



**GAEILGE 2016**  
*Léargas ar theanga bheo*

**IRISH 2016**  
*An insight into a living language*



## Réamhrá • Introduction

Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh

### Féiniúlacht *bain3* indibhidiúlacht (*An foclóir beag 1991*)

Tá tuiscintí éagsúla ann ar cad is féiniúlacht ann agus mar a thuigeann muid é. Cuireann daoine áirithe síos air mar an tuiscint atá ag duine ar an ghaol aici/aige leis an domhan, mar atá an gaol sin tógtha mar a thuigeann an duine iad féin agus na deiseanna acu don todhchaí.

Creideann daoine eile gurb é teanga agus oidhreacht an duine mar an chuid is tábhachtaí d'ár bhféiniúlacht. Is ann a chruthaítear an dearcadh againn orainn féin áit a múnlaítear ár ndearcadh orainn féin agus ar an domhan. Is é an lionsa fríd a ndearcann muid orainn féin agus ar an domhan. Is é a deir cé muid agus cad as dúinn.

**Identity:** The set of characteristics by which a person or thing is definitively recognizable or known (*The free Dictionary*)

There are various views on what “identity” means and how we understand it. Some explain it as as a person's understanding of his/her relationship to the world, how this relationship is constructed, how the person understands themselves and their possibilities for the future. Others view language alongside heritage as the defining factor in our identity. It is essentially the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. It is the lens through which we view ourselves and the world. It is essentially what makes us who and what we are.



Sraith colún atá san iris seo a choimisiúnaigh Foras na Gaeilge chun léargas a thabhairt ar thuirimí i leith na Gaeilge agus ar ról na féiniúlachta sa bhliain 2016. Foilsíodh na colúin uile a chéad uair i bhfoilseacháin náisiúnta in Éirinn agus atá curtha le chéile anseo faoi choimirce Fhoras na Gaeilge.

This magazine is a series of columns commissioned by Foras na Gaeilge go give an insight into attitudes to the Irish language and the role of identity in 2016. All of the columns were published for the first time in national publications in Ireland and are gathered together here under the auspices of Foras na Gaeilge.



Bernard Dunne

4



Páidí Ó Lionáird

7



Máire Mhic Ghiolla Íosa

10



Dónall Ó Braonáin

16



Joe McHugh

19



Jen Ní Mhathúna

22



Linda Ervine

25



*Our language, our journey*  
*—An insight into a living language*

## Bernard Dunne



**S**o when I lived in Los Angeles in the good ol' US of A back in 2001, I noticed something quite alarming about myself. LA was and is full of many different nationalities, much like Ireland is today, and when these people from different nations met with someone from their own country they immediately conversed in their mother tongue. 'Náire' or shame in English came upon me when I realised that I could not speak any of my own language.

Gaeilge is a funny thing. It's our country's national tongue and we start learning it from the age of 5 and continue learning it throughout our next 13 years in school. Most, including myself, end up leaving school with little or no comprehension of the language. We would have a puzzled look on our face if someone spoke to us on the street with our own language.

We use excuses like it is too hard to learn, it's not taught well, it's rammed down our throats and that it is no good to you later on in life for getting a job.

This last one is probably the most problematic for the language to thrive. When faced with the choice of learning the language of our ancestors for an increased sense of pride and belonging, or learning a language which will help one gain employment, it's clear which choice people are making.

Pride, identity or a feeling of belonging is something we only start

It's all of these things equally that make me proud to be Irish. Our language though is as important as anything else to me and my identity as an Irish person. It's as much a part of our country as our music, or love of Gaelic games, art and our geography. It took for me, to travel the world to realise this.

to feel when we get older. It was in LA when I got this feeling or sense of lacking identity. What was it that made me proud to be an Irish man?

Was it that sense of community in our neighbourhoods, our humour, the fact that we have many famous poets/scholars, our lovely countryside, the way we punch above our weight on a sporting level around the world or the fact that we are a resilient people, who, having faced many challenges we still manage to raise ourselves up and smile.

It's all of these things equally that make me proud to be Irish. Our language though is as important as anything else to me and my identity as an Irish person. It's as much a part of our country as our music, or love of Gaelic games, art and our geography. It took

for me, to travel the world to realise this.

Young children in school should be immersed in & taught in the language of Irish. I'm talking about kids as young as 5-12 going through primary school with Irish. After that they can decide what they want to do but they will be fluent so the studying of it in secondary school could nearly become a specialist sort of study. This complete immersion in the language will help give young people a sense of pride in their language, culture and their country.

3 years ago I did a show called *Bród Club*. It was a national campaign aimed at trying to encourage others who like myself had little or no Irish but were wanting to improve their vocabulary even on just a basic level. To this day I still get people, albeit mainly the older generation, coming up and trying to talk with me with whatever Irish that they have. And the big theme from most of these conversations is that they wished they worked more on their Gaeilge.

Des Bishop did fantastic work with the language when he made the programme *In the Name of the Fada*. Moving to a Gaeltacht for 1 year he demonstrated that even a man who did not have to study Irish in school could learn the language.

Sometimes I think our hang ups about the language are more drawn from the past and stories that kids grow up hearing. I believe that we have to look to the future with not just our language but also our identity. There are now many new ethnic groups in Ireland and many

languages spoken by these new Irish citizens. Irish identity is changing and maybe so too is our relationship with our language. We need to try to encourage the language to move along with this change.

Our young people need to be giving more chances to use their language rather than just a 40 min class a day or every 2nd day isn't enough to encourage young people to speak it. They need inspiration from social events where the language can be used. Language can help people identify more with the cultures of this country. But they need to be exposed to the language in a fun and engaging way.

I understand there are those who feel the language is not needed as part of our schools, our lives or our identity. Its different strokes for different folks I suppose, as I feel our language is hugely important to us as a nation. I take pride in the fact that both my children will grow up fluent in our national language and I believe that it is a gift that will keep on giving to them in their lives. It's not about just trying to keep the language alive. It's about preserving our culture, our history, and our identity.

I for one feel that I am doing something, however little, to try and help this.

