

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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IRISH GAELIC IN NEW YORK AND IRELAND TODAY

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For the past few decades, increasing numbers of students and the general public are taking various types of courses to master Modern Irish. The teachers of Irish range from volunteers in non-profit groups, to instructors in continuing-education programs, to academic faculty in colleges and universities granting credit for the courses. Non-classroom activities are also expanding and becoming more varied. For example, temporary Irish speaking communities are created by conducting immersion weekends and, during the summer, full weeks and, in addition to those gatherings, individual Irish language days which have drawn hundreds of learners and fluent speakers.

Audiences attend lectures and Irish language film showings and listen to my own weekly, bilingual radio program, *Míle Fáilte* on WFUV, the radio station of Fordham University in New York. However, in Ireland, the distinctive communities speaking Irish continue to shrink. The official funding of Irish language projects is decreasing. The spectacularly most threatening attack against the language appears in a government report by

the Bord Snip Nua, which, if put into practice, will simply eviscerate the spoken Irish language and kill it. A government plan to address Irish language maintenance within the next 20 years was recently held in Galway, and the emphasis on learners of the language rather than native speakers caused some distress among linguists and activists.

I begin by describing positive actions in the United States in favor of language learning on the university level. Then I will describe voluntary, non-academic activities which have proven popular and successful. In addition, I'll refer to the major Irish language organizations in the New York area, the decline of foreign language teaching on the university level, and finally, the decline of first language, Irish speaking communities in Ireland itself.

Over the past decade or so, the positive fortunes of Irish Gaelic as a learned second language in the Northeast of America have been extraordinarily gratifying. Unfortunately, this North American experience contrasts with the declining use of spoken Irish as a first language in its homeland. The language in Ireland itself has been perceived there as an educational problem rather than a communal, societal process in danger. In contrast, Irish Gaelic second language learning institutions, personnel, and material in the United States are becoming noticeably impressive.

Oddly, these increased opportunities for studying Irish, especially in the New York metropolitan area in both official and non-official venues, are occurring while, at the same time, there is a steep decline in the number of American students pursuing, as a subject of study on the college level, the Humanities, whose core element is language. In contrast, an overwhelming number of students have created an intense demand for technical training in business-oriented programs which sometimes do not require language study as part of their curriculum.

And, yet, despite these countervailing trends, the Irish language has

been attracting students of various ages and educational levels, both in and out of formal college classes and very frequently totally outside of an academic setting. In fact, a growing cohort of learners exhibits substantial mastery of Irish as a second language and in many cases even competence in the language. It has been noted that American students approach Irish with few of the negative attitudes that were developed in schools in Ireland as a response to what was called "compulsory Irish" in the curricula there.

Irish has also achieved a secure status as part of the standard curriculum in prestigious universities in North America and has further attained greater visibility as the result of American textbooks and audio CDs being published to facilitate the acquisition of the language. These achievements have been accomplished primarily by voluntary organizations, dedicated individuals, and unofficial bodies. Today, I will concentrate for the most part on groups promoting ventures which bring the Irish language into social contexts so that it is spoken orally and actively revitalized in social settings.

Towards the end of my commentary, I will cite data from official academic reports about the state of foreign languages spoken in the home in the United States and additional statistics revealing the shrinking of foreign language programs on the college level. These reports, by implication, demonstrate the marginal, if not non-existent, role of Irish in the larger, mainstream picture. In North America, the successful production of an effective pedagogical system and competent speakers of Irish has not encompassed community building, which has been almost ignored since home and family usage of the language does not rank high. Does this mean that acquisition of the language implies a concomitant lack of usage of the language? Also Irish is not approached as a Heritage Language since most American Irish have no Irish speaking parents or immediate ancestors living with them.

As I have already indicated, institutionally, Irish as an academic subject has grown effectively and exponentially. One of the major sources of this institutional success has been, frankly, money, the increased funding of public organizations by private philanthropies and recently by the southern Irish government. Generous financial endowments give security to academic departments so that they do not have to supplicate a dean annually to ensure that courses will be run—even if they have only low enrollments. Endowments partially guarantee that faculty positions will not come under threat because of the vagaries of the market.

