

**eo** (as **ó**) **ceol** (music), **ae** (as **é**) **Gael** (Irishman), **ao** (as **é/i**) **baol** (danger), **daoibh** (to you).

Ordinarily before the consonant clusters **rd**, **rl**, and **rn** a short vowel is lengthened as with the first vowel in the following words: **aird** (direction, attention), **ceird** (trade), **bord** (table), **orlach** (inch), **tuirne** (spinning wheel).

The vowel **a** is usually lengthened before **rr** in monosyllabic words or before **rr** followed by a consonant: **barr** (top), **gearr** (cut), **gearrtha** (past.part. cut).

## CONSONANTS

Irish can be said to have two complete (or nearly complete) sets of consonant sounds: broad and slender or more technically, velar and palatal. As a rule, a consonant is broad when it precedes or follows a broad vowel **a**, **o**, **u** and slender when it precedes or follows a slender vowel **e**, **i**. The consonant-sound **h** is neutral in regard to being neither broad or slender.

It is evident that the two words **beo**, **bó** (meanings - alive, cow) both have the **ó** sound. The distinguishing feature between both sounds is the kind of **h** used. Slender consonants are usually made by raising the front of the tongue towards the hard palate, or in the case of a labial by spreading the lips. The consonant **h** in **beo** may be said to have an **i**-quality - **bó**. Broad consonants are generally made, with the back of the tongue towards the soft palate. The consonant **h** in **bó** may be said to have a **u**-quality.

Consonants may be classified according to the kind of interference the breath stream meets in the articulation of the sound: stop consonants when the breath is completely stopped; nasal consonants when some of the breath escapes through the nose after complete stoppage in the mouth; fricative consonants when because of some obstruction the breath makes a fricative sound in escaping.

Consonants may also be classified according to the part of the mouth where articulation occurs: labial, at the lips; dental, at the teeth; and palatal at the palate.

Another classification is that of whether the consonant is unvoiced, voiced or nasal. A sound is said to be unvoiced when the vocal chords take no part in the production of the sound. If the forefinger is placed on the pharynx, just above the larynx, when a voiced sound such as "buzz" is pronounced, a distinct trilling sensation is felt as the vocal chords vibrate. The nasal consonants **m**, **n**, **ng** (pronounced as the **ng** in "finger") and the liquid consonants **l** and **r** comprise the class of so-called sonorants or resonants. Broad **s** is pronounced as the **s** in the English word "see", slender **s** corresponds fairly well with the sound of **sh** in English: "shun", "shine".

## MUTATION: ASPIRATION AND ECLIPSIS

A distinctive feature of the Celtic languages is a phenomenon we call mutation. The consonants undergo various kinds of modifications depending on their context; such modifications are known as sandhi variations and are often based on the influence of phonological elements in earlier forms of the language. The two most important variations in Irish are lenition and nasalization styled by Irish grammarians as aspiration and eclipsis. They were caused by the final elements of preceding words. The processes may be related to the strong stress; phrasal groups were articulated as units and the finals of some words then affected the initials of others. The Irish language had lost most of its final syllables in the Ogham period but these lost syllables have been transformed into a system of mutations. The