An Instructional Experiment in Grammar Teaching in Irish Immersion

Immersion 2012: Bridging Contexts for a Multilingual World

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19 October 2012
Outline of presentation

- Background and purpose
- Research literature
- Design and methodology
- Findings
- Implications
Europe

Dublin → London 50 mins
Dublin → Paris 1 hour 30 mins
Background to Irish language

- Irish is an official language (minority) – autochthonous
- Students in all schools study Irish from entry to completion
- According to 2011 Census:
  - 1.77m (41.4%) able to speak Irish
  - Only 77,185 (1.8%) daily speakers outside education
- Schools in Gaeltacht & Irish immersion (all-Irish) schools throughout the country
- 7.5% (38,352) primary students – educated through Irish
The Growth of Irish-medium Schools in the 26 Counties outside the Gaeltacht 1972-2012

Source: www.gaelscoileanna.ie
Background to study

- early immersion policy in schools
- all schools are immersion centres/stand-alone schools
- Irish is the primary language of the school, English the auxiliary language
- students are expected to speak Irish at all times (except English language arts)
- immersion teachers teach all subjects (11 in total)
- approx. 85% instruction through Irish from age 4-18
- researcher’s experience in Irish immersion school and previous research
- ‘Gaelscoilis’ ‘speaking immersion’ (Lyster, 1987) Gaeilge líofa lofa (rotten fluent Irish)
- lack of accuracy in students’ Irish
- persistence of errors
Research framework

• “Teachers need to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to keep learning over a lifetime.” (OECD, 2005, p. 97)


• “In inductive teaching, learners are first exposed to exemplars of the grammatical structure and are asked to arrive at a metalinguistic generalisation on their own” (Ellis, 2006, p. 97)
Language acquisition research

- once communicative sufficiency has been reached little pressure or motivation to speak with accuracy (Day and Shapson, 1987)
- learners may bypass syntax and rely on schematic and contextual knowledge – rule-based v exemplar-based coding (Skehan, 1998)
- emphasis on understanding and negotiation of meaning rather than form in immersion – counterbalanced approach (Lyster, 2007)
- moving learners from semantic to syntactic processing (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Broner & Tedick, 2011)
- “meaning-making” (Swain et al., 2011) processing information? or constructing new knowledge?
- communities of practice (COP) “pays less attention to cognitive processes themselves and more to social practices that facilitate cognitive processes.” (Swain et al., 2011, p. 27)
Attainment of Irish immersion students in Irish, English and Maths

• students in Irish immersion schools achieve a high degree of proficiency in Irish relative to their peers in schools where Irish is taught as a subject (Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile & O'Gorman, 2006)

• English reading scores of immersion students are at expected levels when SES factors are accounted for, Maths scores somewhat lower than expected (Shiel et al., 2011)

• very good fluency in the target language but they deviate from native speaker norms in terms of grammatical accuracy (Ó Duibhir, 2009)
Purpose of study

- What effect would of a Form-Focused Instructional (FFI) approach to teaching and learning have on students’ accurate use of genitive case in Irish as measured by a fill-in-the blanks type task?
- Design a reliable Irish Grammar Test to measure improvement over time
- Serve as a pilot for a larger study
Nouns in Irish

• Marked for gender with initial mutation after the article *an*
• Feminine (f) nouns are lenited in nominative case after definite article - *(bean) an bhean* ‘the woman’ - orthographically marked by the letter ‘h’ following the lenited consonant
• masculine (m) nouns are not lenited in nominative case – *(fear) an fear* ‘the man’ but are in genitive case - *hata an fhir* ‘the man’s hat’
• L2 learners find it difficult to identify gender and frequently disregard lenition (Hickey, 2005)
• In the case of Welsh language, children’s development of productive command of grammatical gender and mutations tends to be item-based rather than rule-based (Thomas and Gathercole, 2007)
Genitive case in Irish

- When two nouns come together – *doras na scoile* ‘the school door’
- Verbal noun – *ag léamh an leabhair* ‘reading the book’
- Compound preposition – *i lár an bhóthair* ‘in the middle of the road’, beside, in front of etc.
- Quantity – *beagán airgid* ‘a lot of money’, a little, more
- Possession – *eireaball an mhadra* ‘the dog’s tail’
- Idioms after certain words – *timpeall na tíre* ‘around the country’, according to, across
- Genitive case can change the *article, initial and final mutation*
Design

• Implement four-week programme
• Develop students language awareness through Form-focused Instruction
• Drumcondra (standardised) Irish Test - Reading
• Irish Grammar Test (IGT)
• Pre-test, Post-test (post 1) and Delayed Post-test (post 2)
Design

