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Focla: the introspective diary study of an ab initio Irish learner

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this project is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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FOCLA:

The introspective diary study of an ab initio Irish learner

Madeline Maher
Supervisor: Prof. David Singleton, CLCS
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Abstract

The current dissertation employs qualitative research methodology in the form of a diary study to research learner-internal processes and thought patterns in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), specifically in the context of the researcher's own learning of the Irish language at an ab initio level. In the interests of triangulation of data, the diary study was complemented with both a questionnaire answered by three of the researcher's classmates, investigating their motivations for learning Irish, their learning goals, the strategies they employ in their learning and their impressions of the class, and an interview with the researcher's teacher about similar dimensions of his own experience with the Irish language as a learner, speaker and teacher. This research aims to obtain sufficient information on personal factors in SLA to determine which avenues of language learning are best suited to the researcher and other learners in similar circumstances, to suggest hypotheses for future research in this field and finally to name some possible considerations for learners and teachers of second languages.
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Introduction

The current dissertation seeks to investigate via the diary study technique the ‘black box’ (Larsen-Freeman, 1983: 3) of my own learning mind as it encounters the Irish language ab initio in the classroom setting of Trinity College Dublin’s evening language modules, run by the College’s Center for Language and Communications Studies. The learner-internal processes to be examined encompass a number of cognitive dimensions, including general motivations for learning the language, task-specific attitudes, vocabulary and grammar acquisition, phenomena of language interaction in the mental lexicon, and affective perception of the target language and its speaker community.

Over the first three months of the Irish course I kept a learner diary detailing events, techniques and impressions I considered important in my learning, my responses to them, and often metacognitive speculation as to the reasons behind my approaches and reactions. The entries were made on a weekly basis immediately after the Irish lesson, then revised in batches to remove names and details considered too personal to publish, and posted on a blog. Finally, the entries were analysed for patterns and tendencies.

Research of this kind is valuable particularly as the learning experience is a relatively uncommon one, and therefore in need of documentation. Irish, a Goidelic language on the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family, is a language of unusual status both socially and politically, and so the motivations of those who set out to learn it as adults are of interest. Though taught as a mandatory subject in Irish schools, Irish is only used as the primary language of day-to-day life by a small minority of its speakers. Despite its standing as the first official language of Ireland, the Irish 2006 census data report that it is only some 72,000 people who use Irish on a daily basis outside of the education system. (Irish Central Statistics Office, press release 4 October 2007, p. 2) This represents 4.4% of the roughly 1.66 million people in Ireland who claim some knowledge of Irish (ibid.) and only just under 1.7% of the country’s population of 4.2 million at the time. (ibid.) The language’s small speaker community limits its practical applicability, which means that Irish draws a rather different crowd of learners than bigger modern languages such as English or French. In order to es-

1 See http://focla.wordpress.com.
tablish a balanced view of the second language learner experience, such learner minorities are deserving of analysis as much as those in more common learning circumstances.

I will be paying particular attention to factors influencing both my general and task-specific motivation, but also addressing learning strategies and cognitive style. In conjunction with relevant literature in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as well as an interview conducted with my Irish teacher and a questionnaire filled out by three members of my Irish class, I will contextualize my diary-based findings in the broader scheme of qualitative studies in this field, and compare the learning patterns emerging from the diary study with those identified by other learners. It is hoped that the study will lead to the development of hypotheses for further research in SLA and suggestions for considerations in both teaching and learning approach in courses like the one attended, and that these may in turn lead to an improvement in the effectiveness of such courses.

We will begin with a review of relevant literature to provide the necessary theoretical background for the project, followed by a discussion of the diary study findings. I will then provide an account of the results obtained via questionnaire and interview, finally summarizing the overall findings and suggesting hypotheses for further research in this domain.
Theoretical background

WHAT IS A DIARY STUDY?

The diary study began to come into its own as a research method in the 1970s, and established itself across the succeeding decades through a variety of studies (e.g. Schumann & Schumann, 1977; Bailey, 1983; Schmidt & Frota, 1986). A diary study is according to Bailey & Ochsner (1983: 189) “an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal,” whose distinguishing feature is its introspective nature -- “the diarist studies his own teaching or learning” and “supplements his observations of events with introspection and self-observation.” In this review, I will be concerned only with learners’ diary studies.

Bailey (1983, via Bailey & Ochsner, 1983: 189) recommends that a diary study consist of five steps:

1. Ideally, the diarist should provide an account of his personal language learning (or teaching) history.

2. The diarist should systematically record events, details, and feelings about the current language experience in a confidential and candid diary.

3. The diarist revises the journal entries (i.e., names are changed and information damaging to others or extremely embarrassing to the diarist is omitted) for the public version of the diary. In this revision process, meaning is clarified.

4. The diarist studies the journal entries, looking for patterns and significant events.

5. The factors identified as important to the language learning (or teaching) experience are interpreted and discussed in the finished diary study.’

The goal of this five-step process is to ensure that maximum reflection, motivational, affective or preference-related, is preserved and the author’s ‘believability’ (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983: 192) as a learner is maintained without causing harm to either the author or those in-
volved in the learning process. When the revised journal is finished, observations can be made based on the author’s reports and factors that are likely relevant to a larger body of learners than just the author can be discussed.

Entries, as Cohen & Scott (1996: 99) suggest, “may include learners’ written verbal reports of the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies they use daily in language learning.” Other variables that might be documented in diary entries include those in Skehan’s (2000, via Pavičić Takač, 2008: 45) model for the classification of individual differences, namely modality preference, that is, the learner’s preference for certain types of L2 input, foreign language aptitude, learning style, and learning strategies. Bailey (1991: 62) notes that a diary study consists of more than just the learner’s entries -- the diary serves as the raw data, which is then analysed for patterns. These patterns provide the substance of the study.

AN EXAMPLE SLA DIARY STUDY

One double diary study in particular offers an opportunity for interesting comparison with my own findings, and so this study (Schumann & Schumann, 1977) will be be presented in detail.

In their seminal paper from the 1977 TESOL convention, John and Francine Schumann provide a brief account and analysis of their experiences learning Arabic in Tunisia and subsequently Persian in both California and Iran. (Schumann & Schumann, 1977) The researchers kept separate diaries detailing the language learning process from their own perspectives. A longitudinal, “self-observational study of [second language learning]” was then conducted on the basis of these diaries (ibid.: 242). The study resulted in the identification of several personal variables affecting the authors in their language learning efforts. In this paper, each researcher discusses three behavior patterns identified.

Francine Schumann identified what she refers to as nesting behavior to be a critical factor in her learning, stating that “in order to be able to devote the time, energy or emotional in-
volvement required in language learning [she] must first feel content in the place [she is] living.” (ibid.: 243) She could not become comfortable in her lodgings in Tunisia, and so her struggle with her environment “usurped her energies,” leaving her unmotivated to put effort into learning Arabic. (ibid.: 244) This factor might alternatively be interpreted more broadly as culture shock and an inability to identify with the Tunisian lifestyle. She was equally at odds with the “rigid adherence to the audio-lingual method” employed in her Arabic class. (ibid.: 244) The method’s monotony and demand for constant repetition led her to become frustrated not only with the classroom dimension of the learning, but also with her own performance as a learner. (ibid.: 244) This nonacceptance of the teaching method resulted in her withdrawal from learning Arabic. Because she and her husband, once in Iran, studied Persian through self-instruction, these issues did not arise during this learning experience. The third variable she identifies is the importance of her choice in language materials and what informed her choices. She describes her rejection of the University of Michigan's Modern Persian Readers in favor of elaborately illustrated Persian-language children’s story books. Preferring the visual stimulation afforded by the latter materials, she found that these afforded not only a good learning opportunity, but also entertainment and an interesting insight into Iranian culture.

John Schumann, for his part, cited the factor of his transition anxiety while dealing with the practicalities of moving to a new country and traveling to and from that country. He was able to convert the stress associated with such transitions into a positive opportunity for learning, employing his language studies as a sort of therapy and working through his readers, and then using the motivation gained from this initial progress to fuel further learning. (ibid.: 246) The target language, then, in both Tunisia and Iran, became a coping mechanism with the added bonus of advancement in learning. He also writes of the significance of his personal agenda as a language learner. He had a similar experience in his Arabic class to that of his wife in that the teaching method did not cater to his interests, and his need to assert himself in the classroom as a good language learner stood in the way of his learning agenda. Because of a fear of embarrassment in the classroom, he felt the need to practice items covered during the lesson regardless of how important he perceived them to be. (ibid.: 246) Finally, he mentions his tendency towards eavesdropping rather than speaking: shyness meant
that John preferred activities such as listening to the radio and observing classes and meetings held in the target language over the uncertainties of social interaction. This might also have to do with his previously mentioned fear of embarrassment. Passive tasks are safer for learners who assess their own errors harshly or are less comfortable with trial and error.

**JUSTIFYING THE METHODOLOGY**

John and Francine Schumann, pioneers of the diary study research tradition, suggest viewing the language learning process as a game of pinball. (Schumann & Schumann, 1977: 247) The learner in this metaphor is likened to the ball, with the factors affecting his learning represented by the various knobs and obstacles the ball encounters. Just as each pinball takes a unique path through the machine, so each learner makes his way through language acquisition in a unique manner, each encountering his own set of obstacles. A ball, it may be noted, can take arbitrarily long, in fact possibly infinitely long, to reach its goal, much as the language learner can take arbitrarily long to achieve his aims in the target language. It is the personal variables in a given ball, the Schumanns maintain, that “determine the path it takes through the machine and the extent to which it is influenced by each knob.” (ibid., 1977: 248) It is for precisely this reason that the subjective, personal processes behind SLA require continuous investigation: to determine the most effective way of getting the pinball-learners to their goals, we must understand their thoughts regarding both the language and the process involved in acquiring it.

Looking into the oft-mentioned ‘black box’ (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 1983: 3) of the learner’s mind is a problematic prospect for researchers. Firstly, the learner himself must be consulted, and he cannot help but be biased in his report of what he is doing when he approaches a language learning task, how he is doing it, and why he is going about it in this way. Additionally, he is not always able to provide this information, as much of acquisition occurs subconsciously (see e.g. Krashen, 1981). As language acquisition is a highly personal process, with great differences in cognitive style, motivation and background from one learner to the next, it is not feasible to anticipate all possible factors that might affect an in-
individual's learning, and so eliciting the desired information from the learner is not a simple task.

At this point it may be helpful to use metaphor to distinguish the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Imagining the area of research as a house with a leaky roof, the water entering the house can be considered available data. In quantitative research, buckets are placed in strategic places that are expected to be especially leaky, while the qualitative researcher moves the buckets around to catch whatever leaks he can find. Quantitative research, then, focuses its efforts on highly structured, strategic questions and then works with the answers that happen to fall into the buckets prepared to collect them. The qualitative paradigm, on the other hand, allows for a looser structure in the questions in order that the answers may flow more freely and the questions can be adapted to suit the available information -- it moves the buckets to catch the answers.

It rapidly becomes clear when assessing the various difficulties surrounding the inquiry into learner-internal processes in SLA that the method of choice in such research must be primarily a qualitative one. As the scope needed to capture such a lengthy and complex process as SLA is broad, it is important to allow in the design of the research for unexpected results and unconsidered variables, and to license in this way the broadest possible range of information deemed relevant by the learner. Studies, rather than taking the more traditional and scientifically acceptable path of hypothesis verification or rejection, must employ data-driven procedures that make use of naturally occurring learning circumstances to obtain information about “what people do in real, culturally significant situations”. (Neisser, 1976: 2, via Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2004: 161) In this way, the greatest possible use is made of a small pool of subjects, and potentially critical factors are not as easily overlooked.

The learner can only provide information about his own learning processes in a subjective manner; therefore, subjectivity is an inextricable part of learner-internal research. However, this is not to be perceived as a weakness of the qualitative research paradigm, but rather a valuable and indeed necessary component of such investigations. Subjective accounts are not any less valid than objective ones -- in order to determine, for example, the motivations
of a particular student for learning a particular language, the factors to be taken into account are all subjective in nature. We wish, in this situation, to determine what the learner thinks. As certainty and impartiality cannot be achieved when trying to determine what someone thinks even with modern neurological research tools such as fMRI, it is illogical to employ such techniques. Moreover, it is not the verifiable data in this case that is of interest. The learner’s biases themselves are our concern, since it is often preferences and attitudes that drive the learner in one direction or another.

One criticism often made of this type of research is its characteristically small body of subjects and a corresponding lack of generalizability and replicability. The nature of such studies is that they capture the factors that affect individuals in their language learning: it is therefore highly unlikely that identical results will occur twice. The value of learner diary studies is that they “may reveal aspects of the classroom experience that observation could never have captured, and that no one would have thought of including as questions on a questionnaire.” (Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 4)

This is not to say that quantitative research does not have its place in gaining a better picture of the behavior of language learners. Indeed, the paradigms, as Ushioda (2001: 96) suggests, citing Larsen-Freeman and Long, should be “viewed as complementary rather than competing paradigms, and SLA research might usefully benefit from a combination of both approaches to the major theoretical issues.” Quantitative analysis comes into its own when a specific research question is defined and the data required is measurable, but it cannot be the whole picture: “the logico-scientific mode of conducting research requires a complementary mode — a mode that searches for reasons rather than causes.” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2004: 158)

Responses to questions of the ilk of “what motivated you to learn Irish?” could be addressed in the quantitative paradigm by selecting a large group of language learners and analysing data from questionnaires to obtain, e.g., the percentage of learners that mention their heritage. However, it must be acknowledged that such information, though it gives a broad view of phenomena among language learners, does not provide any clear insight into the behavior
of individuals. One can imagine, for instance, a scenario in which a given learner mentions
his heritage as a primary factor in motivating him to learn a language, though it is really the
embarrassment at not being able to connect with people for whom the language is impor-
tant that gives him his drive to improve. It is information of this type, the kind that lies be-
low the surface, that my research seeks to uncover.

**Motivation & Attitude**

*Motivation: Classification, Effects, Manifestation*

Motivation has been conceived of in two primary and complementary ways in the literature:
under the quantitative research paradigm it is treated as a measurable force, a product of
multidirectional vectors as it were, that manifests itself in learners’ achievement, and under
the qualitative paradigm as “thought patterns and belief structures that seem effective in
sustaining and optimizing involvement in learning.” (Ushioda, 2001: 97) It is this latter side
of motivation that will be addressed in the current paper.

Traditionally, motivation in language learning has been categorized into the *integrative* and
the *instrumental*. (Gardner & Lambert, 1959: 267) A learner’s motivation is said to be integra-
tive if the target language is to be used to help integrate a person with the body of that lan-
guage’s (native) speakers, a region and its customs. Instrumental motivation, on the other
hand, arises when the learner needs or wants to learn the language to serve a specific pur-
pose, e.g. to fulfill university entrance requirements, or to qualify for a job.

In theory, if a learner is motivated integratively, he is more likely to succeed, since mastery
of the target language implies a greater degree of acceptance by the native speaker com-
munity, and so will improve his social life and his lifestyle in general. Instrumental motivation,
on the other hand, bestows on the learner a much lesser degree of success, as the target lan-
guage in this case serves but a minor purpose — to complete a task, enjoy a holiday in a for-
eign country, etc. Integrative motivation, then, indicates a long-term, life-pervading and
probably emotional usefulness of the target language for the learner, while instrumental mo-
tivation has a smaller scope and can be associated with short-term, often practical uses. The target language is closer, in other words, to the integratively motivated learner's heart.

