

## **Ceisteanna faoi Theagasc agus Mheasúnú na Gaeilge sa tSraith Shinsearach**

Plécháipéis freagartha do dhá thuarascáil taighde de chuid an CNCM

arna réiteach

don Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

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## Ceisteanna faoi Theagasc agus Mheasúnú na Gaeilge sa tSraith Shinsearach

### 1. Réamhrá

Is plécháipéis í seo ag freagairt do dhá thuarascáil taighde a choimisiúnaigh An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta chun scrúdú a dhéanamh ar aon tionchar féideartha a d'imir na leasuithe ar shiollabas Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta a cuireadh i bhfeidhm i 2012 ar ghnóthachtáil scoláirí agus ar chuir chuige an teagasc agus an ullmhúcháin i gcomhair na béaltrialach : *Impact of Revised Oral Irish at Leaving Certificate Level* (Ó Curraoin et al, 2017) agus *Léargas ar thaithí, ar dhearcthaí agus ar pheirspictíochtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm i 2012 ar Bhéaltrial Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta* (Nic Eoin 2017). Pléitear torthaí an dá thuarascáil i dteannta a chéile agus tugtar faoi impleachtaí agus faoi cheisteanna a eascraíonn uathu a iniúchadh. Táthar ag súil go spreagfaidh an phlécháipéis seo tuilleadh machnaimh agus plé, ní amháin ar an mbéaltrial leasaithe ach ar ghnéithe a bhaineann le teagasc agus measúnú na teanga i gcoitinne ag an tsraith shinsearach.

### 2. Cúlra an dá staidéar taighde

Cuireadh mórathrú i bhfeidhm ar chóras measúnaithe na Gaeilge ag an tsraith shinsearach sa bhliain 2012. Bhain an t-athrú seo le dáileadh chéatadán na marcanna a bhí ag gabháil don bhéaltrial. Go go n-uige sin, bhíodh 25% ag gabháil don bhéaltrial ag an Ardleibhéal, ag an nGnáthleibhéal agus ag an mBonnleibhéal; ach i 2007, fógraíodh mórathrú in Imlitir 0042/2007 na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna ar riar agus ar dháileanna na marcanna a bhronnfaí ar an mbéaltrial i scrúdú na hArdteistiméireachta ó 2012 ar aghaidh. Sainíodh go méadófaí na marcanna don bhéaltrial ag an Ardleibhéal, ag an nGnáthleibhéal agus ag an mBonnleibhéal ó 25% go 40%. Chuige sin, laghdófaí na marcanna do chodanna eile an scrúdaithe. B'shin athrú suntasach a d'fhéadfadh mórimpleachtaí a bheith aige do chur chuige an mhúinteora agus scoláirí sa seomra ranga.

### 3. An dá staidéar taighde

D'fhonn na himpleachtaí féideartha seo a imscrúdú, choimisiúnaigh an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta dhá staidéar taighde. Thug an chéad staidéar, (*Impact of Revised Oral Irish at Leaving Certificate Level*, (Ó Curraoin et al, 2017) <sup>1</sup> faoi iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar thionchar na n-athruithe seo ar leibhéal agus ar chaighdeán gnóthachtála agus ar inniúlachtaí scríofa agus labhartha Gaeilge scoláirí ag an Ardleibhéal agus ag an nGnáthleibhéal. D'fhonn aon tionchar féideartha a mheas, rinneadh scrúdú comparáideach idir torthaí iarrthóirí Ardteistiméireachta sa Ghaeilge Gnáthleibhéal agus Ardleibhéal sa bhliain 2011, sular cuireadh na hathruithe i bhfeidhm, agus na torthaí sa bhliain 2015, trí bliana tar éis infheidhmniú na n-athruithe céanna.

