Consistency of Irish orthography: the current state of knowledge

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Perceived oral focus

“Is é an aidhm is mó atá ag an múinteoir anois ná an Ghaeilge labhartha.” (M1) The teacher’s main goal now is spoken language.

“Níl an bhéim chéanna ar an léitheoireacht agus a bhíodh sna bunscoileanna anois...is cúrsaí cumarsaide go léir a bhíonn acu, agus cúrsaí comhrá agus mar sin ann.” (S2)

There isn’t the same emphasis on reading as there used to be in the primary schools now... it’s all communication and conversation and such.

“My priority has always been getting them to speak it. I really don’t care too much about any other aspect.” (PT1)
**PISA**: Program for International Student Assessment

**Results for Ireland**

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading Average</th>
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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>496</td>
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Reading in Irish

- **Limited research**: “Ní shílim go dtugtar mórán aird ar litearthacht na Gaeilge nuair atá oiliúint á chur ... nuair a labhrann siad faoi *literacy*, tá siad ag caint ar Bhéarla an t-am ar fad.” (MS1) **I don’t think enough attention is given to Irish literacy in training...when they {Ministers} talk about *literacy*, they are talking about English every time.**

- **Disappointing results in Irish reading**: “In approximately one third of classes, pupils had significant gaps in their skills of word recognition and reading comprehension” (DES 2008, 60).
Signpost

1. Research background
2. Teaching practice
3. Decoding and orthographic transparency
   - Cross-linguistic research
   - Irish
4. Transfer
Three Studies

Qualitative Studies (2)
Semi-structured interviews with language experts and teachers on the methods and challenges of teaching Irish spelling and issues in the teaching of reading

Corpus Study
Hickey & Stenson (2010)

Examination and analysis of spelling regularities in Irish children’s books
### The Reading Wars

<table>
<thead>
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<td>vs.</td>
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Phonological processing

“Becoming aware of the segmental structure of language appears to be a prerequisite to rapid reading acquisition in an alphabetic orthography.” (Stanovich & Stanovich 1999)

“Phonological awareness is important in all languages.” (Ziegler et al, 2010)

“It has become quite clear in recent years that visual learning does not represent a viable alternative to phonological recoding.” (Ziegler & Goswami 2006)
Revised Curriculum for Irish

Recommendations

Variety of approaches
Build linguistic awareness
Promote active learning, read for fun
Informal use of Irish throughout day

English reading first
Expected transfer of English skills
Research on Classroom Practice

Reliance on single text in classroom (Harris et al. 2006)

Little teaching of decoding/word analysis (Hickey 2007, Ó Faoileáin 2006)
What the teachers said—materials

- “I wouldn’t stay with the textbook...the textbook is boring for a start.” (T3)

- “…{designing creative activities} was taking a lot of my energy as a teacher, so gradually...I’ve had to space out my energies, so I have become more reliant on the books.” (T1)

- “My feeling is that the poorer the teacher’s standard of Irish and the less the interest they have in it, the more they’re flogging textbooks.” (PT1)
Decoding? Not so much.

- “That is definitely a part that I neglect a bit—it is there in the curriculum, but I’ve had very little guidance in how to teach it...” (T1)

- “I don’t teach spellings; I teach meanings.” (T2)
  - “Caithfidh mé admháil nár chuir mé aon bhéim riamh ar fhorbairt scileanna léitheoireachta sa ghnáthrang Gaeilge” (MS1) I have to admit that I never put any emphasis on developing reading skills in the ordinary Irish classroom.
Teacher confidence

“I think the biggest challenge is, a lot of people are worried about their own levels, going ‘I’m not good enough, I’m too nervous’... and teachers sometimes drop back into English maybe quicker than they should.” (T6)

“I’m very confident speaking Irish in the class...but written Irish on the board—I’m always afraid of making mistakes and that’s where I’m not comfortable.” (T1)

“...deireann siad liom...agus tá siad ag rá leo féin ‘níl a fhios agam an bhfuil sin ceart.” (M2) They tell me ... and they tell themselves ‘I don’t know if that’s right.’”
What the experts said

Sin ceann de na deacrachtaí a bhiónn ag foghlaimeoirí, déarfainn, ní bhiónn an fhoghraíocht acu…” (O3) That’s one of the difficulties learners have, I’d say, they don’t have the phonetics...

