

An Irish language course for beginners: primary school teachers

About this course

This booklet has been designed for use as part of two ten week taught courses, but also comprises a teach yourself at home component. Experience in adult language acquisition shows that people benefit most when material from lessons is reinforced in as intense a manner as possible over a relatively short time period. There is more than enough material in the booklet to provide for use in the class and at home. Progress in learning the language will depend on the individual student's input.

The emphasis in this course is on the spoken language, on both listening and conversational skills. The recorded conversations, which are the core of the course, are both natural and colloquial. There are grammatical notes for those who understand the grammar and structure of other languages and for those who are curious but it is not essential at this early stage of learning that they be completely grasped. **The most important thing is that the student listens to the language, repeats the sounds faithfully and learns the phrases and how to use them in real conversations, however simple.**

Each unit comprises the following main learning tools:

Learning objectives - are stated clearly at the beginning of each unit:

In this lesson you will learn how to ...

Useful sayings - which will be heard in the recorded conversation.

Recorded dialogue - Each conversation is recorded slowly at first with space for repetition by the learner, to aid comprehension and pronunciation. It is then heard at the normal speed of the spoken language, in order that the student acquire both the rhythm and intonation of the language.

A transcription and translation into English of the recorded dialogue

To be learned - builds on the vocabulary and structure of the dialogue.

Pair work/group work is where the student practises their newly acquired phrases with other people.

Help with grammar - A useful tool which helps the learner to recognise the pattern and structure of the language.

Revision - A set of exercises to revise and reinforce what has been taught.

Written exercises - Although the emphasis is firmly on the spoken language, each lesson has a written component as well. This includes the translation into Irish of simple sentences which will have been heard and said repeatedly throughout the lesson.

Comprehension exercises - These enable the student to test their understanding of what is being said in the recorded dialogue.

Homework for the week - An optional but highly recommended part of the unit which ensures that the learning process continues throughout the week. This allows the student to learn in the manner that most suits them and to consolidate what they have learnt to date. It includes suggestions for using the language in real situations and the keeping of a diary, where the student can remember, compose and be creative with what they have learnt.

It is recommended that the student buy the Collins Pocket Irish Dictionary. It contains useful grammatical information and an excellent guide to pronunciation.

Irish - An Inflexive language

Irish is an inflexive language. That is to say that words and in particular nouns change in both pronunciation and spelling, depending on the grammatical structure in which they are used. These changes are highlighted throughout the booklet in **bold print** in both the Useful Expressions (Abairtí Úsáideacha) section and the Transcripts of the recorded dialogues, so that the pattern will subconsciously register with the learner. These changes will be explained by the teacher during the period of the course. The easiest way for most students to learn where inflexion happens is, however, through hearing and repeating and subconsciously learning the patterns of change.

About the Irish language - a brief history

Irish belongs to the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family of languages along with Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Breton, all of them living minority languages today. The 'ancestor' of modern Irish came to Ireland around 300 BC with the migrating Celts from mainland Europe. It has one of the oldest bodies of literature in Europe. The Celts had great respect for the ability to memorise and it appears that the language was not written until after the coming to Ireland of Christianity in the fifth century, when Irish scholars started to translate Latin manuscripts.

There are three main dialects in Irish today and the teacher will refer to the one which predominates in your area.

Irish - a minority language

Irish is today a minority language, like many others throughout the world. Ireland was colonised by the Anglo normans/ English, English speaking settlers from England and Scotland were 'planted' here and a deliberate policy of discouraging the use of Irish was implemented. Famines in the nineteenth century and poverty and unemployment in the twentieth century led to massive emigration which impacted particularly on the remaining Irish speaking population, forced out as they were to the western seaboard, where land was poor. All colonists seek to denigrate the native culture and language in order to justify their 'superiority' and right to invade and exploit the country/people they would rule. So it was in Ireland and this experience of persecution and belittlement has resulted in the creation of a negative mindset regarding the language amongst a minority of Irish people.

Not to refer to this makes it difficult to understand the complexities of Irish attitudes towards our mother tongue. Without this contextual background it is impossible to plan effectively for the preservation and development of Irish.

On a more positive note, the very fact that the Irish language has survived even into this age of globalisation is a testimony to the tenacity of its remaining native speakers in the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking regions of the country) and Irish speakers elsewhere in the country. Its writers and poets continue to contribute to the body of world literature and imagination.

Irish in the Irish education system today

Irish is one of two national languages in the Republic of Ireland and is a compulsory subject in all schools in this state. There has been a huge growth in Irish medium schools in Ireland both north and south in the last few decades where all subjects are taught through the medium of Irish. In English medium primary schools, and in secondary schools, Irish is a key compulsory subject.

Irish identity and language

'Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam' - *A country without a language is a country without a soul.*

As with all languages, the Irish language encompasses a particular view of the world based on a unique culture, history and outlook. The world would be a poorer place without a diversity of languages, just as a garden is poorer for having just a few blooms.

Irish and your role as a teacher in the Ireland of today

As a daughter or son of Irish emigrants or as a native of another country, you have a very important role to play in the future of the Irish language. Your positive attitude and keenness to master the language will influence thousands of Irish children to be proud of, and indeed to be competent in their native language. In a country which is becoming increasingly multicultural, self-respect and respect for one's own culture is an essential prerequisite to respecting the culture and diversity of other people.

'Beatha teanga í a labhairt', *A language lives through being spoken.*

Go maire sí agus go n-éirí go geal leat! *Long may she live and may you have every success in your efforts!*