However clear this distinction may be in theory, it becomes less clear-cut in the wide variety of real-world language learning circumstances. Learning a language to pursue a certain career, for example, might motivate instrumentally but in a way that is significant in both the learner's current life and in the long term, resulting in high proficiency. An integratively motivated learner might be more motivated to become involved in other cultural aspects than language. Studies, as we might expect, have not been able to demonstrate to a convincing degree whether one of these two motivational categories is generally more effective than the other.

**ATTITUDE: THE AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS**

Originally suggested by Dulay and Burt (1977) and subsequently popularized by Krashen (e.g., 1981), the Affective Filter Hypothesis attempts to account for the effects of learner attitude on acquisition. This hypothesis is particularly useful in explaining why a negative affective perception of a language, its speakers, or the learning environment -- or rather, potentially anything that can be linked by association with the language -- imposes a mental block, impeding input from reaching the hypothetical Language Acquisition Device.

![Image of the Input Hypothesis Model of L2 learning and production](image from Cook, [no date])
The Affective Filter Hypothesis could be partially explained by the finding in the field of neuroscience that cortisol, the human stress hormone, impairs memory (see, e.g., Newcomer et al., 1999; Kirschbaum et al., 1996). If the language acquisition process is stressful for the learner, he will be unable to remember the covered material as well as he would when calm. In the case of Francine Schumann’s Arabic studies in Tunisia, the concept of an affective filter, especially one induced by cortisol, would tidily explain the relation between her inability to ‘nest’ and her rejection of the Arabic language.

Gardner (2001, citing Gardner, 1979) suggests a cyclic motivational model in which attitude influences motivation, which in turn influences achievement, which finally influences attitude once again. It is logical under the Affective Filter Hypothesis to imagine that a positive attitude towards a learning situation, having the effect of lowering the affective filter, would both enable the learner to process more input and motivate him to interact with the target language in the required capacity. A negative attitude, on the other hand, raises the affective filter, thereby blocking out, as it were, the input, making the learner less able to interact appropriately, and consequently less able to learn. We can infer, on the grounds of the psychological principle of stimulus appraisal (Schumann, 1997: 8) -- i.e. that humans avoid repeating experiences that were unpleasant to them and seek further exposure to positive experiences -- that the effects of either attitudinal pole would accumulate over time, with a constant positive attitude resulting in rapid learning and high motivation, and a constant negative attitude permitting only minimal L2 acquisition.

We will later apply the Affective Filter Hypothesis to aid in the explanation of various attitudinal occurrences in the diary study, regarding the hypothesis simply as a clarifying tool, without professing anything as to its validity.

Language Learning Strategies

O’Malley & Chamot (1990: 1) define language learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information.”
Because this definition is conveniently broad enough to encompass the strategies to be discussed later in the current paper, our use of the term ‘strategy’ will denote the above.

**THE GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER**

What makes a good language learner (GLL)? This question has received a great deal of attention in Applied Linguistics for several decades. Rubin (1975) began using this term to describe a learner who employs the ideal set of strategies. Her formula for the GLL consists of seven ingredients: an inclination toward and talent for guessing, a communicative instinct and resourcefulness that takes control in target language interaction, a lack of inhibition, a constant searching for patterns in the L2, initiative and dedication in language practice, awareness and monitoring of own speech as well as others’, and deducing meaning from whatever cues are available. (ibid.: 45-48)

Particularly in a communicative learning environment, an uninhibited nature is of great use, as this allows the learner to interact more with the target language and other learners without becoming discouraged by his own mistakes. Resourceful communication, similarly,

**VOCABULARY: THE KEYWORD TECHNIQUE**

Several mnemonic devices are available to the learner to facilitate vocabulary learning, but the most frequently mentioned in the literature is known as the *keyword method* or *keyword technique*. This technique, as described by Atkinson (1975, via Pavičić Takač, 2008: 59) consists of two steps: establishing a phonological connection between the L2 word and an L1 word -- the keyword -- and then imagining a scenario incorporating the meanings of the two words, thereby creating an artificially meaningful connection. It can be particularly useful in memorizing vocabulary that cannot be immediately or sufficiently linked with another related word in the learner’s repertoire.

This technique is best illustrated by example. Singleton (1999: 155) provides the following use of the method:
An English learner of German trying to remember the meaning of Raupen (‘caterpillar’), could associate Raupen with the English word rope (sound familiarity), and construct a mental image representing a caterpillar stretched out in more than its fullest length (exaggeration helps!) on a rope.

To expand on the above description, one could certainly imagine that the keyword might also be a word from another L2 rather than L1, and the initial connection between new word and keyword might be orthographic in nature rather than phonological. The critical part, it would seem, is the second step. The more imaginative the scenario, the more persistent the memory – and therefore also the connection between the words – should be. However, this technique seems to be only truly worthwhile for a specific group of learners in a specific context. As Singleton notes (1999: 155, citing Cohen, 1987), concrete terms rather logically lend themselves to this method than abstract ones, young children seem less adept at creating such imagery, and more advanced learners seem to perform better with mnemonics of a verbal type. Thus the keyword technique seems appropriate for later L2 learners in the early phases of acquisition who are attempting to grasp basic, concrete vocabulary: this is precisely the author’s situation.
The diary study

The diary study was conducted on the basis of 12 entries recorded over three months, between 17 October 2010 and 27 January 2011. (For the full content of the diary, the reader is referred to Appendix A.) In this section I will first provide a description of the nature of the learning environment, then address my implementation of the diary study methodology and outline my language learning history as well as my motivations for taking the Irish course in order to provide sufficient context to conduct an analysis of the diary data. Following this, the findings of the diary study, in particular those of a motivational nature, will be presented.

The Irish class

The Irish class I attended, run by the Center for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) in Trinity College Dublin, was held once weekly on a Thursday evening from 6 to 7.30. The level of the class was A1, the most basic on the Council of Europe’s scale of language proficiency, and was designed for complete beginners. The course employs a communicative teaching philosophy based on group projects, with the aim of teaching students language primarily through production and collaboration. The dialect of choice for the course was Ulster Irish, which conveniently makes use of fewer sounds not found in English than other dialects.

The class consists of 11 students and the teacher. Most if not all of the students attend out of interest rather than for credit, although some do receive credit towards their degree for the course. These are then under academic pressure to pass to module. However, there rarely seemed to be a stressed disposition in the class; the general attitude was mostly enthusiastic and inquisitive. The group attends very consistently, although this may at least initially have been a result of strict warnings on the part of CLCS of losing one’s place in the course if attendance was insufficient. The students are from a variety of backgrounds. Many are people who grew up in foreign countries but identify with Ireland because of Irish parents, other family or citizenship, a few are Irish and grew up in Ireland but had little access
to the language in school or got little out of the process, a couple more are foreign but are linguistically curious. The teacher is himself a foreigner—he is from New York but has family connections with Ireland, and since his first Irish class in 1999 has gone from novice learner to experienced teacher of Irish.

The classroom’s physical layout was not ideal for language learning, but the teacher’s enthusiasm made it work reasonably well. The room was long and narrow with a window at the far end from the door and a small wheeled blackboard in the corner nearest the door. All the seats were along one wall, and due to a protrusion in the middle of this wall and our habit of sitting in more or less the same place each lesson, I didn’t become at all well acquainted with the students closest to the door for several months.

**METHODOLOGY**

In keeping the diary, I attempted to follow as closely as possible the previously mentioned five-step method detailed in Bailey & Ochsner (1983: 189). Diary entries were normally made on a weekly basis. Entries were on average about 850 words in length, with earlier entries being typically longer than later ones.

One key consideration when carrying out a diary study is deciding when the entries should be written. True introspection, that is, introspection involving no degree of retrospection, would imply keeping the diary entry during the class, as events arise; however, as mentioned in Bailey (1991: 63), “there is concern that this procedure may detract from the learning process.” The ideal compromise, then, is perceived to be immediate retrospection, the midpoint between delayed retrospection, or reflection on events after a substantial amount of time (though what qualifies as substantial is left open to interpretation), and concurrent introspection, or reflection on events as they are occurring. (Bailey, 1991: 64)

To limit the distorting effects retrospection can often have, it was decided (though only after the first three entries) that the entries should be recorded immediately after my Irish class. This would ensure that attitudinal and affective aspects were maximally preserved in
the entry, and that important events were recalled with clarity. There were a few interruptions to the regularity of entry-writing as a result of conflicting priorities such as visitors, meetings and coursework. Where immediate recording after the lesson was not possible for one reason or another, I sought to make a detailed, verbose outline of the entry as soon as possible thereafter. To further ensure nothing critical was forgotten, I always made brief notes of key realizations or developments in the margin of my notes during the class. My entries could therefore be classified as mostly immediate retrospection, though also consisting on occasion of concurrent introspection and delayed retrospection.

Though care was taken to preserve my impressions in this respect, it must be noted that no amount of care can completely exclude distortion in this type of research, particularly, as I have discovered, since the mind is able to distort events in a matter of seconds, especially where the events involved embarrassment. However, this is one of the inevitable complicating factors inherent in a research paradigm grounded in subjectivity, and furthermore, the forms these distortions take may be as much of interest as the initial impressions. In another measure to preserve impressions accurately, I recorded entries initially in a private notebook, later revising them to remove the names of people in my class as well as comments that were considered too personal to publish. The reduction in content was minimal.

Here I will discuss the first of Bailey & Ochsner’s five steps — an account of my language learning history — followed by the fifth and final step, an interpretation and discussion of the factors I have concluded to be important influences on my learning.

PERSONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING HISTORY

Following Bailey & Ochsner’s (1983) recommended process for diary studies, it is relevant to the analysis of the entries to give an account of my language learning history, as it is only in the context of my wider experience both with language and in life that the learning patterns emerging from my studies of Irish are to be interpreted. I am 21 years of age, an American of mixed Irish and Eastern European descent, with English as my L1. As a result of the no-
madic lifestyle of my family, I encountered several Indo-European languages growing up, and from the very start was enthusiastic about learning them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Production</th>
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<th>Learning environment</th>
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</table>

German is currently my strongest L2, with French in a somewhat fossilized state. Of the other three languages, I would only be able to communicate comprehensibly in Spanish; my memory of Romanian consists of just a few words and phrases that I would have encountered often or that were associated with a particularly memorable experience.
At the various English-language international schools I attended, I was a good language learner, usually finding that I didn't need to put as much work into my language classes as in my other classes to be successful, at least in terms of grades, and I generally enjoyed these classes more than others. My parents, having studied several languages themselves and using them frequently at work, were always encouraging and helpful, and their presence in the house as a resource as well as the presence of language books allowed me to easily delve into a given topic if I felt like exploring it further. I took French intermittently in school from the age of 7, but only gained any effective productive ability after living for my last two years of school in the Francophone area of Swiss Romandy. Once outside the family home, I continued to pursue my linguistic interests in the form of Linguistics and German studies as major components of my university degree course. While on a year-long Erasmus exchange at the University of the Saarland in the German town of Saarbrücken, I gained substantially in German proficiency and also took up beginners’ Spanish classes. To summarize my history as a learner, I am and have always been intensely interested in foreign languages, but though this interest generally has conferred success on a superficial level, it has not always been enough to motivate me to gain proficiency.

It is also relevant to mention, in order that we may later begin to address matters of language and identity, that after living in seven countries for an average of three years apiece, my L1 speech became noticeably influenced by foreign accents and dialects, and by Hiberno-English in particular over the past four years. I believe these gradual changes have played no small role in my lack of a strong national identity, though the causality could quite possibly run in both directions, with a change in accent reflecting national identity or vice-versa. If these changes in my accent are viewed as a largely subconscious integrative strategy, they reflect not only my college years here in Dublin, but also a long-standing interest in Ireland and its culture.
I N T E R E S T  I N  I R I S H

My interest in Irish stemmed from a combination of pleasant experiences on holiday in Ireland as a child, an interest in Irish traditional music and also the wish to belong to a particular country.

My infatuation with this country began at the age of seven, when my parents took me to Ireland for the first time. I was taken with the landscapes — in particular the beaches and the sea, as well as the green shoreline, as these natural comforts were quite prominently missing from my city life in Bucharest at the time. As time went on, we made more trips to this country, visiting four times between 1997 and 2005.

[17 October 2010]

My family and I visited Ireland about as often as we visited my parents’ hometowns and their families in the US. I began to identify myself with the country, surrounding myself with photos of our trips and taking up traditional music. My uncle gave me a tin whistle to replace the recorder I had from school music lessons, and when my father began to buy traditional music albums in large quantities, I kept many of them for myself.

At about the age of 11, I developed a great interest in Irish traditional music, and spent much of my time thereafter teaching myself to play various instruments, starting with the tin whistle. It seems my nomadic upbringing brought with it not only an interest in languages, but a distinct lack of ‘home.’ Perhaps because I never felt particularly American, I clung to the idea of belonging to this not-so-foreign country of my music.

[17 October 2010]

I became fond of one musician in particular, Altan’s Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh. The sound of her Donegal Irish greatly appealed to me, and it was her singing that sparked an interest great enough for me to begin investing time in pronouncing and understanding Irish words.
My interest in the Irish language specifically began with Altan. I would spend hours trying to learn off Máiréad Ní Mhaonaigh’s songs phonetically, and gain some basic understanding of the meanings of individual phrases via the English translations in the CD jacket. (I didn’t get very far with this method.)

[17 October 2010]

Over the years, I very gradually picked up a couple isolated words and phrases (e.g. _an tuall_, the apple; _an mhaighdean mbara_, the mermaid; _areir_, last night; _grá mo chroí_, my love) from the music, but nothing substantial or particularly useful. Upon arriving in Ireland to begin university, I was disappointed that I was unable to pronounce or understand the signs I saw around me every day and wanted to take classes, but found none in college for complete beginners. I became increasingly involved in traditional music as college progressed, becoming close friends with other musicians, and found myself increasingly in need of the fundamentals of Irish to be fully included in conversation and to understand and pronounce the names of the tunes I was learning. Close friendships with traditional musicians and Irish speakers, my dissatisfaction with my knowledge of a language I had been interested in for so long, and the language’s integral role in the history and culture of the country I have called my home for three years meant that I applied for the Irish course the minute I became aware of its existence.

**Findings of the Diary Study**

**Motivational Aspects**

The motivational factors in my language learning to be addressed in this section fall into two main divisions: general motivation and task-specific motivation. General motivation depended all but completely on what I will call cultural commitment to Ireland, while task-specific motivation was based on attitudinal factors, learning style and preferences.
CULTURAL COMMITMENT

The major group of general motivational factors affecting my learning in the case of Irish could be labeled ‘cultural commitment.’ This group consists of factors related to my involvement in traditional music, my sense of ‘home’ and what I will refer to as foreign distractions.

Because my original interest in Irish came from traditional music, the music and the language are inherently connected for me.

I’ve just noticed that during my mental repetitions of sentences I seem to try to apply a rhythm to the sentence. Tá mé i mo chónaí i mBaile Átha Cliath (‘I live in Dublin’) is vaguely jig-like.

[17 October 2010]

This connection proved useful in that if I was able to raise my motivation to work at one of these twin skills, my motivation for the other was raised as a consequence. In my last entry, written after attending a live recording of a Raidió na Gaeltachta music program, I note the event’s positive effect on my linguistic motivation, being my ‘first immersive experience’ with the language, citing conversational efforts with Irish speakers in the pub where the event was held. In concluding the entry, I comment:

[This experience has] reminded me of the things I find important. Something about trad always helps me get my head back on straight.

Conversely, a telling remark can be found in another of my later entries:

I haven’t been terribly involved in trad lately, and perhaps this has weakened my ties.

