

# An Instructional Experiment in Grammar Teaching in Irish Immersion

Immersion 2012:  
Bridging Contexts for a Multilingual World

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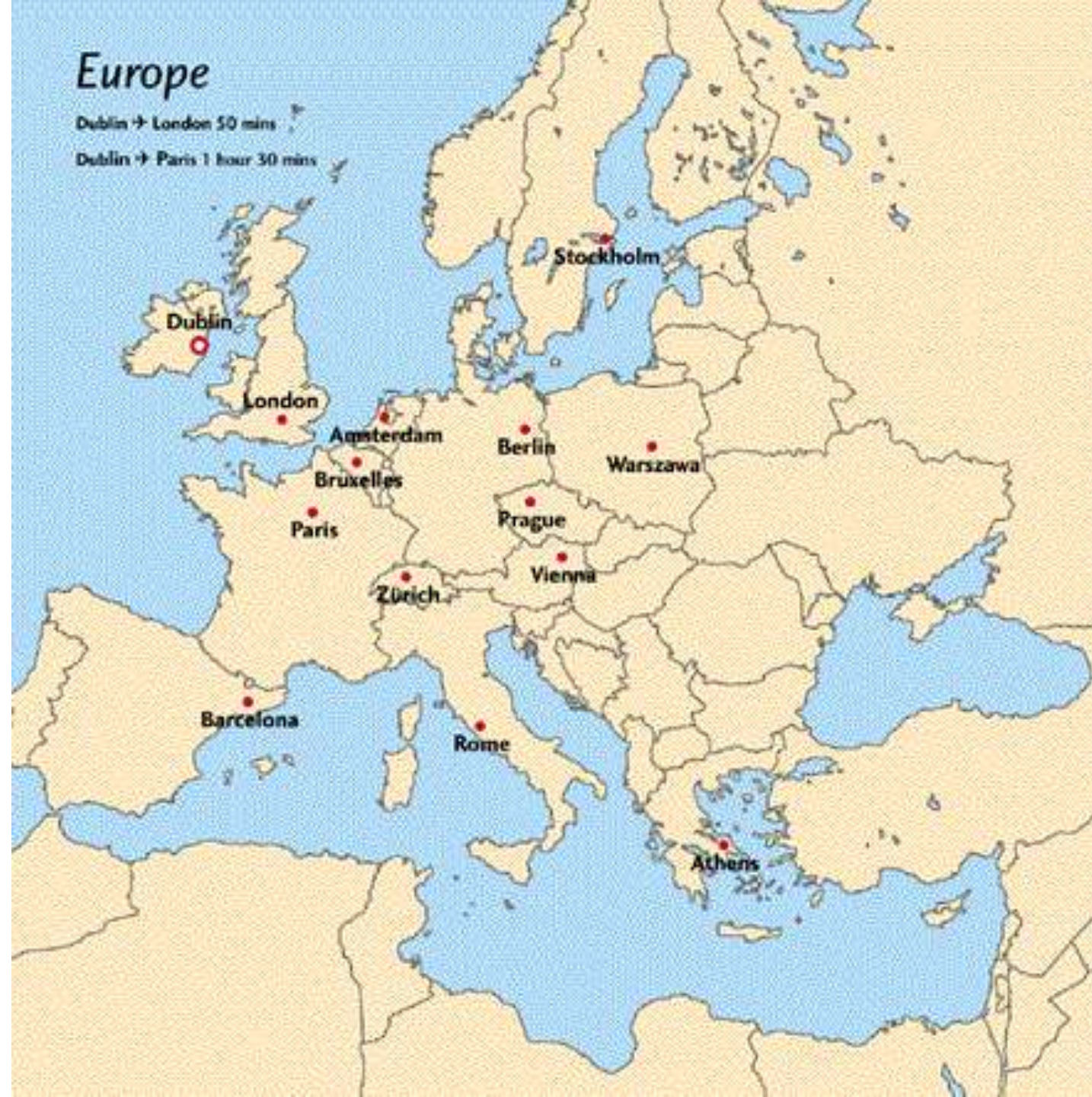
# Outline of presentation

- Background and purpose
- Research literature
- Design and methodology
- Findings
- Implications