Sa dara staidéar taighde, *Léargas ar thaithí, ar dhearcthaí agus ar pheirspictíochtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm i 2012 ar Bhéaltrial Ghaeilge na*

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<sup>1</sup> Staidéar A feasta

*hArdteistiméireachta* (Nic Eoin, 2017)<sup>2</sup> tugadh faoi fhiosrú a dhéanamh ar dhearcthaí agus ar pheirspictíochtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm. Rinneadh iniúchadh ar thrí mhór-réimse a bhain go dlúth leis an bpríomhcheist taighde sin. Scrúdaíodh na himpleachtaí don teagasc agus don fhoghlaim araon a bhí ag an ardú suntasach i marcanna na béaltrialach. I bhfocail eile, féachadh ar phróiseas foghlama agus sealbhaithe na teanga labhartha .í. an ‘bóthar i dtreo na Béaltrialach’ (Nic Eoin 2017:8). Sa chomhthéacs sin, rinneadh iniúchadh ar inspreagadh, ar mhúinín agus ar rannpháirteachas na scoláirí sa phróiseas foghlama agus, ina theannta sin, scrúdaíodh tionchar na leasuithe ar na straitéisí teagaisc, foghlama agus measúnaithe atá in úsáid sa seomra ranga. Chomh maith leis sin, féachadh ar dhearcthaí agus bhraistíní scoláirí agus múinteoirí araon i leith na béaltrialach mar uirlis mheasúnaithe a thástálann inniúlachtaí labhartha; agus ar an gcaoi a gcuireann an scrúdú le hinniúlachtaí sa teanga labhartha. An tríú mór-réimse a ndearnadh scagadh air ná an leas fadtéarmach a bhaineann leis an mBéaltrialail ó thaobh ábaltacht ghníomhach scoláirí páirt a ghlacadh i saol phobal na Gaeilge nó i saol an phobal teanga. Féachadh ar shealbhú na teanga labhartha (murab ionann agus an fhoghlaim i gcomhair scrúduithe) agus ar fhorbairt phríomhscileanna.

Cé go raibh fócas ar leithrigh i gceist sa dá staidéar le béim fé leith ar ghnéithe cainníochtúla (anailís ar mharcanna) i Staidéar A, agus léiriú ar shonraí cáilíochtúla agus cainníochtúla i Staidéar B (tuairimí, dearcthaí agus braistintí múinteoirí agus scoláirí); bhí cuid de na moltaí céanna á ndéanamh i bhfianaise na dtorthaí a fuarthas .

#### **4. Aidhm na plécháipéise freagartha seo**

Sa phlécháipéis seo, féachtar le torthaí agus moltaí an dá staidéar a shintéisiú nó a tharraingt le chéile agus iad a phlé. Chomh maith leis sin, tugtar spleáchadh ar impleachtaí na léargas atá foilsithe iontu do theagasc éifeachtach na teanga. Tá sé mar aidhm chomh maith céanna, díospóireacht agus plé nuálaíoch a ghiniúint agus spreagadh i measc na ngeallsealbhóirí ábhartha, maidir leis an gcur chuige reatha a bhaineann le measúnú a dhéanamh ar an teanga ó bhéal sa tSraith Shinsearach; agus a bhaineann chomh maith céanna le treo athruithe féideartha ar an nGaeilge chun tairbhe cháilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama.

#### **5. Torthaí agus moltaí comónta sa dá staidéar**

Bhí roinnt torthaí comónta sa dá staidéar.

1. Cé go spreagann an bhéaltrialail scoláirí i gcoitinne, is cúis inní dóibh líon agus méid na sraitheanna pictiúr a úsáidtear chun teanga thuairisciúil na n-iarrthóirí a thástáil. Cuirtear in iúl go mbíonn deacrachtaí acu leis an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair a bhíonn á chleachtadh mar ullmhúchán ranga do na sraitheanna pictiúr seo.

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<sup>2</sup> Staidéar B feasta