[7 January 2011]

My drive for improvement in both skills seemed to be linked to something more general than cultural activities – a general sense of ‘home.’ This is evidenced by another event described in the same entry: my three-week visit with my mother’s family in New York over Christmas holidays. During this visit I did no revision at all, and while I would have previously done Irish revision if nothing else, since until early December I saw this area of learning as a pleasure rather than a chore, I didn’t open my notebook once until I had gotten on
the plane back to Ireland. I noted the negative effects of my distance from Ireland on my drive to learn the language. This was a logical consequence of being at a different home, with different cultural features and a completely different set of people who knew very little of my life in Ireland. Spending three weeks immersed in a different culture naturally disconnected me from my usual lifestyle, and thus also from Irish. The immediate jump in motivation once on the airplane suggests that my willingness to invest time in Irish involves thinking of Ireland as ‘home.’

Finally, the foreign distractions to which I refer above have to do with personal connections outside Ireland. It seems that the highest point of my motivation was during a trip to Edinburgh in late November and early December. It had snowed heavily in both Dublin and Edinburgh, so what was planned to be a weekend trip turned into a week. I found that encountering the occasional phrase in Scottish Gaelic was quite encouraging for my Irish learning. I was motivated enough to convince the University of Edinburgh’s library administrators to allow me a pass for an evening to do some reading on Irish.

I spent a while perusing the rather well stocked (if a bit dingy) language and linguistics section, and to my delight found several books on Irish as well as an exciting multitude of books on old or obscure languages. One caught my eye — A Learner’s Guide to Irish, a book by Donna Wong, a native of California and Irish language teacher. It summed up Irish grammar in an interesting way, using sometimes outright crazy examples to illustrate complex grammatical points. The use of bizarre imagery was quite helpful in making the lessons memorable.

[8 December 2010]

I was visiting a friend in Edinburgh who is a native speaker of Finnish. Being linguistically curious and finding that he was open to my countless questions about how Finnish sounds and works, I learned a few things that made me want to continually look up things about Finnish once I was back in Ireland, at the expense of my investigations into Irish. Eventually I was able to explain this to myself: it was an attraction not primarily to the Finnish language, but to the speaker, and this attraction had effectively usurped the place of my affection for Irish.
...I enjoyed myself so much that I thought Scotland could easily become home to me at some point too. That thought triggered dominos of other thoughts -- since I had so enjoyed learning about Finnish, why not Finland? (This may however have been a result not just of the language’s inherent appeal, but that of the company.)

[7 January 2011]

Once I came to this realization, my motivation was able to improve again. I am also convinced that returning to Ireland for what I knew would be at least a six-month period allowed me to readjust my priorities.

**Task-specific motivation**

Through the diary study, my preference for passive learning tasks became apparent. I was frustrated at having to do oral presentations at such an early stage in my language development, as I didn’t feel I was ready for such a task. Valuing accuracy too highly considering that I was in a beginners’ course and not subject to any sort of judgment, I was reluctant and nervous to participate in activities that I felt would showcase the holes in my knowledge more so than my accomplishments.

**Approach to learning**

**Tools**

Facebook was a useful tool for me, particularly in the first weeks when I was trying to find an initial foothold in the language. I posed questions about the language to my Irish-speaking friends *en masse*, which ensured quick responses. I also put up sentences and asked for corrections. Interestingly, the respondents rarely agreed about what was correct, and most responses required further clarification.

I also made extensive use of Google’s online translation software, Google Translate, for several reasons. The pocket dictionary at the back of Mairéad Ní Ghráda’s (1989) *Progress in*.
Irish did not contain many of the words I wished to look up, because I had not bought dictionaries since with Irish one needs to buy two, one Irish-English and one English-Irish, and this becomes rather expensive, and because until rather late in the course I was unaware of focal.ie, the dual-direction Irish-English online dictionary. This software allows for an immediate, rough translation and being in its early stages of development it operates rather idiosyncratically, but in conjunction with other resources such as native speakers and Irish language books, it was a helpful tool for experimentation with the language.

Ní Ghráda’s coursebook proved a useful reference tool, but I could not bring myself to go through it lesson by lesson. The material, with a lesson on each page, was presented too plainly, too densely, and in strong adherence to the grammar-translational teaching method. Instead I preferred to consult native speaker friends when I had questions, and confine revision to looking over notes and handouts, when necessary writing information out in a more accessible fashion than the notes I took in class.

Vocabulary learning & cross-linguistic effects

Out of the items of vocabulary I at some point attempted to learn, the ones that tended to make a lasting impression were either ones that provided a good visual, such as those involved in a keyword scenario, or ones that had cognates in another language with which I am acquainted. An area of great interest during the language learning process is that of connections between languages. These can be rather helpful in establishing a foothold in the target language.

I applied my visual memory abilities in vocabulary acquisition through the use of keywords, creating scenarios connecting the target word to another word in my L1 or in another L2. Four examples of the keyword technique appear in my diary. This high frequency can perhaps be attributed to this strategy’s apparent appropriateness for learners in my particular circumstances -- adults in the early stages of L2 acquisition learning simple, concrete vocabulary, (Singleton, 1999: 155, citing Cohen, 1987) though since three of the four references occur within a day of each other, it is also possible that I was simply trying out this technique at the time.
I came across the word for ‘pig,’ *muc,* while writing one of my earlier entries, and remarked:

‘pig’ in Irish (*muc,* apparently — how great! Mucky pigs!)

[31 October 2010]

To remember the word *glas* for ‘green,’ I connected the target word with the phonologically nearly identical ‘glass.’

*Glas,* in turn, I remember because it sounds like ‘glass,’ and when one looks through the side of a glass tabletop, it looks green.

[9 December 2010]

*Bosca* (‘box’) evidently seemed to me like a phonological mixture of ‘busk’ and ‘box,’ so the following trick resulted:

I remember this word by picturing a busker sitting on a box and playing it as an instrument.

[8 December 2010]

Being unaware that *bróg,* ‘shoe,’ was very like an English word denoting a certain type of shoe, ‘brogue,’ I found it difficult to establish a connection with anything other than ‘brogue’ in the sense of Hiberno-English and its associated accent, and I found this connection too lacking in salience to assist me. I instead invented a complex scenario to aid my memory of the word. Adding the definite article and thereby changing the word phonologically via lenition (or *séimhiú*), I was able to relate *an bhróg* to a rather unlikely member of my lexicon, the Romanian word for ‘please.’

The best and most successful example is *an bhróg,* the shoe. Because it was very unfamiliar-sounding and -looking, I tried to find something to connect it to in the established network of words in my mind, and came up with something vaguely phonetically similar — *vă rog,* the Romanian for ‘please.’ I then imagined a gypsy begging for money so she could buy shoes, and then begging for money with a shoe as the money-receptacle.

[8 December 2010]
The intricate nature of this connection, with multimodal associations — phonological, situational, visual, emotional, recollective — allowed me to easily recall this word weeks and months later, though I had no immediate need for it in my tasks.

Often neither the keyword technique nor any other trick was necessary, notably where the word was phonologically or orthographically similar to an existing one in my lexicon, so that the cognates or pseudocognates could be simply ‘linked up.’

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{salach} & \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{sale} \quad \text{(French)} \\
\text{deir} & \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{dire} \quad \text{(French)} \\
\text{áit} & \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Ort} \quad \text{(German)} \\
\text{máthair} & \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{‘mother’}
\end{align*}
\]

I came across two words I consider to be false friends. The first is *freagair*, and the second *folamh*. *Freagair* is both phonetically and orthographically similar to the German *fragen*, to ask, but means the opposite: to answer. *Folamh* sounds something like ‘full,’ but means ‘empty.’ These words, once associated with a similar-sounding one in a familiar language, were hard to dissociate from their imagined, opposite meaning. Here I found it helpful simply to bear in mind that they were ‘backwards.’

**SUMMARY OF DIARY FINDINGS**

Motivation and effort, as I discovered, do not necessarily correlate with each other. My general motivation levels tended to be rather high as a result of my enthusiasm for Ireland, Irish and language learning in general; however, my task-specific motivations tended to be low by comparison, since as an obsessive seeker of accuracy and as a person whose timetable outside of Irish class was tight, I found myself preferring non-production tasks, which unfortunately did not make my learning style entirely compatible with the project-oriented instruction paradigm.
Additionally, general motivation was found to be dependent on several highly variable factors such as my sense of where 'home' is at a given point in time, my emotional attachment to speakers of Irish versus speakers of other languages, my geographical location and cultural surroundings and my involvement in traditional music.
The questionnaire

The findings of my diary study are supplemented by a questionnaire given to my class. The questions sought to determine primarily the attitude of the students toward the Irish class, their motivations for attending the course and what strategies they employ while learning Irish. (For the full content and results of the questionnaire, please see Appendix C.) The questionnaire serves to put my own reactions to the process of learning Irish in the context of a larger slice of the student body. In comparing my responses with theirs, I hope to paint a more general picture of the considerations and obstacles involved in learning Irish ab initio.

Three of my ten classmates responded, but despite the small pool of respondents, interesting results were obtained. In the following report, names have been changed to protect the respondents’ identities. The respondents and their backgrounds will be presented, followed by a discussion of the commonalities and differences in their responses.

LEARNER PROFILES

Franziska is a visiting graduate student from Germany. She has a great affinity for foreign languages, particularly the more obscure ones. A keen student of linguistics, she can be best described as a serial multilingual, having studied at least six Indo-European languages in some depth prior to Irish, namely English, French, Spanish, Latin, Norwegian and Icelandic. Of these languages, it is perhaps most relevant to mention Icelandic, since it also has a small, isolated community of native speakers and a comparably narrow scope of practical applicability. Franziska envisions applying the knowledge she gains of the Irish language in her linguistic studies, but out of interest rather than necessity. It is mostly the obscurity of the Irish language on a global scale that she finds attractive, and the fun that is afforded her by satisfying her linguistic curiosity.

Tom grew up in Northern Ireland, and is an ambitious first-year student of European Studies at Trinity College. He is enthusiastic about language learning, and studies French and Spanish for his degree. He also took German and Italian classes in early secondary school.
He is interested in taking up the diplomatic profession, specifically in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, and having Irish would be a distinct advantage in gaining such employment. Out of the three respondents, Tom seems to be the most driven to improve his Irish.

Liz, a dual French-Irish citizen, was born in Ireland but lived her whole life in France before coming to university in Dublin. Her parents are both Irish. Her environment as a child led her to be a balanced bilingual in French and English, but her language learning experience is limited to the study of German in secondary school. The communicative and project-based language learning environment provided by the Irish A1 class, then, is a completely new situation for Liz. Her primary reason for learning Irish is to become better acquainted with her country of origin, and for “understanding a bit on TG4.” She seems to be the most field-dependent of the respondents.

Responses

None of the respondents attend the Irish course for credit. Their commitment to the course is their own choice -- though each week they have the choice of not attending the class, all three attended consistently throughout the year. Though it cannot be determined with any certainty that the respondents are not under any significant familial pressures to learn the language, it seems reasonable to suppose that these pressures, if they exist, do not have a strong impact on their language learning, since such factors were not mentioned, and because the families of all three live in different countries. We will therefore work under the supposition that Franziska, Tom and Liz are acting entirely of their own accord in following this course.

Liz says she continued to attend the class despite a significant decrease in motivation “only because [she likes] to finish what [she] started.” She doesn’t wish to continue learning Irish at the end of this course; the others do. Liz is, however, at a disadvantage in that she feels

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1 TG4 (TG Ceathair) is Ireland’s public broadcast Irish-language television channel.
perhaps the greatest pressure to learn, being an Irish citizen living in Dublin, but feeling quite out of touch with her country of origin. Her responses suggest a degree of embarrassment at not knowing any of the first official language of her country.

Liz’s complaint of feeling ‘lost’ in the Irish class might reflect the pressure she feels as an Irish person in Ireland to be able to speak some Irish. As an American, and therefore a true foreigner, distinguishable by accent and dialect, I am not subject to either societal or self-inflicted pressures of this nature. I was largely unaffected by this feeling of being lost; perhaps my having had frequent exposure to languages with which I was totally unfamiliar also contributed to this. I certainly also experienced lostness in the classroom to a degree, but I was not so disturbed by this condition as Liz. Though very much motivated to learn Irish, I felt no pressure to learn rapidly, and so was relatively content with simply taking the language in and figuring things out as I went along. There was no stress or anxiety associated with Irish — much the contrary. Irish was for me a haven of unmarked academia. Though making mistakes was still an uncomfortable experience, I was more content to make them than I have been in past language classes, most likely because this time I was not being marked and so my own satisfaction with my progress was the only measure of success or failure.

Tom’s complaint that an hour and a half “can tend to drag out a lot” might suggest that his autonomy as a learner and his uniquely instrumental, career-related motivation for attending the class make him at odds with the style of the class and the other learners’ choice of focus. This is in contrast with my own perception, as I tended to remain after class to ask further questions.

I identify most with Franziska’s point of view. She views the Irish class as an enjoyable learning experience, not a source of pressure or stress. Since we can both be considered outsiders in Irish society to varying degrees, we are not expected to learn Irish and so can pursue our interest at our own pace. She is, however, interested primarily for linguistic reasons — she would likely be similarly attracted by Welsh or Basque. In my own case, Irish is of more specific personal interest.
SUMMARY

In summary, the project-based orientation of the course, particularly for students at the A1 level, seems to be less favored than an emphasis on individual progress. Group work is clearly valued; however, it seems that it should be complemented with individual tasks to allow for continuous feedback on one’s personal progress. This is particularly important where the students are receiving credit for the course.

It also seems from the questionnaire that field-dependent learners might work better in groups, benefitting from the support of other learners, while field-independent learners might work better as individuals, having the freedom to explore what they like. Perhaps in terms of course design learners could be encouraged to figure out which approach they prefer, and then permitted to choose at least on occasion whether they would like to work alone or in a group.
The interview

To provide further insight into the processes involved in SLA and the acquisition of Irish in particular, I turned to my Irish teacher to find out more about how he learned Irish, what he found important or helpful in this process and what approach he takes to teaching, in order to subsequently compare these findings with those from my diary study. The interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded on my computer; for the abridged transcripts the reader is referred to Appendix B.

Colin Flynn, aka Cóilín Ó Floinn, is a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin and is the teacher responsible for this college’s recently started Irish A1 evening language module. He is a native of Long Island, New York, and began learning Irish in his teens. Coming from an Irish-American family and having been exposed to Irish culture and music from a young age, Colin developed an interest in the Irish language early on in life. He recalls hearing the tapes of Wolfe Tone and the Clancy Brothers that his mother liked to play in the house and desperately wanting to understand what they were singing about on the Irish tracks. He also remembers one critical artifact in the process of his acquisition of Irish:

I remember [my father] coming home from a St. Patrick’s Day celebration of some type that was connected with the Police Department and I remember him coming home with a copy of the programme...which had the Lord’s Prayer on the front cover, in Irish, and I remember holding onto that for quite a long time, realizing later as I advanced in learning Irish that there were a number of mistakes!

Colin’s ‘holding onto’ this programme is demonstrative of his emotional attachment to the Irish language. Indeed he cites an interest in his ‘own culture’ as one of his primary initial motivations to learn Irish:

I’ve also always had a very strong interest in my own culture coming from an Irish-American background, I’ve always been interested in Ireland, in Irish culture, Irish politics etc.

At about the age of sixteen, Colin began his efforts to learn the language, using a textbook by Mícheál Ó Siadhail with an accompanying tape. The information, however, was presented
in such a way that demanded quite a bit of discipline, and Colin's patience with these tools soon ran out, maintaining however his interest in the language and occasionally ‘trying to at least understand the meaning of certain Irish phrases that [he] found in newspaper articles and in documentaries.’ He began learning Irish formally later on, attending Irish classes as an undergraduate student at New York University while on a summer abroad program at Trinity College Dublin. He continued to study it once back at his home university, making rapid progress over the first year of learning, which in turn improved his already great motivation to learn the language.