Mhúin mé sa Ghaeltacht ar chúrsa samhraidh b’fhéidir 2 bhliain ó shin, agus bhí scanradh orm ar an gcaighdeán a bhí ag na múinteoirí eile. (M2) I taught a summer course in the Gaeltacht maybe 2 years ago and the standard of the other teachers frightened me.

“Bhí mé ag glacadh leis gur léitheoirí líofa a bheadh i gceist le ábhair oídí ach, ar an drochuair, ní ‘hin mar atá.” (O3) I was assuming that student teachers would be fluent readers, but unfortunately, that’s not how it is.
Teacher education

“...agus ní chaithimidne mar theagascóirí go leor ama leo le iad a chumasú le tabhairt faoi sin.” (O2) ...and we as instructors don’t spend enough time to enable them to undertake that.

“Caithfidh na múinteoirí tacú leis an léitheoireacht. Ach ní dhéanann siad é agus ní chaithim féin mórán ama ag ullmhú múinteoirí don léitheoireacht.” (MO1) Teachers have to support reading. But they don’t and I don’t spend much time preparing teachers for reading.

“I wish I had more training in how to teach it.” (T3)
Cross-linguistic perspectives

Phonological awareness is a key component of reading acquisition (Ziegler et al. 2010)

Orthographic consistency affects reading speed. (Ziegler et al. 2010)

Reading processes may differ according to the type of orthography (Seymour et al. 2003, Katz and Feldman 1983, Ziegler and Goswami 2005)

Grain size (unit of analysis) may vary between phonological processing and reading and affect processing of the written word (Ziegler and Goswami 2005)
Orthographic depth

“In a shallow orthography, the phonemes of the spoken word are represented by the graphemes in a **direct and unequivocal manner.**

In contrast, in a deep orthography, the relation of spelling to sound is more opaque.”

(Frost, Katz and Bentin, 1987)
Consistency and transparency

“...a given letter is almost always pronounced the same in different words. These writing systems are referred to as consistent or transparent.

`In contrast, English...a given letter is often pronounced differently in different words.

These writing systems are referred to as inconsistent or opaque.”

(Ziegler et al. 2010).
What about Irish?

“Welsh, Gaelic, and Irish have relatively transparent alphabetic orthographies that have been subject to regular review and standardisation in recent decades.” (Lyddy 2005)

“Irish orthography is not as deep as that of English; however it is not a transparent language.” (Parsons & Lyddy 2009)
Views of Irish Spelling

Irish is so much simpler than English, because a sound is a sound. (T6)

In a way, I think that much of Irish is maybe easier...

Irish spelling is said to be much easier than English spelling.
Irish Orthography

18 letters, 50(+) phonemes

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, l,

m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u

Length diacritics:

á, é, í, ó, ú

Digraphs

ao, ae, eo

bh, ch, dh, fh, gh, ph, sh, th

gc, bp, dt, mb, nd, ng, bhf

C+V digraphs
Consonant Quality

“Caol le caol, leathan le leathan”

“Slender with slender, broad with broad”

buí /bi:/ ‘yellow’   bí /b’i:/ ‘be’
bó /bo:/ ‘cow’      beo /b’o:/ ‘alive’
bád /ba:d/ ‘boat’   Báid /ba:d’/ ‘boats’
teas /t’as/ ‘heat/  Tais /tas’/ ‘damp’
The Corpus
Corpas na Leabhar Gaeilge do Pháistí
Corpus of Irish Books for Children

*Examined first 100 words in CLGP
*Compared with Stuart et al. for English Early Reader Corpus

1. Comparable % of total tokens
2. More function words (85) in English than Irish (73)
3. 71% of top 100 Irish words regular in some dialect (cp. 52% in Stuart et al. for English top 100)
Levels of Regularity