# Europe

Dublin → London 50 mins

Dublin → Paris 1 hour 30 mins

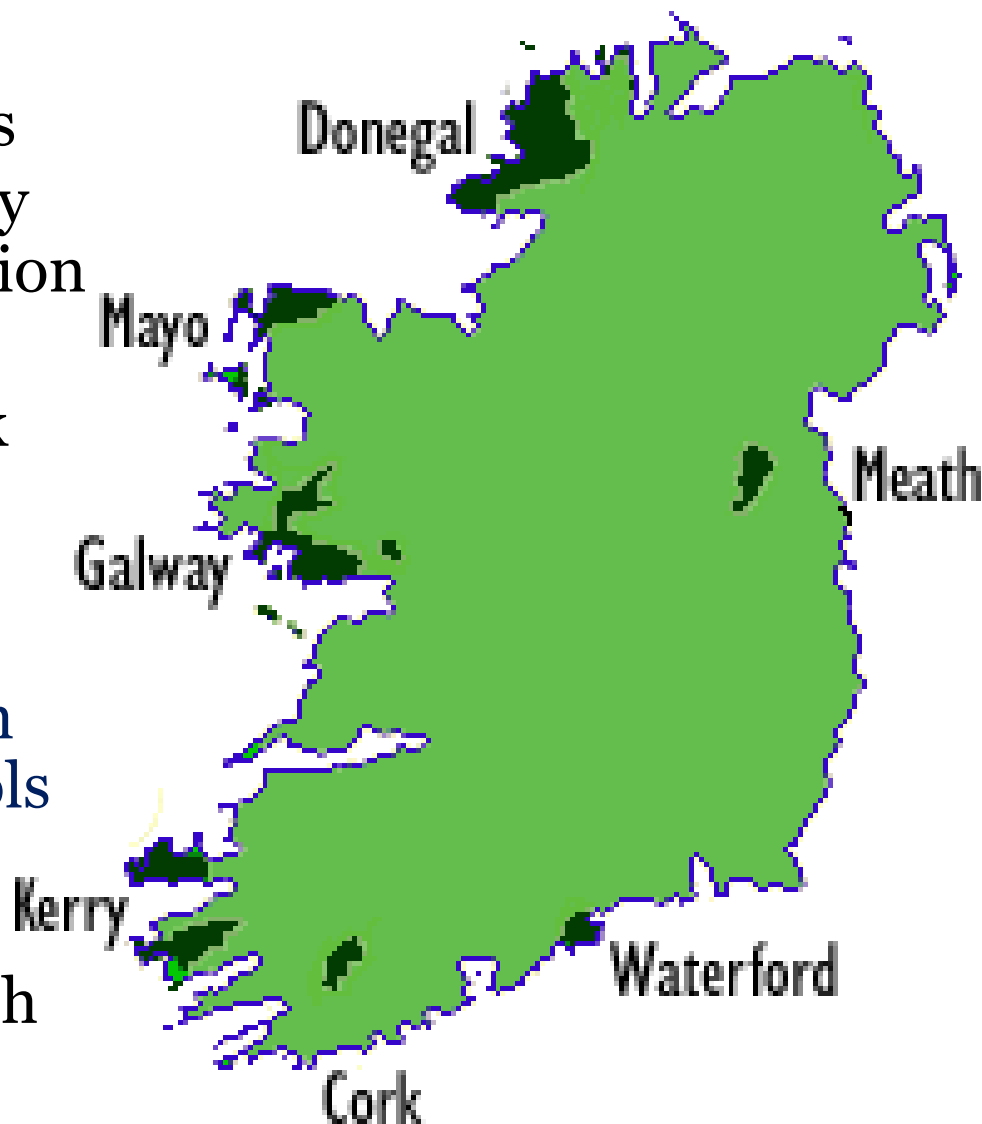


# Background to Irish language

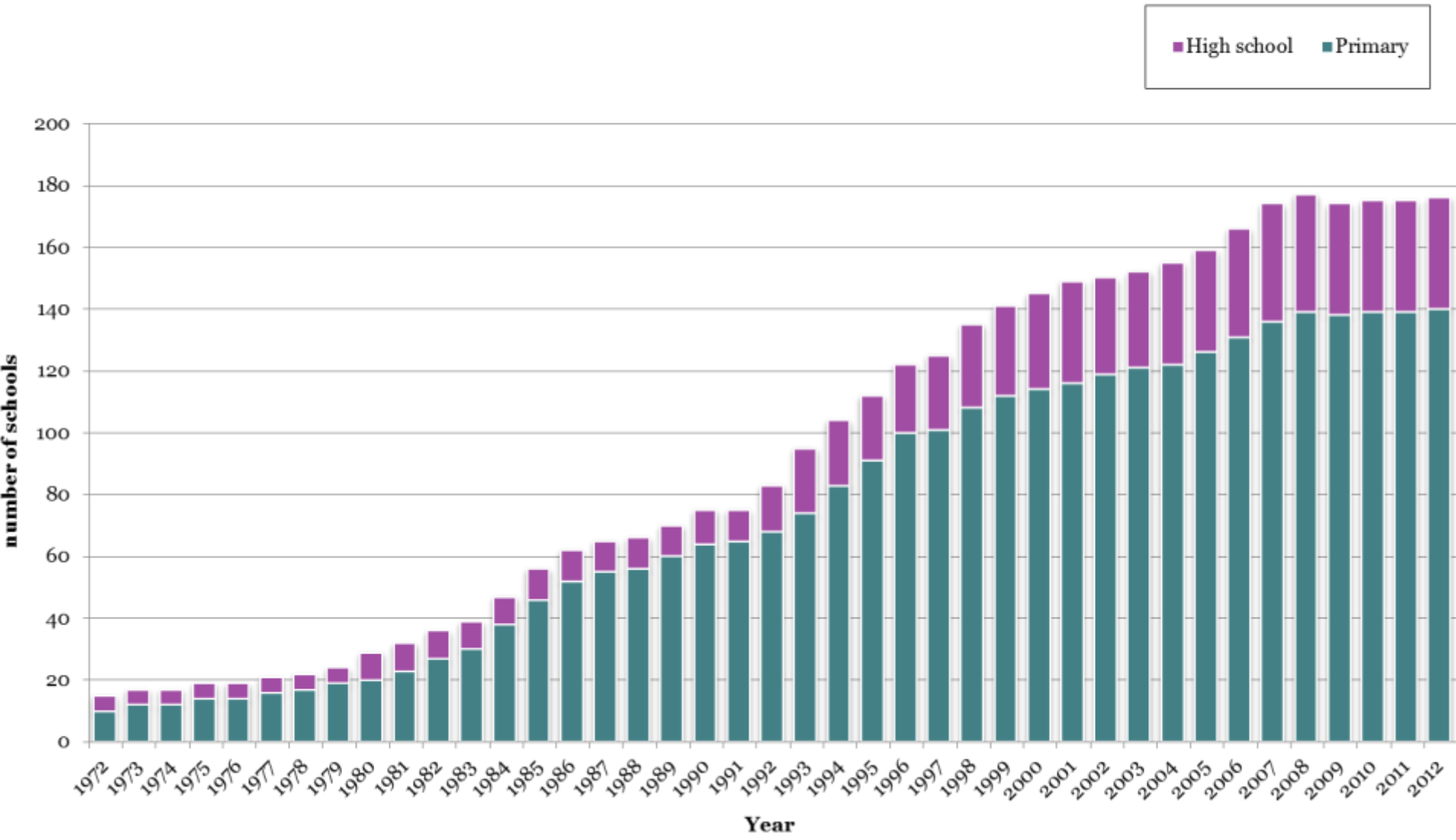
- Irish is an official language (minority) – autochthonous
- Students in all schools study Irish from entry to completion