2. Tá easpa dóthain ama á lua le cuid chomhrá na trialach. Toisc go mbíonn an tsraith pictiúr agus an comhrá araon le déanamh ag iarrthóirí anois, maítear nach bhfuil a dhóthain ama tugtha don chomhrá sa triail.
3. Bhí éagothroime shuntasach agus easpa comhsheasmhachta ó thaobh dúshláin teanga agus ábhair idir pictiúir áirithe. I bhfocail eile, bhí cuid de na pictiúir níos deacra agus níos éilithí ná a chéile.
4. Ar an mórgóir, ní raibh an oiread céanna imní faoin scrúdú ar scoláirí i scoileanna a mhúineann trí mheán na Gaeilge agus a bhí ar scoláirí i scoileanna Béarla agus ar an iomlán, d'éirigh níos fearr sa bhéaltrial leis na scoláirí sna scoileanna a mhúineann trí mheán na Gaeilge.
5. Spreag an t-ardú céatadán formhór na scoláirí (60%) tabhairt faoin nGaeilge agus thaitin an t-ullmhúchán don bhéaltrial lena bhformhór acu, in ainneoin nach rabhadar sásta leis na sraitheanna pictiúir. Spreagann sé breis scoileanna le tabhairt faoin mbéaltrial roghnach ag an Teastas Sóisearach.
6. Ba í an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair bá mhó agus ba mhinicí a bhí in úsáid mar straitéis foghlama agus ullmhúcháin i gcomhair na béaltrialach agus thug 62% de mhúinteoirí nótaí réamhullmhaithe do scoláirí.
7. Is í an easpa deiseanna an Ghaeilge a úsáid lasmuigh den scoil an chonstaic is mó roimh ullmhúchán don bhéaltrial.
8. Ó thaobh cháilíocht Ghaeilge labhartha agus scríofa scoláirí de, tá fianaise áirithe ann i sonraí na scrúduithe nach raibh cumas scoláirí sa ghramadach agus sa chruinneas imleor a dhóthain agus bhí sé sin amhlaidh sna scoileanna Béarla ach go háirithe.
9. Tá fianaise ann leis, ar an mórgóir, nach gcuireann an bhéaltrial mar atá sí faoi láthair chomh mór sin le hinniúlacht fhadtéarmach labhartha na scoláirí. I bhfocail eile, níl aon fianaise ann go *sealbhaíonn* siad an teanga dá barr. Tá sé seo fíor i gcás scoláirí sna scoileanna Béarla ach go háirithe. Tá sé suimiúil áfach gur cuireadh in iúl i Staidéar B nach í an Bhéaltrial féin amháin is cúis leis seo, ach an easpa deiseanna atá ann pé Gaeilge atá acu a úsáid sa ghnáthshaol ina maireann siad.

10. Ar an iomlán, bíodh is go samhlaítear dúshláin áirithe leis an tsraith pictiúr mar atá imlínithe thuas, fós féin, bhí formhór mór múinteoirí (81%) agus scoláirí (90%) den tuairim go dtugann cuid chomhrá na trialach deis do scoláirí a scileanna agus inniúlachtaí labhartha a chur in iúl don scrúdaitheoir. Is díol suntais é, áfach, go rabhthas cáinteach i dtaobh "... an ghiorracht ama, an ghríosacht chun foghlama de ghlanmheabhair chomh maith le hintuarthacht agus cúinge ábhar na gceisteanna a cuireadh sa chomhrá" (Staidéar B, lch.19).

Tá moltaí áirithe comónta sa dá staidéar ag eascairt ó na torthaí taighde seo:

- Go bhféachfar le níos mó comhsheasmhachta a chinntiú ó thaobh chaighdeán agus cháilíocht teanga de idir na sraitheanna áirithe pictiúr, i dtreo is nach mbeadh aon mhíbhuntáiste i gceist, dá roghnódh iarrthóir sraith áirithe a atá níos dúshlánaí ná cinn eile ó thaobh ábhair agus teanga de.
- Tá gá le féachaint in athuair ar fhad ama na béaltrialach, d'fhonn breis ama a thabhairt do chuid an chomhrá.
- Is béaltrialach chomónta atá ann anois don Ghnáthleibhéal agus don Ardleibhéal ach moltar go bhféachfar le hiniúchadh a dhéanamh ar fhéidearthachtaí maidir le trialacha éagsúla a chur ar fáil chun riaradh ar riachtanais scoláirí i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla agus le cúlraí difriúla teangeolaíochta. Moltar go bhfuil gá le dúshlán cuí a sholáthar do scoláirí dara teanga Ardleibhéil agus Gnáthleibhéil agus do scoláirí scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge agus scoláirí a bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar chéad teanga acu.
- Léirítear buairt i Staidéar A faoin líon mór scoláirí nach n-oireann an soláthar reatha dóibh agus faoin tionchar féideartha fadsaoil a d'fhéadfadh bheith i gceist lena leithéid: " At the same time there is another very large cohort of students at the opposite end of the scale with a very limited level of understanding and fluency in the language and yet very many of this cohort of students have a positive attitude and goodwill towards the language. For many of these weaker students the oral examination, as presently constituted, could be an entirely negative experience. This experience, coming at the end of their second level schooling, could colour their attitude towards the Irish Language in later life. This report recommends that the current practice of having a common oral examination at both Higher and Ordinary Level be reviewed" (lch 60).

