English insecurities about loyalty
England, thy country betrays thee, as each other hates thee: The Scot incrocheth: the Frenchman gapes for a vantage: Wales threatens kindness: wild Irish lurks in ambush: Behold thy captains dispatched all on a sudden: And Ruin hudled up, when thou think lest of a mischief: Peace fostered for a time, shall finally prove to be fained Which breaking unawares, shall bring on greeuousser horror.

John Harvey, *A discoursiue probleme concerning prophesies how far they are to be valued, or credited* (1588)
Conclusion

• All of our topic groupings were supported by analysis of collocating semantic tags (though little extra was added by that analysis; a number of tags were errors, e.g. battle)

Limitations/further work:
• Collocation analysis needs to be repeatedly with (fully) regularized spelling.
• Dispersion: Most items are well-dispersed, but a few, especially in the Irish data were not. The role of Holinshed’s Chronicles is an issue.
• Collocational Networks: Scots and Irish clearly share a network, but generally more precision needed.