- Irish Grammar Test (IGT) - fill-in-the blanks type tasks
- Three versions of test A,B,C
- 20 items - 10 m, 10 f
- Three subscales - article, initial and final (3x20=60)
- 4 dummy items embedded which did not require application of genitive
- Students randomly assigned to one each of three forms (group 1 n=10; group 2 n=10, group 3 n=8)
- Students took a different form of the test on each administration – A or B or C
- Didn’t become familiar with specific content
- Focus group interviews
Triail A  
Cód: _______

Scriobh amach na habairtí seo a leanas go cruinn gan na lúibíní.
Bhí na bileoga i lár (an bord).
Bhí na bileoga i lár ___________________
Bhí sé ag tabhart (caint) ar ainmhithe na hÉireann.
Bhí sé ag tabhart __________________ ar ainmhithe na hÉireann.
Cé hí an captaen ar (an fhoireann) sin?
Cé hí an captaen ar _____________ sin?
Dhreap siad go barr (an cnoc).
Dhreap siad go barr ___________________
Thit sí i lár (an bóthar).
Thit sí i lár ___________________
Bhí fear ag glanadh (an t-ospidéal).
Bhí fear ag glanadh ___________________.

- Example of first six items on Test A
- Write out the following sentences accurately without the parentheses
Participants

• One intact Grade 6 class
• 28 students – 15 girls, 13 boys
• Average age 12.5 yrs
• High level of achievement on TGD-R – standardised reading test
Students’ achievement on the TGD-R, overall and by gender and TGD-R subscale. (TGD-R = Standardised reading test)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Males</th>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Percentile Score</td>
<td><strong>82.39</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.73</strong></td>
<td><strong>88.60</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Programme

- Four weeks (Apr-May 2012)
  - average of four 30-minute lessons per week
  - Rinne muid go leor tagairtí don phointe gramadaí i rith an lae mar a tháinig se isteach sa chaint go nádúrtha freisin.
- PowerPoint presentations
- Games – memory, cone, word tennis,
- Quizzes
- Dictogloss (rules in context)
- Learner diaries
An Tuiseal Ginideach

Gaeilge mhaith, Gaeilge cheart agus Gaeilge chruinn
Cad a thugann tú faoi deara???
(What do you notice)
An Bord

Ag barr an bhoírd
An Bóthar

I lár an bhóthair
An bád
Seol an bháid
An Carr
Tiománaí an chairr
An Ubh

Ag briseadh na huibhe
An Oíche
Ag deireadhh na hoíche
An Obair
Ag déanamh na hoibre
An Geimhreadh

Aimsir an -------

![Image of a snowy landscape](image)
An Dialann Mhachnamhach
(Learner diary)

- Cad a d’fhoghlaim mé?
- Míniú ar cad a d’fhoghlaim mé
- Mo shamplaí féin
- Cad a cheap mé?

- What did I learn?
- Explanation of what I learned
- My own examples
- What did I think?
Learner diaries

What did I learn?

Explanation of what I learned

My own examples

What did I think?
Learner diaries

What did I learn?

Explanation of what I learned

My own examples

What did I think?
Results

• Students randomly assigned one each of three forms
• Results indicate that the groups are equivalent in terms of their proficiency in Irish as measured by the TGD-R
• At pre-test stage, Form B of test proved somewhat easier but no significant differences at post-test stage

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>Form C</td>
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## Mean scores on the IGT - Pre, Post1 and Post2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>% Correct Pre</th>
<th>% Correct Post1</th>
<th>% Correct Post2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post1</td>
<td>Post2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>16.70</td>
<td>16.70</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>15.61</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>48.63</td>
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# Mean scores on the IGT by gender of items, at Pre, Post1 and Post2

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<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post1</th>
<th>Post2</th>
<th>% Correct Pre</th>
<th>% Correct Post1</th>
<th>% Correct Post2</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Alt/Article</td>
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<td>9.30</td>
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<td>Tús/Initial</td>
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<td>Deireadh/F</td>
<td>1.31</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Feminine</strong></td>
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<td>Alt/Article</td>
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## Test means for item aspect and practice/non-practice classification, overall and by testing occasion

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
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<th>Post2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>43.77</strong></td>
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Scale reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) for the IGT, overall, and by form and gender of items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form/Items</th>
<th>Alt/Article</th>
<th>Tús/Initial</th>
<th>Deireadh/Final</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>.853</td>
<td>.942</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>.769</td>
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<td>.900</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>.735</td>
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<td>Masculine items</td>
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<td>Feminine items</td>
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<td>.875</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
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<td>.802</td>
<td>.933</td>
<td>.907</td>
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Weighted mean scores on the IGT - Pre, Post1 and Post2

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
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<td>Post2</td>
<td>% Correct</td>
<td>% Correct</td>
<td>% Correct</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>Post1</td>
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Weights applied to the data in previous table

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<td>Tús</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
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<td>Deireadh</td>
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<td>Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus groups: inductive approach

- N: Uaireanta, nuair atá tú ag caint faoi foghlaim gramadáí, tá tú ag smaoineamh, tá tú istigh sa rang agus ta na múinteoir ag múineadh duit. Ach leis é seo tá tú ag piocadh amach na patrúin tú féin agus dul amach sa chlós agus ag imirt na gcluichí chun cur na rialacha i bhfeidhm.