*First published in The Herald*





Ár dTeanga, Ár nOidhreacht  
– Léargas ar theanga bheo

## Páidí Ó Lionáird



**M**airnéalach. Sin an focal ar theip orm smaoineamh air nuair a bhí an crú ar an tairne. Bhíos 11 nó 12 b'fhéidir agus mé i rang 5 nó 6 i Scoil Naomh Abán, Baile Mhic Íre, i bparóiste Bhaile Mhúirne. Ábhar náire a bhí ann. Ní domsa, áfach, ach don bPríomhoide, an Máistir Mac an Mhaoir. Bhí an cigire, Séamus Mac Gearailt i láthair — é ag fiosrú cumas nó easpa cumais Gaeilge na scoile.

Níorbh ábhar náire domsa é nach raibh focal agam ar dhuine a bheadh ag caitheamh a shaoil ar muir; domsa, níor bhain sé le gnáthrithim an tsaoil. Tá Baile Bhúirne le cois scór míle ón bhfarrage — an Neidín, siar ó dheas, an áit is gaire dúinn.

Dá bharr sin, ní raibh an fharrage ná slite beatha na ndaoine uirthi lárnach ná fiú imeallach i mo shaolsa.

Bhí isteach is amach le seacht mbliana caite ar scoil agam faoin tráth seo agus fios maith agam go raibh rud éigin difriúil fúm.

B'fhéidir gur chóir go mbeadh m'fhoclóir níos forbartha, níos leithne agus níos doimhne ná mar a bhí — ní raibh agus sin mar a bhí — ach ní raibh aon Bhéarla in aon chor agam nuair a chuas ar scoil an chéad lá riamh. Ní cuimhin liom go raibh fadhb agam a bheith ag meascadh le mo chomhuaisle.

As mo rang bunscoile, ina raibh 18 scoláire, bhíos ar an aon duine ann a tháinig as teaghlach ina raibh an Ghaoluinn amháin á labhairt againn eadrainn féin.

Bhí scoláirí eile a raibh bunús maith na teangan acu ach ní raibh sí á húsáid mar mar theanga theaghlaigh.

Dá bhrí sin ar fad, nuair a thagadh cigire ar cuairt, cuirí sinne, a raibh greim mhaith againn ar an nGaeilge, chun tosaigh sa tseomra ranga le ceisteanna an chigire a fhreagairt.

Cur i gcéill cinnte ach cuma faoi.

Nuair a iarradh orm mo smaointe i leith na Gaeilge a bhreacadh síos don alt seo, níor shamhlaíos go dtiocfadh cás eiseach an duine i gceist. Níor tuigeadh dom riamh go raibh mistéir eiseach ag baint le labhairt na Gaeilge, ach tuigim anois gurb amhlaidh go bhfuil.

Cá gcuirim mé féin i gcomhthéacs na teangan? Cá bhfeicim an teanga i gcomhthéacs m'fhéiniúlachta? An bhfuil ceangal idir an teanga agus an tuiscint atá agam ar cé mé féin?

Agus má tá, cé chomh dlúth, chomh doimhin is atá an ceangal sin? Go craiceann? Go cnámh? Go smior? Nó an bhfuil doimhneas níos doimhne ná sin ann? Doimhneas anama? Doimhneas i gcroí an duine?

Anois agus an tír i ngreim chomóradh céid Éirí Amach na Cásca 1916, tá go leor údar againn féachaint orainn féin agus ionainn féin.

Cé sinn agus cá bhfuil ár dtriall? An bhfuil na mianta céanna againn agus a bhí acu siúd a dhréacht Forógra na Poblachta le linn Éirí Amach na Cásca 1916?

Ceisteanna eiseacha agus íogaire gan aon agó.

Níos faide siar sa stair, nuair a bhí Naomh Pádraig ar a dhícheall págánaigh na hÉireann a mhealladh lena chreideamh Críostaí, thug sé faoi na ceisteanna teibí ar fad a bhain leis an gcreideamh a fhreagairt trí chomhthéacs nua agus intuigthe a chur ar fáil do na hÉireannaigh.

I 'Lúireach Phádraig', mhínigh sé don slua cén tuiscint a bhí aigesean ar a chreideamh i gCríost — cad a chiallaigh Críost dó.

*Críost liom, Críost romham,  
Críost im dhiaidh, Críost istigh ionam,  
Críost fúm, Críost os mo chionn,  
Críost ar mo lámh dheis, Críost ar mo  
lámh chlé, Críost i mo luí dom, Críost i mo sheasamh dom,  
Críost i gcroí gach duine atá ag cuimhneamh orm,  
Críost i mbéal gach duine a labhraíonn liom,  
Críost i ngach súil a fhéachann orm,  
Críost i ngach cluas a éisteann liom.*

Nílím ag rá gur féidir an focal 'Gaeilge' a mhalartú le 'Críost' sa mhéid thuas agus go mbeadh ciall leis na habairtí i gcónaí, ach má dhéanaim amhlaidh déanann sé ciall domsa. Cuir an focal 'Gaeilge' in áit an fhocail

**Bhuaileas le mo bhean chéile de bharr na Gaeilge, cuir i gcás, agus murach san, ní bheadh mo mhac ar an saol.**



‘Críost’ i Lúireach Phádraig agus sin mar a bhraithimse faoin nGaeilge im shaol.

*An Ghaeilge liom, an Ghaeilge romham,  
An Ghaeilge im dhiaidh, An Ghaeilge istigh ionam...*

Bhronn an Ghaeilge orm gach a bhfuil agam — ag an leibhéal is bunúsaí thug sé cumas cumarsáide agus slí bheatha dá réir dom. Más fíor do na húdair, bronnann mo dhátheangachas deiseanna breise orm i bpróiseáil eolais agus i réiteach fadhbanna.

Tá samplaí níos soiléire agam de na buntáistí a bhaineann le mo chumas Gaeilge a labhairt agus í a bheith lárnach im shaol. Bhuaileas le mo bhean chéile de bharr na Gaeilge, cuir i gcás, agus murach san, ní bheadh mo mhac ar an saol.

