



Fáilte ar ais arís! Welcome back again! It's six months since I began intensively studying Irish. Although I had pattered around a bit in Irish in the months before, I didn't really get going till August 2020. It took me a few weeks to ramp up my study and so I've counted my time since the beginning of September 2020. In this edition, I let you know how I think I've done.

Bitesize Irish

In January 2019, I started to feel the urge to make one last stab at learning Irish. I had tried a number of times over the years but was consistently unsuccessful. I saw some videos on YouTube done by Bitesize Siobhán. She made learning seem possible for me in a way I hadn't experienced before. I signed up for a free one month Irish for Beginners course at Bitesize at the very end of January 2019. Work and life interfered, though. Until the middle of April, I was getting ready to retire and finishing up at my job. Having just retired and feeling insecure about taking on additional financial obligations, of whatever size, I didn't do any more with Bitesize except receive Bitesize newsletters and announcements. Still, I was encouraged by the Siobhán's videos and I bought Gaeilge Gan Stró at the beginning of September 2019. I thought, with the initial inspiration I felt from the videos, I might be able to learn from the book. No. No, I couldn't. I knew I needed actual people to work with.

I became an Explore member of Bitesize on 12 August 2020 but upgraded my membership to the Grow level on 26 August.

It is no exaggeration to say that my life changed when I made the personal commitment to join the Bitesize Irish community. The three Irish people who run the site at the moment, Eoin, Aisling, and Siobhán are friendly and helpful in the very best customer service sort of way. Without them, I would likely never made the kind of progress I have. There are many nice people in the Bitesize Pobal community, the Grow level members. Everyone is united in their desire to learn. Their enthusiasm shows in how they interact and help one another. I have said it before but, if one wants to learn some Irish, I don't think there's a better place to start. Especially now.

Duolingo

I started using Duolingo on 22 September 2020. As of 28 February, I've used it every day for the past 160 days. I still find it to be a steady source of new vocabulary and reinforcement for learning. After this many months, doing a daily Duolingo session has become habitual and easy to maintain. I set the daily point level as low as I could go. This

always gives me the opportunity to exceed the goal, if I want.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I ordered Gaeilge gan Stró from Gaelchultúr USA on 2 September 2019 but had it sitting around for nearly a year before I actually began to use it. I was able to start using it by the middle of August 2020 because Bitesize Irish started making it easy for me to read and pronounce Irish words. By the time I issued my first newsletter, I was beginning the 3rd unit. On Ranganna <https://www.ranganna.com>, it estimates **Fad an chúrsa: 80-100 uair an chloig**. This would be 5-6 hours per week over the course of 15 weeks. I have put in roughly double that time. According to the standard of the **Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG)** <https://www.teg.ie/teg-levels.8.html>, the number of hours of study recommended to take the **Bonnleibhéal 1 (A1)** test is also 80-100. When I took the sample test on the TEG site, the result placed me in **Bonnleibhéal 2** but I think that is too high.

I feel I am only fair in Basic Level 1 Irish. My reading is where I think it should be but my speaking and listening are lagging significantly. As of this moment, I rate myself this way on a scale of 1-10, where ten = Intermediate student:

Reading: 5

Speaking: 2

Listening: 2

I would say, as a result of these six months of study, I have attained some basic familiarity with the Irish language.

FutureLearn Irish 102

I am in the 3rd week of this online course, Irish 102. It is too easy. I suppose this should make me pleased with my progress and I ought to be enjoying this sign of success. All of us who have been in lockdown for a year are experiencing some negative emotional effects. ("Welcome to the first anniversary of our 2 week lockdown!") I have to constantly check myself to insure any negative feeling I have is not being amplified by my pandemic-related feelings.

Goals for the Next Three Months

I find it useful to try and map out where I plan to go. It's not that I can't be spontaneous and just wander but I like to pair

my spontaneity with a focus I can return to. I also highly value the Two Questions: What are you doing? Why are you doing it? I've found, over the years, they've helped me stay clear and not get involved in too much nonsense.

Listening and Speaking

Based on my experience learning Hebrew, I expect to be "conversational" in 9 to 12 months. This would mean I could engage in more normal daily conversations without a lot of trouble. Not perfect Irish. Maybe not even good Irish. But at least adequate Irish for daily life. I think this is doable but the two areas of Listening and Speaking need a lot more attention. Over the next 90 days, I will particularly pay attention to Listening; to the ways that Irish speakers run their words together when speaking at normal speeds. I've heard people refer to "getting used to the rhythm" and I think that's good. From my perspective, though, it doesn't address the underlying issue which I see as the features of rapid connected speech in Irish. These constant sound linkings in Irish are part of what generates the rhythm of the language. I haven't found any resources addressing this language feature but Irish speakers are unconsciously aware of it. For instance, when Bitesize Siobhán says Conas atá tú?, she uses an unspoken Irish language rule for blending syllables which results in the sounds *KUNusaTAWtoo*. This results in a high-low-high-low rhythm in the phrase which you do not get if you say the three words separately. Lack of any stress on this aspect of Irish has made it more difficult for me to understand rapid connected Irish speech and to produce speech that sounds more naturally native. All my study in the next few months will have this as one focus.

Bitesize Irish

I have yet to complete 9 courses in the Bitesize content. I will complete all of them in the next 90 days. I will participate in as many Bitesize Beo sessions as I can but no fewer than 2 each month.

Gaeilge gan Stró Book 1 and 2

I will complete the first Gaeilge gan Stró book by the middle of March. I will spend the last part of March reviewing all 15 Units again. I will begin the second book before the end of March and get through at least 6 units by the end of May. Ranganna projects only 65-75 hours to complete the Lower Intermediate course. I don't know. That remains to be seen.

Duolingo

I will complete the remaining sections of the Irish language tree by the end of May. There are 42 sections remaining. This means I will finish roughly 4 sections a week.

Goals for the Three Months After

Sometime before the end of one year's learning, I want to be able to:

- write another story (at least one)

- write more poetry (at least one poem)
- tell historical stories about my family; for instance, do you know what these are?



They belonged to my great grandfather. **Tá scéal ann.**

- tell the story of losing my religion and regaining it
- discuss martial arts and self-defense
- be able to lead a Tai Chi class in Irish
- have made more actual Irish friends in addition to the couple I have now

Naturally, over the next six months, I'll continue with my Long Imaginary Journey. I will amble along and not rush. I spend whatever time I feel I need in any given location and don't experience any undue pressure to get a move on to the next spot. I'll keep on reporting things I find interesting or compelling about places I visit.

Interesting Resources

I came across a web site called **Butt Gaeilge**. <https://toingaeilge.com/> The name is a cross-language joke from **As Gaeilge** > Ass Gaeilge > Butt Gaeilge > Toingaeilge. (The site's author defends not putting a **séimhiú** in "gaeilge" because of the derivation from "as gaeilge"; it would spoil the joke.) I found a lot of interesting information and links there.

From that site, I discovered a Chrome extension: **Rememberry** (you can find it by searching on the chrome.google.com site). It's useful for instantly making flash cards for yourself. There are other uses but I've not explored them yet.

If you wonder what you sound like when you speak Irish, you can record and listen to yourself at SpeakPipe <https://www.speakpipe.com/voice-recorder>. I was introduced to this through the FutureLearn Irish courses. This can definitely help improve your speech production.

Memory: My mother feeding my little brother and sisters in their high chairs, saying "Open your gob."

Slán!