• Regular by letter-sound rules*: (37)
  agam, agat, agus, as, cá, cad, cat, cé, dul, é, í, in, ina, lá, le, léi, Liam, mé, mise, mór, ná, ní, níl, ó, ocras, orm, sásta, sé sí, siad, sin, sise suas, tá, trí, tú

• Regular by grapheme-phoneme rules: (34)
  ach, am, ann, aon, béar, bhfuil, bhí breá, buí, chonaic, chuir, Daidí, dearg, deas, deir, dtí, duit, féach, fear, féin, leaba, leat, léim, leis, Mamaí, Mhamaí, múinteoir, nach, nuair, Róisín, sibh, teach, tháinig, thug

• Irregular or exceptional: (30-34)
  a, ag [agam, agat], air, amach, an, anois, anseo, ansin, ar arsa, atá, beag, caithfidh, [cat], chuaigh, do, go, is, isteach liom, maith, mhaith, mo, na, raibh (M), rith, sa, Sciob, seo, [sibh], siopa, thosaigh

• *in at least one dialect
Identification of Rules

- **Dialect variation**: regular in any dialect = regular

- **Vowels, diphthongs and digraphs**: consistent across many words = regular *ui, ea, adh, agha*, etc.

- **Mutations**: differ by position

- **Predictable rules**: *im, poll, ann, ceann, tinn*

- **Epenthesis**: *banbh, gorm, arm, film*

- **Unstressed vowels**: non initial schwa

- **Digraphs for consonant quality**

**RESULT**: Multiple one-to-many phoneme-grapheme pairings
Grapheme-phoneme ambiguity

Consonant quality:

<table>
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<td>tiubh</td>
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Diphthongs:

/ai/: Tadhg, praghas, aghaidh
/au/: dabht, amhlaidh, gabha
Bottom Line

• Regularities can be taught
• Even irregularities show (some)regularity
• Not teaching rules for decoding spellings is an opportunity missed
  »BUT
• Consistency does not necessarily entail transparency
• Transfer of literacy cannot be assumed to be automatic
Transfer

• In English we go by the phonics...you don’t do phonics in Irish...you get to 1st class and all of a sudden...the kids are expected to just read (T3)

• We don’t formally teach it... people just kind of assume that they’re going to learn. But you’d never do... (T2)

• Tá sé fós smaointithe ag na múinteoirí go bhfuil an stór focal ag na déagóirí ach i ndáiríre, níl sé ann. (M3) Teachers still think that the teenagers have the vocabulary, but really they don’t.

• ...ghlac mé leis go raibh na daltaí in ann léamh...bhí caighdeán fíorlag sa Ghaeilge ag na daltaí ag teacht isteach. An t-aon rud a bhíodar in ann a dhéanamh ná Gaeilge a léamh...Now, níor thuig siad cad a bhí á léamh acu... (MS1)... I assumed that the pupils could read...the pupils coming in had a very low standard of Irish. The only thing they could do was read...Now, they didn’t understand what they were reading...
Homographs and other confusions

Bean  Bóthar
Teach  Eochair
Rang  Iógart
Seisear
Summary

• Irish reading  = Whole Word
• Phonological decoding is central to fluent reading, especially in more consistent orthographies
• Irish spelling is more consistent than English (in early vocabulary at least)
• L2 learners transfer L1 knowledge, both positively and negatively. Transfer of English spelling rules is likely to be negative transfer.

• Therefore, attention to Irish-specific spelling rules and decoding skills in Irish reading education is an essential tool to help learners master reading skills.
Acknowledgements

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Go raibh maith agaibh
Diolch yn fawr
Tapadh leibh
References

- Katz, L. and Feldman,
References, continued


• Stanovich, K.E. and Stanovich, P.J. 1999. How research might inform the debate about early reading acquisition. In Oakhill and Beard, eds., 11-41.