Ní bheadh cónaí orm san áit a bhfuilim murach an Ghaeilge.

Ní aithneofaí mé mar atáim murach an Ghaeilge.

An mbeinn pósta agus clann orm? Gach seans go mbeinn agus go mbeadh, ach bheadh sé difriúil.

An mbeinn fostaithe agus mo chuid oibre chomh lárnach sin dom’ fhéinaitheantas? Gach seans, ach bheadh sé difriúil.

An mbeinn sásta ionam féin? Gach seans go mbeinn... ach arís bheadh sé difriúil.

Bheadh gach gné dem shaol difriúil. B’fhéidir nach mbeinn, in aon tslí gurb eol dom, níos measa as. B’fhéidir nach mbeinn ar an ngannchuid nó nach mothóinn chomh difriúil sin d’uireasa na Gaeilge, ach tá a fhios agam go mbeinn cosúil leis na céadta eile a deir liom, le linn gnáth-chomhrá, go bhfuil aiféala orthu nach bhfuil Gaeilge ar a dtoil acu.

Agus ní deirim seo ag ceapadh gur mó d’Éireannach mé de bharr go bhfuil ar mo chumas Gaeilge a labhairt. Níl aon stampa breise ar mo phas dá bharr. Ní chaithim aon lipéad ná suaitheantas le rá gur Gaeilgeoir mé — ní gá dom é.

B’fhéidir gur leor fáinne amháin a thugann le fios go bhfuilim pósta!

Mar sin féin, is ball de chumann mé atá ag dul i laghad bliain i ndiaidh bliana más fíor. Cumann na ndaoine a rugadh agus a tógadh le Gaeilge mar an chéad theanga acu — an t-aon teanga teaghlaigh.

Cuirim fúm i gConamara, an ceantar is mó ina labhraítear an Ghaeilge, ach áit mar sin féin ina bhfuil an teanga ag caolú agus ag cúngú lá i ndiaidh lae. (tá tuiscint níos fearr acu anseo ar chúrsaí mara chomh maith!).

Ní bhraithim gur lú de dhuine mé dá bharr seo ar fad. A mhalairt; braithim go bhfuil an t-ádh liom agus go mbeadh folús doimhin im shaol nach líonfaí d’uireasa na Gaeilge.

*Foilsíodh den chéad uair ar Tuairisc.ie*

Ár dTeanga, Ár nOidhreacht  
– Léargas ar theanga bheo

## Máire Mhic Ghiolla Íosa



**C**éad bliain ó shin bhí Gluaiseacht na Gaeilge agus Gluaiseacht na Poblachta ceangailte go dlúth i meon agus i saol mhuintir na hÉireann. “Ní amháin saor ach Gaelach chomh maith; ní amháin Gaelach ach saor chomh maith” a bhí mar shluaghairm choitianta ag an am. Bhí an Ghaeilge, dar le mórchuid de bhunaitheoirí an Stáit, mar dhlúthchuid den fhéiniúlacht Éireannach.

Tá an Ghaeilge mar chuid thábhachtach de m’fhéiniúlacht féin mar Éireannach, agus bhí riamh, fiú ag an am nach raibh Gaeilge agam. Tá taisí agus tionchar na Gaeilge de dhlúth agus d’inneach an tsaoil in Éirinn. Ní gá ach smaoineamh ar shaibhreas na logainmneacha a úsáideann muid gach lá. Tá siad fréamhaithe go daingean in ithir an dúchais. Tuigeann muid ar fad na focail is coitianta a úsáidtear, agus dá bharr sin tá tuiscint againn ar bhunús na logainmneacha. Níl dabht ar bith ach gur saibhre muid an tuiscint sin a bheith againn.

Is saibhre Béarla na hÉireann struchtúr na Gaeilge a bheith air fosta. As béal an Éireannaigh amháin a chluinfeá: “Is it yourself that’s in it?” nó “I’m after doing it.” Tá rian na Gaeilge beo beathach sa Bhéarla atá thart orainn in Éirinn. Sin oidhreacht ár sinsear; cuid den saol, cuid dár bhféiniúlacht.

Rugadh agus tógadh mé in Ard Eoin, i mBéal Feirste. As Contae Ros Comáin m’athair, áit a bhfuair sé a chuid scolaíochta i nGaeilge. Béarla a bhí ag a thuismitheoirí, ach Béarla a bhí breac le Gaeilge bhinn Chúige Connacht. Ní raibh Gaeilge ag mo mháthair, ach bhí Gaeilge na mBráithre

Tá an Ghaeilge mar chuid thábhachtach de m'fhéiniúlacht féin mar Éireannach, agus bhí riamh, fiú ag an am nach raibh Gaeilge agam.

Críostaí ag a cuid deartháireacha óga, agus ba í sin a labhair siad agus iad den bharúil go raibh cluasa fada ar na muca beaga.

Cion is nach raibh an Ghaeilge mar chuid den churaclam sna bunscoileanna paróiste le linn m'óige, chinn mo thuismitheoirí an chlann a chur chuig scoileanna a raibh an Ghaeilge á teagasc iontu. Mar sin, cuireadh na cailíní chuig Clochar na Trócaire agus na buachaillí chuig na Bráithre Críostaí. Lean mé féin leis an

Ghaeilge in Ardscoil San Dominic ina dhiaidh sin, agus chaith mé trí shamhradh fhada fhliucha i mBaile na Finne sa Ghaeltacht Láir.

Bhí cónaí orm ar imeall Ard Eoin i gceantar a raibh mórchuid na ndaoine ina bProtastúnaigh agus ina nAontachtaithe. Ní haon iontas é gur mhinic teannas san áit. Cé gur ag tarraingt ar thobair éagsúla a bhí an dá phobal, d'fhás cairdeas idir mé féin agus roinnt de na comharsana Protastúnacha, muintearas atá beo beathach go fóill. Nuair ba ghnách liomsa dul chuig an chamógaíocht nó feiseanna, nó chuig an damhsa Gaelach, is caithimh aimsire de shórt eile ar fad a bhí ag mo chairde Protastúnacha.

