



Thank you, dear friend, for joining me again on my Irish learning journey. There's more Irish here than usual, the most since Uimhir a 3, **Mo Scéal ó 1953**. I apologize for my Irish language mistakes. (Does "A mo dheirfiúr" mean "O my sister"?)

My Year-End Assessment of My Irish

I must never ask myself if my Irish is any good. I only need to ask myself if it's better than yesterday. An issue one faces is the more one knows, the less one may seem to progress. At the beginning, **nuair níl Gaeilge agat aon focal**, you learn 10 new words and it's a lot! It's literally ten times more than you knew before! Later, when you know 2000 words, learning 10 words is only a tiny increase. Quite a difference in perceived speed of learning! Also, I have to constantly remind myself I haven't been doing this very long. There are times when all the Irish I've learned seems to escape me. There are moments of feeling badly because I struggle with pronunciation. I sometimes feel I've hit the wall of "all the things I have yet to learn" and am daunted. I feel like I don't want to let my friends down by failing to excel in Irish.

At the same time, I managed to write my first poem in Irish; a sort of memorial poem to my sister who left us in 2015. I wrote it while virtually in Drogheda, standing in Donor Park by the bank of the Boyne. I am talking to her because I miss her but I know it will not be all that long before we are together. The river is impersonal. It doesn't know us or love us. It just moves on. It arrives inevitably at Muir Éireann just as I move inevitably into the future. So, in this inevitable motion we are brothers. I talk about how I look on the journey and I wonder if death is cold or warm like my sister's heart. Though she and I are separated, each waiting in their own place, I know we will be young together in Tír na nÓg.

Tá mé sean, a mo dheirfiúr,
Tá mo rás beagnach críochnaithe.
Bím ag faire ar an abhainn;
Sreabhann an abhainn isteach san fharraige.
Cad a fheiceann na huiscí dorcha sin
Nuair a fhéachann siad orm.
An bhfuil a fhios acu gur mise a ndeartháir?
Téann an bheirt againn amach anseo.
An bhfuil a fhios acu gur mise an solas atá orthu?
Tá mo shúile geala.
An bhfuil do lámha sínte le glacadh liom?
N'fheadar an bhfuil an t-uisce fuar.
Nó an mbeidh sé te cosúil le do chroí?

Caithfidh tú fanacht liom.

Caithfidh mé fanacht leat.

A mo dheirfiúr, beimid beirt óg arís go luath.

I do not consider this poem a success because it requires too much explanation. I persist, though, in thinking one must try and use a new language creatively from the beginning.

Today, on a scale of 1-10, I rate my Irish progress thus (and I may be being generous):

reading/writing 1.3

listening 0.8

speaking 0.5

I took the TEG assessment again. The first time I did it a few months ago, I scored a 16%. This time I scored 46%. Still not terrific but a real improvement.

I've also continued experimenting. I don't have a huge active vocabulary yet in Irish but I wanted to get out of the habit of only saying short sentences and start talking in paragraphs. I've solved this by saying whatever parts of the sentences I can say in Irish and the other parts **as Béarla**. For instance, "**An bhfuil any ceisteanna agam?**" Now, this is definitely incorrect and might seem silly even to do but for two things: I know I'll know better later; I want to get in the habit of speaking in more than one sentence at a time.

My Year-End Assessment of My Main Learning Channels

Duolingo

I have learned a lot of vocabulary and grammatical structures using Duolingo. The Irish course is limited, however. When I looked into functionalities available - like stories and community - for more popular languages,, the Irish course was missing features. This is disappointing but I will continue to use Duolingo for general practice and review.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I am on track with my book study. I finished Unit 8: *Work* and started Unit 9: *Food and Drink*. Overall, I'm finding the book useful but not as useful as it could be if I were learning in a classroom environment. This is frustrating. I feel I'm having to

work a lot harder than I might otherwise have to. I am also discouraged when I hit differences between actual Irish in use and the new standard Irish the book represents. My latest experience was with the word **caifé** and I didn't like it. **Caifé** = Café in standard but everyone in practice actually uses **caife**.