I do remember when I started learning Irish that I made a huge amount of progress in a very short time and that was motivating in itself so...it maintained my motivation or, if not, raised it, the fact that I was doing so well, that I was learning the language so quickly.

Colin contrasts this learning experience with that of French in secondary school.

I learnt French at school and I won't say that I didn't do well -- I did fine -- but I had very low motivation or not much motivation to make any real progress. [...] I was a “Good Language Learner” in the case of Irish, where I may not have been in the case of French.

This contrast underlines the importance of the right kind of motivation in making progress in language learning. The cultural and familial connection with Ireland was strong enough, being a part of Colin’s identity as an Irish American, to be motivating in itself, whereas the same could not be said of French.

Colin describes how he used a good phonological memory to look up words he hadn’t understood after a conversation or radio broadcast was over.

I had an ear for the language -- that's probably the only way I can describe it -- that I could remember sounds -- you know -- or the sound of a word that I didn't know, and I was able then to locate the word in a dictionary based on what I had heard. [...] The sounds of the language, the words would just reappear in my mind at a later stage and there was this process of connecting the dots that continue well after the fact.
He characterizes his learning behavior as ‘playing detective.’ He would listen Raidió na Gaeltachta, a broadcast from Donegal, for hours on end, being content with understanding little of what he heard. He would also pore over old texts in various dialects, working through the language ‘almost word by word’, with extreme patience.

So I used to read these really old books, and I used to constantly search, scour these dictionaries for the words and phrases [...] I used to wake up in the morning and reach over and grab the dictionary, and look for things....Sometimes I’d just read the dictionary. [...] I felt like I was a language detective because I wasn’t using any other language learning materials. I was relying almost entirely on dictionaries and works of prose.

Upon encountering speakers of other dialects while living in Dublin and finding that the differences between his dialect and theirs were sufficient to cause comprehension issues, Colin decided that it would be necessary to familiarize himself with dialects spoken in other regions. He was not put off by this task -- the other dialects were, after all, ‘just another piece of the puzzle’ he had been working on for years. He turned once again to the radio, this time listening to a broadcast from the South, An Saol Ó Dheas, and sought out books by non-Ulster Irish-language authors.

Colin, as we can see quite plainly, is a highly motivated learner of Irish. This language, it seems, is his great passion in life. With this in mind, and as Colin himself points out, few would be in a position to work as tirelessly as he has at acquiring the language.

As concerns teaching, Colin finds it important to appeal to the interests of his learners, as ‘at least in the immediate learning context, activities that spoke to the learners’ interests certainly were more successful.’

I know, having taught a number of groups like this, that they’re interested in more than just how you meet and greet people in Irish. They’re interested in kind of what makes the language tick, what it is about Irish that’s unique, what’s fun and interesting about it, you know.
In my diary, I focus on precisely this aspect of Irish in nearly all entries, for instance, in response to hearing two ways to say that one is tired,

I questioned my Irish friends as to [...] the usage of *tá mé tuirseach* (‘I am tired’) vs *tá tuirse orm.* (‘tiredness is on me’). Richard explained that the latter is the proper way, expressing tiredness as an external force. He clarified that the Celts believed tiredness, hunger, etc. were spirits that would come to you and inflict themselves upon you, hence the odd, idiomatic way of phrasing this thought.

[17 October 2010]

or the different way of expressing possession,

CF says *tá...again* is for concrete things, objects. Saying *tá cistin again* would mean that the kitchen were a physical part of you.

[8 November 2010]

to the way in which prepositions are used,

...you listen ‘with’ things, not ‘to’ them (*Éistim leis an nuacht; Éisteann sí le ceol*)...

[18 November 2010]

to amusing vocabulary.

squid = *máthair shúigh* (mother of suction!)

[8 December 2010]

In fact, I focused very little on communicative aspects, most likely because I was not in a position to use communicative Irish on a regular basis, nor did I create such situations for myself until the very end of the diary study.

**Summary of Interview Findings**

Following the interview, I regretted having conducted it so late in the year, as I might have found useful applications for Colin’s strategies in my own learning.
Colin’s account of his learning process in Irish, especially as compared with his other language-learning experiences, seems to provide further support to Schumann’s Acculturation Theory. (Schumann, 1986) Colin’s Irish took off through a series of determined efforts at seeking out input in as many ways as possible. In order to allow for such extensive immersion, particularly in a situation where the target language is not normally necessary for communication, one has to have a genuine interest not just in the culture of Ireland, but in the subculture of Gaelgeoirí. Above all, one has to perceive the language, despite its rather confined presence, to be important.

This seems to suggest, as my own diary did, that linking the target language to as varied a domain of existing knowledge or interests as possible confers success on every level of language learning, from vocabulary acquisition to maintaining the necessary motivation to allow appropriate effort to be devoted to learning the language and seeking out learning opportunities. In Colin’s case this seems to have been a major component in enabling the attainment of high degrees of proficiency.

Perhaps the positive effects of acculturation (see Schumann, 1986) in terms of SLA sometimes seen in studies are in fact part of a more general phenomenon: the broadening of the learner’s fields of interest to include the target language and finding, either intentionally or coincidentally, ways of connecting prior interests to the language, making the target language an advantage and a source of fun in many areas of life. In other words, in order to reach the higher echelons of proficiency, one should make the language a necessary component of one’s life, or at least a highly desirable one without which many attractive possibilities would be precluded. In this manner, by finding room for it wherever possible, the target language becomes welded to many if not all aspects of one’s identity, and eventually it becomes too valuable to be abandoned. I have found this in my own learning of German. Noticing that from the beginning, the language introduced me to people, notably my language teachers, and cultural phenomena such as Christmas markets and local cuisine, that German became important for my enjoyment of my surroundings. This might explain the problems
in demonstrating a clear correlation between acculturation and degree of proficiency attained.

Based on the interview data, I feel it is appropriate to highlight the importance of an inquisitive approach to language acquisition, and would propose that inquisitiveness be included in the criteria that make a Good Language Learner. It is a fundamental curiosity in the way unfamiliar things work, as well as a certain degree of uninhibitedness, that allows a learner to trundle through the challenges and victories of the acquisition process.
Summary

**Considerations for the Language Learner**

The diary study has shown me as a learner how the powers of introspection can demonstrate quite clearly how one’s language learning approach could be improved. For this reason, I would suggest to any language learner to keep a diary of his progress in a language, particularly in the early stages of acquisition. It is during this phase, in my experience, before a language becomes an integral part of one’s life or identity, that there exists the greatest risk of abandoning the learning efforts.

The learner diary has some additional bonuses. It requires that the learner spend more time thinking about the language and attempting to answer his own questions, thereby cultivating learner autonomy and field-independence, both seen as advantageous in SLA. It also has the effect that while making a diary entry, the learner is able to spot what he did and did not understand so that he may return to the next lesson with questions. Furthermore, as Danielson (1981: 16, via Bailey, 1991: 68) notes, apparently “commonplace” observations often come as “revelations” to the diary keeper. It would appear that keeping a diary is capable of widening the domain of items available for introspection, i.e. it can make more aspects of language learning accessible to the conscious mind, thereby affording the learner greater control over his technique and enabling him to better manage his time and effort.

**Considerations for the Language Teacher**

From the perspective of a learner in an *ab initio* learning stage and living in an area where obtaining L2 practice opportunities isn’t always easy, particularly for learners who fear embarrassment or prefer more passive learning styles, it must always be borne in mind that the classroom, whether it is the primary source of L2 material for the learner or not, is probably the place where the learner measures his progress. Taking into account my own teacher’s point that one should “drive home to learners from a very early stage that there’s only so much they can learn in the classroom,” it is advisable to continually suggest from the very
start of a course multimodal resources that are available to the student if he wishes to go beyond the material provided in class. This may be in the form of useful tutorials or dictionaries either in book form or online, electronic coursebooks or exercises, accessible TV programs, radio stations, local events being held in the target language. In this manner, the student learns what he has at his disposal and what modes of learning he likes best. The teacher should ideally make it his aim to convince students that these modes of practice require minimal effort but offer great linguistic benefits, as it seems even the more motivated and interested students suffer frequently from a lack of initiative. The teacher could also exploit the learners’ fear of embarrassment in a helpful way by assigning homework tasks and letting the class know that these will be discussed at the next lesson. By developing a routine of sending the students to forage for language and report back with their findings, the students will be able to make use of the positive or negative feedback they receive to adapt their learning strategies.

HYPOTHESES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It seems to me that it would be of interest to the field of SLA to investigate a connection between a learner’s creativity and curiosity and his efficiency in acquiring a language. Furlong (2009) has suggested a connection in the reverse direction, i.e. that plurilingualism might have a positive impact on creativity. Supposing a test battery could be devised to measure creativity and curiosity on a broad scale, second language learners could be subjected to this test battery and after a period of time be gauged in various aspects of their attained L2 proficiency.

Finally, I would like to put forward the hypothesis that allowing the learners a greater degree of choice in the type of work they undertake, particularly in a beginners’ course where, as my teacher suggests, the primary aim is to cultivate an enthusiasm for the language, would result in higher proficiency levels attained at the end of the first year of classes.
References


Bailey, K. M. (1991). Diary studies of classroom language learning: the Doubting Game and the Believing Game. In...


Appendices

Appendix A: Diary Entries

Preliminaries

(From 17 October 2010)

I have not yet looked at the SLA diaries of more experienced students & researchers, but here I will sketch out preliminarily what this diary seeks to record and establish.

• How my teacher approaches the teaching of our beginners’ Irish class, what he chooses to include/exclude/leave for later, and the learning environment he creates

• What approaches I take to the tasks at hand, what questions I ask in class

• What I choose to practice outside of class; in what manner and modes I do this

• What motivates me to do the above

• What questions I ask outside of class, who I ask, how I verify the responses

• My affective thought processes/attitude in relation to Irish, my reasons for taking the class to begin with and how these motives change over time

• How my approach to learning compares to those of others, and how my approach differs from what I was taught to do in school

• How I take notes — what I include, exclude, what I mark as important

• What aspects of my learning habits are characteristic of beginners’ learning, which ones are features of my personality, which relate to Irish in particular as a relatively obscure language with limited application (?)

• How I envisage applying my knowledge of Irish

• How I deal with the difference between Irish and other languages I’ve learnt (Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis) and what effect this has on my intuitions and guesses about meaning, spelling, etc.

• How I react to mistakes and corrections

• What form my guesses at syntactically/semantically/orthographically correct Irish take — error analysis

• How this language learning experience compares to previous ones

e tc.

I feel it is important to begin by explaining the nature of my course. My teacher, funnily enough from New York, teaches us once a week for 1.5 hours (18:00-19:30 on Thursdays). In the first week there were ~25 students; in the second about 10-12 remained. Personally, I find smaller language classes better — there is then more time for one's own questions — so if the class size continues to shrink I will be even happier.

I also find it relevant to outline my motives for studying Irish. My infatuation with this country began at the age of seven, when my parents took me to Ireland for the first time. I was taken with the landscapes — in particular the beaches and the sea, as well as the green shoreline, as these natural comforts were quite prominently missing from my city life in Bucharest at the time. As time went on, we made more trips to this country, visiting four times between 1997 and 2005. At about the age of 11, I developed a great interest in Irish traditional music, and spent much of my time thereafter teaching myself to play various instruments, starting with the tin whistle. It seems my nomadic upbringing brought with it not only an interest in languages, but a distinct lack of 'home.' Perhaps because I never felt particularly American, I clung to the idea of belonging to this not-so-foreign country of my music.

My interest in the Irish language specifically began with Altan. I would spend hours trying to learn off Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh's songs phonetically, and gain some basic understanding of the meanings of individual phrases via the English translations in the CD jacket. (I didn't get very far with this method.) After moving to Ireland, this personal interest was compounded with the more practical one of wanting to be able to at least guess intelligently at the pronunciation of words I see on signs: place names, bar names, College buildings, ... the desire not to look a (foreign) fool, really.

For the first two years of college, I could not find a beginners’ Irish course; in my 3rd year I was in Germany and focusing on other things. I was delighted to be presented with the opportunity to learn Irish this year, and snapped it up. I was even more pleased to discover we would be learning the Ulster dialect — the very same spoken by Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh.
The first class was on 7 October, when we learnt the preliminaries — greeting people, asking after their names and wellbeing, and presenting oneself. We also learned, as a consequence, the verb tá (a sort of ‘to be’) and to a basic degree the way in which it is used. In preparation for the next class, I almost involuntarily repeated the conversations and sentences in my head, wrote them out once again and then verified that I had spelled things correctly. I questioned my Irish friends as to the dialectal/semantic difference (if any) between fosta and freisin. (I’ll have to ask again...they both mean ‘too’ or ‘as well’, as far as I can tell) and the usage of támé tuirseach (‘I am tired’) vs tá tuirse orm. (‘tiredness is on me’). Richard explained that the latter is the proper way, expressing tiredness as an external force. He clarified that the Celts believed tiredness, hunger, etc. were spirits that would come to you and inflict themselves upon you, hence the odd, idiomatic way of phrasing this thought.

My notes for the last two classes are quite detailed. I jotted down rough phonetic transcriptions in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) so that if in doubt about pronunciation I could go back and verify — much like Hansel and Gretel’s trail of breadcrumbs. This way I wouldn’t be memorizing incorrect sentences. Also, I have always found it helpful to use what I’ve learned immediately, and so:

- I signed off on a couple emails with Slán go fóill (‘bye for now’)
- asked a friend Cad é mar atá tú? (‘how are you?’)
- taught my roommate about the curiosity of Dia duit. (‘God to you’, a formal greeting) having to be answered with Dia is Muire duit. (‘God and Mary to you’)
- and updated my Facebook status to tá mé go hiontach, go raibh maith agat, agus tusá? (‘I’m great, thanks, and yourself?’)

I also noted in an email to my linguist mother my speculation that “Howaya” as a greeting may well come from Irish, and that the “and yourself?” one hears so often in this country is similar to the tusá/ortsa/leatsa emphatics one sees in Irish return questions and repetitions, as in Tá sé go deas castáil leatsa fosta (‘It’s nice to meet you, too.’)

This is a habit of mine in language learning — establishing patterns and connections, however implausible, wherever possible, as this assists my memory. It’s much like saving a document in two places, e.g. on the hard disk and on an external, so that it won’t get lost.

Part of my study is reading my notes out loud — when I stumble over a string of sounds, I repeat it until I no longer stumble. I do this internally too when I come across a sign in Irish, and try to work
out how it is most likely pronounced. This technique has the advantage of making me notice which things I didn’t completely understand, so that I can ask friends about them or at least mark them to be asked in the next class.

Since the first lesson, I’ve bought a compact but helpful little book of lessons called Progress in Irish by Máiréad Ní Ghráda. (I wondered why her first name had so many fadas in it.) I haven’t yet looked at it properly except to try to read things out; I aim to have Lesson 1 (the first page) learnt for Thursday, as well as the info sheets from the class on the 14th.

I’ve just noticed that during my mental repetitions of sentences I seem to try to apply a rhythm to the sentence. Tá mé i mo chónaí i mBaile Átha Cliath (‘I live in Dublin’) is vaguely jig-like.

INCIDENTAL LEARNING
(From 28 Oct 2010)

I did hardly any study at all in the last week; visitors distract completely. I did, however, manage to learn at least one thing: Cad é an scéal? (What’s the story?) — this was on a sign on a lamppost on the Quays. Because of a conversation with the Irish teaching assistant, who had inserted the word scéal into an English sentence, I could deduce the meaning. (Believe my guess was ‘What’s the craic?’) I then noticed that the other side of the sign was in English.