Ba ghnách liom cuid de gach samhradh a chaitheamh i gContae Ros Comáin, le tuismitheoirí m'athar. Bhí an tAthair John Joe McGreevy ina chuirteoir rialta sa teach, col ceathrar le m'athair agus scoláire Gaeilge. Ní chluinfeá focal Béarla sa teach nuair a bheadh an tAthair John Joe ar cuairt. Ba mhinic mé faoi dhraíocht ann. Cé nár thuig mé na focail, thuig mé go raibh caidreamh álainn éigin ceilte orm.

Blianta fada ina dhiaidh sin, agus mé ar chuirteanna oifigiúla thar lear mar Uachtarán na hÉireann, ba ghnách liom an Ghaeilge a úsáid i ngach píosa cainte poiblí a rinne mé. Is minic a tháinig daoine chugam i ndiaidh na cainte le hinsint dom gur mhothaigh siad ceangal agus comhbhá ní ba láidre leis an tír de bharr na teagmhála leis an Ghaeilge. Bíonn tábhacht ar leith ag baint leis an chúpla focal i saol an deoraí.

Is iomaí duine in Éirinn a shíleann nach bhfuil acu ach traidhfil bheag Gaeilge. Ach is iontach mar a fhásann agus a fhorbraíonn an cúpla focal nuair a thugann duine faoin Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim arís. Sin mar a tharla dom féin: faoi mar a bheadh mo chuid Gaeilge, a bhí ina sámhchodladh, i ndiaidh í féin a mhúscailt arís.

Mar is faide a bhíonn daoine gan an Ghaeilge a úsáid, mar is deacra a bhíonn sé orthu dul i ngleic léi. Is minic a bhíonn eagla ar dhaoine tabhairt faoin Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim arís. Síleann siad nach bhfuil bunús maith go leor acu, ach is beag duine nach bhfuil stór fairsing focal acu thiar ansin áit éigin sa chuimhne.

I mo chás féin, tháinig mo chumas faoi bhláth nuair a chuaigh mé isteach san Áras. Thug mé faoin staidéar go cíocrach, agus níorbh fhada gur thuig mé go raibh mé ar thairseach saoil eile ar fad, saol litríochta agus cultúrtha a bhí ceilte orm roimhe sin. Diaidh ar ndiaidh, osclaíodh doras dom isteach sa saol sin.

Fuair mé blaiseadh ceart, den chéad uair, de shaibhreas na teanga agus d'áilleacht na litríochta Gaeilge. Bhí mé faoi dhraíocht ag na scéalta agus an fhilíocht. Cé go raibh cuid den saothar léite agam i mBéarla cheana féin, níor leor liom a thuilleadh an t-aistriúchán. An léirstean dubh agus bán a bhí agam ar shaol na Gaeilge, bhí sé anois ildathach, gleoite, glé.

Ní thig liom a mhaíomh go bhfuil m'fhéiniúlacht Éireannach níos láidre anois ná mar a bhí nuair nach raibh an Ghaeilge agam, ach tá tuiscint agus léirstean níos doimhne agam anois ar m'fhéiniúlacht ná mar a bhí riamh.

Is saibhre go mór mo shaol an Ghaeilge a bheith mar chuid de; agus ní miste dom a rá gur boichte go mór a bheadh mo shaol le scór bliain anuas, gan an chairdeas agus an chuideachta agus an chraic a bhí agam as Gaeilge.

*Foilsíodh den chéad uair in The Irish Times*



*Our language, our journey*  
*– An insight into a living language*

## Mary McAleese



**O**ne hundred years ago the Republican Movement and the Irish Language Movement were closely linked in the minds and hearts and lives of many Irish people. “Not only free but Gaelic as well; not only Gaelic but free as well.” This was a familiar slogan at the time. To most of the founders of the Irish State, the Irish language was an intrinsic part of Irish identity.

The Irish language is an important part of my own Irish identity, and always has been, even before I could speak Irish. The language itself, its vestiges and influences, play a significant part in Irish life. Our placenames are firmly rooted in the rich soil of our linguistic heritage. They surround us. Each Irish place name is the distillation of a long narrative, a history of our people, and enriches us linguistically and culturally.

The English we speak in Ireland is heavily influenced by Irish. Where else would you hear: “I’m only after doing it”, or “Is it yourself that’s in it?” These phrases come word for word from Irish and are a seamless part of everyday life, carrying with them a memory of times we did not live in; but those who did shaped us and our world.

I was born and reared in Ardoyne, in north Belfast. My father was from County Roscommon, and during his brief years at school he was educated through Irish. His parents’ English was liberally laced with Connacht Irish. I heard it before I heard Ulster Irish. My mother did not speak Irish to us but her younger brothers, who were educated by

the Christian Brothers, did. They often spoke it among themselves when speaking of things we children were not supposed to hear.

Irish was not taught in our parish primary schools at the time, so my parents sent us to schools outside the parish, where it was taught. The girls went to the Convent of Mercy and the boys to the Christian Brothers. Later I studied Irish at St Dominic's High School and spent many a wet summer in the Donegal Gaeltacht.

I lived in a part of Ardoyne that was predominantly Protestant/ Unionist/ British in its identity. The tensions between competing identities made for an unsettling conflictual environment, but did not prevent the growth of strong inter-religious friendships that endure to this day. But there was a going of different ways, of looking to very different sources, drawing from other wells. I went to Irish dancing, took part in feiseanna, wore a fáinne, played camogie. My Protestant friends did none of these things.

Use of the cúpla focal was even more common in County Roscommon, where my father's parents lived, and where I spent part of each summer. His cousin, the late Columban Father John Joe McGreevy, a wonderful Irish scholar, sometimes dropped by to chat. When he did, no English was spoken. I remember being so proud of him, and knowing without understanding why, that in that tiny house on the Carrow Ard, something profound, beautiful and natural was happening ... and changing.

Many years later, as President of Ireland, I incorporated Irish into every speech I made while on official visits abroad. I was often approached by expatriates who told me that hearing the Gaeilge again made them feel proud and close to home. The cúpla focal can go a long way to make an exile feel connected to both today's and yesterday's global Irish family.