I refer to three outstanding examples of this type of philanthropy. The University of Notre Dame was supplied an enormous grant of money from the Donald Keough family establishing the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies in 1992. A *Roinn Ghaeilge* (Modern Irish Language Department) was established there in 2004, creating the only university department devoted specifically to the Modern Irish Language in the United States. Now hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students have been participating in a variety of B.A. and M.A. Irish Studies programs, all of which require an Irish language component of three semesters. In 2008, the Irish government and the United States Fulbright Commission sponsored a native speaker from Connemara to teach introductory courses and mentor students in Irish. The Modern Irish Language Department is staffed by first rate scholars and lecturers in Irish, such as the American Sarah McKibben, Brian Ó Conchubhair, and the new head of the department, the feminist scholar Bríona Nic Dhiarmada. Recently a full scholarship has been offered both in Ireland and America for a Ph.D. in Irish language literature at Notre Dame.

Another lavishly funded endowment has been granted to New York University by Lewis Glucksman, the Jewish American financier, who previously funded the Business School at New York University, an Art

Museum in Cork, Ireland, and the Japanese nexus for the Business School of the University of Limerick. Lewis Glucksman, who died in 2006, had become personally enamored of Irish literature and wished to encourage sharing it widely. He supported the establishment of an Irish Studies program housed in the building which bears his name, Glucksman Ireland House. The Irish Studies program at New York University, begun in 1993, includes courses in Irish. The program has recently been expanded to include an Irish Major, and B.A. and M.A. degrees, stipulating the Irish language as a required component of the program. Also non-credit Irish language courses are offered to the public in the evening. The NYU Fulbright program this year provides two scholars—Professor Art Hughes of Queens University, Belfast, as a senior fellow and a student from Dublin, Cillian Ó Chonchúir—to teach undergraduates.

In The Bronx, Lehman College of the City University of New York continues within the Fulbright program this year, having a native Irish speaker from the Aran Islands in Galway, Una Faherty, teaching courses online and in the classroom. Lehman has expanded its Irish language teaching into classes at other local colleges: Manhattan College in Riverdale in The Bronx, Queens College, and the College of Mount St. Vincent in The Bronx, as well as Lehman and other non-collegiate sites in Westchester County (see <http://www.irishamericanstudies.com>).

In addition, at the local level, John Feeney established a two semester, credit-bearing Irish language course at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, Connecticut (tel. 203.332-5200). Thirty students registered for the first semester and fifteen for the second semester.

A comprehensive publication of college courses in Irish by Roslyn Blyn-Ladrew has been printed in this annual journal of the NAACLT (North American Association of Celtic Language Teachers), the *Journal of Celtic Language Learning*, Volume 8 (2004): 49-72, which contains

23 pages of solid information, for the most part still valid, in her essay entitled: "Accredited Irish Language Courses in North America: A Report from the (Cyber-) Field." In addition, in 2008, Brian Ó Conchubhair published a convincing account of the growth of Modern Irish studies in North America in his book, *Why Irish? Irish Language and Literature in Academia*, distributed by Syracuse University Press.

Other accomplishments involve not only courses but textbooks specifically geared to an American market. Roslyn Blyn-Ladrew, Thomas Ihde, and John Gillen—all Americans—were the co-authors of an introductory text built on the communicative model, titled: *Conversational Irish: The Complete Course for Beginners*. The text is accompanied by an audio CD, recording native speakers from Connemara reciting all the lessons. It was published by Routledge in 2008. In the same year, Routledge also published two other student workbooks devoted to Irish grammar and written by a founder of NAACLT, Nancy Stenson, Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Minnesota. These two workbooks, one Introductory and the second Intermediate, guide students toward a sure command of Irish grammar along with a sensitive awareness of the probable problems facing an American learner. In addition, commercial firms have now grown interested in Irish language learning. In fact, Rosetta Stone has published three graded audio self-instruction guides to Irish which have proven marketable despite their prices.