According to 2011 Census:

- 1.77m (41.4%) able to speak Irish
- Only 77,185 (1.8%) daily speakers outside education
- Schools in Gaeltacht & Irish immersion (all-Irish) schools throughout the country
- 7.5% (38,352) primary students – educated through Irish



# The Growth of Irish-medium Schools in the 26 Counties outside the Gaeltacht 1972-2012



Source: [www.gael scoileanna.ie](http://www.gael scoileanna.ie)



# Background to study

- early immersion policy in schools
- all schools are immersion centres/stand-alone schools
- Irish is the primary language of the school, English the auxiliary language
- students are expected to speak Irish at all times (except English language arts)
- immersion teachers teach all subjects (11 in total)
- approx. 85% instruction through Irish from age 4-18
- researcher's experience in Irish immersion school and previous research
- 'Gaelscoilis' 'speaking immersion' (Lyster, 1987) Gaeilge líofa lofa (rotten fluent Irish)
- lack of accuracy in students' Irish
- persistence of errors

# Research framework

- “Teachers need to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to keep learning over a lifetime.” (OECD, 2005, p. 97)
- Learner autonomy (Little, 1991). Sociocultural theory - ‘learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use’ (Little, 2007, p. 23).
- “In inductive teaching, learners are first exposed to exemplars of the grammatical structure and are asked to arrive at a metalinguistic generalisation on their own” (Ellis, 2006, p. 97)

# Language acquisition research

- once communicative sufficiency has been reached little pressure or motivation to speak with accuracy (Day and Shapson, 1987)
- learners may bypass syntax and rely on schematic and contextual knowledge – rule-based v exemplar-based coding (Skehan, 1998)
- emphasis on understanding and negotiation of meaning rather than form in immersion – counterbalanced approach (Lyster, 2007)
- moving learners from semantic to syntactic processing (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Broner & Tedick, 2011)
- “meaning-making” (Swain et al., 2011) processing information? or constructing new knowledge?
- communities of practice (COP) “pays less attention to cognitive processes themselves and more to social practices that facilitate cognitive processes.” (Swain et al., 2011, p. 27)



# Attainment of Irish immersion students in Irish, English and Maths

- students in Irish immersion schools achieve a high degree of proficiency in Irish relative to their peers in schools where Irish is taught as a subject (Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile & O'Gorman, 2006)
- English reading scores of immersion students are at expected levels when SES factors are accounted for, Maths scores somewhat lower than expected (Shiel et al., 2011)
- very good fluency in the target language but they deviate from native speaker norms in terms of grammatical accuracy (Ó Duibhir, 2009)

# Purpose of study

- What effect would of a Form-Focused Instructional (FFI) approach to teaching and learning have on students' accurate use of genitive case in Irish as measured by a fill-in-the blanks type task?
- Design a reliable Irish Grammar Test to measure improvement over time
- Serve as a pilot for a larger study

# Nouns in Irish

- Marked for gender with initial mutation after the article *an*
- Feminine (f) nouns are lenited in nominative case after definite article - (*bean*) *an bhean* ‘the woman’ - orthographically marked by the letter ‘h’ following the lenited consonant
- masculine (m) nouns are not lenited in nominative case – (*fear*) *an fear* ‘the man’ but are in genitive case - *hata an fhir* ‘the man’s hat’
- L2 learners find it difficult to identify gender and frequently disregard lenition (Hickey, 2005)
- In the case of Welsh language, children’s development of productive command of grammatical gender and mutations tends to be item-based rather than rule-based (Thomas and Gathercole, 2007)

