

## TEACHING FORUM

### Several Tired Children Howling, as Gaeilge

Will Kenny and Kia Cashman  
*Gaeltacht Minnesota*

At the 2001 NAACLT conference, Phil Kelly (2001) introduced us to "Several Tired Children Howling", a mnemonic device to help Manx learners remember which consonants undergo mutation. Teaching Irish to adults in community-based classes, we, too, have looked for tools to help our students figure out when and how to apply the common initial mutations.

The problem for new students of Irish is twofold: on the one hand, they have to recognize *which* consonants are subject to the mutation, whether lenition or eclipsis, and second, they have to know *how* to perform the mutation. Our experience suggests that, for many students, these two facets of learning proceed differently for lenition and eclipsis.

In general, lenition skills seem to develop more easily, partly because students seem to find the second component, actually performing the mutation, easier for lenition than for eclipsis. Spelling may mediate this learning. Students tend to think of lenition as a spelling change, "adding an h", and don't have a lot of trouble learning to turn "síl" into "shíl".

If they can remember which consonants to modify for lenition then, they're well on their way. In this phrase:

*Be courageous, don't fear guppies, my pet snapping turtle*  
the initial letters provide a list of consonants for which lenition is shown by adding an "h". (this phrase doesn't address the lenition of / or n still found in some Irish dialects). With this phrase firmly memorized, students always have a handy tool to help them decide whether a consonant can be lenited. And they can also learn to say it in lenited form:

*Bhe chourageous, dhon't fhear ghuppies, mhy phet shnapping thurtle*

to practice making the right changes to these initial consonant

sounds.

Eclipsis presents greater learning challenges. Students may see it, not as a *modification* of a sound (lenition), but as a *replacement* of one sound with another. At the same time, the representation of eclipsis in spelling may help *too much*. That is, there is nothing about the spelling "sh" that tell you to say that like "h", but it is easy to remember to say "mb" as you would "m" alone.

That means that students find it easy to deal with eclipsed consonants in their reading, because they can visually "unpack" the consonants at the front of the word. But, compared to lenition, *production* of eclipsis develops much more slowly.

That makes it all the more important for a useful mnemonic tool to give clues both about *which* sounds are eclipsed, and *how* (or *by what*). The following ditty addresses both facets:

TeD is DoNe  
as a PuB BuM  
with the KeG GaNG,  
for (W)once and foreVer,  
I kNow.

It's important to point out to students that these pairs of consonants appear *in the order of the production or replacement process*. For each of the key words in the mnemonic, the initial sound (Ted) is replaced by the final sound (teD) to produce the eclipsed form. In other words, this mnemonic helps them get over thinking about the final spelling ("d before t") and helps them think that "t turns into d".

"for (W)once and foreVer" reminds students that "f" sound can be replaced by either a "w" or a "v" sound, depending on broad/slender context (and dialect). And "I kNow" reminds them that eclipsed vowels are preceded by n-.

Good notes and handy reference tools can help students a great deal, in mastering the mutations found in Irish. But tools they can carry around in their heads can be especially helpful. When we hear our students muttering about "my pet snapping turtle" and "pub bums", as they participate in class conversations, we know they're on their way to more reliably producing correct mutations in their speech.

## References

Kelly, P. (2001). *Several Tired Children Howling (An Introduction to Manx Mutation)*. Paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers, Jersey City, NJ

## TEACHING FORUM

### Workshop Report – Experimenting with “speech first”

*Mary Roguski*

#### **Introduction**

New students of Irish are rarely aware of the variety of challenges facing them. While greater numbers of people have experience with at least one foreign language, this experience is usually of little help in grasping concepts like lenition, eclipsis, and a syntax that sometimes seems far removed from that of the Romance and Germanic languages that most have studied. Even attempting to read a simple proverb aloud can be discouraging for a beginner, given Irish spelling conventions.

In my work teaching beginners on a weekly basis with Gaeltacht Minnesota, I have benefited from the open-ended format of the classes. If students could commit the time, I could work with them long-term to learn the “code” to the spelling. Gaeltacht Minnesota also offers workshops during the year, and the beginning level is often populated largely by individuals who are unable to attend the weekly classes, whether due to their schedules or because they live a significant distance away. Contact time with these participants is, obviously, limited; the day-long workshop offers only about four hours in the classroom. Rather than spend valuable time early in the day having the students look at handouts and listen to a teacher explain spelling correspondences, I set the tone for our time together by having them spend the first session hearing, repeating, and using basic Irish with each other without looking at the written forms, then following up with spelling in a subsequent session.

#### **Structure and implementation**

The basic Irish used in the first session consisted of conversational exchanges, fourteen items in total (ex. 1)<sup>1</sup>. Each utterance was introduced with an accompanying icon to help identify it; large reproductions of each icon were presented to the class during the demonstration of the utterances, and the entire set was made into a handout for the students to use to make notes for themselves on what they heard (ex. 2).