



Thank you, dear friend, for reading my Irish learning journey. I apologize for the Irish language mistakes I will inevitably make. I live in the United States so, if you live outside the sphere of American English, I also apologize for the spelling.

Reflections on where I am in Irish

I was startled to realize I know almost 2,000 words in Irish. That sounds like a lot until one realizes an average 7 year old recognizes 10 times that many words passively and can use 3 or 4 times that many actively. I have an active vocabulary still under 500 words, I think, regardless of how many I "know". Still, I give myself a pat on the back for having come this far even as I see how far I have yet to go. I work at increasing my active fluency. I got the book *Irish Conversation Patterns for Beginners* by Dewi Rhys-Jones. I got the Kindle version. The print version was too dear for me. I repeat these over and over as my vocabulary grows. You already know I talk to myself in Irish as I can, pointing out things around me, mentioning the weather, the time, work, whatever I can think of. I talk to the television on my city walks. As an aid to adjusting my mind, I've also started talking to myself in English as though it's Irish. "It is good with me breakfast." "It is the weather cold today." Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't. Polonius says this in *Hamlet*...and he's an eejit. Also, I have to adjust my vocabulary acquisition. **Portach** is a bog. The only bogs in Massachusetts are the ones growing cranberries. I'm not sure if they are **portach mónóg** in Irish. I use Fry sight word lists in English to help me compiling my own Irish vocabularies. <https://sightwords.com/sight-words/fry/>

Bitesize Irish

I participated in my first **Foráin** on December 9. It was interesting but strange. Because there was a big time lag between posts, it was like having a conversation with someone far away in outer space with a time delay in transmission. The net effect was to be in the conversation for an hour but only have about fifteen minutes worth of conversation. I've had nice correspondence with Bitesize Eoin and Bitesize Aisling on a variety of Irish topics. Aisling asked if I would write a very brief testimonial for them. I reproduce it for you here: "Bitesize Irish was truly my gateway to success in learning Irish. I had tried other avenues before and failed. The Bitesize approach is open and friendly. The range of resources is also broad and deep while staying easily accessible. The Bitesize community -

Pobal - is warm and welcoming, a constant source of support and encouragement. I am very grateful to have found this." My problem writing a very brief testimonial is I have too much good to say about Bitesize. Limiting myself to a few short sentences was really the challenge! Through a recommendation from a Bitesize Pobal member, I signed up on Future Learn on December 9 and put Irish 101 on my wish list.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I'm about halfway through the Beginner book now. I looked at ranganna.com to see if there might be more help. I signed up for a trial lesson. When I did the lesson, though, it seemed like the content was only what was already available to me on the CDs that accompanied the book. I think the book is most useful in some kind of classroom setting. Using it on your own is more difficult. There seem to be places in the text which could do with many more examples. In a classroom setting, this would be easy to do. Nevertheless, I completed Unit 7 *Talents and Skills* (despite having basically none of the talents or skills mentioned in the lesson) and got started on Unit 8 *Work*. With my experience of Unit 7, I looked ahead in Unit 8 and also discovered that not a single bit of the types of work I've done are mentioned. I wish they had included more types of work. Again, this would probably be solved easily in a classroom setting. I did realize, though, I'm over halfway through the book now.

Duolingo

I continue to press on learning. I have slowed my pace somewhat and, at the moment, spent about as much time reviewing as I do advancing. It's not a race. There's no real need for speed. There's just a need for persistence and steady effort. This past week, I finished at Number One on the leaderboard again. Either this is very easy to do or I am just absolutely champion. **Gáire ós árd!** (LOL!)