CURIOSITIES OF THE MENTAL LEXICON
(From 31 Oct 2010)

Our teacher (hereafter referred to as CF) likes to throw us some Irish — whether on the board, on a handout, or in speech — then has us guess what he might mean from context or from information in previous lessons. I’ve noticed that, when presented with a written word, I first check if I know it already, and failing that I look at its form and see if I can recognize it as a borrowing from another language or an Indo-European word, and also check if it resembles any words I’ve learnt.

Here I will briefly mention the role of embarrassment in SLA. CF put up the word seachtain and asked us what it meant. (We had come across it in passing the last week but I didn't remember this.)
A classmate said it meant ‘week’ — that was correct. I looked at the word a while and saw a number in it. “Does the word have something to do with six?” I asked.

— “Well,” said a slightly confused CF, “it has the word ‘seven’ in it.” Frustratingly, I had in fact, just prior to the lesson, painstakingly revised the numbers to ensure I knew how to spell them and that I knew the people-numbers. (There are different words — modified numbers — used for counting people.) I think I may have mixed up 6 and 7 because seacht looks a bit like 6 in German — sechs. In any case, it makes a great deal more sense that ‘week’ might have something to do with 7. Making this silly mistake, however, will almost certainly burn a clear path in my neural networks for three words: sé (‘six’), seacht, and seachtain, and additionally will help me to remember that the definite article an is followed in some cases (an + [+continuant]?) by a letter t placed before the noun, as in:

*an t-úll* (the apple — the name of a trad song)

*an tseachtain seo caite* (last week, ‘this week spent’)

CF will often precede an English sentence with its Irish equivalent to allow us to piece things together on our own. I find this helpful, especially because I just quite enjoy hearing strings of speech in foreign languages, but also because this enables me to get a better idea of intonation and stress patterns in Irish.

Part of checking whether or not I can make a reasonable guess at a word’s meaning is saying (or attempting to say) the word out loud, to see if the phonological form resembles anything I know. For example, a sitting room in Irish is a *seomra suí*, /ʃomɹə/, and I was not able to deduce the meaning of *suí* until I’d said it aloud on CF’s suggestion — even with the full context in front of me in the form of a labeled floorplan, with the *seomra suí* quite logically just off *an chistin*. This goes to show how separated the reading-writing mental track is from its speaking-listening counterpart, and how unaware we are of this separation. Further examples I did not recognize until said aloud:

*taephota* = teapot

*cófra* = cupboard/press

*sáspan* = saucepan

*citeal* = kettle
I’m now realizing there were more of these words — I’ll have to ask CF for the small bits of paper with nouns on them. He gave us stacks of words to sort into 3 piles — ‘know what it means,’ ‘don’t know’ and ‘might know.’ CF’s teaching style is characterized by a great deal of what a former computer teacher of mine called ‘sandboxing,’ or short periods of time during which the learner experiments with the tools that have been given him — tests himself and the language out. I think sandboxing helps the learner to feel capable of managing the inundation of linguistic information, and encourages active rather than passive learning, since learners are allowed to focus briefly on the details particularly interesting to him, and to regroup.

Another observation, made when writing the above text, is that my small and developing Irish brain seems to be connected not directly to my English brain, but via other foreign languages, or more accurately, via a foreign-language-center or reception area in my brain.

As this picture describes, a thought might move from a nonlinguistic conceptual level into either English or German (my somewhat autonomous languages), more likely English. It would then move to the Foreign Language Center if I wanted to continue the thought in an L2 other than German (and in certain cases French). So to think of ‘pig’ in Irish (muc, apparently — how great! Mucky pigs!), I would need to perform a mental algebra something along these lines:
I’ve noticed that when I’m trying to internally produce an Irish sentence, I sometimes pull out Russian or Spanish words. For example, freisin or fosta (too, also) is often equated with тоже. When I was learning Spanish last year, I noticed that I would often think спасибо when I meant to think gracias, or мороженое instead of helado. Perhaps because my experience with each of these languages is more or less equally basic, they are all stored in a sort of floating purgatory in the Foreign Language Center, where their lexica flow into each other and are not obviously festively separated.

One final observation: are broad d’s and t’s always dentalized? What about slender ones? And why does it seem in class that I am intuitively supposed to have a notion of ‘broad’ and ‘slender’? I’ve not heard this terminology used in any other case except in the discussion of Irish.

The next step to be added to my journaling in this process of metalearning is to compare myself with the criteria in the literature describing the Good Language Learner, and to compare my technique with the established Language Learner Strategies.

I’m recalling now that I’d meant to be supplementing Irish class materials with M. Ní Ghráda’s coursebook — this may have to wait until reading week.

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**Cluisean tú torann na sráide i mo árasán**

(From 8 Nov 2010)

I’m writing my diary 4 days after the class today. I’ve decided to switch my diary to electronic form to enhance usability later in the game, to shrink the task of transcription, and to make the diary available to other researchers later on. I’ll be removing names for ethical reasons.

In the last class, I was not quite as eager and happy to try things out as I have been in the past. Perhaps this has to do with the exhaustion from the past couple weeks and things piling up on my desk. I found I was not in exactly the right mood, more anxious about making mistakes, and fell to chit-chat with my neighbor during exercises rather than working properly. This may also have had something to do with the fact that my neighbor had not been able to attend recently, and since she was behind on the material, we couldn’t play off each other as much as usual.

I found myself getting slightly irritated when asking the assistant for help with translating “In my apartment you can hear noise from the street” (we were describing our houses). She has a habit of giving a multitude of answers involving words we’ve not heard before, and while this is great for our
vocabulary, we need our information to be presented slowly enough that we can understand it, so I kept having to ask her to repeat herself and guess at the appropriate spelling, getting her to check my sentence at the end. This, however, did seem to work, as I recall most of the outcome. (I think.)

\[ \text{glóra} = \text{loud} \quad \text{(from gló = ’voice’)} \]

\[ \text{torannach} = \text{noisy/loud} \]

\[ \text{na sráide} = \text{street + GEN} \]

\[ \text{Cluisteán: Cluisean tú torann na sráide sa árasán/i mo árasán.} \]

There was another word for noisy beginning with c I think, but which S said is only used in speech.

Another thing I learnt as a result of a question:

\[ \text{Tá ceist agam.} \]

\[ *\text{Tá cistin agam.} \]

\[ \text{Tá teach agam. (?)} \]

CF says \( \text{tá...aga} \) is for concrete things, objects. Saying \( \text{tá cistin agam.} \) would mean that the kitchen were a physical part of you. I intend to ask one of my native speaker friends for clarification on when I can and can’t use \( \text{tá...aga} \) — the semantic boundaries seem a little fuzzy. (Then again, a house is an object, a question is a sort of theoretical object, but a kitchen is a poorly delineated area/function of a house, so it sort of makes sense.)

I’ve just played around a bit in Google Translate to try to figure some things out, and have concluded that the Irish <> English functionality is as yet a little impaired, and that I’d better find myself a dictionary. In fact, I’ve just realized a small one is at the back of my exercise book — this will be handy. In any case, when I put into Translate ‘a voice,’ it gives me nothing back; for ‘the voice’ it gives me \( \text{an guth} \); for ‘my voice’ it gives \( \text{mo ghlór} \). At least I can conclude that \( \text{glór} \) is feminine because of the \( \text{séimhiú} \).

And my internet dabblings have led me to an etymological revelation! I was trying to get Translate to tell me how to spell \( \text{séimhiú} \), and I put in ‘soft’; it returned \( \text{bog} \). This got me thinking that maybe our word ‘bog’ (the wet, spongy ground, not ‘toilet’) might come from Irish. Sure enough, Dictionary.com says ‘bog’ came from Ir/ScotsGael around 1495-1505. Nice. Would have been strange indeed, though, had the word not come from one of those languages.
Another thing occurs to me about last class. Our group project was mentioned and briefly discussed, but not assigned. I am slightly offended by the green paper on which the project regulations are printed — I have a strong distaste for group projects. I hate coordinating work with hard-to-reach people, and I question the usefulness of the teamwork component. I do see the point of working in groups in a language class — we do, after all, need more than one person to have a conversation (under usual circumstances). I would prefer we were allotted sufficient in-class time to complete the project so that scheduling issues don’t wind up using more of my time. The weeks are short enough as it is!

Lately I’ve changed my outlook on the Irish language. I’m realizing that many more people use it day-to-day than I initially thought. Consequently, I no longer view my class exercises in the same way. At the start, I was interested in Irish in a mostly academic way, with the only real practical motivations being to have enough in my repertoire to be an acceptably naturalized inhabitant of this country — that is, to be able to understand the trad crowd when they slip into their Native Tongue, read road signs and maybe the odd poem, and sing songs in a phonetically correct manner and understand the key messages. Now I see the point of conversation and using the language as something more than a Latin-like curiosity; I am on the one hand assisting in a revival/conservation movement, and on the other hand, how is one to know a language in any significant capacity without being able to understand and produce speech? Speech confirms the vitality of the language, and its vitality makes it all the more interesting to me.

Another brief note on *Clúisean tú torann na sráide i mó árasáin*. I found it interesting that the use of ‘you’ as an unspecified person is the same in Irish. Perhaps this was always the case, perhaps this was taken from English?

I’m unsure of when to pronounce ‘r’ as retroflex, when as a flap. And how to say á — it takes so many forms! Depending on context (I’ve not yet established a clear pattern) it’s sometimes [a], other times [ɑ], still others [æ], and even [ɛ] (*dbá, sráid*). I’m also unsure how much of the variation is down to variations in accent between CF, S and other speakers.

I find myself getting very excited when asked by my enlightened friends to guess the meanings of signs in the street, around college, etc. I was very much amused by a sign in the primary school where I have my fiddle class. It said ‘don’t run’ but however the Irish is phrased, it directly translated to something like ‘don’t be runnin.’ (*Ní... ag rith...?*) Gearóid also made me guess the meaning of a sign on a door that meant ‘keep this door shut always’ (*doras...gcónaí*). My guess was completely
context-based: ‘shut the door behind you,’ as I could glean nothing from gcónai, having only seen it in the context of 1st-3rd person plural mutations in tá sibh in bbur gcónai, etc. and so I’d only doras to go on. Gearóid explained that gcónai (was it maybe go gcónai in the context?) is also used when referring to time in some senses. I’m sure I’ll find out more later — a lesson has been learnt though: bring a notebook to fiddle class!

A final note. When studying, I seem to like to take stock of everything that I know by simply writing down all I remember on a sheet, guessing at the things I’m unsure of, and then verifying. It’s an exciting prospect to think that very soon, if not already, it may not all fit on one page!

**BAD DAY TURNED GOOD - THE POWER OF INQUISITIVENESS**

(From 18 Nov 2010)

When I went to class this evening, I was in an awful mood. Thursdays begin at 9 and end at 19.30, and on this particular occasion I had only gotten about an hour of free time in all of that, which was spent frantically feeding myself. I was tired, stressed, overworked and above all grumpy — and for the first time I really didn't want to go to class at all. But as soon as I sat down with my eager peers and started listening to CF begin the lesson, the weight of the day was lifted. I was able to immediately turn my bad mood into a tool for learning by asking about something we had not yet learnt — how to say that one is feeling anything other than positive. Go measartha is middling, so-so; tá mé go dona or go bólc is ‘I’m doing badly’.

The class really is the highlight of my week. I can’t leave the class even to use the toilet in case I miss something interesting — a friend of mine refers to this condition as FOMO (fear of missing out). Generally he uses this term in reference to the drive to say yes to social events such as parties, dinners, movies and nights out. I get the same kind of excitement from learning new languages (but especially Irish, for some reason) as I do from being in the early stages of a romantic relationship. I’ll be walking home and saying something or other over to myself, and suddenly be overwhelmed with giddiness and let out a small laugh even though I’m on my own. It definitely makes me a little bit high. Maybe it’s the idea of the exponential expansion of my knowledge with every phrase learnt (all the possibilities!) or just the observations of similarities between Irish and other languages, or even odd, almost coincidental differences, such as the striking similarity between the Irish freagair (to answer) and its opposite in German: *fragen* (to ask).
For the first time, I found my background in linguistics to be an obstacle today. We were discussing conjugations of verbs. If the last vowel sound in the verb stem is slender, the ending must begin with a slender vowel; if broad, then the ending must start with a broad vowel. (Caol le caol agus leathan le- leathan.) This confused me, as I thought we were talking about phonology, but we were actually talking about spelling, so when I could not hear any difference in the pronunciation of the endings, I had to ask what was going on. Once I’d gotten CF to understand what I was asking, the answer was quite a bit simpler than I had expected, because the lines on which I was thinking were not as obvious.

I’ve been well trained at this stage to analyse language in detail, and for this reason I might often miss the forest for the trees.

CF said early on in the lesson that he wanted us to start asking questions in Irish. Though we had learnt a few questions/requests/classroom statements (‘What’s the Irish for...?’ ‘Say that again, please.’ ‘Another sheet, please.’ ‘I’ve a question.’ etc.) we’ve seldom used them. I find in my own case that this is largely because whatever way I want to ask the question or request clarification, I’ve forgotten one of the words necessary, or I don’t know one of the words and need to be efficient about asking, or the question I want to ask is not in my vocabulary at all. For instance, I don’t know how to say ‘What’s that mean?’ but I do (theoretically) know how to say ‘What’s the English for...?’, so I suppose to a large extent it’s a lack of creativity on my part in piecing together the things I do know in time so that I can ask a question in Irish. My personality impedes progress sometimes; I am embarrassed if I’m not entirely accurate, so the risk-taking component in shoving a bunch of words together and hoping they make sense is a little unpleasant for me, though I’ve gotten over that on occasion in the past. This is exactly where a glass of wine comes in handy.

Some observations on prepositions in Irish: names are ‘on’ (ar) things, as CF pointed out today (Cainm atá ort? Cén Ghaeilge atá ar...?); you don’t have things, but rather things are ‘at’ you (Tá ceist agam); you listen ‘with’ things, not ‘to’ them (Éistim leis an nuacht; Éisteann sí le ceol); you are not tired, but tiredness is ‘on’ you (Tá tuirse orm.). I find this prepositionalization in Irish quite amusing.

We learnt a few Irish phrases today that present themselves, literally translated, in Hiberno-English. In Ireland one often hears that someone “is after” doing something. As it turns out, this is an example of a literal translation, not just some strange linguistic invention. (Tá mé i ndiaidh sin a dhéanamh. = ‘I’m after that to do.’ = I’m after doing that.)

It helps a great deal to have humorous, inquisitive classmates. In groupwork, this helps to overcome the fear of making mistakes — we are of course all in the same boat and know more or less equally
little about how the language works, but it is distinctly easier to realize this if your partner is friendly and talkative. My partner today suggested that I watch TG4 (the Irish TV channel) online to get a bit more listening in. I tried this out after class — for some reason the connection with the server ‘could not be established’ so I’ve emailed TG4 asking what could be done to fix this. Hopefully I’ll hear back soon.

I was enlightened today about a couple contractions we’ve seen before: cé is short for cad é an (‘what is the...’); don is short for do an. (‘for the...’). Funny how things like that are not at all apparent to early learners but are so thoroughly obvious to fluent speakers.