However, most obviously, the vitality of Irish language teaching has issued forth from dedicated voluntary organizations and individual teachers in non-credit, sometimes unstructured, venues and not from generous gifts of money to pre-existing academic institutes. I am now going to emphasize one activity which has been sponsored by many volunteer groups with the intention of gathering students outside the classroom to share each other's company naturally while speaking Irish. I'm referring

to the Irish Language Day, or Lá Gaeilge, whose focus is on facilitating ordinary conversation among their members. These language days occur in differing shapes and formats and are sponsored at various times of the year. I will simply present a list of groups now conducting a Lá Gaeilge to give you a sense of their popularity: Hilary Sweeney's at Iona College, in New Rochelle (an.scoil.chois.clai@gmail.com); Jerry Kelly's at Scoil Gaeilge Ghearóid Tóibin in Babylon on Long Island (<http://www.scoilgaeilge.org>); and Glucksman Ireland House at New York University (<http://irelandhouse.fas.nyu.edu/page/home>), the Irish Arts Center in Manhattan (<http://www.irishartscenter.org>), and, as far away as Ontario, Canada, at an embryonic Gaeltacht, directed by Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh (info@anghaeltacht.ca)—as well as many others.

The Lá Gaeilge (Irish language Day) specifically establishes a temporary community of Irish speakers. Although nearly all Lá Gaeilge have some introductory, intermediate, and advanced classroom sessions, their major focus, inside and outside classes, is conversation. Sometimes films or DVDs are shown, debates conducted, lectures presented, sketches performed, all interacting with the audience. I have attended many Lá Gaeilge, and the participants range in number from forty to over a hundred people and in age from youths to older groups.

Another organization which was founded in 1981 specifically to encourage ordinary conversation as its goal has been Daltaí na Gaeilge, one of the most long-lived and active organizations supporting enjoyable gatherings of Irish speakers. The name Daltaí was deliberately chosen since it means student, not teacher, recognizing the ongoing learning necessary for Americans who have no nearby Irish speaking communities to associate with. Daltaí have conducted immersion courses during full weeks in the summer and during weekends at various times throughout the year. These immersion sessions join learners with fluent speakers and include

entertainment, lectures, *sean-nós* (old-style) singing workshops, sharing meals together, and sometimes dormitory style accommodations to facilitate the participants talking to one another. Spoken Irish contact is the rule. They also have special weekends only for fluent speakers, hopefully establishing a network of willing Irish speakers that may become ongoing. In the spring, the weekend for fluent speakers is held at a motel on Long Beach Island at the Jersey shore. Also the immersion weeks and weekends are growing in number and quality and retain their focus on language being actually spoken by people face to face. On Presidents' weekend in February, a successful Ceardlann na Múinteoirí (Teachers' Workshop) is conducted by a professional Irish language teacher brought over from Ireland addressing the needs of teachers of Irish.

The most impressive aspect of these activities is that they have not relied on outside institutional support. Immersion sessions have now been imitated by groups in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, Montana, and Ontario, Canada. Daltai's most public and practically beneficial act has been to create a website, www.daltai.com, where all Irish teachers are listed by state and then by cities within the states. This website has become a major source for those individuals seeking to contact Irish teachers or the academic institutions near them, whether or not they are willing or able to attend formal classes. Annually, Daltai na Gaeilge offers generous scholarships, one to a student, a second to a teacher, to travel to an actual Gaeltacht in Ireland to perfect their language practice.

A more recent venture by unrelated organizations has been the showing of a series of short films in Irish. Obviously, an audience implies people in groups who will discuss the films, hopefully in Irish. I'll mention only three of them. "Culture Fest na Gaeilge" is part of the Long Island Film Festival, with over twenty-five years' experience. The "Culture Fest" was initiated independently four years ago by the Festival Director, Francis

Leik, to kindle a greater appreciation of Irish language creativity in the modern media. Correspondingly, last year Glucksman Ireland House had presented at New York University, "Oscailt," an evening of seven short Irish language films as part of its public outreach effort. On another evening, the full-length, Irish language feature film: *Kings*, which had been nominated for a Hollywood award, was shown free to the public. And, finally, Boston College regularly includes Irish language films in its film showings throughout the year.

At this juncture, I must mention my own radio program devoted to the Irish language. I started offering five-minute simple language lessons on WFUV, the radio station of Fordham University, 32 years ago on a weekly Irish music program. Then I became the Host of *Míle Fáilte*, which grew for some years into a stand alone program every Saturday, at first for ten minutes, then a half hour. And now, for the past 18 years, it has been a weekly, one-hour program, and it is generously supported by listeners to the fundraisers held three times a year at the station. The program is essentially a kind of variety show covering history, music, literature, current affairs related to the Irish language with *sean-nós* singing and pop songs in Irish interspersed through the talk. "Míle Fáilte" is offered every Saturday on the air at 90.7 FM in New York, and anywhere, streaming live, on <http://www.wfuv.org>. It can also be heard at any time by accessing the website [wfuv.org](http://www.wfuv.org) and then the WFUV Archives. To give a flavor of a month's program, I include the broadcasts of August 2009:

8/01 Lúnasa, celebrating the sun god, the beginning of the harvest, the high point of the summer

8/08 Newspapers in Irish Gaelic not funded: "Foinse," (after 14 years) from Connemara, "Lá Nua" (daily) from Belfast

8/15 Happy Birthday "Míle Fáilte," celebrating 32 years of Irish Gaelic on WFUV, and 18 years of "Míle Fáilte" as a weekly, one-hour

program

8/22 End of summer pop music

8/29 Léachtaí Cholm Cille, beginning its 40th year and 40th

volume, a collection of annual lectures about all aspects of Irish Gaelic Literature and Language

The station requires that a percentage of the program be in English. Arbitron ratings have at various times counted 6,000 to 13,000 listeners, not to mention those listening on the Internet.

The Internet has become a major contact among Irish speakers here and abroad. It does not confine itself to even moderately literate writers and creates no face-to-face contact. I'll simply mention three outstanding blogs from the New York area: Hilary Sweeney's blog, (Hilaryny.blogspot.com) which won the 2007 Irish Blogs Award for the best use of Irish in a Blog. Séamas Ó Neachtain revived the Philo-Celtic Society, with his own blog. He re-established the Philo-Celtic Society on the web and attracts over 800 non-paying members so far (<http://philo-celtic.com>). He also podcasts in Irish. Another fascinating blog has been established by Daithí Mac Lochlainn and includes Celtic and other languages, not just Irish content, and is titled in the Esperanto language: Keltalingvaj Novajoj, to avoid employing any one of the imperial languages (<http://keltalingvoj.blogspot.com/>).

Recently, these various voluntary activities attracted the attention of an Irish language organization in Ireland, Glór na nGael. Glór na nGael, which means Voice of the Irish, was established in 1961 to encourage community participation in efforts to use more spoken Irish in individual geographical areas in Ireland: cities, suburbs, villages, the Gaeltacht [or Irish-speaking districts], and ex-Gaeltacht areas. It employs seven full-time workers. Its manner of operating is to allow local voluntary groups to organize various language-oriented activities and then compete with other

groups within the same geographical unit. Money prizes were then offered to the most attractive and substantive efforts. For example, last year, the city of Derry was awarded the first prize of €40,000, the next region was awarded €20,000, down to three Gaeltacht areas awarded €3,000 each, with second prizes of €1,500.00 each. The total prize treasury is €150,000. The program is voluntary, relying on the enthusiasm and dedication of various individuals coming together within their own communities to organize Irish language events.

Two years ago, Glór na nGael branched out from local and national to international sites, offering three international prizes each year. In fact, Scoil Ghaeilge Ghearóid Tóibín in Long Island won two years ago, and Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh in Ontario, Canada, won the first prize last year. More importantly, Glór na nGael sponsored an Irish Language conference focusing on the Vision of the Irish Language for North America, or Fís Ghaeilge Mheireacá Thuaidh, in Manhattan from the 16th to the 18th of May 2008. It was an important success, and it attracted over 130 attendees with Irish the only language used throughout the conference.

I have decided to present sketches of six of the sixteen panelists to personalize some of the diverse advantages and limitations which volunteers teaching Irish are faced with. The first speaker I will describe is Mike Newell, originally from Connemara. Mike Newell spoke about the on-and-off enthusiasm of the members of the Gaelic League in Boston. He reminded us that, some years ago, Boston had had Irish speaking households and neighborhoods. Families spoke Irish at home and raised their children speaking Irish. This practice waned with the arrival of the "New Irish" and the dispersal of the residents to the suburbs. One of the members of the League, Máirín Concannon, also originally from Connemara, produced her own audio CD, "Bóithrin na Smaointe," singing local *sean-nós* (old style) songs, telling stories and reciting her own poetry in Irish. In

addition, Máirín Concannon had regularly taught courses in Irish as part of the standard curriculum in the high school where she taught. Since the earliest years for a child, those before age of 12, are the most facilitating years for a child to learn a language, this high school project seems to be a move in the right direction.