Éilíonn na torthaí a fuarthas sa dá staidéar agus na moltaí breis machnaimh agus plé, ní amháin ar impleachtaí an mhórathraithe ar an gcuiraclam Gaeilge ach ar threochtaí agus ar

dhúshláin reatha a bhaineann le teagasc agus measúnú na Gaeilge ag an tSraith Shinsearach, mar a phléifear sa chuid eile den pháipéar seo.

## **6. An bhfuil athrú ar ghnóthachtaíil scoláirí sa Ghaeilge ó cuireadh na hathruithe i bhfeidhm?**

Níl aon fhianaise mhillteanach, láidir, shoiléir go bhfuil athrú intomhaiste suntasach tagtha ar ghnóthachtaíil scoláirí sa Ghaeilge ó cuireadh na hathruithe i bhfeidhm. Ní mór bheith ríchúramach agus tagairt á déanamh againn do chúrsaí gnóthachtála agus caighdeáin. Cé go bhfeidhmíonn scrúdú náisiúnta na hArdeistiméireachta mar thagarmharc do ghnóthachtaíil normthagartha scoláirí, bliain tar éis bliana, níl aon fhianaise go bhfuil na torthaí foghlama a bhaintear amach de bharr an scrúdaithe sin sa Ghaeilge leabaithe in aon chomhchreat níos leithne mar an Fráma Tagartha Comónta do Theangacha, nó *The Languages Ladder*, cuir i gcás, le go mbeifí in ann an iniúlacht a bhaintear amach a chur i gcomparáid agus a cheangal le leibhéal eile i gcomhchreat oibiachtúil.<sup>3</sup> Dá mbeadh sé sin amhlaidh, d'fhéadfaí plé bailí struchtúrtha a bhunú ar athruithe féideartha sa ghnóthachtaíil.

Bíodh sin is uile, tar éis comparáid a dhéanamh i Staidéar A idir torthaí 2011 agus 2015, níor léiríodh go raibh aonmhór athrú suntasach chun feabhais nó chun donais le tabhairt faoi deara. Cé go bhfuil mionathruithe staitisticiúla le sonrú ar threo na marcanna a bronnadh ar na scileanna éagsúla do chodanna éagsúla an scrúdaithe, ní léir, mar sin féin go raibh aon mhórathrú tathagach suntasach i gceist.

Tá macalla inspéise anseo do staidéar Ní Mhaoinigh (2013) a thug faoi staidéar agus anailís chomparáideach den chineál céanna a dhéanamh ar thionchar ardú chéadatán na marcanna ar chaighdeán Gaeilge scoláirí. Bhí an toradh céanna ar a staidéar siúd. Tar éis di scoláirí Ardteistiméireachta 2011 agus 2012 (agus iad ina mic léinn chéad bhliana ollscoile) a chur faoi scrúdú caighdeánaithe Gaeilge, féachaint ar imir an t-ardú céatadán aon tionchar chun feabhais ar scoláirí 2012, nochtáíodh nach raibh i gceist idir an dá chóhort ach fíorbheagán difríochta sa bhéaltrial agus gur éirigh níos fearr fiú le grúpa 2011 sa chluastuiscint.

I bhfianaise an dá staidéar sin le chéile, ní móide gur féidir a áiteamh go bhfuil aon róthionchar suntasach ag na leasaithe ar mharcanna atá fabhrúil do labhairt na Gaeilge ar ghnóthachtaíil scoláirí.

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<sup>3</sup> Níl aon fhianaise oibiachtúil ann faoi láthair a léiríonn cén leibhéal go baileach a bhaineann scoláirí na hÉireann amach sa Ghaeilge ar an CEFR.

## 7. Cleachtais Reatha

Is foinsí inspéise iad an dá thuarascáil do léargais ar na cleachtais reatha a bhaineann le teagasc agus measúnú na Gaeilge ag an tsraith shinsearach. Is léir ó shonraí an dá thuarascáil go bhfuil trí dhúshlán mhóra<sup>4</sup> i gceist:

1. Cleachtais a bhaineann leis an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair;
2. Raon na n-uirlisí agus na dtascanna measúnaithe atá á n-úsáid;
3. Aitheantas a thabhairt do chomhthéacsanna teangeolaíochta éagsúla fhoghlaim na Gaeilge

Scrúdófar na dúshláin seo sa chuid eile den phlécháipéis seo.