Lots of Irish people have what they think is only a smattering of Irish. But it is remarkable how that seemingly small vocabulary quickly expands and develops when you decide to re-engage with the language. That is what happened to me. After University my engagement with Irish was intermittent, but when I took it up seriously again, words, phrases and sentences came tumbling, stumbling back, as if awoken from sleep.

If you haven't used Irish for some years, you may be afraid to take that first step; afraid of failure, of getting mired in the rules of grammar; afraid of the effort it takes to kick-start the learning. Don't

The Irish language is an important part of my own Irish identity, and always has been, even before I could speak Irish.

let those fears hold you back. You will have lots of support and encouragement along the way. The learning road is full of adventure and fun, new friendships, new insights; and the rewards are great.

My own efforts blossomed when I became President. I worked very hard to become as fluent as possible. I revelled in the literature, the poetry, the songs, the placenames, the narratives. Comprehension of the language revealed so much that had been hidden from me except in translation. Now I saw the creativity, the beauty and the artistry at first hand. It was like transitioning from black and white television to colour. Irish life came into view in Technicolor.

My understanding of Irish identity was enhanced and enriched every step of the way. The skin of identity became more comfortable, a better fit. From the language, the discourse and the culture of Gaeilge there developed a sense of a circle completed, a wound healed.

Do I feel more Irish than when I spoke no Irish? No. Do I feel I know my identity more intimately and convincingly? Yes. Is my life better for re-engaging with the Irish language? Definitely. It has been the gift of gifts, a remarkable source of endlessly renewable energy in my life; and I cannot imagine how poor my life would have been without these past twenty wet craic-filled summers in the Donegal Gaeltacht.

*First published in The Irish News*



Ár dTeanga, Ár nOidhreacht  
– Léargas ar theanga bheo

## Dónall Ó Braonáin



**G**aeilgeoirí muid. A leithéid d’fhocal, de lipéad, de bhoiscín beag táir, de choincheap ciotach atá bisiúil agus truailithe san am céanna. Spreagann an téarma col, coimhthíos, ómós agus meas in aon bhun séimeantaice amháin. Duine gan cuntanós a tharraingeodh an maide mullaigh anuas ar an gcéad iarraidh d’aon turas. Sin nó an é go léiríonn réimse úsáide agus céille an fhocail seo cén bhail atá orainn mar phobal teanga?

Sula dtiocfaidh mé orlach níos faide déanaim faoistin. Ní adhlacóir, tubaisteoir ná olagónaí gairmiúil mé. I bhfad uaim geonaíl, grágaíl agus cailicéireacht faoin mbás. Nílimse dall ar an suíomh a bhfuil muid ann, ní dhiúltaím don stair, do staidrimh ná don scoláireacht ach éilím go mbeadh cead againn ár meabhair féin a bheith againn ar chinniúint na teanga, más guagach féin í.

Is críonna an té a dhealódh traidisiún, dúchas, eitniúlacht, féiniúlacht agus teanga óna chéile. Cuimsítear éagsúlacht mhór cainteoirí Gaeilge i gcatagóirí corracha na socheolaíochta. Is maith ann don léann úd cinnte, oirnéis iontach atá ann le scagadh a dhéanamh ar chainteoirí dúchais, athdhúchais, foghlaimeoirí, athfhoghlaimeoirí, cainteoirí nua agus nuachainteoirí chomh maith le cainteoirí dóchais. Mura bhfuil tú áirithe sa liodán seo, foighid ort — tiocfadh an chéad bhus béarlagair eile gan mhoill.

Ach le filleadh ar mhíchuibheas an mhaide mhullaigh, Gaeilgeoirí muid. Éiríonn linn ár mbealach a dhéanamh ainneoin an dá stát ar an



Nílímse dall ar an suíomh a bhfuil muid ann, ní dhiúltaím don stair, do staidrimh ná don scoláireacht ach éilím go mbeadh cead againn ár meabhair féin a bheith againn ar chinniúint na teanga, más guagach féin í.

oileán seo. Agus sula gcuirfear m'ainm ar an leabhar dubh ar Shráid Mhuirfean nó i Stormont ní nós liom a bheith ag caitheamh agus ag cáineadh ar obair an dá rialtas ach oiread, más patuar, uireasach, lagbhríoch a gcuid iarrachtaí ar uairibh. Ina dhiaidh sin féin, is iomaí sin sampla atá ag gach duine againn den mhearbhall oifigiúil a chleachtaítear chomh fada is a bhaineann sé le teanga, cultúr agus féiniúlacht.

Níl mórán urchóide sa scéilín seo i ndáiríre ach léargas atá ann ar an seanrecht a bheith ag imeacht as. Fógraíodh i gCáinainisnéis 2012 go mbeadh

deireadh á chur le scoláireachtaí comórtha Sheachtain na Cásca 1916 chomh maith le dhá scéim Scoláireachtaí Gaeilge Tríú Leibhéal (teoranta agus neamhtheoranta) i measc scéimeanna seanbhunaithe eile a chuidíodh le mic léinn cumasacha scoláireachtaí ollscoile fochéime agus iarchéime a bhaint. Socraíodh go ndéanfaí comhtháthú ar na scéimeanna seo agus go mbunófaí scéim úr aonair a thabharfadh tús áite do mhic léinn ó theaghlaigh ar míbhuntáiste agus dóibh siúd a fhreastalaíonn ar scoileanna DEIS.

Beart ar son an chomhionannais in aimsir na déine breith na coitiantachta ag an am ach ba dheas mar a cuireadh bealú faoin seantrosacán teanga a bhí le díchoimisiúnú agus le cur de lámh amhail is go raibh contúirt chultúrtha ag baint leis. Sa mbliain 1966 a cuireadh tús leis an scéim chomórtha agus seacht gcinn de scoláireachtaí a bhronntaí in ómós don seachtar a cuireadh chun báis. Nár lige Dia go samhlófaí go mbeadh dlúthnasc idir gnóthachtáil acadúil sa teanga, an fhéiniúlacht náisiúnta agus bearta an mhí-réasúin.

