Fifth Annual Conference of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
7-8 May 1999

Cinquième congrès annuel de l'Association nord-américaine des enseignants et enseignantes en langues celtiques
Université d'Ottawa (Ontario) Canada
du 7 au 8 mai 1999
The North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers

The North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers (NAACLT) was formed with these goals in mind:

1. To permit instructors to exchange ideas and research through meetings and an annual publication.
2. To increase links of Celtic language teachers with those of other languages and other umbrella organizations.
3. To increase opportunities for Celtic language teachers in North America.

Despite its name, the NAACLT welcomes members from outside North America, researchers in Applied Linguistics, and graduate students in related fields. Queries about membership and the organization in general can be sent to info@naaclt.org.
The Programme
Friday 7 May
Le vendredi 7 mai

12:00–13:30
Registration
Arts Building First Floor Mezzanine
The Arts Building is located at 70 Laurier Avenue East on the corner of Waller Street.

13:45
Welcome/Accueil/Fáilte/Croeso
Simard Hall, Room 222
Simard Hall is directly behind the Arts Building, and can be accessed from Waller Street. All papers will be delivered in this room.

14:00–14:45
Síle Scott, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)
“The Acquisition of Irish: Guidelines for Comprehension”

14:45–15:30
Kenneth E Nilsen, St Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, Nova Scotia (Canada)
“Ceart na Gaeilge: a Plea for Improved Standards in the Teaching of Irish in North America”

Coffee Break/Pause-Café

16:00–16:45
Nancy Stenson, University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis, Minnesota (USA)
“Language Attitudes Among First-Language Speakers of Irish in the USA Today”

16:45–17:30
Robert Burke
Columbia, Maryland (USA)
“From Accountants to Zoologists and In Between: Experiences in Irish Language Teaching”
17:45
Executive Meeting
Arts Building Seminar Room 141

18:30
Reception
Simard Room 123
Sponsored by His Excellency Mr Paul Dempsey, Ambassador for Ireland.

20:00
An evening at the pub
Dunvegan Pub, 244 Laurier Avenue East
With music by 'Róisín Dubh'. The Dunvegan Pub is a centre of Scottish cultural activity.
Saturday 8 May
Le samedi 8 mai

9:00–9:45
Simard Building, Room 222
John Donahue, Champlain Regional College
St-Lambert, Quebec (Canada)
“Theories of Language Acquisition”

9:45–10:30
Robert Orr, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)
“Celtic as Non-Exotic: a Comparative Approach”

10:30–11:00
Coffee Break/Pause-Café

11:00–11:45
Marta Weingartner-Diaz, Indiana University
Indianapolis, Indiana (USA)
“New Learners for a New Century? A Welsh Case Study”

11:45–12:30
Paul W Birr, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)
“Teaching Welsh in a Hispanophone environment:
the Welsh-Argentinian experience”

12:30–14:00
Lunch/Déjeuner

14:00–14:45
Thomas W Ihde, William Paterson College of New Jersey (USA)
“The Independent Language Learner and Technological Advances”

14:45–15:30
Gearóid Ó Néill, Ollscoil Luimnigh, Luimneach (Éire)
“A Guide to the Pronunciation of Irish”

15:30–16:00
Coffee Break/Pause-café
16:00–16:45
Muirís Ó Laoire, Institiúid Teicneolaíochta, Trá Lí (Éire)
“Learning Irish for Participation in
the Irish-Speaking Community in Ireland”

17:00
Round Table Discussion:
“NAACLIT Five Years A-Growing:
the Future of the Organization”

19:00
Feast
La Créperie, 47 York Street
Breton pancakes with cider in the historic By Ward Market district of
Ottawa’s Lower Town.

After dinner
The Heart and Crown, 67 Clarence Street
A visit to the Irish community pub, also in the Market area.
Sunday 9 May
Le dimanche 9 mai

9:00–13:00
Study trip to the Village of Dunvegan in the District of Glengarry.
Guided tour by Mr Kenneth McKenna.
Meet before 9:00 on the green in front of Tabaret Hall, across Laurier Street from the Arts Building.

Glengarry was settled in 1784 by Gaelic-speaking refugees from New York Province after the American War of Independence. Scottish settlement continued for many years, and Gaelic continued to be the language of everyday life until well into the 20th Century.
Abstracts of Papers
Paul W Birt  
University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)  

"Teaching Welsh in a Hispanophone Environment: the Welsh-Argentinian experience"

The Welsh Argentinian settlements in Chubut Province in southern Argentina are the only location outside of Wales where the Welsh language has survived as a partial community language over a number of generations since the first arrival of Welsh-speaking colonists to the region in the mid 1860s.