## 8. An fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair

Tugadh léargas an-soiléir i Staidéar B ar cé chomh forleathan is atá an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair mar straitéis ag i measc scoláirí agus iad ag ullmhú don bhéaltriall. Leagadh an-bhéim ar nótaí réamhullmhaithe agus ar an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair. Dar le Nic Eoin: “Tá an meon seo ag cothú cultúir agus cur chuige nach dtagann leis an mbéim atá ann go hidirnáisiúnta ar thábhacht na foghlama féin-riar i bpróiseas an tsealbhaithe teanga. Ardaíonn sé seo mórcheist faoi aidhm na foghlama teanga i gcoitinne, idir shealbhú teanga agus foghlaim dara teanga” (lch 73).

Is í aidhm mhúineadh na Gaeilge mar dhara teanga ná cur ar chumas an scoláire an teanga a shealbhú. Is í aidhm mhúineadh na Gaeilge mar chéad teanga ná an teanga atá sealbhaithe cheana féin a shaibhriú agus a fhorbairt a thuilleadh. Is mar dhara theanga a dhéanann formhór mór scoláirí staidéar ar an nGaeilge. I gcás na scoláirí seo, ar an mórghóir, ní chabhraíonn an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair le sealbhú na Gaeilge mar dhara teanga. Má fhoghlaimíonn scoláire ar bith slamaice de ghlanmheabhair faoi cheann de na sraitheanna pictiúr nó aiste nó freagra réamhullmhaithe ar an téacs litríochta, is cineál “cur i gcéill” é ar shlí. I ngan fhios dó féin, tá sé ag ligean air go bhfuil an teanga sealbhaithe aige nuair nach bhfuil i ndáiríre. Chun an teanga a shealbhú, ní foláir go ndéanfadh an scoláire a chuid féin den teanga. I bhfocail eile, ní mór dó a chuid abairtí féin a chumadh. Beidh na habairtí seo ciotach, bearnach agus lochtach ag tús phróiseas an tsealbhaithe, ach de réir a chéile, rachaidh na codanna teanga atá á sealbhú idir ainmfhocail agus briathra isteach sa chuimhne fhadtéarmach, áit ina stóráltar iad. Ar fheiceáil sraith pictiúr ar bith, mar sin, nó ag labhairt faoi rud ar bith i gcuid ar bith den chomhrá nó ag scríobh aiste faoi rud ar bith, ní bhíonn le déanamh ag an scoláire ach an teanga chuige sin a aisghabháil ón gcuimhne fhadtéarmach. Mar sin, dá mbeadh an teanga sealbhaithe seachas foghlamtha, d’fhéadfadh aiste ar bith

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<sup>4</sup> Níltear ag diriú anseo ach ar ghnéithe den teagasc agus den fhoghlaim a raibh léiriú orthu sa dá thuarascáil taighde. Níl plé déanta anseo ar ghnéithe fíorthábhachtacha eile mar an t-aischothú ceartaitheach, FCÁT (an Fhoghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhair agus Teanga), ról an mhúinteora, forbairt na litearthachta sa dara teanga, etc., feic Harris agus Ó Duibhir (2011). Ní scrúdaítear ról an FCT ach oiread anseo.



bheith ar an scrúdpháipéar nó sraith ar bith pictiúir nach mbeadh feicthe roimh ré agus bheadh ar chumas an scoláire scríobh faoi nó labhairt faoi.

An gcaitheann scoláirí na Gaeilge mar dhara teanga an iomarca ama agus an iomarca dua mar sin ag foghlaim slamaicí de ghlanmheabhair nuair ba thairbhí go mór dóibh bheith ag cumadh a gcuid abairtí féin? Má bhíonn an teanga curtha de ghanmheabhair seachas sealbhaithe, méadaítear ar imní an scoláirí agus é ag súil go dtiocfaidh an aiste atá foghlama de ghlanmheabhair aige aníos ar an scrúdpháipéar nó nach bhfaighidh sé an tsraith pictiúr sin nach bhfuil ar bharr a theanga aige ag an mbéaltrial.

