



**Fáilte ar ais!** Welcome back! Thanks again for taking the time to look at what I've written. As you will see, I've been staying on track and moving forward. Not everything goes as smoothly as I'd like but, as long as I'm moving forward, everything will be all right in the end. Please forgive my inevitable mistakes in Irish. I'll get better as time goes on. **Fan slán!**

### An Scéal go dtí seo: Caibidil a haon

When I was small, my mother dressed me, as mothers do. One of my very early memories was of a Sunday morning. My mother had put on my jacket but not done up the zipper. She left me standing in the dining room and stepped away for some reason. I must have been feeling adventurous because I started playing with the zipper myself and trying to figure out how it worked. Suddenly, and to my surprise, I zipped my own jacket up! I had never done that before. I was filled with an indescribable feeling and raced to where my mother was and cried out it was a miracle! Look! A miracle! I zipped my own jacket up! For me, it was as if all the choirs of angels had appeared and I heard the voice of God saying "This is my little boy who did his own zipper up and in whom I am well pleased." And the angels sang. I recall my mother being nowhere near as impressed as I thought she should have been. This did not, however, dampen my spirits and the event had such an effect that here I am, seventy years later, still remembering it.

What does this have to do with Irish you might well ask? Well, this same miracle seems to happen to me sometimes in my Irish language journey. One small example: I got over a big hurdle months ago when it dawned on me that the Irish language is written in Irish letters, not English letters. Of course, Irish shares letter forms with **Béarla** but, for me, that wasn't the point. I saw, as suddenly and miraculously as a small boy doing up his jacket zipper, that these letters and combinations of letters were magical in a way I hadn't realized before. They were Irish. Look! A miracle! Irish letters! The great effect of my realization was that I stopped having problems reading Irish words and figuring out how to pronounce them.

I was talking online to a **gaeilgeoir** acquaintance and telling her enthusiastically about my discovery. I remember the look on her face which seemed to be part "What is he on about?" And part "Grand", the same as my mother's face must have looked so long ago. Thinking back, I feel foolish about it now. How sweet for the little beginner student to discover something everybody and his brother Mike already knows! Water **IS** wet! But I've learned you have to be willing to appear foolish if you want to advance. Zippers. Letters. Miracles.

### Caibidil a Dó

I saw a prize-winning short Irish film from 2003, "Yu Ming Is Ainm Dom" (My Name is Yu Ming) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqYtG9BNhfM>

#### SPOILERS!

It's the story of a young Chinese man who decides to try to make a new life in Ireland. He discovers Irish is the official language of Ireland and gets the 2002 book from Gael Linn, **Gaeilge agus Fáilte**, from his local library. He learns Irish. He flies to Ireland, doesn't know English, but happily uses the bilingual signage to get into Dublin. Later, we see his disappointment and frustration because no one understands him. At last, he meets someone who puts him on the right track and the film ends happily.

#### Reaction

I found the film very nice and, at one point, laugh-out-loud funny. I felt a bit of a jolt, though, because Yu Ming has a conversation in a pub - speaking very nice, fluent Irish - and mentions he only studied Irish for six months. By himself! I'm coming up on finishing six months of intensive Irish study and I'm nowhere near Yu Ming in the pub as far as speaking goes. (I did, however, understand the Irish dialogue so that's something.) I had the thought: "If **Gaeilge agus Fáilte** produces this kind of result, I've been on the wrong track all along!" Of course, I might sound fluent, too, if I was following a script in a movie. Or in a Bitesize Beo scripted conversation. LOL! Bonus: Frank Kelly, the actor who played Father Jack in the series *Father Ted*, plays the man who helps Yu Ming out.

#### Duolingo

I continue moving forward. The most significant thing I did in this period was make an Excel spreadsheet of all the Duolingo vocabulary I've learned so far. I should probably have been listing these all along. It was a bit of work to get this done.

#### Gaeilge gan Stró

I am still working on Unit 13: *Last Weekend*. It may be my imagination but there seems to be more content in this unit than in some of the others: past tense, irregular verb past tenses, questions in the past, adverbs of time, talking about the weather. It's going to take me another week to finish to my satisfaction.

## Bitesize Irish

I've now completed 13 out of 22 Bitesize Cúrsaí. I have set myself the goal of memorizing all the Bitesize Beo scripts and their additional appended material. There are so many conversational interactions in our lives that are routine, almost scripted. I want to be able to speak all these scripts in a natural and flowing way, as if I'm just coming up with the words on the spot.