I’ve been finding more and more words that look or sound like French. Today we learnt to say ‘How do you say...?’ (Cad é mar a deir tú...?), and the verb deir, conveniently, looks a lot like dire. Salach (dirty) looks like sale. Cé is a bit like qui. Additionally, Irish is a bit preoccupied with sticking in extra consonants in certain areas, sometimes out of a fear of vowels running into each other, sometimes for reasons I don’t understand. French does this too. The preposition le turns into leis if the next word starts with a vowel. The French un, to take a simple example, turns into une to avoid this problem. I suppose English does this too, with ‘a’ and ‘an’. However, in Irish, perfectly harmless situations are ‘fixed’: an + seachtain = an tseachtain; an +  úll = an t-úll. I complain, but really I find all this interesting — it creates new puzzles for me to try to work out. After all, this is one of the primary reasons I’m in the class at all: it reminds me of a prolonged strategy game. It’s pure entertainment.

Another curiosity: plural forms of certain nouns apparently vary between dialects, with certain groups opting for alternative plural morphemes. The instance we had in class was áit, or place (sounds a bit like Ort = place in German), whose plural in the North and West is áiteacha, while in the South áiteanna is preferred.

Yet another: In my homework I came across is breá liom é, which Google Translate informed me means ‘I love it.’ I find this odd, since go breá means okay. Also, is maith liom é means ‘I like it’; go maith means ‘well.’ Tá mé reidh means ‘I’m ready’; go reidh means finished. What does go do to the meaning of a word?

I read today that the process of SLA ‘involves the gradual automation of increasingly complex cognitive processes.’ The automation is indeed very gradual, but the nice thing is that practice does guarantee a certain degree of advancement. I find it rather similar to playing music — the more you work on the same piece, the more you realize how it’s put together and the more fluid and detailed you
can make it sound. As in music, in language it seems critical to get a good grasp of the basics and start adding things once the basic rhythm, so to speak, has established itself in your mind.

I'm gradually becoming better at guessing the meanings of things I see in Irish. An acquaintance of mine put up on Facebook recently: *Cá ndeachaigh an grian?* This was succeeded by a comment about the *grian* being in Paris. Given the context, and the fact that the weather was pretty bad, I could work out that she was wondering where the sun had gone, which made me quite happy.

Finally, I'm noticing something that is fairly apparent but nonetheless relevant — journaling makes me look over my work, and just writing this entry has made me clarify and review a good few things. Even if the reflection amounted to nothing, the process would still be worthwhile because it helps me study at the very least in this way. It's also made it quite clear to me that I am the kind of learner who gathers rules, seeks patterns, makes postulations. The problem with this is that I seem to then get absorbed in these thoughts instead of actually making myself understandable. That is, however, the next step up, and I'll have to get better at that once I've automated the other bits.

**ALTERNATIVE VIEW**

(From 25 Nov 2010)

Today I missed 2/3 of my Irish class. I was able to collect the handouts and get a broad overview of what was covered. My roommate's mother was visiting from the US and decided to take us out to dinner — it went on a little longer than expected and it would have been both rude and dissatisfying to leave when I was due to, so I stayed and caught the tail end of the class. Our teaching assistant took the class today. We talked afterwards for a bit, and she told me about some of her teaching strategies — interesting one being the use of a song to drive home the importance of historical knowledge when learning the Irish language.

Today was all about teaching, in fact. I discussed my FYP with Professor Michael Grenfell from the School of Education. He told me about an experiment he did with language learners (native English speakers learning some language in school, I believe). He presented them with a poem in Dutch, which they did not speak, and asked them to deduce what they could of the meaning. The poem was on a sheet with pictures, so some inference could be made as to the general theme purely from visual cues, while the closeness of English and Dutch might have allowed further deductions based on similar orthography or phonology. The concept of the visual cues interested me, since they are such a
vital aspect of a language learner's toolbox. It's something to latch onto, something on which new inferences can be built. And if one pays attention, they are everywhere. I frequently encounter Irish language posters in college, and am generally able to decipher roughly what they mean from a combination of decisive imagery and heavy incorporation of English borrowings.

I have to admire CF's handout-making abilities. They are simply beautiful. He incorporates images in a clever way, everything is neatly labeled, sentences are translated, important grammar points are noted, and at the end of every class there is a summary sheet handed out so we know just what we covered and therefore just what to revise. My revision methods work much better when primed with this sort of impeccably organized information — I don't feel so inundated when everything is on neat, uniformly formatted sheets. I then feel free to make my own work as sketchy and messy and sandboxy as I like.

Reading about other learners in Grenfell's book reminded me of certain aspects of my learning I have not yet addressed. I strongly prefer writing to speaking when it comes to language production, although successfully holding a conversation and pronouncing things well is much more fulfilling to me than writing the same number of sentences successfully. I like writing because I can take my time and be accurate, whereas speaking involves pain whenever I make a mistake. It isn't rational to be embarrassed making a small mistake in a language being learnt unless it is a formal situation in which accuracy is expected, or if the mistake made led to some sort of innuendo or taboo expression. Nevertheless, being wrong bothers me. It bothers me less in Irish than in German, however, because less is expected of me in Irish. German is something I've been learning for 9 or 10 years all told, and when I come across unfamiliar words, especially in class, I wonder why I haven't come across them before and feel guilty for not knowing them. I dislike ignorance in myself, and I do what I can to repair the holes I find in my knowledge of topics that interest me, and where necessary, those in topics that don't interest me.

I remember once when I was very young, maybe 6 or 7, a colleague of my parents' asked me if written words appeared in my head while I was speaking or listening, and I said they did. I think if this were to happen all the time, my brain's capacity for other processes would be greatly impaired, but it certainly is the case if I'm trying to remember a word in a foreign language or pronounce a word I've only ever read and not said.

We're starting our group project next week. In preparation, I'd like to revise everything we've learnt thus far. This is somewhat unrealistic, but I will aim to revise the vocabulary systematically to some
extent by creating mind maps of terms in the areas covered, such as family, food, house, days of the week, etc.

THE WEEK THAT WASN’T

(From 8 December 2010)

I haven’t had Irish class since my last entry. On the 27th of November I went to Edinburgh to visit a friend, and on the 29th found myself quite stuck there — which I really didn’t mind at all because the snow was beautiful and I was having an absolute blast. I wound up staying until the 3rd of December, which would ordinarily have meant my missing Thursday’s Irish class (along with my myriad other Thursday classes), but since college was canceled from Wednesday through Friday, I missed next to nothing. Edinburgh was interesting from a linguistic perspective in several ways. First of all, their fadas are backwards. It turned out that my friend, a student of physics and chemistry, was interested in my favorite topic — language. I was happy to find another willing victim for my language blabber, and turned much of our conversation in this direction, summing up the curiosities of Irish I’ve learnt thus far, and learning new curiosities in Finnish. My friend eventually had to wander back to the library, as he had quite a bit of work to be doing, so I got a visitor’s pass and joined him there. I spent a while perusing the rather well stocked (if a bit dingy) language and linguistics section, and to my delight found several books on Irish as well as an exciting multitude of books on old or obscure languages. One caught my eye — A Learner’s Guide to Irish, a book by Donna Wong, a native of California and Irish language teacher. It summed up Irish grammar in an interesting way, using sometimes outright crazy examples to illustrate complex grammatical points. The use of bizarre imagery was quite helpful in making the lessons memorable. Wong mentions on p 8 her annoyance with gaps in the standard collection of Irish language books. They do not take a holistic, personable approach to language learning guidance, and either leave out grammar details where they are needed or go overboard with linguistic details when the learner is still too green for them. This was Wong’s motivation for writing her own book. I identified quite strongly with her point of view. She believes that true motivation and willingness to invest the necessary time and effort in the language are the only requirements for success — age and linguistic background should not be problematic to overcome. I like her enthusiasm, and to a large extent agree that it is appropriate. Here I will list things I found interesting in this book:
ordeal = oirdéal

the differences between the old (and sesquipedalian!) Dinneen spelling forms and the modernized Caighdeán

sciurd = hurry; sciuird = quick trip

a proverb roughly equivalent to ‘The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree’: Céard a dhéanfadh mac an chait ach luch a mharú? (What would the cat’s son do but kill a mouse?)

enthusiast = diograiseoir (looks like ‘digressor’)

(and my favorite:)

squid = máthair shúigh (mother of suction!)

While at my friend’s house, we took a couple breaks from fun to do study. I laid out my papers across the living room table so I could see a stack from each lesson, giving me an overview of things covered so far. I wrote out a list of new vocabulary in English, putting my vocab sheet away to try to remember the Irish equivalents, writing them down and then verifying their correctness. I made little mind-maps of vocabulary, read things aloud, and began to write out sentences using new vocab, finally becoming too sleepy to proceed — vocabulary is all well and good; it is the plethora of questions arising from attempts to actually use the vocabulary in sentences that is really strenuous. I took a 20-minute nap before dinner, and realized that napping is in fact quite effective for remembering vocabulary. Somehow I felt like the nap allowed all the vocabulary clouds in my head to settle into a more scrutable form.

I suppose I might also mention a few things about my habits while studying. I recently did a vocabulary session where I tried to use strange linguistic connections to remember words. The best and most successful example is an bbróg, the shoe. Because it was very unfamiliar-sounding and -looking, I tried to find something to connect it to in the established network of words in my mind, and came up with something vaguely phonetically similar — vărog, the Romanian for ‘please.’ I then imagined a gypsy begging for money so she could buy shoes, and then begging for money with a shoe as the money-receptacle. I have yet to use the word bróg, but it is undeniably a part of the network now.

Another one I had trouble remembering was ag ól, or ‘drinking’. I wrote next to the word “ól gone!” and this helped substantially. During this exercise, I noticed a tendency of mine, when pronouncing read Irish words in my head, to elongate the vowels where there are no fadas, e.g. ‘i’ becomes /i/, ‘o’
becomes /ol/, ‘e’ becomes /e/ etc. I suppose I mentally add fadas where they don’t belong because the foreign languages I’m familiar with pronounce these vowels in this way most of the time. The word folamb (empty) was difficult because it sounds like ‘full of.’ However, well after having learnt this word initially, simply having noted that it was ‘backwards’ seemed to have helped me remember. Bosca (box) is backwards in a different way: the /s/ and /k/ sounds are switched in English and Irish. I remember this word by picturing a busker sitting on a box and playing it as an instrument. Díreach on the other hand was simple to remember, since it looks a bit like ‘direct.’ Cam. (crooked) sounds a bit like the German krumm. which means the same thing. Salach (dirty) sounds like the French sale. meaning the same thing. Upon reading salach I remembered it coming up in a Dara O’Briain skit in which he says to a girl Tá tú salach! This also was helpful for my memory.

I know a good few words at this stage — the trick now is actually putting them together. I learned that I need to take advantage of CF’s willingness to correct text submitted by email. My aim for next week is to have submitted at least 10 sentences for him to correct.

SIONGOFÓIL/FEOIL.

(From 9 December 2010)

Today we spent the first part of the class reviewing food words, then asking questions in pairs about food, and learning to tell time before going onto the second part in which we briefly discussed our group projects and tried to come up with scenarios in which enough speaking would be done.

While reviewing food words, our first task was to cover up the English words on a vocab sheet and try in pairs to remember what the Irish words meant. The only one I had trouble with was tortbáifruit). I couldn’t remember at all what it meant, but contextually I could work out what it was likely to be, since glasrai was just below it and I could remember that quite well thanks to S’s trick — glas means ‘green’, eat your greens, etc. Glas, in turn, I remember because it sounds like ‘glass,’ and when one looks through the side of a glass tabletop, it looks green. (Logical, right?)

It’s not only Irish I learn in class — sometimes it’s also English. Since Hiberno-English has a smattering of Irish folded into it, things like am bailé. appear in English as ‘home time’ = time to go home, in the English I’m accustomed to. There is also the classic case of ‘I’m after doing...’ which is also a direct borrowing — something to do with i nditaidh ... Can’t quite remember what the form is. It’s
grammatically a bit ahead of where we are at the moment, since we're still working in the present tense.

CF talked today about the slenderness and darkness of /l/. I've noticed of late that I don't pick up on this distinction quite as much as I should. For instance, I made the mistake of pronouncing feoil (meat) the same way as fői (yet). This was not only an /l/ problem — it is darker in the former than in the latter — but also a vowel problem — I'm never quite sure where palatalization and labialization occur, and the behavior of the 'eo' grapheme confuses me. I was perhaps basing my guess of feoil = /fo:l/ on words like seo rather than ceol.

Then again, it has always been the case that when I am learning a language, my ability to pick up on these distinctions grows rather logically with my knowledge of the language; the learning seems to start out with a large-grain, raw grasping at whatever I can pick up, and as I amass the more prominent distinctions I can then turn my focus to the finer-grain ones.

I made an error today that seemed quite clearly to be a transfer of L1 rules into Irish — not because I wasn't aware of the correct form, but perhaps because conceptually verbs behave differently in the languages I know. ‘Do you like vegetables?’ for instance is an maith leat glasrai? in Irish, which is literally somewhere along the lines of are vegetables good with you? Perhaps force of habit makes this difficult for me to utter — I said an maith tú glasrai, which makes no sense, but incorporates the active nature of liking something.

I made a connection during the meeting I had after class. Baile an Mhuilinn (Eng. Milltown) was the name of my old Luas stop — this could be translated to Home of the Mill (I think), which is a very common German town name: Mühlheim. For some reason I found this connection exciting.

We were talking about time (an t-aonam.) today. In order to discuss this adequately, we needed to learn a few more numbers. I now know 11, 12 and 20, and given a few minutes could work out the numbers in between — will have to do that at some point. I really liked 11 and 12, because they do something odd. If one wants to say for instance ‘eleven days’ in Irish, it’s aon lá déag, gloss: ‘one day teen.’ In addition to this strange separability of certain numbers, lá is used rather than the plural form laethanta. The same goes for dó lá dbéag. It’s going to take me a while to be able to count things — there are many reorderings, mutations and in general counterintuitive things to keep track of for a person who isn’t used to this kind of complexity in counting.
A classmate mentioned an interesting fact to me today — a black man in Irish is not a *fear dubh*, but rather a *fear gorm* (a blue man).

We learned a word recently that I find a little confusing. *Subh /su:/* means jam. *Sú*, also *su:/*, on the other hand means soup or juice, and also appears in *sú talú* (strawberry). Soup is also called *anraith*, which though it sounds less like soup, cannot be confused with juice, so I may prefer to use this word in the end. Google Translate has once again helped me out — the plural of *sú* (juice) is *súnna*, while the plural of *sú talú* is *sútha talú*. *Sú* (juice) connects to the Romanian *suc* (also juice) in my head.

I’ve noticed recently that I am not transcribing things phonetically as much in my notes as I used to — it would appear that I am now able to make better guesses at pronunciation.

**Presentation and Motivation**

(From 16 Dec 2010)

Today we had oral presentations. Ours did not go well. We kind of threw it together at the last minute — our group was only together for an hour to prepare, the hour being directly before the presentation. The group work was supposed to run over 3 weeks, but the first week we only had half an hour with an incomplete group, the second week class was canceled because of snow, and the third was a bit of a scramble. We were given free rein for the format of the presentation — the others stuck to dialogue around a dinner table, which was appropriate for our knowledge of the language. We however decided to do a game show, and it turned out to be too complicated. Had we been allowed to read a script, it might have been okay — though it may have been best to have a script written in any case rather than try to be too spontaneous. J and I wound up with only a couple lines as game show participants, and C wound up with the bulk of the speaking, being the game show presenter. We were to guess items being drawn on the board, and not as many full sentences came out as hoped. C, having used many words that were not yet part of our vocabulary, stumbled and got nervous, and as J and I hardly spoke, it was plain we weren’t very well prepared. I said so little, in fact, that I didn’t even get a chance to make mistakes. It would have been a better idea to stick to basic concepts, using as many of our known sentences as possible and adding minimal new vocabulary. It was a little embarrassing, to be honest, so in a way it was pretty motivating — I realized that I can’t spontaneously come out with Irish sentences like I’d hope to, so broadening the set of sentences I
can rattle off without too much thought would be very helpful in future. CF did not point out that
we hadn’t done very well, which I thought was considerate of him — we knew this in any case. He
simply asked us what we thought of our performance, and we agreed that it was lacking in substance
and that the format wasn’t terribly suitable. I felt like there was a lot that we knew that we weren’t
able to showcase in the framework we had chosen, and this frustrated me a bit. In future we’ll know
to stick to what we’ve learnt.