Ní hionann sin is a rá nach bhfuil ról ag an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair i sealbhú an dara teanga. Tá ról ag an gcuimhne i sealbhú an dara teanga. Beidh gá i gcónaí le hainmfhocail, nathanna, patrúin agus gnéithe eile den teanga a chur de ghlanmheabhair. Ach caithfear ceist a chur faoi fhiúntas *abairtí iomlána nó ailt iomlána* bheith á gcur de ghanmheabhair mar nach dtugann a leithéid de chleachtas deis don scoláire a chuid féin a dhéanamh den teanga. Ní mholtar an cleachtas seo fiú má thuigeann an scoláire an bhrí a bhaineann leis an slamaice, mar ní ón scoláire féin a thagann sé agus stórálfar sa chuimhne ghearrthéarmach, seachas sa chuimhne fhadtéarmach é, áit a bhfuil na próisis shealbhaithe ag feidhmiú

D'fhéadadh an smutánáil nó *chunking* mar a thugtar air cabhrú leis an sealbhú teanga má thugtar faoi anailís ar an teanga sa smután atá foghlamtha de ghlanmheabhair (Myles et al, 1998; Clark, 2016). Ciallaíonn sé seo go bhféadfadh an foghlaimeoir foirmlí, patrúin, nathanna, abairtí foirmleacha agus araile a chur de ghlanmheabhair, ach chun tairbhe a bhaint as sin, ní mór cabhrú leis an bhfoghlaimeoir miondealú a dhéanamh ar an teanga atá foghlama ó thaobh na gramadaí de, ó thaobh nathanna de, ó thaobh foirmlí de agus ó thaobh foclóra de. I bhfocail eile, tugtar deis don fhoghlaimeoir dul siar ar an smután atá foghlama chun gnéithe de teanga a aithint ann agus tátail a bhaint astu. Dar le Dörnyei, (2009) d'fhéadfadh na smutáin cabhrú leis an sealbhú teanga mar go mbíonn sraith focal a théann le chéile go coitianta stóráilte le chéile, agus mar sin, nach gá don duine rialacha a chur i bhfeidhm gach uair is mian leis an abairt sin a chumadh nó focail san abairt a aisghabháil.

Ach ar an iomlán, ní mholtar an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair mar dhea-chleachtas. Is mór idir eolas atá foghlama a choinneáil sa chuimhne (*retention*) agus a eolas atá foghlamtha a aistriú ón gcuimhne chun fadhbhanna a réiteach (*transfer*) (Mayer, 2002) ó thaobh fhorbairt na scileanna cognaíocha de. Ní bhaineann an chuimhne ach le próiseas amháin de na próisis chognaíocha atá i gceist san fhoghlaim fad is atá próisis thábhachta eile i gceist mar phróiseas an tuisceana, an fheidhmithe, an anailisithe, an mheasúnaithe agus na cruthaitheachta.

Ní mór ceisteanna a ardú faoi fhiúntas na foghlama de ghlanmheabhair mar straitéis ullmhúcháin don bhéaltrial agus do na scrúduithe.

## 9. An sealbhú teanga sa seomra ranga

Muna gcabhraíonn an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair mar chleachtas le sealbhú an dara teanga a éascú, an bhfuil cleachtais ann atá éifeachtach chun an sealbhú a chinntiú? Cuirtear béim mhór ar ionchur agus aschur sa taighde comhaimseartha ar shealbhú an dara teanga (Antonova Ünlü & Wei, 2016; Meisel, 2011). Ciallaíonn sé seo go gcaithfidh foghlaimeoir a oiread deiseanna agus is féidir bheith aige an dara teanga a shú isteach agus a labhairt agus a scríobh chun í a shealbhú i gceart. Nuair a thógtar duine i bpobal a bhfuil teanga ar leith á labhairt thart timpeall air, bíonn go leor ionchur saibhir agus go leor deiseanna aschuir aige sa teanga i réimse leathan comhthéacsanna éagsúla. Ach ní hamhlaidh an scéal maidir leis an bhfoghlaimeoir nó an scoláire dara teanga sa seomra ranga, mar a mbíonn níos lú ama i gceist agus easpa nádúrthacht an tsealbhaithé i gceist. Maíonn Singleton & Ryan ina leith seo (2004:115): "L2 exposure-time involved in studies focusing on formal learning situations never approaches that involved in long-term naturalistic studies". I bhfocail eile, níl foghlaim na teanga sa seomra ranga inchomparáide i ndáiríre le sealbhú nádúrtha na teanga lasmuigh de.