Foilsíodh paimfléad *An Aisling* le Máirtín Ó Cadhain aimsir an chomórtha i 1966, bunaithe ar léachtaí a thug sé i nGaillimh agus i mBaile Átha Cliath. Aiste aighneasóireachta atá sa téacs, ealaín na reitriche go tréan inti, colg agus gangaid ina n-orlaí trí phrós biorach, bearránach. Arbh fhíor don Chadhnach nuair a dhírigh sé aird ar an bparadacs náisiúnta 'nach bhfuil sa nGaeilge ach fige-dhuilleog in aice láimhe mar fhalach ar náire náisiúnta an fhíor-chorruair a mhothaíos muid gur riachtanach sin?'

Ceist spéisiúil í cén chaoi ar caitheadh le cuid den seantrosacán cultúrtha eile ó shin — an ceol dúchais, na cluichí gaelacha, an amhránaíocht ar an sean-nós mar shampla. Ní cosúil go bhfuil scinneadh ná scáth orainn fúthu siúd ach is dóigh nár mhór

cúimhneamh gur toradh atá sa bhféiniúlacht ar shíormhargáil. Próiseas bisiúil atá san idirbheartaíocht chultúrtha ina dtugtar dúshlán, ina gceistítear, ina mbréagnaítear agus a n-athchruthaítear toisí agus teorainneacha. Ní chuirtear teir ar an ní a bhfuil luach leis. Ní hiad na teireanna céanna a bhain le tréithe poiblí na féiniúlachta i 1916, i 1966 agus is cinnte nach iad na luachanna céanna a bheidh i réim le linn chomóradh 2016.

Céad bliain i ndiaidh 1916 b'fhearr liomsa breathnú ar cheist na teanga in Éirinn i dtéarmaí taithí bhraite de réir mhodh saoil an duine. Erlebnis a thug an fealsamh Gearmánach Wilhelm Dilthey ar a leithéid má thuigim i gceart é. Samplaí poiblí den taithí bhraite atá sa litearthacht teanga, sa litríocht agus sna meáin, don fhéiniúlacht i mbarr a réime, próiseas comhcheangail agus díscailte atá ar fáil ar bhealach ar leith don phobal teanga trí Raidió na Gaeltachta, TG4, Comhar, Feasta, Tuairisc.ie agus ar an gcuid is fearr den litríocht chomhaimseartha.

Muide Gaeilgeoirí a dhéanann cinneadh comhfhiosach teanga a chleachtadh ní bhíonn de rogha againn ach a bheith beo ar an mbisiúlacht agus muinín a chur sa litearthacht agus sa litríocht. Ná leagaimis uainn ball troscáin seo na féiniúlachta ach mairimis sa taithí bhraite atá againn, idir olc is mhaith, mar Ghaeilgeoirí. A mhaide mhullaigh, fan thuas scaitheamh eile.

*Foilsíodh den chéad uair ar Tuairisc.ie*

*Our language, our journey*  
*— An insight into a living language*

## Joe McHugh



I always threatened to go back but the excuses always outweighed the positives. Not enough time. It's too difficult. Afraid to make mistakes. Bad experiences learning grammar. Can you speak Irish? Tá brón orm, níl mé ábalta Gaeilge a labhairt! 15 years in politics, this was my standard reply. Last summer things changed. An Taoiseach Enda Kenny gave me an opportunity to represent the Gaeltacht community as Minister. I'll never forget the moment when he offered me the job. I predicted the next 48 hours and it didn't shape up too well. Again, after 15 years in politics you learn to predict what might happen next. Interviews in Irish, speeches in Irish, meetings in Irish! Through the storm of the first 24 hours, I made my mind up — I'm going to do this. I'm going to immerse myself in my native language. Having been offered the job mid-summer, I had a few weeks to give it a solid effort. Dictionaries by the bed, [tearma.ie](http://tearma.ie) on hand, grammar books in the kitchen, CDs in the car, you name it. I surrounded myself with language aids. During a few days' break in Birr I sought out a Fanad native to engage in my local dialect. I recall encountering an 80 year-old Irish man living in Australia, who had gone back to learning Irish the previous year and I still remember that giving me great encouragement — ní bhíonn sé riamh ró-mhall — 'it's never too late.'

My first wonderful week in Gleann Cholm Cille included a two hour chat as Gaeilge — with An tAthair Éamonn Ó Gallachóir in a back kitchen in Kilcar explaining the meaning of “An chloch is mó ar mo

phaidrín” — ‘my first priority.’ I received a very positive and warm response from my parish in Mevagh. A neighbour I had lived beside for many years spoke to me in Irish for the first time and I remember that was a window-opening moment. I entered a new world. A world where everything was different. Language was suddenly more about describing things, explaining things. Not just a communication tool where I learned familiar phrases, like ‘fáilte romhat’ but more than that. Go ndéana a mhaith duit — ‘all the best to you.’ Not just doing my best but doing my seven bests — mo sheacht ndícheall. Where Maam Cross became An Teach Dóite; where An Fál Carrach became Na Croisbhealaí; where the comharthaí bóithre became alive to me for the first time.

Irish was all around me. Before the appointment, I was like most people in Ireland — aware of the language. Now I could see it, learn from it, experience more than I had realised. Things started to make sense.



Irish was all around me. Before the appointment, I was like most people in Ireland — aware of the language. Now I could see it, learn from it, experience more than I had realised. Things started to make sense. The energy around me was positive and I wasn't on my own. So many people contacted me with their own experiences and stories. One example was through my conversations with people from the North of Ireland, they were no longer about politics but about language, one language — an Ghaeilge. Different dialects — Connemara, Munster,



Ulster Irish (*cén chaoi a bhfuil tú v conas atá tú? v cad é mar atá tú?*).

One language with distinctive geographical parts — *buachaill dána* or *gasúr dalba*. A rich tapestry for learning. Not being afraid, realising it's ceart go leor to make mistakes. Many mistakes! Ag labhairt Gaeilge — standing up in front of people in Boston, at the Catholic Memorial High School, Carna, Ciarraí, Múscaí, Ráth Chairn, Maigh Eo, Na Dúnaibh, Gaoth Dobhair, na hOileáin.