I’m sure it also didn’t help that everyone was so busy with end-of-term work these last few days —
what wasn’t done in class wasn’t going to get done at all, and so I did next to no preparation on my
own, when really a review of all topics was necessary. Perhaps this bulk of prospective work was mak-
ing me drag my feet?

The other groups’ work I found quite impressive. It was nice to see a couple minutes transpire fully
in Irish, and spoken by people who had come in just a couple months earlier with little to no knowl-
edge of the language. One in particular was based on a very clever idea that incorporated just about
every topic we’ve covered so far. It was a blind date, so the two of them ordered food and drink, dis-
cussed where they live, what they do, their families...and upon finding out that his date was looking
to have children sooner rather than later, J decided dinner was over. Knowing that with our current
knowledge it is possible to have such a conversation is encouraging.

I also remembered during this experience how much I dislike presentations. I realize their purpose
— I do agree that they are necessary, as one has to take time periodically in language learning to take
stock and make a push to apply the language as comprehensively as possible. One never really knows
what one has learnt and what is left to work on until one has done this. However, I much prefer be-
ing able to listen to the patterns of the language being described to me, and asking questions to de-
terminate better how these patterns work. I’ve always enjoyed reading, writing and listening much
more than speaking — in the early, embarrassing stages at least. The speaking becomes more enjoy-
able when you’re better prepared and the basics are already hardwired.

On the bright side, I actually learned a lot. Cóisir tí (/ti:/, not slender — this is because of an illogical
spelling reform) is a house party, cén fath? is ‘why?’ (one of my favorite words), blásta is tasty.

Nollaig shona daoibh agus bliain úr faoi mhaise!
EITLEAN

(From 7 January 2011)

I’m on my way back to Ireland from Corning, NY. I’ve been lazy with my Irish in the last couple weeks (cúpla seachtain?) I made no effort at all to study. Perhaps my lack of motivation has to do with being outside the geographic domain of the language — its presence encourages me. Perhaps it also had to do with the very distracting nature of my grandparents’ house — it is nearly always full of visitors, my relatives who I only see every couple of years and who have a great fondness for board games. One never knows in that house how long one will be permitted to sit quietly, so instead I watched TV, did crosswords, waited around to go shopping with my parents, logically.

But now that I’m on my way back, I feel the urge to learn some Irish. Granted, if I had TV and internet in this plane I would probably be doing something else. My lower than usual levels of motivation have me wondering whether I am showing signs of becoming less attached to Ireland, the place I often call ‘my country.’ Perhaps becoming too attached to any one country conflicts with the identity I’ve grown up with — that of an adopted European of no particular nationality?

When I got stuck in Edinburgh last month, I enjoyed myself so much that I thought Scotland could easily become home to me at some point too. That thought triggered dominos of other thoughts — since I had so enjoyed learning about Finnish, why not Finland? (This may however have been a result not just of the language’s inherent appeal, but that of the company.) And if Finland is being considered, why not Denmark, France, Argentina? These sorts of thoughts I think are dangerous to my commitment to Irish; in a way, it sort of feels like I’m cheating on Irish if I spend time looking into other languages. I had not expected my attachment to Irish to be fickle, but apparently it is dependent on my willingness to leave the country. That in turn, I suppose, depends on my emotional attachment to people I know will be staying in the country, and also on my cultural involvement — I haven’t been terribly involved in trad lately, and perhaps this has weakened my ties. Then again, it is exactly these things — the people, the language and the culture — that make me happy in Ireland, and I wonder if such things exist to the same extent for me elsewhere.

AN RAIBH BRISEADH DEAS AGAT?

(From 20 Jan 2011)
Today we started to learn the past tense. Most verbs, apparently are quite simply put into the past — the root of the verb gets séimhiú and presto. However, the most common verbs are all irregular — fortunately there aren’t terribly many of them, but they’re pretty mad.

CF put up a slide today with a bunch of questions in the past tense that we were to ask each other in pairs and find answers to given a sheet detailing the transformations of these irregular verbs when put into the past or negated. There were a couple typos, and though generally I assume if something is anomalous it is simply because I haven’t learned it yet, this time I was able to spot them.

Initially I thought Nollag was a typo too, but it occurred so many times on the sheet that I thought it must be correct — it is the genitive form of Nollaig, which I find strange, since many of the genitives I’ve seen take a transformation that is just the opposite, e.g. focal (nom.)—> focal (gen.).

I found myself pronouncing a couple unfamiliar words in a German accent, e.g. gaolta (relatives) — I suppose this is due to a lack of understanding of the broad/slender behavior of /l/.

CF asked us what the word aimsir meant — we’d come across it before, but most of us had forgotten, myself included. Initially I thought it was another word for time (a.m.), but it means weather. Interestingly, in French these two words are the same: temps. Perhaps there is some sort of intrinsic connection between ‘time’ and ‘weather’ in my Foreign Language Center. For some reason, upon thinking about this, the Russian word погода (‘weather’) sprang to mind, and I wondered if this equation existed in Russian too. It does not — time is время — but this also means ‘season,’ which has a semantic connection with weather. Suppose this area of my brain is a little fuzzy, or perhaps hyperactive?

I wondered during class today if I would be so inclined to learn the language if it were no longer in use, like Latin. I concluded that I’d probably still be eager, but not quite as enthusiastic and excited. And if it were a made-up language, like Esperanto, in which language learning consists almost purely of pattern-learning? No. This wouldn’t be as appealing to me. So I am not inclined to learn Irish simply because it is there — it has a long history, but at the same time is alive and in use, and it has an identity in the form of a body of speakers. This makes it interesting. (Esperanto speakers of course also use their language, but because of the contrived nature of the language use I’m not so attracted to it.)
I’ve just realized that today I am acquainted with far more verbs than before — this is going to take quite a bit of revision, because I look at them just a couple hours later and they’re already beginning to seem like strangers, especially since their negative forms are unrecognizable from the base form... but these quirks, though among the harder things to get used to, are among the things I like best.

RAIDIÓ NA GAELTACHTA
(From 27 January 2011)

I was supposed to have stopped entries last week, but something came up, and I had a couple important realizations.

CF emailed us around midday today to tell us that RTÉ’s Raidió na Gaeltachta would be recorded live in Oliver St John Gogarty’s pub in Temple Bar — the Temple Bar Trad Festival started last night, and Clannad, Altan, Ciorras and Beoga would be playing on the show. I decided to skip my classes for the afternoon and attend the Irish-language event, both because of the language opportunities and because Altan is my favorite band — they are what got me interested in Irish and trad in the first place.

Disappointingly, for some unknown and unmentioned reason, Altan was not present; however, I was almost equally happy to see Clannad, being the trad legends that they are. I wound up liking Ciorras best of all — they are just so energetic and inspire a great deal of foot-tapping. Just about everyone in the room was speaking Irish, which was rather disorientating but immensely enjoyable. I felt like I had crossed some invisible border and turned up in a foreign country. This was the first immersive experience I’d had — I’d never heard this much Irish at once. Previously my experience with the language had been in tiny bits and pieces, a couple sentences at a time at most. [This reminded me that I’d intended to watch TG4 online, but for some reason could connect to it via the proxy server -- I'll have to find a way to listen to Raidió na Gaeltachta -- or at least the podcasts. (Listening to the podcast of the evening now -- he keeps saying galánta, galánta!)]

Rónán Mac Aodha Bhuí, the presenter, speaks extraordinarily quickly, so he was rather difficult to understand; however, nearly everyone else spoke slowly enough that I could recognize quite a few words, and get the general gist of what was going on. I was also surprised that I was able to distinguish Ulster from the other dialects. Something about the intonation more so than the pronunciation makes it identifiable.
The best bit was speaking to CF’s Irish pedagogy teacher from UCD. Because he’s a teacher himself he was very patient with me and directed all his questions to me in Irish, rephrasing if necessary, and translating if I still didn't understand. I managed to ask him how to say a couple things using questions in Irish, and clarified a couple grammatical points to do with urú as I tried to answer his questions. The most important sentence I learned, and the most useful one at the time was Tá mé ag fogh-laim Gaeilge (I’m learning Irish). People here in general were very encouraging and pleased to hear that a foreigner was learning the language. Interestingly, here I wasn't asked why I was learning Irish, as I am everywhere else. Another thing I noted was the general use of English filler words ('I suppose...', 'well,...', 'you know', 'pretty much', 'hopefully'), instinctive responses ('no, no!', 'yeah', 'of course...') and curses when speaking Irish.

The combination of my two favorite things, music and language, made me realize that I would very much like to go spend some time in Gweedore. I suppose my wish to learn this language or any other for that matter has something to do with the FOMO I mentioned early on. The experience has certainly had a positive effect on my motivation. It’s reminded me of the things I find important. Something about trad always helps me get my head back on straight. The language and the music have gone hand in hand from the very first, so I suppose they should be treated as a single entity in terms of motivation.
APPENDIX B: ABRIDGED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

M: When did you start learning Irish?

C: I tried learning Irish on my own or I started learning Irish on my own when I was about 16, in New York, with the aid of a book and tape set that an aunt of mine had given me. And I remember trying to master the first few lessons in that course and finding it very very difficult, mainly because of the approach, perhaps. It was a very technical start or introduction to the language so.... At 16 I didn't really have the discipline to wade through that to get to the more communicative elements of the course, but at any rate I kind of gave up after that.... But I do remember at various periods from then on trying to at least understand the meaning of certain Irish phrases that I found in newspaper articles and in documentaries that I had been exposed to after that. I remember buying a pocket dictionary not long after that [...] but at any rate I remember trying to to make subsequent efforts to learn Irish. But it wasn't really until I went to university that I started learning Irish formally, attending classes. And the first class I attended was in the summer of 1999 here in Trinity College actually, but I was an undergraduate student at New York University ...and they -- each year -- ran a summer abroad program and one of the options was a summer in Dublin and we stayed here in Trinity. [...] 

M: What made you want to learn it in the first place?

C: I think there were a couple of simultaneous motivations. One was that I've always had an interest in more obscure or lesser-known cultures.... I've also always had a very strong interest in my own culture coming from an Irish-American background, I've always been interested in Ireland, in Irish culture, Irish politics etc. ... and in general I like languages. So these three elements together I think gave me a strong motivation to at least start learning Irish. 

I can remember being aware that there was an Irish language from a very young age. I remember being exposed to Irish music, and Irish language singing from I guess teens, maybe earlier -- I can remember that music coming from my mother -- she used to play the music in the house. I can remember being aware of the fact that there were certain phrases and slogans in Irish that were used -- you know your typical “Erin go bragh” and things like that -- at certain cultural events or gatherings. 

I remember [my father] coming home from a St. Patrick’s Day celebration of some type that was connected with the Police Department and I remember him coming home with a copy of the programme...which had the Lord's Prayer on the front cover, in Irish, and I remember holding onto
that for quite a long time, realizing later as I advanced in learning Irish that there were a number of
mistakes!

[...]

I learnt French at school and I won't say that I didn't do well -- I did fine -- but I had very low moti-
vation or not much motivation to make any real progress. [...] But I do remember when I started
learning Irish that I made a huge amount of progress in a very short time and that was motivating in
itself so...it maintained my motivation or, if not, raised it, the fact that I was doing so well, that I was
learning the language so quickly. [...] I was a “Good Language Learner” in the case of Irish, where I
may not have been in the case of French.

[...]

Later, when I moved to Dublin permanently -- or at least in retrospect permanently, at the time I
didn’t think it would be permanent -- [Irish] was a social outlet for me. I didn’t know anyone in
Dublin [...] so my social outlet was the Irish language club on Harcourt Street [Conradh na Gaeilge]
and I can remember going in there and not knowing anyone but feeling that it was much easier in a
setting like that to approach people, to get involved in a conversation. I certainly would not have had
the confidence to do that in an English-speaking pub, on my own, but this commonality, this com-
mon purpose that I shared with other members of the club [...] made it easier to approach them or
get involved in an already flowing conversation, which is kind of bizarre because that’s probably not
the norm for a second language learner, [...] but in this case there was a specific purpose to it, part of
which may have been cultural, and connected with the learning process, but part of it was social, get-
ting to know people.

M: How did you practice?

C: I discovered a number of second-hand bookshops or specialty bookshops that sold older Irish
publications -- and one particular bookshop had [...] a basement area dedicated entirely to the Irish
language. [...] Most of them were quite old...a great majority of it was in the old script. [...] I bought a
number of dictionaries [...] and a number of short works in various regional dialects. [...] So I used to
read these really old books, and I used to constantly search, scour these dictionaries for the words
and phrases, and that used to bring me back to that bookshop a lot, [...] to buy specialty glossaries
and academic publications that were connected with certain regions because in a lot of cases I
wouldn’t find the word or phrase I was looking for in the dictionary. [...] That was a very solitary en-
deavor -- I used to wake up in the morning and reach over and grab the dictionary, and look for things....Sometimes I'd just read the dictionary. [...] I became, dare I say, obsessed with finding the origins of phrases, the origins of grammatical structures and [...] I felt like I was a language detective because I wasn't using any other language learning materials. I was relying almost entirely on dictionaries and works of prose. And for my, if you like, communicative development, I was spending hours and hours listening to Raidió na Gaeltachta, not understanding most of what I heard but.... I had an ear for the language -- that's probably the only way I can describe it -- that I could remember sounds -- you know -- or the sound of a word that I didn't know, and I was able then to locate the word in a dictionary based on what I had heard. And I think [...] this is an issue that I'm not quite sure still to this day how to deal with, or how to explain to people, because very often, as you well know, people say 'Oh God, [...] spelling in Irish is crazy -- it doesn't sound the way it's written' and all of this... but this is something I came to grips with very early on...I was very tuned in to the orthography of the language and how sounds were represented in the written form. [...] So I used to find this very enjoyable, to spend hours reading books and listening to radio programs that I didn't really understand at the time, but working almost word by word to figure out what was going on, and I'd realize things well after the fact, well after the radio program had ended, or well after I had given up on reading the book -- you know -- the sounds of the language, the words would just reappear in my mind at a later stage and there was this process of connecting the dots that continue well after the fact. [...] People were so willing to engage in conversation with -- for all intents and purposes -- a stranger who may or may not have had anything really in common with them. I can remember getting involved in a conversation one time and I think I was only drawn into the conversation because I was listening [...] and one of the people involved in the conversation turned to me and said something like 'what's your take on this?' and I said 'well I'm not sure I know exactly what you're talking about.' And he was using the word rótharraingt., and at the time I wouldn't have had a notion of what rótharraingt. was, but rótharraingt. is the Irish for overdraft. And I said 'I don't understand that word' and he said 'Rótharraingt. Overdraft.' And I said 'Oh, well I don't have an overdraft,' and he immediately ended that part of the conversation or at least excluded me from the rest of that conversation. [...] But I was doing to a certain extent what I was doing with the dictionary and the radio programs or the books. [...] I was playing detective, I was listening. I had patience. I didn't have to be involved in a conversation -- I was content enough to listen. And I didn't feel an urge to communicate. [...] There was no real drive to communicate an idea.
Another issue was that I had come from at least linguistically a homogenous learning experience where I wasn't exposed to other dialects in the classroom -- I was exposed only to Donegal Irish. [...] And I had acquired that variety of Irish to the extent that I was able to communicate with people quite easily [...] after at least the first year. So when I did arrive in Dublin and started conversing with people, I found that my Irish was different. [...] I do remember there being a number of incidents where I was not aware of the more common word or phrase to indicate something. I remember [...] thinking ... I'm probably going to have to familiarize myself with these other dialects because I'm finding it difficult to communicate with people in Dublin. [...] In Donegal [...] I just found it easier.