Cabhraíonn na heilimintí seo a leanas leis an sealbhú teanga a chur cinn sa seomra ranga áfach:

1. An fhíorchumarsáid
2. An fheasacht teanga agus an fhéinfheasacht mar fhoghlaimeoir

Agus nádúrthacht aiceanta bhailí an phobal teanga in easnamh sa seomra ranga, ní mór pobal teanga a chruthú ann trí dheiseanna don fhíorchumarsáid agus cur chuige tascbhunaithe cumarsáideach (Ellis 2003; Robinson 2011) a chur ar fáil. Is úsáideoir féideartha teanga gach scoláire sa seomra ranga. Sin é an bunús teoiriciúil atá le siollabas reatha na hArdteiste agus le Sonrúcháin Ghaeilge nua na Sraithe Sóisearaí. Mar sin, ní mór an chumarsáid bheith chun cinn i gcónaí chun cumas cumarsáide scoláirí a fhorbairt. Cuimsíonn cumas cumarsáide inniúlachtaí, ábaltacht agus máistreacht an scoláire sna cúig scileanna teanga: éisteacht, léamh, labhairt, idirghníomhú cainte agus scríobh, scileanna atá ag teastáil uaidh chun cumarsáid a dhéanamh le húsáideoirí eile. Bíonn an teanga spontáineach mar aschur le linn na cumarsáide má chuirtear chuige i gceart agus cé go ndéanann scoláirí cleachtadh ar an teanga (scafall) is chun críche deiridh na cumarsáide é.

Tá béim i sonrúcháin na Sraithe Sóisearaí nua, ní amháin ar an gcumarsáid, ach ar an bhfeasacht teanga agus ar fhéinfheasacht an fhoghlaimeora chomh maith. Nuair a chumann scoláirí a gcuid abairtí/teanga féin seachas teanga atá foghlamtha de ghlanmheabhair, bíonn botúin agus easnaimh ann go minic i ngeall ar an idirtheanga (trasnaíl ón mBéarla). Léirigh Staidéar A (Ich.59) go raibh cruinneas agus gramadach na n-iarrthóirí Ardteiste lag go leor. Ach chun cabhrú le sealbhú an chruinnis, ní mór don scoláire gnéithe na teanga nach bhfuil inchomparáide leis an mBéarla (foclóir, gramadach, comhréir agus foghraíocht) a thabhairt faoi deara. Tugtar an fheasacht teanga air seo. Glactar leis anois gur gá d'fhoghlaimeoirí díriú ar fhoirmeacha na sprioctheanga má tá siad chun an teanga a shealbhú i gcomhthéacs na

scoile. <sup>5</sup>Is cuid de shealbhú teanga sealbhú na gramadaí, na comhréire agus an chruinnis. Sealbhaítear na gnéithe seo tríd an tabhairt faoi deara agus tríd an airdeall nó an fheasacht agus tríd an machnamh (bheith san airdeall i leith na ndifríochtaí idir córas an Bhéarla agus córas teangeolaíoc na Gaeilge). Is í trasnaíl na hidirtheanga (meascán den Bhéarla agus den Ghaeilge) is cúis le botúin is easpa cruinnis. Ach moltar spás agus deiseanna a chur ar fáil do scoláirí dul i ngleic leis an easpa cruinnis agus le deacrachtaí gramadaí. Tuigeann siad, mar shampla, cúiseanna earráidí trí chodarsnacht chórasach a dhéanamh idir an Ghaeilge agus Béarla nó idir Gaeilge agus teangacha eile.

Tá tábhacht faoi leith chomh maith ag baint leis an bhféinfheasacht mar fhoghlaimoir i bpróisis an tsealbhaíthe sa seomra ranga. Moltar deis a thabhairt don scoláire dul i ngleic leis na deiseanna a bhaineann leis an bhfoghlaim fhéinriartha. Trí idirghníomhú leis an múinteoir agus lena chomhscoláirí agus trí mhachnamh a dhéanamh, fásann tuiscint an scoláire air féin mar fhoghlaimoir teanga. Cuireann sé aithne de réir a chéile ar a chuid straitéisí foghlama agus ar a stíl phearsanta foghlama. Trí thascanna éagsúla teanga a chur i gcrích, tuigeann an scoláire na réimsí ar a bhfuil feabhas tagtha maidir lena úsáid teanga, na gnéithe ina bhfuil breis feabhsúcháin ag teastáil agus conas tabhairt faoin bhfeabhsúchán sin.

