



Canúintí/Dialects (Foghraíocht/Pronunciation)

Like many languages, Irish is one with different dialects. Dialects are a particular form of a language which are specific to a region or social group. These include differences in how words are pronounced, and the meanings of those words. There is one written Irish standard, **An Caighdeán Oifigiúil**/The Official Standard. However, unlike, the English language for example, and its Received Pronunciation, there is no spoken standard in Irish. We will give you guidance on pronunciation throughout the course. Please note that the Irish language has a unique phonetic system quite different from French or English. Speakers of the language usually find themselves speaking in one of three main dialects, or a mixture of the three, depending on the influences on their Irish language education.

The three main dialects are:

- **Gaeilge Uladh**/Ulster Irish – Spoken in the **Gaeltacht** regions of Co. Donegal.
- **Gaeilge Chonnacht/Connacht** Irish – Spoken in the **Gaeltacht** regions in Co. Galway, Co. Mayo, and in the Irish speaking community of **Ráth Chairn** in Co. Meath.
- **Gaeilge na Mumhan**/Munster Irish – Spoken in **Gaeltacht** regions in Co. Kerry, Co. Cork, and in **Gaeltacht na Rinne** in Co. Waterford.

You will see some of the main differing examples of pronunciation between the three dialects below:

Gaeilge Uladh/Ulster Irish is a dialect of soft spoken sounds, and this can be heard most clearly with words containing ‘á’, which is usually pronounced like a soft ‘ah’. Another example of this ‘softening’ would be words ending in ‘-ch’. While this is usually a harsh guttural sound, similar to the English, ‘ck’, in Ulster Irish the ‘ch’ sound fades away towards the end of the word. However, often when ‘ch’ occurs in the middle of a word, it is pronounced like an ‘r’. Something similar also occurs with ‘cn’, where it sounds like ‘cr’, when at the beginning of words. The last sound we will look at in relation to **Gaeilge Uladh**/Ulster Irish is ‘-adh’ which is often pronounced like ‘oo’ when it occurs at the end of words. For example:

Focal/Word	Fuaimniú/Pronunciation (general)	Fuaimniú/Pronunciation (Ulster)
bradán (salmon)	bra-dawhn	bra-dahn
Domhnach (Sunday)	Doh-nuck	Doh-nahck
ocht (eight)	uhckt	art
cnoc (hill)	k-nuck	cruck
samhradh (summer)	sow-rah	sow-roo

Like the Ulster dialect, **Gaeilge Chonnacht/Connacht** Irish, has its own unique dialectal pronunciation traits. Like we saw with **Gaeilge Uladh**/Ulster Irish, ‘cn’, when at the

beginning of a word, is pronounced like ‘cr’ in **Connacht**. However, in **Connacht ‘-adh’** is more frequently pronounced like ‘uh’ at the end of words.

Certain **forainmneacha réamhfhoclacha**/prepositional pronouns (which we will look at in the course), are shortened to one syllable by removing the vowel from the second, e.g. **agam** > ‘ahm’. Also, the prepositions forms ‘**de**’ and ‘**dó**’ are both pronounced with ‘g’ sounds widely in Connacht. This sometimes causes confusion for speakers of this dialect when it comes to writing.

Focal/Word	Fuaimniú/Pronunciation (general)	Fuaimniú/Pronunciation (Connacht)
cnoc (hill)	k-nuck	cruck
samhradh (summer)	sow-rah	sow-ruh
agat (at you)	ah-guht	aht/ahd
de (of him/it)	jeh	yeh
dó (for/to him/it)	doh	goh

The most differentiating feature of **Gaeilge na Mumhan**/Munster Irish in terms of pronunciation is that **béim**/emphasis is usually placed on the second syllable of two syllable words. Another unique feature is the pronunciation of ‘**atá**’ as ‘ah-haw’, swapping the ‘t’ sound for that of a ‘h’. Also when using the prefix ‘**an-**’ before an adjective meaning ‘very’, an extra ‘a’ is often added by Irish speakers in Munster. **An-mhaith** becomes **ana-mhaith**/very good.

There are other dialectal differences in Irish, namely in terms of vocabulary and grammar, between the three main dialects. However, it is important that you should be able to understand the language when you hear it spoken, as you will hear examples of speakers of all **canúintí**/dialects throughout this course. To hear words, and sentences, pronounced in the Irish of the three main **canúintí**/dialects, visit abair.ie, fuaimneanna.ie, and check out the pronunciation tab on teanglann.ie.