- N: Sometimes, when you are thinking about learning grammar, you are in the classroom and the teacher is teaching you. But with this, you are picking out the patterns yourself and going out to the playground and playing games to implement the rules.
Focus groups: autonomy

D: Má oibríonn tú amach é tú féin tá sé agat. Ach má insíonn an múinteoir duit, cloiseann tú é ach déanann tú dearmad air i lá.

A: Agus uaireanta ní bhíonn tú ag éisteacht.

R:Bíonn tú ag tabhairsntíos mó aird nuair a bhíonn ort féin é a oibriú amach tú féin in ionad an múinteoir a bheith ag abair leat, ansin b’fhéidir nach mbeidh tú ag éisteacht léi ach nuair a chaithfidh tusa é a fháil amach, caithfidh tú bheith ag trialladh é a fháil amach agus nuair a fhaigheann tú é fanann sé i do cheann

N: If you work it out for yourself you have it. But if the teacher tells you, you hear it but you forget it in a day.

A: And sometimes you don’t listen.

M: You pay more attention when you have to work it out yourself instead of the teacher saying it to you, then you might not be listening but when you have to work it out, you have to try to work it out and when you get it, it stays in your head
Focus groups: effectiveness

A: We had to learn things for ourselves, to look things up in the dictionary

N: Your Irish improves because you are going on the internet and looking up [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie) (online dictionary) for things and when the teacher corrects your draft and when you get it back you have to type it up on the computer and the rules and correct Irish go into your head better.
Focus groups: learner diaries

M: At the start of the year it was kind of a book but now it is very valuable. There are lots of examples in it and grammar rules.
A You are not just writing down, you have to (put in) your own examples.
N: If you are not sure of something you look it up in the diary instead of asking a question.
A: It will be useful for projects in High School as well. It helps with your homework. If you forget something you have everything written in it.
Focus groups: accuracy

C: Tar éis tamall ní bhíonn ort smaoineamh bíonn sé i do chloigeann.
R: Tá a fhios againn na rialacha agus cén chaoi muid féin a cheartú. Ní bhíonn muid díreach ag guessáil. Tá a fhios againn cad a bhfuil mícheart agus ceart.
N: Níl aon leithscéal againn anois mar chuamar tríd na rialacha go léir agus ta siad againn sa dialann.
L: Má thuigeann tusa an rial, nuair a fheiceann tú an focal, tá a fhios agat an bhfeiceann sé ceart nó mícheart.

C: After a while you don’t have to think, it is in your head
R: Now we know the rules and how to correct ourselves. We are not just guessing. We know what is incorrect and correct.
N: We have no excuse now because we went through all the rules and we have them in the diary.
L: When you understand the rule you are able to look at the word and you know if looks correct or incorrect
Focus groups: group work, COP

É: Ní chaithfidh tú gach rud a dhéanamh tú féin. Tá tú in ann píosa amháin a dhéanamh. Foghlaimíonn tú é níos fearr. Tá sé níos deise

R: Dá ndéarfadh Seán ‘cúpla daoine’ céard a tharlódh?
T: Cheartódh daoine eile sa rang é.
R: An gcuirfeadh sé isteach ort?
T: No. Just cuireann sé leis na rudaí atá foghlaamtha agat

É: You don’t have to do everything yourself. You can do one piece. You learn it better. It is nicer.

R: If Seán said ‘a couple of peoples’ what would happen?
T: Someone else in the class would correct him.
R: Would that upset you?
T: No. It just adds to the things that you have learned.
Limitations

- Small sample size
- High percentile score of class on TGD-R
- Absence of free-production task
- Ceiling effect of test
- Time of year
- Dummy items
Findings

• improvement in mean achievement from pre to post-test stage highly statistically significant
• post 1 and post 2 scores not statistically different
• Irish Grammar Test proved reliable and valid
• No difference in the mean scores of males and females on the IGT
• Learning had taken place in an enjoyable way
• COP, positive learning environment
References


References