Summary

- Spelling is not an issue for fluent speakers.
- Decoding skills and linguistic awareness are not explicitly taught.
- Common assumptions about the skills and knowledge that pupils and students bring to particular educational levels do not seem to be borne out.
- Teacher skills in Irish are a major challenge.
- Teaching decoding is a potential aid to enhancing literacy, as well as understanding of grammar.
Misc. Refs

- Phonological awareness is essential to development of skilled readers (Frost & Katz 1992, Byrne and Liberman 1999)
- Phonological sensitivity can be taught (Stanovich and Stanovich 1999)
- Phonemic awareness emerges after reading begins (Goswami 1999, Bentin 1992)
- Analogy – neighborhoods
  - Ziegler & Goswami 2006: “The first steps in becoming literate, therefore, require acquisition of the system for mapping distinctive visual symbols onto units of sound (phonology). This mapping process is called phonological recoding.”
  - ‘It has become quite clear over recent years that visual learning does not represent a viable alternative to phonological recoding.”
Experts’ Views of Irish Orthography and Reading

Qualitative study
- 13 Participants (Male = 8, Female = 5)
  Secondary, tertiary teachers
  Language Scholars, journalists
  Teacher educators
  Curriculum developers

- Elicited views on challenges of Irish spelling and issues in the teaching of reading in Irish
Main Sections

1. Personal experience in learning Irish and Irish reading
2. Experience teaching and understanding of system
3. Methods of teaching Irish reading
4. Challenges of teaching Irish reading
5. Views on the Caighdeán Oifigiúil and recent reconsiderations of it.
Teachers’ Perspectives

• Seven participants: (Male = 3, Female = 4)
• Primary teachers and principals
  2-10 years’ experience
  Junior infants – 6th class
  Regular English-medium schools

-- Elicited descriptions of their classroom practices at the different levels of instruction
-- Elicited views of the principal challenges facing teachers and pupils in primary school.
5c: Teacher challenge: Language skill

Ceapaim gurb é an dúshlán is mó ná cumas an mhúinteora. (O3) **I think that the biggest challenge is the teacher’s competence.**

Leath de na mic léinn níl aon fhadhb acu agus iad ag teacht isteach sa choláiste, agus an leath eile, ní bhíonn na bunrudaí ar eolas acu. (SO1) **Half the students have no problem when they enter the college, and the other half don’t know the basics.**

Ní thuigeann siad an tábhacht atá le seimhiú agus urú—seo na daoine a bhfuil céim acu sa Ghaeilge agus atá ag ullmhú don mhúinteoireacht. (MO1) **They don’t get the importance of lenition and eclipsis—these are people with a degree in Irish who are preparing to become teachers.**
1e. Spelling-dialect fit

An-chruinn, déarfainn. Very accurate, I’d say.

Measaim, ar an iomlán, go ndéanann sé, an litriú, freastal chomh maith agus is féidir ar an gcanúint atá agam. (S1) I think on the whole that it, the spelling, serves my dialect as well as possible.

Tás caighdeán litrithe ann atá in ainm is a bheith ag freagairt don Ghaeilge ina hiomlán, agus ní shamhlaím go bhfuil an oiread sin deacrachtaí ann (S4) There’s a spelling standard that is supposed to serve Irish as a whole, and I don’t see many problems with it.
• ...labhfar mé le coid de na múinteoirí féin, múinteoirí óga, ní bhíonn mórán tráchtta acu ar an ngramadach nó ar an litriú, agus deireann siad liom go bhfuileadar ag cailliúnt gach uile fhocal a bhí acu...(M2).

• Má tá tú le bheith i do múinteoir kaykadóireachta, caithfadh tusa bheith ábalta snámh...so bím ag rá leo, níl na botúin a dhéanann na daltaí i scríbhneoiracht chomh tábhachtach sin, ar scoil, ach mar múinteoirí, caithfidh sibh bhur gcaighdeán a ardú. (MO1)
Current teaching

- “Iarrass ar an dalta an rud a léamh ós ard. Agus ansin déanaimse nótaí ar na botún nó na laigí a bhfaighim leis an sliocht.” (M1) I ask the pupil to read aloud. And then I make notes on the mistakes or weaknesses that I find in the passage..