What I started doing was [...] I went back to my radio programs and listened to the ones that were being broadcast from the South -- An Saol Ó Dheas for example [...]. And I remember [...] specifically seeking out books that had been written by Irish speakers from the South of Ireland -- Kerry, Cork and that. [...] I found this just to be another piece of the puzzle. I knew that regardless of this decision I had made to learn one variety I couldn't limit myself to that -- I had to at least familiarize myself with the others, if for no other reason than to communicate effectively with people.

I was also very lucky [...] -- I met a number of [...] Irish language speakers who were around my own age, from Donegal who were studying in Dublin and I quickly became friendly with this crowd and started spending a lot of time with them. [...] I felt that I was lucky, to have that opportunity to spend time with a group of native speakers who were more or less the same age as me who were interested in a lot of the same things as me. I wasn't going to them for the language, I was going to them in a very, you know, social capacity. I enjoyed spending time with them and we got along great but an added bonus was that they were native speakers of the language -- that I was being exposed to this natural use of Irish on a regular basis. It also -- having that group of friends in Dublin -- made it easier. [...] When I met these people, I started traveling to Donegal on weekends that they were going home. And I used to stay with some of them sometimes or I’d stay in a Bed and Breakfast but I would socialize with them in their native parish -- drinking in the pubs with their friends. And I got to meet a number of other speaker of Irish [...] who had had a lesser experience with non-native speakers. So they didn't slow down even the slightest bit for me. I think my good listening skills and my patience paid off -- I never really felt the need to ask them to explain anything. I used to make mental notes of things they said that I didn't understand and then when I got home, open up the dictionary again and try and figure out -- 'Oh that's what he was talking about.' I missed that part of
the conversation, but I was content to let that happen, and I think that’s something that unfortu-
nately not many language learners are patient enough to do. They need to know exactly what’s hap-
pening, exactly what’s being said right then and there. And if they don’t, then they become very frus-
trated. And this unfortunately is a problem -- it creates a difficulty for the Irish language learning
context because 98.5% of the time, the learner and the native speaker are both speakers of English,
so when a miscommunication arises, it’s very easy for both parties to revert to English, and this is
something that learners find very frustrating. [...] They very often go to the Gaeltacht, and when they
try to speak Irish, get replies in English. [...] 

[...]

Communicative language teaching very often makes use of the same topics over and over. [...] I don’t
know that learners are being given the opportunity to discuss things that they’re interested in
through Irish. [...] I think that if they were given the opportunity that I was, to be in a very natural
environment and talk about perhaps whatever they want with native speakers, they would benefit
immensely. [...] Very often in the language learning classroom they’re being told what to discuss for
that hour- or two-hour session, and this may have implications for the type of language they develop
or to what extent they develop their language skills.

M: What do you most enjoy about teaching?

C: I think what I enjoy most about teaching Irish to adult learners is their level of commitment,
their enthusiasm, their motivation, their interest. I enjoy meeting people, I enjoy working with peo-
ple,... And when I’m able to give them what they want in the classroom, it just...it makes me so
happy that I can share with people this love for the language that I have, and this wealth of informa-
tion that I’ve built up from various sources. It kind of gives you the feeling that it was all worth it,
this time I spent hunched over books, you know, or lying in bed listening to Raidió na Gaeltachta
and trying to figure out what they were talking about. [...] That my work has paid off in yet another
way that I am able to share. [...] 

M: Is there anything you don’t enjoy?

C: [...] Over the years I have been in situations where I’ve been asked to teach a course for learners
that were not entirely committed to the idea -- they weren’t, you know, they weren’t really in favor of
this, had they been given the choice they might not have done the course -- some of them, this was
needed for a professional qualification, others, their employers had asked them or required them to
attend the course. And in those cases I found it less enjoyable to work with groups of people who perhaps aren’t entirely interested in the language, in learning Irish, or using the language. But even in those contexts, I’ve found it if not enjoyable at least beneficial and interesting to find ways of at least getting them interested in at least part of the learning process.

[...]

Maybe that’s part of the reason I decided not to go into secondary teaching -- there’s this argument that a successful teacher or a good teacher will inspire the students -- I think we’ve all seen movies that show this in action -- but I just felt that I wanted to be working with people who were already motivated, already interested, and that I could then share this knowledge that I had acquired with them. So I don’t enjoy being put in a situation where I have to convince students that this is worth doing.

[...]

M: What do you feel is the most important kind of task to give learners?

C: Giving them a task which allows them to develop their own autonomy as learners -- develop some sort of skill -- and one that speaks directly to their interests. That’s not always easy to do especially when you have to cover items on a syllabus, or if you’re preparing a group for an exam. But as far as successful language teaching, I’ve always felt that if you can get them to take an interest in developing their own skills, and not be dependent on you or the coursebook to do that for them, then [...] they seem to be more successful. And the other is that connected with that is the idea that if they can interact with the language or use the language to develop an interest, whether it be in the language itself or in something else, music or prose or history or whatever it might be, if you can link the two together, the language learning process and some other interest, I’ve found that whether they’re successful or not they at least enjoy the experience more because it’s relevant to them. [...]

At least in the immediate learning context, activities that spoke to the learners’ interests certainly were more successful. [...] I’ve often found too that you have to drive home to learners from a very early stage that there’s only so much they can learn in the classroom -- in fact the majority of what they learn, if they dedicate the time, is probably going to happen outside the classroom. So what I’ve always found somewhat frustrating is that coming back each week if they haven’t studied...this is not as a crusty teacher but as someone who wants to see them succeed.... The problem with some of the teaching I’ve done is that each week is a new topic, of course there’s some review, but review might
be only 10 minutes out of 2 hours. So you have to work very hard to link the new topic to the old one, otherwise they work for 2 hours one week on one aspect of the language or one type of language and when they come back a week later they don't use any of that or at least very little of it, and they start learning a new aspect of the language or dealing with a new topic. [...] If it doesn't get overwritten, it's at least not linked up. [...] If I can't link the topics I try to at least link the learning experiences -- draw their attention to something that was dealt with in class before.

[...] In general the most successful learners are the ones who are most interested and most dedicated and I know that sounds cliché but it's the truth because they're the ones who dedicate time to it outside the classroom, they're the ones who are at least in part more autonomous than the others, and they engage in language learning activities on their own time outside the class. So [...] if you can speak to an interest or at least awaken an interest -- perhaps they weren't aware of an interest they had -- if you can do that, they're probably going to be more successful.

M: What would you say is the single most important thing for you to accomplish with our class?

Everybody in that class made a conscious decision to sign up for Irish. [...] This wasn't because they needed some language requirement or because there was nothing else available so they took this -- they're really interested in Irish. So if I can maintain and develop that interest and give them the opportunity to engage with ... I mean there's a bunch of people in that class who are, and this is part of what I like about teaching complete beginners, they're people who have some familial connection with the language, they have Irish heritage or at least in part, and so for them this is very personal. [...] That's the impression I get. So if I can give them the opportunity to engage with this aspect of their identity, their culture,... [?] If I can show them that these misconceptions about Irish as this ridiculously difficult language, if I can kind of dispel them or at least show them that with the appropriate amount of effort it's not this unachievable goal. [...] If I can at least keep them on the Irish language learning path, it will be successful. [...] Of course I would like for them to develop a communicative repertoire, but I don't know that that's my primary goal. If anything that's a side effect of the effective teaching if in fact my teaching is effective. If do I aim for these other goals, I think that the communicative repertoire or at least a basic competency in the language will come as a result. I try to keep it practical, I try to keep it useful, but I know, having taught a number of groups like this, that they're interested in more than just how you meet and greet people in Irish. They're interested in kind of what makes the language tick, what it is about Irish that's unique, what's fun and interesting about it, you know. I also know that learners very often go home at the end of an evening having learnt something that I didn't even intend to teach. I just wrote something on the board in order to
explain something else and they’ve honed in on what I wrote on the board, not what I was trying to explain, and I always find that fascinating. That’s why I try to write as much as possible on the board -- it’s difficult in that room because the board is very small. [...] So if I can answer whatever questions those events inspire then I’m doing my job. [...] When I see smiles on learners’ faces because something’s just clicked, or they’ve just mastered saying something, you know, that’s probably the most enjoyable moment. That kind of ‘Eureka’ moment. Or the satisfaction that they are getting from whatever it is they’ve just done. [...] If I can achieve all those things then I’ve done pretty well.
# Appendix C: Questionnaire & Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Liz</th>
<th>Franziška</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. nationality</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Irish/French</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. gender</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. degree course</td>
<td>European Studies</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. first language</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English/French</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. years in Ireland</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>about 3</td>
<td>less than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. motivating factors</td>
<td>Ability to speak Irish is desired for people wishing to pursue career in Irish department of Foreign Affairs so I took up Irish again to increase chances of getting my desired job in the future.</td>
<td>I was born in Ireland but grew up abroad. Which means that I had absolutely no notion of Irish, and couldn't even read out our national anthem. Being Irish, I wanted to learn a little more about the country I was born in, which was my main reason for moving to Dublin. It is something I have always wanted to do. And this acquaintance goes through the Irish language too.</td>
<td>I’m interested in obscure languages and languages in general. It bears no relevance for my study or career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. requirement for degree</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>This module does NOT fill a requirement for my degree; it is just for personal satisfaction.</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. favorite aspects of Irish class</td>
<td>Evening class doesn’t interfere with other classes. Minimum work in your own time.</td>
<td>I really like the fact that we speak a lot. However it seems we mostly repeat pre-set sentences, without understanding what is in them.</td>
<td>Getting together with people who are equally interested and having a nice motivated teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Liz</strong></td>
<td><strong>Franziska</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10. Least favorite aspects</strong></td>
<td>1.5 hour long class can tend to drag out a lot.</td>
<td>I do not understand what the words I am saying mean at times (cf. question 9). And when written I still find it difficult to figure out how to pronounce them. I feel like the classes are poorly organised, which adds even more confusion to an already difficult language. We have had very little preparation for our exams, which makes them even more worrying. We had little time to practice our oral presentations in MT, and have had no training whatsoever for our exam in week 12 of HT. This adds to the impression of general confusion aforesaided.</td>
<td>Sometimes the feeling of being lost and not making progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11. Emotional connection</strong></td>
<td>significant</td>
<td>significant</td>
<td>significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12. Likelihood of continuing with Irish</strong></td>
<td>very likely</td>
<td>unlikely</td>
<td>likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13. Future use of Irish</strong></td>
<td>For reading and basic comprehension at work.</td>
<td>Only for reading and basic comprehension. Mostly the national anthem and understanding a bit on TG4.</td>
<td>I hope to come back to it in Contrastive Linguistics or use it for further language studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14. Motivation levels</strong></td>
<td>remained the same</td>
<td>decreased significantly</td>
<td>remained the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. Reason for change in motivation</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>As I grew more confused and the amount of work I had to do in my other lectures increased, my motivation decreased, and I now almost find it a drag. I only go because I like to finish what I started.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTION</td>
<td>TOM</td>
<td>LIZ</td>
<td>FRANZISKA</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>16. learning goals</td>
<td>Greater grasp of basic Irish grammar and vocabulary</td>
<td>To be able to read a bit, and know basic sentences like 'Hello', and 'How are you'</td>
<td>At least have a sense of the pronunciations and understand simple texts. And figure out how the language as such works, without the vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. practice time per week</td>
<td>The very minimum, depends if homework has been set or if I found a particular topic rather difficult.</td>
<td>About an hour on average, more when I have to prepare an oral presentation.</td>
<td>one or two hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. practice materials</td>
<td>conversation with friends who are fluent Irish speakers</td>
<td>Handouts and lecture notes mostly, and a bit of internet for vocabulary testing and pronunciation.</td>
<td>books, conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. challenges</td>
<td>grammar and spelling (especially the many different spellings of words) e.g. tri bliaina, seacht mbliaina</td>
<td>PRONUNCIATION no doubt. And lack of time for study does not help.</td>
<td>pronunciation, lack of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. approach to challenges</td>
<td>continuous practice and revision</td>
<td>I go on the internet, where I find internet sites where the words are pronounced. But given the different dialects I am afraid it does not really help.</td>
<td>Unfortunately I don't. I just try to pay attention in the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. previous L2 learning</td>
<td>French and Spanish - GCSE &amp; A-Level and currently studying these at Trinity. German and Italian - GCSE Level only.</td>
<td>I am bilingual in French (but that's not my second language: I have two first languages), and took German in secondary school. And I took English in primary and secondary school, but being bilingual those classes were somewhat irrelevant.</td>
<td>English, French, Spanish, Latin, Norwegian, Icelandic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUESTION</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOM</strong></td>
<td><strong>LIZ</strong></td>
<td><strong>FRANZISKA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>22. vocabulary learning</td>
<td>connections with other languages; repeated usage of word in work</td>
<td>Looking over handouts, making connections with other languages, internet and iPhone apps. I tend to lose flashcards.</td>
<td>Depends on the language, I learn most vocabulary very quickly and am thus not very motivated to learn them from any sheets of paper. But normally I try then flashcards (even virtual ones, I have a program) and trying to make connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. group vs. individual work</td>
<td>Both have positive aspects, though I generally tend to work better alone.</td>
<td>Group. I find it helpful to work with other people. Especially when they are just as lost as I am: it comforts me to see I am not the only one!</td>
<td>Individual work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Questions**

1. Age

2. Nationality or nationalities

3. Gender

4. Course of study

5. First language(s)

6. Total years spent living on the island of Ireland (if less than one, please say 'less than 1')

7. What factors motivated you to begin learning Irish, or as the case may be, take it up again? (e.g. relevance for course of study/career plans, family connections, curiosity)

8. Does this module fill a requirement for your degree? If so, was it your first choice out of the options available?

9. Please describe the aspects of the course that appeal to you most.

10. Please describe the aspects of the course that appeal to you the least.

11. Please rate the strength of your emotional connection to the Irish language.
    
    [very significant/significant/neutral/insignificant/very insignificant]

12. How likely are you to continue your learning of Irish after the end of this course?
    
    [very likely/likely/neutral/unlikely/very unlikely]

13. How do you aim to use Irish in the future? (e.g. only for reading and basic comprehension, for conversation, at work, not at all)

14. Would you say that your motivation has increased, decreased, or remained about the same since the beginning of the course?

15. If your level of motivation has changed, for what reason do you think this happened?

16. What do you want to have accomplished by the end of this course?

17. How much time per week would you usually spend studying/practicing Irish outside of class?
18. What materials do you use to practice? (e.g. books/workbooks, TV, radio, handouts, conversation with Irish speakers)

19. What aspects of learning Irish do you find most challenging? (e.g. grammar, lack of opportunity for practice, pronunciation, speaking to an audience, lack of time for study)

20. How do you attempt to tackle the aspect you find most challenging?

21. Have you learned (to any extent) a foreign or second language before? If so, which?

22. How do you learn vocabulary? (e.g. flashcards, lists, looking over handouts, making connections with other languages)

23. Do you prefer group work or individual work?