Speaking Irish and making mistakes was an extremely daunting



prospect, especially when you're doing so in public. However, it's only by doing it, and making those mistakes, that you learn from them. Cinnte, déanfaidh mé botúin — 'Yes I will make mistakes.' Ach, ní bheidh eagla orm botúin a dhéanamh — 'But I won't let the fear of making mistakes hold me back.'

Irish is all around us and I believe we all have a role to play. My advice to anyone thinking of going back and learning the language is: Take the leap and go for it, it's in our DNA and it's part of who we are. It's a journey worth taking and one that you won't ever regret. This is a journey without a destination, rather one of discovery and responsibility. We have an obligation to pass the torch on to the next generation. The child on our knee will have another child on their knee, from one generation to the next — ó ghlúin go glúin.

Jump in, you won't be on your own. You'll meet many more doing the same thing and taking the same risk at different stages. If the excuses continue to outweigh the positives, go for the positives anyway, it will be the right road, an bealach ceart. To all the people who have been with me since the beginning of my special journey, and still are today — Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

*First published in The Irish Times*

Ár dTeanga, Ár nOidhreacht  
– Léargas ar theanga bheo

## Jen Ní Mhathúna



**C**uireann sé bród orm nuair a smaoiním ar mo nasc leis an nGaeilge. Cé nach raibh an Ghaeilge agam ón gcliabhán, spreagadh an grá don teanga ionam agus mé sna déaga tar éis dom tréimhse a chaitheamh sa Ghaeltacht. Rinne mé mo chuid scolaíochta ar fad i scoileanna Béarla agus mar sin ba mhór an gheit a baineadh asam nuair a cuireadh i suíomh tumoideachais Gaeilge mé nuair a thosaigh mé bunchéim sa Ghaeilge i gColáiste na Tríonóide. Chaith mé tamall fada ag labhairt i nGaeilge bhriste agus ag cleachtadh scríbhneoireachta a bhí míchruinn agus go mór faoi thionchar an Bhéarla. Bhí mé in éad le mic léinn a tháinig ó na ceantair Ghaeltachta, na daoine a bhí ar bharr na réime lena gcaint nádúrtha agus a bhfoghraíocht bhinn. Ach le tacaíocht ó na léachtóirí sa Choláiste agus leis an misneach a fuair ó phiontaí go deireanach i gClub Chonradh na Gaeilge, ardaíodh mo mhuinín i leith na teanga. Bhain an paisean agus an grá a bhí ag lucht an Chumainn Ghaelaigh sa Choláiste siar asam; daoine nár tógadh le Gaeilge ag labhairt na Gaeilge agus ag dul i mbun feachtais ar a son, ag eagrú imeachtaí sóisialta as Gaeilge, ag seoladh téacsanna i nGaeilge agus ag glacadh seilbhe ar an teanga. Theastaigh uaim a bheith cosúil leo. I mo bhliain dheireanach, ba mhór an onóir dom a bheith i mo Reachtaire ar an gCumann Gaelach agus an long a stiúradh leis na daoine a mhúscail an splanc chéanna ionam féin na blianta roimhe sin. Rinne mise mo dhícheall an dúil mhallaithe sin a spreagadh i mic léinn óga an Choláiste.

Is bua í an Ghaeilge i ngach gné de mo shaol. Mhothaigh mé i gcónaí fréamhaithe in Éirinn. Chaith mé sealanna thar lear ach níor shocraigh mé in aon áit i ndáiríre, bhraith mé i gcónaí go raibh orm teacht abhaile agus bhí tionchar mór ag an nGaeilge ar an mothú sin.

Anois, iompraím an bród agus an paisean don Ghaeilge liom gach lá. Is bunmhúinteoir mé i scoil lán-Ghaeilge i mBaile Átha Cliath agus is breá liom mo phost. Is breá liom a bheith ag obair trí Ghaeilge agus a bheith i m'fhinné ar shealbhú Gaeilge na bpáistí. Cé gur cliché é do roinnt daoine, níl aon rud níos deise ná páistí óga a chloisteáil ag labhairt go muiníneach i nGaeilge — uaireanta go rómhuiníneach! De réir mar a mhéadaigh ar an spéis a bhí agam sa Ghaeilge., thosaigh mé ag úsáid an leagain Gaeilge de m'ainm go neamhfhoirmiúil — ag síniú le haghaidh pacáistí poist, ag fáil cárta leabharlainne nua, fiú ag ordú bia Síneach ón take away áitiúil. Agus an fear seachadta ag tógáil an airgid uaim (Éireannach é féin), cheistigh sé mé faoi mo

náisiúntacht, ag ceapadh gurbh as an Meánoirthear dom. Is cosúil nár chuala sé a leithéid de shloinne riamh roimhe sin.

D'athraigh mé m'ainm ar mo phas cúpla bliain ó shin, ó Jennifer Mahon go Jennifer Ní Mhathúna. Cheistigh na pearsana móra i mo shaol an cinneadh, mo thuismitheoirí, roinnt cairde — 'nach gcruthóidh sé sin deacrachtaí duit sa todhchaí? Cad faoi lucht slándála na n-aerfort eachtrannach? Seasfaidh tú amach dóibh le hainm neamhghnách, ní bheidh siad i dtaithí ar an nGaeilge a léamh nó a fheiceáil.' An ndéarfá an rud céanna le Francach nó Gearmánach agus iad ag iarraidh a n-ainmneacha a úsáid? Tá sé aisteach fiú a leithéid de choincheap a thuiscint. Theastaigh uaimse go mbeadh m'ainm i nGaeilge ar an bpas agus mhothaigh mé go raibh sé tábhachtach dom mar bhean Éireannach agus mar chainteoir Gaeilge go mbeadh sin amhlaidh. Ar bhealach is ionann ainm agus féiniúlacht. Nuair a chuirtear beirt in aithne dá chéile, tosaíonn an bheirt ag smaoinreamh ar na daoine eile ar a n-aithne ag a bhfuil an sloinne céanna. Déantar nasc idir na daoine seo, is baill iad den 'chlub céanna' ar bhealach. Baineann sloinnthe le ceantair áirithe sa tír, 'Mac Cárthaigh? Is Corcaíoch é mar sin!', 'Ó Gallachóir? Is cinnte gur as Dún na nGall dó!' a chloistear go minic. Tá ainmneacha fíorthábhachtach mar fhianaise agus mar thaifead ar an rian a fhágfaidh an duine sin ar an domhan. Agus bhí sé tábhachtach domsa go samhlófaí mé mar Jennifer Ní Mhathúna in ionad Jennifer Mahon agus go mbeadh a fhios ag daoine go raibh cinneadh cinnte déanta agamsa an leagan Gaeilge den ainm a úsáid.