# Genitive case in Irish

- When two nouns come together – *doras na scoile* ‘the school door’
- Verbal noun – *ag léamh an leabhair* ‘reading the book’
- Compound preposition – *i lár an bhóthair* ‘in the middle of the road’, beside, in front of etc.
- Quantity – *beagán airgid* ‘a lot of money’, a little, more
- Possession – *eireaball an mhadra* ‘the dog’s tail’
- Idioms after certain words – *timpeall na tíre* ‘around the country’, according to, across
- Genitive case can change the **article**, **initial** and **final** mutation

# Design

- Implement four-week programme
- Develop students language awareness through Form-focused Instruction
- Drumcondra (standardised) Irish Test - Reading
- Irish Grammar Test (IGT)
- Pre-test, Post-test (post 1) and Delayed Post-test (post 2)

# Design

- Irish Grammar Test (IGT) - fill-in-the blanks type tasks
- Three versions of test A,B,C
- 20 items - 10 m, 10 f
- Three subscales - **article**, **initial** and **final** (3x20=60)
- 4 dummy items embedded which did not require application of genitive
- Students randomly assigned to one each of three forms (group 1 n=10; group 2 n=10, group 3 n=8)
- Students took a different form of the test on each administration – A or B or C
- Didn't become familiar with specific content
- Focus group interviews



## Triail A

Cód: \_\_\_\_\_

**Scríobh amach na habairtí seo a leanas go cruinn gan na lúibíní.**

Bhí na bileoga i lár (an bord).

Bhí na bileoga i lár \_\_\_\_\_.

Bhí sé ag tabhairt (caint) ar ainmhithe na hÉireann.

Bhí sé ag tabhairt \_\_\_\_\_ ar ainmhithe na hÉireann.

Cé hí an captaen ar (an fhoireann) sin?

Cé hí an captaen ar \_\_\_\_\_ sin?

Dhreap siad go barr (an cnoc).

Dhreap siad go barr \_\_\_\_\_.

Thit sí i lár (an bóthar).

Thit sí i lár \_\_\_\_\_.

Bhí fear ag glanadh (an t-ospidéal).

Bhí fear ag glanadh \_\_\_\_\_.

- Example of first six items on Test A
- Write out the following sentences accurately without the parentheses

# Participants

- One intact Grade 6 class
- 28 students – 15 girls, 13 boys
- Average age 12.5 yrs
- High level of achievement on TGD-R – standardised reading test

# Students' achievement on the TGD-R, overall and by gender and TGD-R subscale. (TGD-R = Standardised reading test)

Measure	All		Females		Males	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Vocabulary Standard Score	116.57	11.03	120.87	10.68	111.62	9.54
Vocabulary Percentile Score	81.18	18.29	87.13	16.75	74.31	18.17
Comprehension Standard Score	115.64	12.21	118.40	10.20	112.46	13.91
Comprehension Percentile Score	79.00	21.95	84.53	16.13	72.62	26.42
Total Standard Score	117.71	11.43	121.67	9.98	113.15	11.65
Total Percentile Score	<b>82.39</b>	17.73	<b>88.60</b>	11.88	<b>75.23</b>	20.96

# Programme

- Four weeks (Apr-May 2012)
  - average of four 30-minute lessons per week
  - Rinne muid go leor tagairtí don phointe gramadaí i rith an lae mar a tháinig se isteach sa chaint go nádúrtha freisin.
- PowerPoint presentations
- Games – memory, cone, word tennis,
- Quizzes
- Dictogloss (rules in context)
- Learner diaries

# **An Tuiseal Ginideach**

Gaeilge mhaith, Gaeilge cheart agus  
Gaeilge chruinn



Cad a thugann tú  
faoi deara???

(What do you notice)