Another speaker, already referred to, Séamas Ó Neachtain—an American—teaches at the Irish language school in Babylon, Long Island, and has also published a bilingual volume of his poetry, *An File ar Buille* (2004), with an accompanying CD on which all his Irish language poems are recited with their English translations. He then issued a second CD, this time of his songs in Irish, *Cleas Amhráin*. Even more impressively, in 2008, he published his 268-page novel in Irish, *Cogadh Dearg* (meaning Red, or Bloody, War) about the American Civil War, using some of his own family records as a source. It was published in Ireland by Coiscéim. He has just published in 2010 his second bilingual volume of poetry, *An File agus Araile*. By the way, Séamas Ó Neachtain has never set foot in Ireland. In addition, his re-established Philo-Celtic Society publishes a monthly, bilingual internet newsletter, *An Gael Breise*, listing various current events and activities. And, furthermore, his magazine entirely in Irish, entitled *An Gael*, is now published on Long Island. Three issues of this quarterly periodical have appeared so far.

A third speaker at the Irish Language Vision for North America conference was Pádraig Ó Siadhail, originally from Derry City in Ireland. Professor Ó Siadhail teaches at St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He has published a number of significant novels in Irish and cutting-edge academic literary criticism in Irish as well. He is raising his children trilingually: in English, French, and Irish. Ó Siadhail pointed out the difficulties of establishing any academic or teaching program when one is isolated and how inadequate the Internet can become when relied on solely

to keep up to date outside of Ireland. A particular misfortune affected his children since there was no surrounding community of Irish speaking peers for them to interact with.

Another panelist, Elaine Ní Bhraonáin, originally from Dublin, conducts conversation classes in Irish at the Irish Arts Center in Manhattan. She has developed and taught classroom and on-line courses at Lehman College of the City University of New York in The Bronx. Ní Bhraonáin writes a bilingual column in the New York weekly newspaper, the Irish Echo. Ní Bhraonáin's surprising proposal at the conference was her intention to establish an Irish language high school in New York, paralleling Greek, Polish, and French schools, and attracting the parents and children who are part of this growing enthusiasm for Irish.

Another panelist, Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh, a Canadian whose group won the Glór na nGael international competition last year, has founded a Gaeltacht in Ontario, Canada, to provide a place for Irish speakers to visit and commingle. He is a professor of Physics at the military University in Kingston. He demanded from the Irish authorities more practical support of the language work being attempted in North America, especially a change from the condescending Irish attitudes in Ireland and a greater appreciation by them of the realistic situation North American learners find themselves in, having no Irish community life to reinforce their efforts.

The last speaker on the panels who I will describe in a thumbnail sketch is the only person representing an Irish language organization in Ireland. Feargal Ó Cuilinn was the least bureaucratically slick of the Glór na nGael panelists from Ireland and the most connected with actual Irish speakers. He is the Stiúrthóir (director) of *Comhluadar*, a group dedicated to assisting families struggling (without much systematic assistance) to raise their children in their homes as Irish speakers. Ó Cuilinn is not

himself a native speaker of Irish and realizes how difficult it is to change languages. As a parent, he has made himself into an adult learner of the language to support his children's acquisition of Irish. As all linguists have indicated, endangered languages must have a strong root in the intergenerational transmission of the language from parent to child at home, and Ó Cuilinn's group seemed to be the only one directly addressing this central problem of language being passed on to the next generation within the household.

The conference was an exciting success until the Glór na nGael officials asked for volunteers to organize a New York committee to plan ahead. Some attendees commented that the behavior of the Irish organizers, although impressive as administrators, managers, and public relations experts, seemed job-oriented, not people or language centered. This parallels comments made in her 379-page comprehensive account by Helen Ó Murchú in *More Facts About Irish*, a study written in English and published last year for the Irish Committee of the European Commission for Less Commonly Spoken Languages. *More Facts About Irish* is an encyclopedia of necessary information about the current state of the language. In it, Ó Murchú has pointed out that the new generation of language officials are patently professional and unabashedly project such a stance. She wonders whether this new type's professionalism will merge with the interactive, personal commitment, passion, and love that characterized the behavior of earlier language workers.