- “Tugaim gach focal agus [fiafraím] cad an focal seo? Na fuaimeanna i ngach focal.” (M3) I give each word and [ask] what is this word? The sounds in each word.

- “Téim tríd léamhthuisínt leo, agus...breacann muid síos na focal is coitianta nó is tábhachtaí dóibh don scrúdú.” (M2) I go through reading comprehension with them, and... we write down the most common or most important words for them for the exam.

- “Bheifeá ag léamh an téacs sa rang ‘is ag iarraidh fadhbanna a reiteach dóibh le rudaí atá deacair.” (S2) You’d read the text in class and try to resolve problems for them with the difficult things.
6a. System challenges: complexity

Ní dhéarfainn é...ní bhíonn móran tráchta ar an ngramadach nó ar an litriú.(M2) I wouldn’t say so...there’s little mention of grammar or spelling.

Ní dóígh liom go dtuigeann, no. Níl an structuras i gceist sa teagasc (MS2). I don’t think they do, no. There’s no structure in the teaching.

Dearfainnse nach dtuigeann.(S3) I’d say not.
Tá mé cinnte nach dtuigeann.(S1) I’m sure they don’t.
Ní cheapfainnse é. (S4) I wouldn’t think so.

Tuigeann cuid, ach tá cuid nach dtuigeann. (O3) Some do, but some don’t.
5d. Learner challenges: Assumptions

- Mar mhúinteoir Gaeilge iarbhunscoile, ghlac me leis go raibh na daltaí in ann léamh (MS1) As a postprimary Irish teacher, I assumed that the pupils were able to read.

- ...táthar ag glucadh leis ag leibhéal ollscoile (MS 2) One assumes it {reading skill} at university level.

- Bhí mé ag glucadh leis gur léitheoirí líofa a bheadh i gcéist le ábhair oidí ach, ar an drochuir, ní ‘hin mar atá. (O3) I was assuming that student teachers would be fluent readers, but unfortunately, that’s not how it is.
4c. Teaching: decoding rules

Ní féidir liom smaoineamh ar mhúin mé rialacha faoi leith. (O2) I can’t recall that I taught specific rules.

Níor mhúin. Bheinn ag súil go mbeadh an t-eolas sin acu ó dhaoine eile. (S3) I didn’t teach {rules}. I’d be expecting them to have that from others.

Caithfidh mé admháil nár chuir mé aon bhéim riamh ar fhorbairt scileanna léitheoireachta sa ghnáthrang Gaeilge (MS1) I have to admit that I never put any emphasis on developing reading skills in the ordinary Irish classroom.
an trasnaíonn idir Béarla agus Gaeilge, bhí--ní chuimhín liom féin teacht ar a lán fadhbanna dá bharr san, ach cinnte, tá sa Bhéarla agus an stuif a--níl an oiread céanna ar fáil sa Ghaeilge, tá um b’fhéidir, an-éagsúlacht abair, fish...ghoti atá molta ag GB Shaw is mar sin de, níl a scéal díreach chomh holc sa Ghaeilge.
5d. Learner challenges: L2 skills

Braithim gurb é seo an rud is mó atá ar iarraidh i gcomhthéacs na Gaeilge...nach bhfuil go leor éisteachta le canúintí na Gaeilge. (MS2) I feel this is what’s most lacking in the Irish context...not enough listening to Irish dialects.

Sin ceann de na deacrachtaí a bhíonnns ag foghlaimeoirí, déarfainn, ní bhíonn an fhoghraíocht acu...(O3) That’s one of the difficulties learners have, I’d say, they don’t have the phonetics...