# An Bord

Ag barr an bhoird



# An Bóthar

I lár an bhóthair



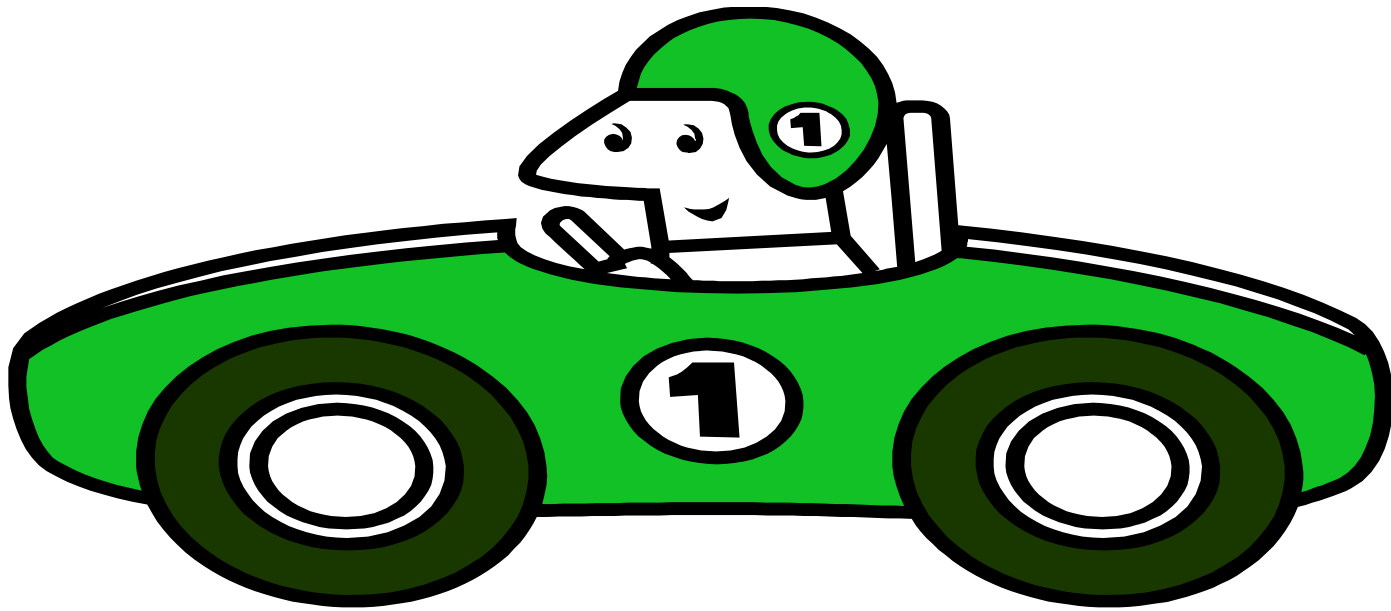
# An bád

## Seol an bháid



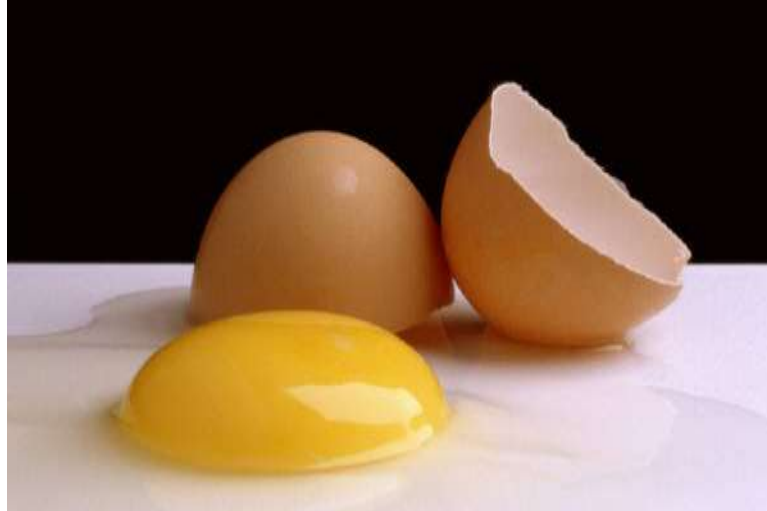
# An Carr

## Tiománaí an chairr



# An Ubh

Ag briseadh **na huibhe**



# An Oíche

Ag deireadh **na hoíche**





# An Obair

Ag déanamh **na hoibre**



# An Geimhreadh

Aimsir an -----