These Irish bureaucrats felt that the Fulbright program by focusing on the Irish diaspora overseas seemed to have more chance of success than working on what seems like the intractable problems of spoken Irish in Ireland. In fact I have recently discovered from Kenneth Nilsen, the Professor of Scottish Gaelic at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish in Nova Scotia, that a new program funding six scholarships from Ireland

to Canada has also been enacted. In the United States, the original colleges were New York University; Lehman College of the City University of New York; St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota; St. Thomas University in Houston, Texas; and Notre Dame. This year Southern Illinois University in Carbondale; the University of Montana; and the American Indian, Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, have been added.

Oddly, the success of Irish language learning in the United States is taking place at the same time that foreign languages and the Humanities are in a precipitous decline in the American colleges. As an illustration, at the end of the Second World War, students taking humanities courses accounted for 47% of the American college population. That percentage has been reduced today to about 9%.

The Modern Language Association of America, or the MLA, is the major professional body for academics working on languages. The Modern Language Association "Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature," was published in February 2009. This report was an investigation of the traditional core of Liberal Arts study: language, literature and culture. An extensive series of statistics accompanies the report and indicates a sharp decline in students studying foreign languages, dropping 55 percent from 1972 to 1980, pausing for a brief recovery, and then continuing to decline.

Another set of statistics are reported in another study entitled "The Number and Percentage of 2004-2005 Bachelor Degree Recipients in 44 Language Programs Classifications," which listed only 7 students in Celtic Studies, or 0 percent, and none of the individual languages, like Irish, were listed at all. And as I have already shown, while learning Irish is growing in academia and outside of it, a contrasting negative pattern of drifting away from language study in general is occurring during the same period.

The MLA has also published a series of papers on the Less Commonly Taught Languages. One report focuses on New York for the Fall semester of 2006. Only five four-year colleges are listed as having students studying Irish, namely: Barnard College, 1 student; Columbia University, 4 students; New York University, 84 students; the State University of New York at Buffalo, 28 students. Vassar lists one student.

In a separate report entitled the “Course Enrollment in 204 Less Commonly Taught Languages” for the years 2002 and 2006, there is some miscalculation about Irish—either that, or the source institution’s reporting the statistics had been changed—since there is a reduction from 659 students studying Irish on the undergraduate level in 2002 while for 2006 only 383 are recorded. My intuition would expect a gain in student numbers in Irish. Also I don’t understand the category for Irish since it is divided into three parts: Irish, Modern Irish, and Old Irish. I don’t understand the distinction between Irish and Modern Irish.

On a more personal level, the Annual International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association attempts to document comprehensively every publication in or about language and literature in five volumes. The Bibliography incorporates two sections, one on the Celtic languages and another in a separate volume on the Celtic literatures, which are assigned by country—Ireland, Wales, Scotland—with the Celtic material mixed with English. During my 18 years as Head of the Celtic Section, I tried to make certain that college students doing research and term papers would at least be aware of the existence of these languages. I solicited additional volunteers from among my Celtic language colleagues to supply further references to publications in and about the Celtic Languages. Because of their preexisting workloads, most academics in the field refused to take on this work. Younger faculty based their refusal on the fact that the work was unpaid. Worse, when I stepped down from the Celtic Section three years

ago, no replacement was discovered by the MLA to continue the work. A gap in information about modern Celtic languages now faces current students who are doing research related to those languages. This means that students in the humanities are not going to be made aware that the Celtic languages are living and being discussed on high, middle, and low levels regularly and, this omission diminishes an ordinary awareness of Celtic languages by educated people.

To gather a more informed perspective on languages spoken generally in the United States, the MLA has created a language map imaging on their website the location of residents of the country who speak a language other than English in their home. The numbers and percentages are attached to the map. Over 46 million people speak a language other than English in their home, about 15 percent of the population. Only the thirty largest language groups are listed on the map. Laotian and Hungarian are at the bottom of that list of 30 with the lowest percentages, registering 0.06% and 0.04% percent of the population respectively. No Celtic language is included on the list, indicating their extreme minority status.

So the activities by voluntary and university groups confirms the presence of Irish language study while, in contradistinction, the documentary record provides insubstantial data on Irish language learning on the college level. The high school or primary levels were not included in these reports.