This paper examines the rapid language-shift which took place during the early part of the 20th Century in the major areas of the eastern Chubut river valley around Trelew, Dolavon, Gaiman and Porth Madryn, and the relatively isolated western settlements around Trevelin and Esquel in the Andean lowlands. From a position of relative strength with institutional support in the earlier period of the colony, the Welsh language has become restricted to specialised domains (Chapel, the eisteddfod) albeit remaining predominant in the home life of some families.

Although attempts were made to revive interest in Welsh in the 60s and 70s it was not until the 90s that a real boom became apparent with financial aid from the Welsh Office and the Chubut Provincial Government that allowed professional teachers from Wales to come to Argentina to create a new network of courses and to pave the way towards the training of Welsh-Argentinian teachers. Questions will also be raised about the integration of aspects of Argentinian Welsh speech forms into the curriculum and also the implications of the language revival for the largely Hispanophone Welsh-Argentinian community.
Robert Burke
Columbia, Maryland (USA)

"From Accountants to Zoologists and In Between: Experiences in Irish-Language Teaching"
Theories of Language Acquisition

Two views predominate of language acquisition — the imitation school and the innateness school.

According to the imitation school, children acquire language by imitating adults around them. They learn through a process of observation (unconsciously, of course) and trial and error, eventually assimilating the structures of language. Skinner, the behaviourist, is an example of this. Language methods based on the imitation school use Skinner's stimulus-response theories and techniques to teach structures. Language laboratories, pattern drills on tape or in written textbooks, follow the same pattern: stimulus, response, repetition, and correction, until the form is assimilated.

The innateness school, on the other hand, sees the acquisition of language as a process taking place in stages with the assimilation of the program of the language in segments. Chomsky and others argue that the human brain is the language organ, genetically engineered to acquire language. The essential structures of language are genetically wired into the brain while the details of a particular language are picked up after birth. This scheme is the way Mother Nature ensures that any human will pick up the system most useful in his environment. Consequently, learning language is not a question of stimulus and response, imitation and trial-and-error correction but the internalizing of the rules for generating linguistic structures.

The process is the same for both first-language learners and second-language learners. These theories get translated into language methodologies.
The Skinnerian approaches require the memorizing of dialogues, repetition of basic sentence patterns with substitution of elements to reinforce the pattern.

The Chomskian approach leads to methods that stress the creative dimension of language, highlighting instead the rules for generating statements that let the learner internalize the rules for generating language.

The methods currently available for teaching Irish as a second language reflect these theories. *Buntús Cainte*, an audio-lingual method, is designed with the imitation theory as foundation. Students are expected to memorize dialogues, to repeat sentences to assimilate patterns. Vocabulary is introduced as part of patterns through repetition. *Teach Yourself Irish*, by Ó Sé and Sheils, uses the communicative approach which is an adaptation of the Chomskian school of thought. Language is presented in terms of contexts where language must be used. Those structures essential to speak about a particular topic or in a particular situation are presented. Many complain that this approach presents the structure of a language in a very choppy, haphazard way. For example, the student would only learn to form the genitive case of those nouns to be used in a particular context, while the use of the genitive case in general is not presented.

My presentation will explore these contrasts in greater detail and study some of the methods for teaching Irish, emphasizing the theoretical foundations of the various methods.
Thomas W. Ihde
William Paterson College of New Jersey
Wayne, New Jersey (USA)

"The Independent Language Learner and Technological Advances"

Self-taught students in any language have often provided curious stories for language enthusiasts.

These stories have become more frequent with the use of teach-yourself materials that have included records and, more recently, cassette tapes. Language labs with their link to audiolingualism in the 60s were a medium for teaching the masses. Students were required to spend a specific number of hours per week in the audiotape labs repeating phrases until they acquired the right "habit."

Although many labs were dismantled during the 80s, with the increase of technology in education, multimedia labs have gained popularity.

The focus of this paper is on the merging of these two separate situations. What we are now seeing in the late 90s is a new kind of learner. Although many people continue to study Irish on their own, they do so with the aid of modern technology. Many such students have the components of their own multimedia lab in their home already, using newly introduced software with their personal computer, cassette player, and video player.

As technology progresses, we must ask the question "What is the role of the teacher?" Do independent language learners want a teacher's help, or do they just want to be given all the resources and left to plan out their own language learning agenda? This paper
will share the results to research I have carried out among independent learners of Irish and English.

The results show that although these students enjoy working on their own, they ask very much for the direction of a language teacher. They value the advice of a professional in designing a personal study plan that will identify what software they should use. Especially in the area of writing, they want a tutor to check their work and provide feedback, a challenge which computers have yet to meet.
Towards Establishing Guidelines for Irish Teachers in North America

In the last 15 years or so, Irish language classes have sprung up throughout North America. In the last five or six years Irish has come to be used on a daily basis on the Internet by a large number of teachers and learners in North America.