Creidim go bhfuil caighdeán na Gaeilge in a lán Gaelscoileanna an-íseal, go bhfuil Gaeilge an-lag ag a lán páistí ins na scoileanna. (MS1). I’d say the standard of Irish in many schools is very low, that many children in the schools have very weak Irish.
Irish orthography: what do teachers and learners need to know about it, and why?
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bInstitute of Linguistics, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA
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Irish has significant State support, but lacks a research base to support the teaching of Irish reading. Current approaches to teaching Irish reading are presented, and outcomes summarised. Issues of consistency and complexity in Irish orthography are discussed in light of an analysis of a corpus of early reader texts, and the formulation of rules for discriminating between words which are regular by letter-sound and grapheme-sound rules is outlined. While the most frequent words show a high level of regularity, underlying rules are very complex. The need to target decoding skills early is discussed. Recommendations regarding the teaching of aspects of Irish orthography are presented.

Concluded: Regularity, but needing specification of large number of rules
Initial mutations

**Lenition**

- $p \rightarrow ph /f/$
- $b \rightarrow bh /v/, /w/$
- $f \rightarrow fh$ (silent)
- $m \rightarrow mh /v/, /w/$
- $t \rightarrow th /h/$
- $d \rightarrow dh /\gamma/$
- $s \rightarrow sh /h/$
- $c \rightarrow ch /x/$
- $g \rightarrow gh /\gamma/$

**Eclipsis**

- $p \rightarrow bp /b/$
- $b \rightarrow mb /m/$
- $f \rightarrow bhf /v/,/w/$
- $t \rightarrow dt /d/$
- $d \rightarrow nd /n/$
- $c \rightarrow gc /g/$
- $g \rightarrow ng /\eta/$

**Citation**

- bord
- cat
- fraoch

**Lenition**

- bhord
- chat
- fhraoch

**Eclipsis**

- mbord
- gcat
- bhfraoch
# Vowel and diphthong graphemes

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# Grapheme identification – Initial mutations

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<td>‘door’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhfaitíos</td>
<td>/wat'i:s/</td>
<td>bhf - a - it - í - os</td>
<td>‘fear’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grapheme identification – consonant quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Graphemes</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bean</td>
<td>/b'än/</td>
<td>be - a - n</td>
<td>‘woman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>áit</td>
<td>/aː:t'/</td>
<td>á - it</td>
<td>‘place’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rúnaí</td>
<td>/ruːniː/</td>
<td>r - ú - na - í</td>
<td>‘secretary’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buí</td>
<td>/biː/</td>
<td>bu - í</td>
<td>‘yellow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faitíos</td>
<td>/fatʃiːs/</td>
<td>f - a - it - í - os</td>
<td>‘fear’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitríona</td>
<td>/katʃrɪ'inaː/</td>
<td>c - a - it - r - í - on - a</td>
<td>‘name’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spelling vs. Grammar

• No, an tumadacht a bhí i gceist...Ba rud an-nadúrtha a bhí i gceist. (M1) **No, it was immersion...it was very natural.**

• D’fhoghlaimear a lán rialacha...“tá séimhiú tar éis mo...” rialacha gramadaí? (M3) **We learned lots of rules: “there’s lenition after mo”—grammar rules?**

• Múineadh, sa mheánscoil. Rialacha dáiríre a baineadh le hathrú gramadaí, seachas bunrialacha an litrithe (MS2) **Yes, in secondary school. Rules of grammar, really, rather than basic spelling rules.**

• Is dócha an rud is measa ná iolraí na bhfocal (MS2) **The worst is probably the plurals of words.**
To learn to read an alphabetic script, one must understand its logic, one must gain reflective awareness of the already overlearned phonological relations that the system represents (Adams 1999).

“...well-controlled studies in several different language communities (citations) have shown that there is a consistent relationship between success on phonological awareness tasks and the ease with which young children develop word recognition skills in reading (Stuart et al).