Reading

I have been reading *Motherfoclóir* by Darach Ó Séaghdaha. I find it quite interesting, often funny, and occasionally sad in

the way that reading anything about Irish seems to me to have a bit of the incense of sorrow in it. The book deserves to be read in little bits, a chapter or two at a time, rather than as one straight read. One needs time to ponder. I found I shared the author's opinion on how Irish should be taught in school (as multiple subjects, not as a single stream). When Darach left school, his engagement with the Irish language gave way to other things. He came back to it as his father, a native Irish speaker, grew older and more frail. What struck me as a factor in the disengagement from Irish was the general lack of environmental support. It reminded me of my own life and my eldest son. When we left Israel, my son was five and already a fully balanced bilingual in Hebrew and English. I routinely spoke to him in both languages. He attended kindergarten entirely in Hebrew. He bargained with shopkeepers in Hebrew. Quick asides: I took him to a used bookstore in Haifa and he discovered some children's books he liked. He took them to the two little old ladies who ran the shop and asked how much one book cost; they told him. He said, what if I buy three? They were so entranced by the tiny ginger boy trying to bargain with them he ended up getting a very good price. One evening, we had a friend who was new to the country over for supper. Our friend had only started learning Hebrew recently. When our son's Hebrew came up, the friend said to him, in Hebrew, "Do you speak Hebrew?" Our son, with the candor only little children can muster, said (in English) "Were you trying to speak Hebrew just then?" Back to the main story: when we got back to the United States, our son noticed I was the only person around who spoke Hebrew to him. He immediately stopped speaking the language and told me he had forgotten it on the airplane coming over. I could not get him to speak Hebrew ever again. I wonder how many students in Ireland have a similar experience.

Virtual City Walk - Cork

I've done less virtual walking (that is standing in front of my television while walking videos played) because I've been concentrating more on my Long Imaginary Walk and my time in the gaeltacht. I did, however, promise myself to walk in a different Irish city every two weeks so I did. This time I've been walking around Cork. I did a lovely tour of Elizabeth Fort. I was impressed with the statues scattered about recreating historical moments. The heads on pikes were particularly memorable. I wandered down to St. Finn Barre's cathedral. Very beautiful place. From there, I strolled the way down to the UCC campus. I envy the students who get to study in such a place. Going further afield, I got over to the River Lee. I was surprised to see a life preserver on a pole till I got down to where the Brian Quilligan statue memorializes a poor soul lost to the river in 2011. There's a lot to see in Cork. I know I'll visit many more times.

My Imaginary Long Walk

These past two weeks I've been visiting (virtually) in Ráth Chairn, the southern half of the Meath gaeltacht. I've been learning more about what happened here in the time of Cromwell. Bláthnaid Ní Chofaigh was raised here. I had seen her on Republic of Telly and a bunch of chat shows. Sibéal Ní Chasaide is also from here and I had heard her rendition of *Mise Éire* a number of times. There is a **Siopa agus Caife** attached to **Coláiste na bhFiann**, I saw **éireann gais** propane on sale for 30 euros. That's about what it would cost where I live for a similar size tank but the picture I saw in Google Earth was from June 2018. I don't know what it would cost at Siopa agus Caife now. It made me smile to see "**An Bradán Feasa**" in large letters on the wall of the school since I had just learned about that a little while ago. The southern end of the little building complex is the **Áras Pobail Ráth Cairn**. Since I have been wandering the gaeltacht in Meath for the past month, I've developed quite a fondness for it. The people are full of spirit and I wish I was seeing them in person. I've learned the 100 words I assigned myself for this area so now I'll be heading south. Some of my favorite words this time are:

slíbhín a deceitful person

racún say it out loud; it's the same in English

lampróg glow worm. What a cute word!

In Closing for Now

I turned 72 on December 7. Every year of my life where the numbers of my age have added up to 9 has been special. I expect no less from this year. I remember my father. He lived to be 72 and 4 months. I will be older than him soon. He has been gone for 25 years and I hope, in all these years, I have done what would make him proud to name me as his son.

My brother sent me a wonderful gift for my birthday. He found three old books, two from 1921 and one from 1922 on learning Irish: *Irish at School*, *Irish at Home*, and *First Irish Grammar*. The *Irish at Home* book has the owner's name inscribed on the front page. I think of all the people who have held these books in the past 100 years. They, too, were on the journey I am taking. I imagine their hands holding the books and feel they are holding my hands, too.

To you who may be celebrating over the next few weeks, whether it's Christmas, Yule, or the Festival of Lights, I wish you health, happiness, and all the joy of the season. I am with you in my heart even if I cannot be with you in person.

Slán!