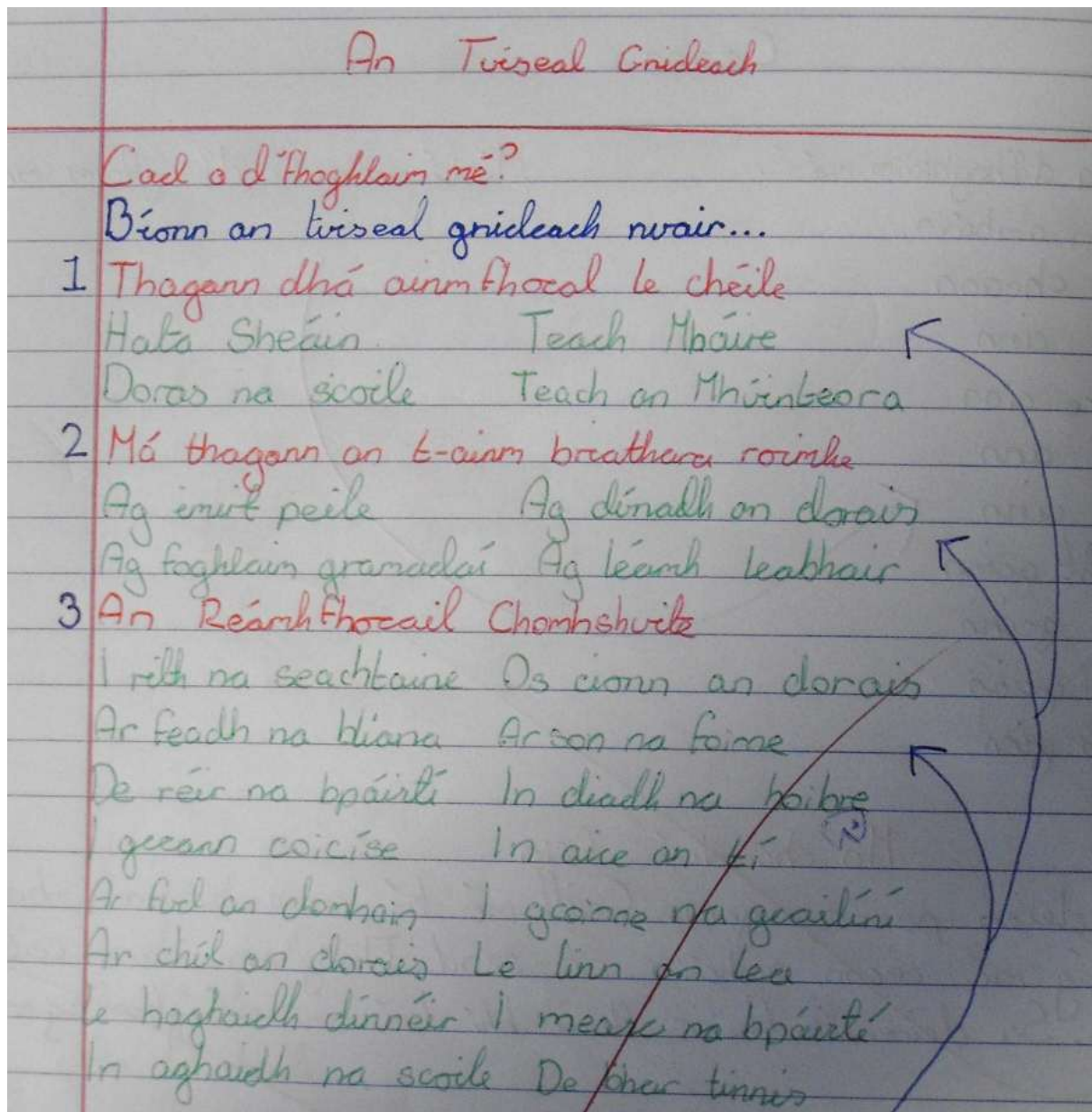


# An Dialann Mhachnamhach (Learner diary)

- Cad a d'fhoghlaim mé?
- Míniú ar cad a d'fhoghlaim mé
- Mo shamplaí féin
- Cad a cheap mé?
- What did I learn?
- Explanation of what I learned
- My own examples
- What did I think?



# Learner diaries



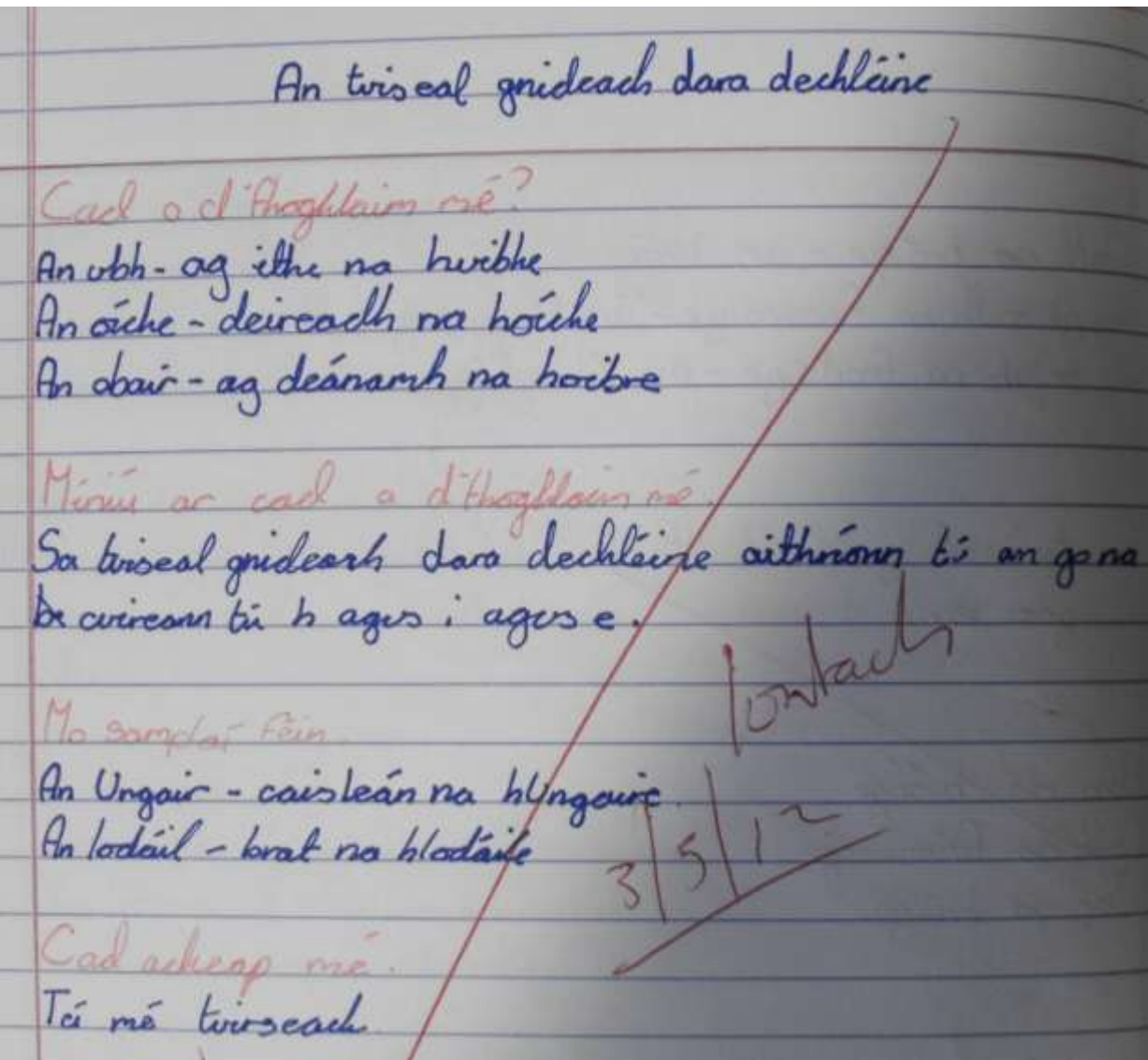
What did I learn?