Without some awareness of phonemic segmentation, it would be impossible for a beginning reader or writer to make sense of the match between the structure of the printed word and the structure of the spoken word.
Some Questions

• What is reason for poor results?
• How is Irish reading taught?
• Does literacy really transfer without instruction?
• How transparent is Irish spelling, really?
Four types of learner

- English L1 children in English-medium schools
- English L1 children in Gaelscoileanna
- Irish L1 children in Gaeltacht schools
- English L1 or L2 adults in Ireland and abroad
Other challenges

- Sé an rud atá ag tarlú...go bhfuil daoine anois ag dul isteach sna coláistí oiliúna...agus...ardghrád bainte amach acu in Gaeilge, ach dháiríre gan scríobh ná go minic labháirt na Gaeilge go maith acu... agus leanann an ciorcal sin arís ar aghaidh. (S1) **What’s happening is that people are now going into the training colleges, with a high grade in Irish, but really without good written or often spoken Irish...and that circle continues on.**
Sé an rud atá ag tarlú...go bhfuil daoine anois ag dul isteach sna coláistí oiliúna...agus...ardghrád bainte amach acu in Gaeilge, ach dháiríre gan scríobh ná go minic labhairt na Gaeilge go maith acu... agus leanann an ciorcal sin arís ar aghaidh. (S1) **What’s happening is that people are now going into the training colleges, with a high grade in Irish, but really without good written or often spoken Irish...and that circle continues on.**
Fresh start?

- Dха bhфёadfaï glacadh leis nach bhfuil aon eolas ag na daoine atáthar á múineadh, ar chorph sёrithe nó ar léitheoireacht na Gaeilge, sílim gur tус iontach a bheadh air sin. Sё an rud atá ag tarlú... go minic ná go bhfuil daoine ag teacht isteach ón leibhéal roimhe sin, agus an duine atá dá múineadh anois ag glacadh leis gur baineadh amach caighdeán áirithe ag an leibhéal roimhe seo, agus ba cheart tosaí ag an leibhéal nua, ach nach bhfuil an caighdeán sin bainte amach, mar sin tа sé cosúil le bréag mór nach bhfuil aon duine sаstа admhachtáil gur áil di agus fągann sé go bhfuil daoine anois ag dul isteach sna coláistaí oiliúna, mar shampla, agus is dóígh ardteistiméaracht, ardghrád bainte amach acu i nGaeilge, ach dáiríre gan scríobh nó go minic labhairt na Gaeilge go maith acu, ach gur éirigh leo na ceachtanna is gа a dhéanamh leis na scrúdaithe a phаssáil. Agus fągann sin nuair a thёann siadsan thríд an bpróíséas, muna bhfuil córas an-mhaith sna coláistaí oiliúna, agus áirim ansin na colаístí do na bunmhúinteoirí agus na hollscoileanna i gcás na meánmhúinteoirí, go bhfuil daoine ag tіocht amach ag imirt le bacaí a rinne siad féin nó na faillі a rinne siad féin, ar an gcéad ghlúín eile, agus leanann an cіorcal sin arіst ar аghaidh. (S1)
Comparison with English?

- Ní doigh liom go ndéanaim [comparáid], seachas b’fhéidir just an c, a mhíniú... mar atá /k/ nó /s/ i gceist sa Bhéarla. Agus i nGaeilge go bhfuil sé...rialta. (MO1) I don’t think I do [compare], except maybe just the c, to explain... how it may be /k/ or /s/ in English. And in Irish, that it’s...regular.

- Is dócha gur mó contrárthacht a bhíonn i gceist seachas comparáid. (O3) I guess it’s more contrast than comparison.

- Is dócha go mbraitheann sé ar an ngrúpa...Amanntaí bíonn muid ag tagaírt don Bhéarla, do na samplaí as Bearla agus an Fhraincis agus na teangacha eile atá ag daoine sa seomra ranga. (SO1) I guess it depends on the group...Sometimes we mention English, samples from English and French and the other language people in the classroom have.
Teacher weaknesses, continued

• Bhí agallaimh ar bun againn...agus dúradh liom gur...bunmhúinteoirí a b’ea ochtú faoin gcéad acu, agus go raibh an Ghaeilge chomh dona ag ‘chuile dhuine acu, nó a bhformhór, is a bheadh sí ag aon tríocha duine a bhuailfeadh muid isteach ón tsráid, rud a scanraigh mé beagán. Nó chuir sé aon iontas orm, ach scanraigh sé mé. (S1) We had interviews here...and I was told that...80% of them were primary teachers, and that the Irish of all of them, or most, was as bad as any 30 people we’d pull in off the street, which scared me a little. It didn’t surprise me, but it scared me.
Spelling vs. Grammar: Cé na fadhbanna a bhaineann le litriú an Chaighdeáin?