Is bua í an Ghaeilge i ngach gné de mo shaol. Mhóthaigh mé i gcónaí fréamhaithe in Éirinn. Chaith mé sealanna thar lear ach níor shocraigh mé in aon áit i ndáiríre, bhraith mé i gcónaí go raibh orm teacht abhaile agus bhí tionchar mór ag an nGaeilge ar an mothú sin. D’airigh mé uaim an Ghaeilge agus an suaimhneas a thugann sí dom. Leis an nGaeilge, mothaím go bhfuil áit agam agus go bhfuil coibhneas agam leis an mbaile, rud atá riachtanach le haghaidh saol sásta. Cuireann an Ghaeilge le mo shaol, d’oscail sí doirse dom ó thaobh na hoibre de agus bhuaíl mé le dlúthchairde mar gheall uirthi. Rugadh mé agus Jennifer Mahon a cuireadh ar mo theastas breithe. Tugadh féiniúlacht dom leis an ainm sin — ballraíocht i dteaghlach agus gaol leis na glúine a tháinig romham. Ach ag staid áirithe de mo shaol, theastaigh uaim féiniúlacht nua a chruthú dom féin, féiniúlacht nach raibh beartaithe ag mo thuismitheoirí dom ach féiniúlacht a bhí bunaithe ar mo mhianta agus ar mo chuid cinntí féin. Bhí gliondar orm nuair a fuair mé an pas nua agus mhothaigh mé, ar bhealach, go raibh ré nua ag tosú ag an nóiméad sin domsa mar dhuine óg, ag cruthú saol nua di féin.

*Foilsíodh den chéad uair ar Nós.ie*





## Linda Ervine



I think the first time I saw Irish written down was on a visit to Donegal. It looked complicated and inaccessible, just random letters on road signs. A few years later I had the opportunity to hear the language at a taster session in East Belfast Mission. It sounded strange to me; unfamiliar words which were difficult to say and impossible to remember. Probably not a very promising start, yet this contact awakened a curiosity within me. For reasons that I didn't understand myself, I wanted to learn Irish, I wanted to be able to read the signs and understand the words, something was attracting me to this strange language.

I began to go to classes, not in my own area as Irish classes didn't happen in unionist areas. Myself and a friend started classes in a nearby nationalist area and I suppose we felt that we were outsiders coming to learn this 'Catholic' language. At least that's what we believed at the time and with good reason. I mean the classes were being held in what we regarded as a Catholic primary school, the names of the other learners were Sean, Mairead, Bernie, Seamus, Paddy and a map of Ireland with no border was on the wall. We felt that we were the only real beginners as everybody else seemed to know the language whilst we were '*gan focal*', without a word. And although we were made very welcome and never made to feel different in any way, at times I questioned my own desire to learn Irish. What had this language to do with me a Protestant from East Belfast? Was I doing something wrong

by learning Irish? Was I betraying something and if I was what was it I was betraying?

Despite my doubts I continued to attend classes and I gradually began to encounter the truth about the language. For me it was a shock to discover that the Irish language is all around us, in our place names, Belfast — ‘mouth of the sandbank ford, Finaghy — ‘the white field’, Lisnasharragh — ‘the fort of the foals’; in our surnames, McCullough — ‘son of the hound of Ulster’, McCoy — ‘son of fire’, Mateer — ‘son of the craftsman’; in our local vocabulary; brogue, poteen, dulse, whiskey, banshee and also in the structure and syntax of our everyday speech. Expressions such as, ‘He be’s here’, ‘She’s after doing that’, ‘I’ve the cold on me’. How could I have lived all these years surrounded by the language and yet be totally oblivious to it?

I began to read books and articles about the history of Gaelic, and was continually amazed to uncover fact such as, in the 1830s the Presbyterian General Assembly termed the language ‘Our sweet and memorable mother tongue’ and how during the 1840s they made it a requirement for all of their trainee ministers to have a knowledge of the language and that the largest Gaeltacht (Gaelic speaking region) is not in Ireland but in Scotland where the majority of speakers are from the Protestant tradition

My feelings of doubt and confusion gave way to anger and sadness; this was my language, the language of my homeland, a language spoken in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, a language which had been denied to me for one reason and for one reason only — I was a Protestant. I was determined not only to reclaim it for myself but to share it with others and to defend it from those who wished to use the language as a target for their hatred and bitterness. I had fallen in love.

Over the past few years I have met many Protestant speakers and visited the Gaelic regions of Scotland. I even went to a Rangers Club in Stornoway and was given an official Rangers t-shirt with the Gaelic motto ‘Sinne na daoine’ — ‘We are the people’ emblazoned on it. The more information I uncover about the links between my own community and the Irish language the more ridiculous it seems that I could ever have believed that I was doing something wrong by learning Irish.

And to those who would accuse me or point the finger and question why I am learning a ‘foreign language’, I would tell them to have a look at their British passport. They’ll see that it is written in three

My feelings of doubt and confusion gave way to anger and sadness; this was my language, the language of my homeland, a language spoken in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man....



languages; English, Welsh and Gaelic. To those who fear that learning the language will somehow change people's political viewpoint I would state that it has given me a renewed pride in my Presbyterian heritage and made me more aware of the links between Ulster and Scotland.

I have lost nothing of myself through learning Irish but have gained so much.

*'A different language is a different vision of life'* — Federico Fellini.

*First published in The Irish News*