Bitesize Irish

Bitesize has, all along, been for me, hands down, the best and most useful resource. I am satisfied on multiple levels and I could go on for a long time about its virtues but I fear I would start to look like I must be a paid endorser. Bitesize will continue to be my mainstay for the foreseeable future.

What I am missing, though, is a personal guide. To this end, I plan to search out an online tutor/mentor who can help me. I tried italki.com but didn't find a tutor to meet my needs. I also decided I need to regiment my learning even more than I do already. My brain gets worn out trying to do too many modalities at once. To address this, I'm dividing my lessons each day into speaking, listening, reading and writing segments which will focus on each skill. Discipline and perseverance are key!

Virtual City Walk - Waterford

Waterford is about an hour's drive from Ring. I thought, as long as I was on the way to Ring, I'd stop by Waterford for a virtual walk or two. I was able to do the main area of the city in about a half an hour, starting from the clock tower on the River Suir, going to the end of O'Connell Street then all the way down to the Holy Family Catholic Church. From the church, I headed back toward the river till I got to the Garda headquarters then I went right and visited the Medieval Museum and the Waterford Crystal place.

criostol = crystal

A little to the northwest is Reginald's Tower and then, following the river, I ended up back at the clock tower. And, yes, I did take a little side step to see the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity right next to Penney's. I was surprised to see a school teaching Israeli Krav Maga self defense in Waterford. I learned this system from the system's founder when I lived in Israel and have been teaching it myself for nearly 40 years. I wonder **an bhfuil gaeilge acu na muinteoirí freisin**.

I didn't learn as much Irish in Waterford as in Ring. This is natural, I suppose. I did, however, after all the virtual city walks I've done, start to develop an "attitude" toward "**Fáilte!**" signs on pubs that were otherwise all **as Béarla**. I might just be crazy but it felt like "**Now let's all put on our Irish for the tourists.**" And I did see several small crowds of tourists on walking tours as I wandered around. Fair play to the pubs, though. They need tourist business. I suppose this won't be the last time I find myself having conflicted feelings about something here.

My Imaginary Long Walk

I continue my Imaginary Long Walk through the **gaeltachtaí** by heading south. I didn't stop by **Baile Átha Cliath** because I'd already spent time there. I did, as you noticed, pop by Waterford on the way but I didn't stay long. I've spent these past two weeks visiting virtually in **Gaeltacht na nDéise**, which includes Ring, Old Parish and County Waterford.

I spent time at **Coláiste na Rinne** and this was a terrific learning experience. There were so many school-related terms and phrases that I was prompted to post to Bitesize Pobal a question asking about typical expressions used in school classrooms. This brought some response but I think there is much more. For instance, I don't know how to say $2+2=4$, $2*2=4$, or $4/2=4$ in Irish but I'm sure expressions like these appear in class. "Open your books to page 73." I'll explore this more.

I learned many expressions using "bí".

Bí linn! Join us!

Bí pairteach! Get involved!

Bí ag spraoi! Have fun!

Bí ag caint! Be talking!

Bí miuinneach! Be confident!

Bí dearfach! Be positive!

Bí in am! Be on time!

And, thanks to COVID-19, I learned phrases like:

saincheisteanna sláinte health issues

díghalrán lámh hand disinfectant

Nígh do lámha! Wash your hands!

I plan to spend at least the first two weeks of 2021 in this area to continue learning. I also want to see if I can make virtual visits to the famine graveyards near Dungarvan and learn the words in the inscriptions on the monuments.

In Closing for December and for 2020

This has been a tough year. For many, it's been the toughest year they have ever faced. **Buíochas le Dia** for all the scientists, for the medical personnel, for the people who kept food and supplies coming, for all those people who taught us a new appreciation for the word "essential". May divine help continue to support us in our need and comfort us in our loss. **An bhfuil aonduine chun fadhbanna a réiteach ach Dia amháin?** I hope we will all be together again this time next year.

Slán!