- Is dócha an rud is measa ná iolraí na bhfhocal (MS2) **The worst is probably the plurals of words.**
- Na heisceachtaí an fhadhb is mó... {e.g.,} ní chuirfeá seismiú más ball den rud é: éadaí saighdiúra/éadaí shaighdiúra (M1) **Exceptions are the biggest problem {e.g.} you don’t put lenition when it’s part of something...**
- Úsáideann na déagóirí...rialacha Béarla ag scríobh na teanga: so, tá sé triúr pháistí aige. Fadhbanna gramadaí is mó.(M3) **The teenagers use English rules in writing the language ...**
Reflections on reading and spelling

• ...dírítear isteach ar an ngramadach, ach...ar chóir díríú isteach ar an litriú ar dtús, i gcoinne briseadh isteach ar an ngramadach dá réir? (MS2) ...one focuses on grammar, but...should one focus on spelling at first, and break into grammar through it?

• Déarfainn gur greim daingean a bheith acu ar an teanga...an Ghaeilge a bheith i gceart acu, foghraíocht na teanga a bheith i gceart acu, agus ansin tabhairt faoi léamh agus scríobh na teanga (MS1) I’d say they {need} to have a firm grip on the language, to know correct Irish, to have the phonetics right, and then take up reading and writing the language.

• Ní fheicim go bhfuil aon dúshlán má tá Gaeilge líofa agus cruinn ag an té atá ag múineadh.(O3) I don’t see any challenge if the person who’s teaching has fluent and accurate Irish.
Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis – following Braun and Clarke 2006
  Semi-structured interviews in Irish
  Verbatim transcription
  Review to ascertain main themes and sub-themes
  Development of coding frame
  Consultation on coding frame & review
  Inter-rater reliability - underway
| Challenges of System | Historical/Conservative  
Irregularity/exceptions  
**Complex Grapheme-Phoneme mappings**  
Grammar  
Homonyms  
Hyphens/punctuation/Capitalisation |
|---|
| Challenges from English | Dominance/Inevitability vs Irish low status  
English spelling pronunciations  
Anglicized syntax/morphol. |
| Challenges to Teachers | **Limited Irish skills**  
Don’t know rules (Linguistic Knowledge)  
Dialect issues  
Teachers don’t read enough  
Confidence lacking  
Lack knowledge about materials  
Training & Support lacking  
Context: school/motivation/behavior  
Lack of time |
| Challenges to L2 learners | **Weak L2 skills**  
Weak L1 Skills  
Weak study/learning skills  
Too much assumed  
Lack Motivation/Interest  
Don’t read in general  
Dialect diffs in teaching |
| Challenges for Native Speakers | No Tradition of Literacy  
Dialect vs. Caighdeán  
Anglicism |
5. Challenge in teaching Irish reading?

5a: Sound system


Cúrsaí foghraíochta is dócha (SO1)  Phonetics, I guess.

Sé an córas litrithe, níl aon amhras air. (S2)  It’s the spelling system, no doubt about it.

5d. Motivation

Na daltaí a spreagadh chun cloí leis (MO1)  Inspiring the pupils to stick with it.

Tabhair ar dhaoine léamh! (S4) Getting people to read!

Easpa suime (M2)  Lack of interest
General observations

- Fluent speakers don’t see spelling as problematic, wouldn’t change things much.
- But teachers and pupils alike are believed not to understand Irish spelling.
- Little focus on spelling as a system.
- Spelling and grammar are often confounded by secondary teachers and even teacher educators.
- Teachers confirm low levels of language skill among Irish pupils. And teachers.
- Assumptions about what is known – warranted?