Statistics from The Modern Language Association of America, from UNESCO reports, and Less Commonly Taught Language agencies narrow even further the actuality of an Irish language presence considerably. For example this year UNESCO issued its report on Endangered Languages, categorizing Irish Gaelic as “definitely endangered.” UNESCO provides statistics from the Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs for the year 2007, that 44,000 people live in primarily Irish speaking areas in Ireland. However, it doesn’t indicate that many of

these people never speak a word of Irish. I will now enumerate the categories that UNESCO uses to indicate the vitality or lack of vitality of spoken language groups so you have a grasp of what they are claiming. The first category is extinct languages, and Manx and Cornish (both Celtic languages) are listed here. The second category is “nearly extinct.” The third category is “seriously endangered,” and Breton (the Celtic language of France) is included here. The fourth category, “endangered languages,” engages us here today since it includes Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, and Welsh, the three major Celtic languages. UNESCO’s fifth category is “partially endangered”; and its final, sixth category is “not endangered,” including here, merely as an example, Maltese. The report claims that the Irish language is extinct in Northern Ireland. The UNESCO report further notes that Irish Gaelic is widely studied as a second language, but it does not contain information concerning the diaspora overseas.

The latest published American census states that 24,000 speakers of Irish live in the United States. However, this is a self-reported calculation giving no indication about fluency or the lack of it. In 1998, Nancy Stenson, a professor of applied linguistics, published an article in *New Hibernia Review*, entitled “The Use of Irish Among Immigrants to the United States,” studying the in-family transference of Irish by first language speakers of Irish. She concluded that the practice was almost non-existent. The results of Professor Stenson’s work are near dismal, especially considering that Irish language activists did not make Irish the home language to be acquired by their own families.

In 2002 and 2003, UNESCO sponsored a separate linguistic report on “Language Vitality.” Nine categories predicted the maintenance or revitalization of a language. As an example only 18 of Australia’s 250 indigenous languages are described as “strong,” according to such a critical factor as intergenerational transmission, meaning passing on your language to

your children at home. Indeed, UNESCO’s definition of an extinct language is when the last native speaker, or speaker of a first language, dies, not having passed it on to his or her survivors. I will select three of the nine categories which are pertinent to the language situation in Ireland as follows. First, governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use, must be positive; and unfortunately they are not vigorously so in Ireland. Secondly, community members’ attitudes towards their own language must be favorable and, unfortunately in Ireland, this is not strong. And, finally, there must be intergenerational language transmission, which is weak and waning rapidly in Irish first language communities today.

In Ireland, the educational system was made the sole guardian of passing on the language. Confining Irish to the educational system created the destructive perception that Irish was a commodity, a subject to be studied in school, like math, with no human, personal or social associations for most students. The latest expensive linguistic survey commissioned by the 26-county government predicts the death of Irish as a community language in 20 years. A Twenty-Year Plan had been promised by the Irish government—and delayed for well over a year—and finally appeared recently. Supposedly this publication will provide planning for these language communities to prevent their deaths in twenty years. The prognosis is not encouraging. In fact, a separate report was commissioned by the Irish government to respond to the current, enormous economic downturn. A series of five economic professors and businessmen produced a report under the aegis of An Bord Snip Nua (also called The McCarthy Report) whose proposals, if enacted, would eviscerate the Irish language and quite simply put an end to it. Unfortunately, the Irish language has become a cultural tourism commodity like the claddagh ring or an Aran Island sweater, a heritage symbol, whose significance overlays the

observable dying of the language itself in real-life communities. Part of the hypocrisy is recorded in the latest government survey claiming 93% of the population is in favor of Irish. But sadly they are not favorable enough to actually speak it.

Maírtín Ó Murchu, whose “Cás na Gaeilge 1952-2002: Ag Dul ó Chion?” Paimphléad 1, in *An Aimsir Óg* by Coiscéim published in 2002 sadly says of the language that it has now become a private benefit, a choice, which is my approximated version of his (“Is leas príobháideach, roghnach, anois í agus is ar éigean gur leas poiblí feasta í a mbraítear dualgas gníomhach a bheith ar an Stáit ina leith” pp. 38,39). The Irish language is hardly now a community benefit anymore, no longer depending on the active responsibility of the state to work for it. Joshua Fishman, the American linguist, who has studied reviving languages, particularly in Ireland, emphasized that passing the language on to the next generation was absolutely central to the survival of Irish and that it didn’t seem to be happening vitally there.

In conclusion, all linguistic evidence emphasizes that intergenerational transference of language by parents or guardians to their children is the basis for any hint at a language surviving, but the behavior in first language Irish speaking communities seems no longer a strong underpinning for the language.