## FutureLearn Irish 101

I completed the 4 week 101 course on February 12. I went into it not knowing what to expect and this made for some surprises for me. The course started off by showing me how to write my name in Ogham script and talking about the various Celtic language branches and splits. I was a bit put off because it wasn't what I was expecting. It took me a while to realize the course really integrates cultural learning with language learning. Once I settled into this realization, I was fine with everything. I was thrown off by some of the expressions taught in the class which were different from anything I've learned before. In the end, though, it was all good. I knew practically everything in the course already but it was a fine experience altogether. They don't avoid having speakers with different dialects doing different parts of the course. It's fascinating when you hear two **gaeilgeoirí** having a **comhrá** and they both are saying the same words somewhat differently. I've signed on to do the FutureLearn Irish 102 and have just begun that material. At this point, I'm expecting to enjoy it. I would recommend the 101 course to interested beginners.

One additional thing to note: each course is four weeks long and the material is released only when the new week arrives. This means one can't complete a course in less than four weeks. The series seems to be made up of 8 courses and so, at a minimum, will occupy 32 weeks if the courses are done sequentially.

## Virtual City Walk and My Imaginary Long Walk

I didn't do any city walks this past two weeks. I've been concentrating all my effort on my Imaginary Long Walk. Over the past couple of months, I've been to Baile Ghib, Ráth Chairn, and Ring. Now I'm going to Baile Mhúirne (Ballyvourney) west of Cork. My goals as I go to each gaeltacht area are:

- ◆ Do an imaginary "visit" to the place and give myself an experience as if I spent a few days there talking with local residents about where they live
- ◆ Do "walking" tours and see what can be seen of the life of the village, town or city
- ◆ "Visit" and learn about the places meaningful to the local residents
- ◆ Get some sense of the history of the place but stay more in the present than the past
- ◆ Add dozens of new Irish words and phrases to my vocabulary connected to my "visit"

I've developed a routine now and a list of resources I generally use for my "visits". For instance, with Baile Mhúirne, I'll do searches using:

- Wikipedia
- Google Maps
- Google Street View
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Local business, school and church web sites
- Personal web pages, blogs and vlogs by residents
- Local government and school web sites

My research and virtual travels end up spread out over quite a few days, just as they would be if I were physically visiting the village. On any given day, I'll focus on one specific activity. The first day, I'll be looking for an overview and hints about special points of interest. In Baile Mhúirne, I spent the first day seeing the Google satellite map then did a Street View walk along the N22 from the Mills Inn (**An Muileann**) to down past St. Gobnait's Catholic Church, looking around the whole time. The next day, after a detailed visit at the Mills Inn using their web site, I wandered down to the road leading to St. Gobnait's cemetery. I used Street View for my walk and initial look around. I found YouTube videos that gave me history and local culture around St. Gobnait's places as well as first person walks and commentary. On another day, I toured the schools and saw a show put on by the **Ionad Cultúrcha** last December. I "walked" the streets on more than one day, just looking at houses and trying to get a sense for how people live. I try to notice details: **Isteach** and **Amach** as the Enter and Exit markings on the ground at the **Coláiste Ghobnatan** parking lot; the sign on the low wall by the small parking lot in front of the church, **Tú féin atá freagrach as do vehicil anso** "Vehicles parked at owner's risk" and the signs in the old Irish script at the larger side parking lot, **SLÍ Isteach** and **SLÍ Amach**; how the Irish name of the Abbey Hotel (near the school) is **Óstán Gobnatan** and how many things around town make reference to St. Gobnait. Along the way, I've also picked up nearly 100 new words in Irish as well.

The above is just a brief idea of what I try to do. I want my visit to be personal and memorable. When I look at the school web site, I imagine what parents would want me to hear: things like accomplishments at the school and how the sports teams are doing. When I chat about local news, for certain there'll be talk of the bypass being built. There is so much to see and experience in every gaeltacht area; it's easy to understand how I can spend a couple of weeks exploring. And, if you wanted, you could, too!

Meanwhile, I have a new favourite word: **múnóg, múnóga**; cranberry, cranberries.

Slán!

1 mo 32eiltacht bheas fheim  
Uimhir 10 —15 Feabhra 2021—Séamus Ó Cianáin  
No. 10—15 Feabhra 2021—Jim Keenan