Explanation of  
what I learned

My own examples

What did I think?

# Learner diaries



What did I learn?

Explanation of what I learned

My own examples

What did I think?

# Results

- Students randomly assigned one each of three forms
- Results indicate that the groups are equivalent in terms of their proficiency in Irish as measured by the TGD-R
- At pre-test stage, Form B of test proved somewhat easier but no significant differences at post-test stage

	Mean
Form A	24.4
Form B	27.3
Form C	23.1



# Mean scores on the IGT - Pre, Post1 and Post2

Scale	Time						% Correct Pre	% Correct Post1	% Correct Post2
	Pre		Post1		Post2				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Alt Article	12.46	1.40	17.75	1.78	16.96	2.03	62.3	88.8	84.8
Tús Initial	9.82	2.14	16.82	1.83	16.70	2.37	49.1	84.1	83.5
Deireadh Final	2.79	2.79	15.61	2.01	14.96	3.09	13.9	78.0	74.8
Total	<b>25.07</b>	5.28	<b>50.18</b>	4.99	<b>48.63</b>	7.04	<b>41.8</b>	<b>83.6</b>	<b>81.0</b>

## Mean scores on the IGT by gender of items, at Pre, Post1 and Post2

Scale	Pre		Time		Post2		% Correct Pre	% Correct Post1	% Correct Post2
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
<b>Masculine</b>									
Alt/Article	9.27	1.56	9.30	0.87	9.36	0.76	92.7	93.0	93.6
Tús/Initial	6.27	1.64	8.48	1.19	8.60	1.12	62.7	84.8	86.0
Deireadh/F	1.31	1.62	7.78	1.37	7.76	1.54	13.1	77.8	77.6
Total	<b>16.89</b>	2.96	25.50	2.65	25.70	2.46	<b>56.3</b>	85.0	85.7
<b>Feminine</b>									
Alt/Article	3.26	1.83	8.50	1.50	7.73	1.93	32.6	85.0	77.3
Tús/Initial	3.52	1.48	8.50	1.14	8.23	1.73	35.2	85.0	82.3
Deireadh/F	1.59	2.06	7.81	1.30	7.23	2.12	15.9	78.1	72.3
Total	<b>8.18</b>	5.11	24.68	3.24	22.93	5.47	<b>27.3</b>	82.3	76.4



# Test means for item aspect and practice/non-practice classification, overall and by testing occasion

Aspect	Total		Pre		Post1		Post2	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Alt Practice	77.00	22.16	57.40	16.68	90.88	11.69	82.94	21.45
Alt Non-Practice	73.29	25.25	60.10	19.50	81.55	25.17	78.40	25.88
Tús Practice	73.06	27.84	41.58	16.47	92.79	10.03	85.25	20.43
Tús Non-Practice	58.98	30.45	35.46	26.05	71.77	23.22	70.11	27.56
Deireadh Practice	60.80	39.00	11.86	15.06	<b>89.92</b>	11.29	81.35	22.32
Deireadh Non-Practice	33.06	35.08	10.74	13.12	<b>46.41</b>	37.30	42.38	37.92
<b>Total Practice</b>	<b>71.34</b>	26.30	<b>37.97</b>	9.69	91.20	9.26	85.34	12.93
<b>Total Non-Practice</b>	<b>67.07</b>	20.09	<b>43.77</b>	10.27	79.31	9.88	78.55	13.38

## Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for the IGT, overall, and by form and gender of items

Form/Items	Alt/Article	Tús/Initial	Deireadh/Final	Total
A	.746	.853	.942	.931
B	.710	.769	.935	.900
C	.735	.834	.938	.914
Masculine items	<b>.534</b>	<b>.504</b>	.882	.799
Feminine items	.833	.787	.884	.875
All	.706	.802	.933	.907

# Weighted mean scores on the IGT - Pre, Post1 and Post2

Scale	Time						% Correct Pre	% Correct Post1	% Correct Post2
	Pre		Post1		Post2				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Alt Article	7.94	1.44	13.13	1.62	12.36	1.94	52.9	87.6	82.4
Tús Initial	11.63	2.73	21.21	2.26	21.08	3.09	46.5	84.8	84.3
Deireadh Final	5.92	5.64	31.15	4.12	30.08	6.39	14.8	77.9	75.2
Total	25.50	8.78	65.50	7.27	63.52	10.90	31.9	81.9	79.4

# Weights applied to the data in previous table

Scale	Masculine	Feminine
Alt Article	0.5	1.0
Tús Initial	1.0	1.5
Deireadh Final	2.0	2.0
Total	3.5	4.5

# Focus groups: inductive approach

- N: Uaireanta, nuair atá tú ag caint faoi foghlaim gramadaí, tá tú ag smaoineamh, tá tú istigh sa rang agus ta na múinteoir ag múineadh duit. Ach leis é seo tá tú ag piocadh amach na patrúin tú féin agus dul amach sa chlós agus ag imirt na gcluichí chun cur na rialacha i bhfeidhm.
- N: Sometimes, when you are thinking about learning grammar, you are in the classroom and the teacher is teaching you. But with this, you are picking out the patterns yourself and going out to the playground and playing games to implement the rules.