At the same time it is obvious from the effusions of these people, that many of them, and most notably some Irish teachers, have only an imperfect knowledge of Irish and have attained a level of language ability that would be unacceptable in widely taught and used languages.

In recent times, a number of Irish teachers in North America have raised the question for the need for recognized sets of standards by which the language level of teachers and learners can be gauged. I believe, however, that before such guidelines can be established teachers of Irish must endeavor to improve their own knowledge of Irish and learn to correct erroneous pronunciation, grammar and syntax.

With this in mind, my paper will take a look at some of the most egregious but nevertheless frequent errors made by many Irish teachers themselves (both in North America and Ireland). The paper will cover matters of pronunciation, grammar and syntax. Specific questions to be dealt will include:

a) the pronunciation of ‘is é’, ‘is i’ and ‘is iad’ in various contexts.

b) the pronunciation of lenited ‘c’, ‘d’ and ‘g’.
c) the treatment of the preposition 'ag' before a verbal noun.

d) infinitive clauses, including infinitive of purpose.

All items dealt with will be illustrated by extensive documentation drawn from scholarly sources as well as from recorded sources. The paper is intended not as an exercise in chastisement but rather as a step toward establishing a set of guidelines for Irish teachers in North America.
“Learning Irish for Participation in the Irish-Speaking Community in Ireland”

Until the early 1970s, Irish-language pedagogy (ILP), as part of the state’s interventionist role in language revival, was seen to constitute a symbiotic strategy for language maintenance, status planning and acquisition planning for the language.

But since 1970, has there been a change in state policy for ILP? Is Irish still being taught and learned as a second language (L2) with the objective of achieving a societal bilingualism? To what extent does learning Irish in schools at present guarantee rates of reproduction of sequential bilinguals to ensure consolidation and extension of the speech community pobal na Gaeilge?

Pobal na Gaeilge, as well as including the territorially defined Gaeltacht, significantly refers to a growing number of networks of users of Irish outside that regional, territorial and linguistic entity both at home and abroad.

In contrast to the Gaeltacht, where the student of Irish may have the support mechanisms of home and neighbourhood domains in sustaining or increasing proficiency through use, for the learner of Irish as L2 outside the Gaeltacht, the school alone may be the only source of language learning, which may or may not be reinforced by participation in and integration into the speech community.

In the social organization of pobal na Gaeilge, Irish-speaking networks outside the Gaeltacht have never
been sufficiently numerous to form a readily identifiable and easily visible speech community. The spatial distribution of Irish-speaking networks poses a serious problem for the learner of Irish within the communicative framework, where the relevance of learning is wholly identified with societal use. For many students, there is no readily identifiable speech community, where such communication might be meaningful, other than communicational transaction in the Gaeltacht.

This paper examines the present requirements for accountability in ILP (eg, syllabus, societal bilingualism and state revival policies). The author argues that ILP needs to address realistically the present focus of revival policy programmes, as well as to empower learners to be more aware of the Irish-language context and the process of language learning itself, in order to achieve meaningful and purposeful language learning in the classroom.
Gearóid Ó Néill
Ollscoil Luimnigh
Luimneach (Éire)

“A Guide to the Pronunciation of Irish”
Many people approach the study of Celtic languages with apprehension, believing them to be exotic and therefore of above-average difficulty.

On first acquaintance with certain aspects of Celtic linguistic structure, such as the mutations, VSO order, the lack of a verb “to have”, prepositional pronouns, and certain items of the phonology (the palatalisation in Goidelic, the voiceless lateral in Welsh, etc) such apprehensions seem justified.

This paper will argue, however, that most of the salient phenomena of the Celtic languages are not in fact that uncommon cross-linguistically, and suggest that this might be highlighted in introductory brochures.

In this context the paper will also include brief discussions of the vigesimal numerical system and verbal constructions with auxiliaries. These are as rare as many of above enumerated constructions, but as they are familiar from French and English respectively they somehow seem less “exotic” to the learner.
Marta Weingartner-Diaz  
Indiana University  
Indianapolis, Indiana (USA)

“New Learners for a New Century?  
A Welsh Case Study”

This session will examine the changing nature of the market for the Welsh language in North America, tracing the experience of several organizations offering Welsh instruction (week-long intensive courses, community-based classes, and university-level courses).

I will consider enrollment trends over the last few decades, the increased availability of multimedia teaching materials, and the growing role of the Internet in publicizing courses, reaching potential students, and helping current students learn better.

These issues should also have relevance to teachers of Irish and Gaelic.