# Focus groups: autonomy

D: Má oibríonn tú amach é tú féin tá sé agat. Ach má insíonn an múinteoir duit, cloiseann tú é ach déanann tú dearmad air i lá.

A: Agus uaireanta ní bhíonn tú ag éisteacht.

R: Bíonn tú ag tabhairt níos mó aird nuair a bhíonn ort féin é a oibriú amach tú féin in ionad an múinteoir a bheith ag abair leat, ansin b'fhéidir nach mbeidh tú ag éisteacht léi ach nuair a chaithfidh tusa é a fháil amach, caithfidh tú bheith ag trialladh é a fháil amach agus nuair a fhaigheann tú é fanann sé i do cheann

N: If you work it out for yourself you have it. But if the teacher tells you, you hear it but you forget it in a day.

A: And sometimes you don't listen.

M: You pay more attention when you have to work it out yourself instead of the teacher saying it to you, then you might not be listening but when you have to work it out, you have to try to work it out and when you get it, it stays in your head

# Focus groups: effectiveness

A: Bhí orainn rudaí a fhoghlaim dúinn féin freisin, rudaí a féachaint suas san fhoclóir

N: Tagann feabhas ar do chuid Gaeilge mar bíonn tú ag dul ar an idirlíon ag féachaint suas [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie) do rudaí agus nuair a cheartaíonn an múinteoir do dhréacht agus nuair a fhaigheann tú é ar ais caithfidh tú type é suas ar an ríomhaire agus téann na rialacha agus an Ghaeilge cheart isteach i do chloigeann níos fearr.

A: We had to learn things for ourselves, to look things up in the dictionary

N: Your Irish improves because you are going on the internet and looking up [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie) (online dictionary) for things and when the teacher corrects your draft and when you get it back you have to type it up on the computer and the rules and correct Irish go into your head better.

# Focus groups: learner diaries

M: Ag tús na bliana bhí sé saghas leabhar ach anois tá sé an-luachmhar. Tá a lán samplaí ann agus go leor rialacha gramadaí

A Níl tú just ag scríobh síos, caithfidh tú do samplaí féin ...

N: Mura bhfuil tú cinnte faoi rud éigin féachann tú sa dialann seachas ceist a chur.

C: Beidh sé go maith don tionscadal sa mheánscoil freisin. Cabhraíonn sé le d'obair bhaile. Má dhéanann tú dearmad air tá gach rud scríofa ann.

M: At the start of the year it was kind of a book but now it is very valuable. There are lots of examples in it and grammar rules.

A You are not just writing down, you have to (put in) your own examples.

N: If you are not sure of something you look it up in the diary instead of asking a question.

A: It will be useful for projects in High School as well. It helps with your homework. If you forget something you have everything written in it.



## Focus groups: accuracy

C: Tar éis tamall ní bhíonn ort smaoineamh bíonn sé i do chloigeann.

R: Tá a fhios againn na rialacha agus cén chaoi muid féin a cheartú. Ní bhíonn muid díreach ag guessáil. Tá a fhios againn cad a bhfuil mícheart agus ceart.

N: Níl aon leithscéal againn anois mar chuamar tríd na rialacha go léir agus ta siad againn sa dialann.

L: Má thuigeann tusa an riail, nuair a fheiceann tú an focal, tá a fhios agat an bhfeiceann sé ceart nó mícheart.

C: After a while you don't have to think, it is in your head

R: Now we know the rules and how to correct ourselves. We are not just guessing. We know what is incorrect and correct.

N: We have no excuse now because we went through all the rules and we have them in the diary.

L: When you understand the rule you are able to look at the word and you know if looks correct or incorrect

# Focus groups: group work, COP

É: Ní chaithfidh tú gach rud a dhéanamh tú féin. Tá tú in ann píosa amháin a dhéanamh. Foghlaimíonn tú é níos fearr. Tá sé níos deise

**R: Dá ndéarfadh Seán ‘cúpla daoine’ céard a tharlódh?**

T: Cheartódh daoine eile sa rang é.

**R: An gcuirfeadh sé isteach ort?**

T: No. Just cuireann sé leis na rudaí atá foghlamtha agat

É: You don't have to do everything yourself. You can do one piece. You learn it better. It is nicer.

**R: If Seán said ‘a couple of peoples’ what would happen?**

T: Someone else in the class would correct him.

**R: Would that upset you?**

T: No. It just adds to the things that you have learned.

# Limitations

- Small sample size
- High percentile score of class on TGD-R
- Absence of free-production task
- Ceiling effect of test
- Time of year
- Dummy items

# Findings

- improvement in mean achievement from pre to post-test stage highly statistically significant
- post 1 and post2 scores not statistically different
- Irish Grammar Test proved reliable and valid
- No difference in the mean scores of males and females on the IGT
- Learning had taken place in an enjoyable way
- COP, positive learning environment

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