Má fhanar taobh go hiomlán leis an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair, mar sin, ní thabharfar na deiseanna cuí don scoláire chun cumarsáid a dhéanamh, chun an fheasacht teanga agus an fhéinfheasacht mar fhoghlaimoir a chothú ann féin. Ní mór an cheist seo bheith á hardú agus á plé amach anseo ag na geallshealbhóirí a bhfuil baint acu leis an nGaeilge sa tSraith Shinsearach.

#### **10. Raon na n-uirlisí agus na dtascanna measúnaithe atá in úsáid**

Más maith linn bheith ar ár n-airdeall faoin easpa tairbhe a bhaineann leis an bhfoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair, ní mór ceist a ardú faoi na huirlisí agus na tascanna measúnaithe atá in úsáid againn i dtástáil scileanna labhartha agus scríofa. Ní bhíonn an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair i gceist an oiread sin mar straitéis ullmhúcháin i gcomhair na scileanna eile, (an éisteacht agus an léitheoireacht) seachas na scileanna ginchumais, labhairt agus scríobh. Ach i gcás na teanga labhartha agus scríofa, bheadh sé iomhola gan uirlisí nó tascanna measúnaithe a úsáid a spreagann an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair. D'fhéadfaí a áiteamh go spreagann an aiste thraidisiúnta an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair, mar shampla. Ach tá raon tascanna ceapadóireachta eile seachas an aiste a bhféadfaí leas a bhaint astu chun an teanga scríofa a mheas.

Tá sé mar an gcéanna i gcás na béaltrialach. Mar atá léirithe ag Maunsell (2009), tá gá le réimse beart agus modhanna éagsúla chun an chaint a mhealladh as na hiarrthóirí agus tá

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<sup>5</sup> Feic obair eiseamláireach Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017; Ó Duibhir, Ní Dhiorbháin, & Cosgrove (2017) sa réimse seo

neart cuir chuige eile seachas an comhrá chuige sin (Hughes 1998; Underhill 1993, etc.). Cuireann Maunsell (2009) síos ar mhúnlaí éagsúla an agallaimh (an comhrá) atá in úsáid sa bhéaltrialach díreach agus mhol sé go mba chóir go n-úsáidfí raon nó réimse níos éagsúla de bhearta láithreoireachta agus de mhodhanna oibre chun an chaint a mhealladh as na hiarrthóirí le linn na béaltrialach Gaeilge "... ionas go mbeadh réimse feidhmeanna teanga á dtabhairt faoi mheas agus léargas níos fírinne a fháil ar an gcumas cumarsáide 'dáiríre'." (Maunsell 2009: 16).

De réir an dá staidéar seo, tá an chuma ar an scéal go bhfuil an tsraith pictiúr seo ag cothú faidhbe i ngeall ar í bheith feicthe agus ullmhaithe roimh ré. Spreagann sraith pictiúr atá feicthe roimh ré an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair. Tá sé suimiúil go léirítear i Staidéar B nár chothaigh na sraitheanna pictiúr an imní chéanna i measc scoláirí Gaelcholáistí agus scoileanna Gaeltachta. I gcás an Ghaelcholáiste agus na scoile Gaeltachta, i ngeall ar líofacht na scoláirí, ní raibh an modh foghlama de ghlanmheabhair chomh leitheadúil céanna. Bhí sé seo amhlaidh toisc go bhféadfadh go raibh ar chumas na scoláirí seo caint a dhéanamh go spontáineach ar na pictiúir toisc an teanga bheith sealbhaithe nó geall le bheith sealbhaithe acu.

Moltar i Staidéar A uirlis mheasúnaithe eile seachas an tsraith phictiúr a úsáid (lch. 61). D'fhéadfadh an tsraith pictiúr bheith ina huirlis bhailí chun cumas an scoláire labhairt go spontáineach faoina bhfuil le feiceáil ann, muna dtugtar an pictiúr dó chun é a ullmhú roimh ré. Tá sé suimiúil go bhfuair Ní Laoire (2015) amach i staidéar taighde a rinne sí ar dhearcadh múinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge i leith an tsiollabais nuashonraithe gur theastaigh ó fhormhór acu, (67.4%) nach mbeadh an tsraith pictiúr feicthe roimh ré. Níor aontaigh ach mionlach de na múinteoirí seo go bhfuil fiúntas ag baint le líon na sraitheanna pictiúr (21%) agus d'eesaontaigh móramh (62.8%) ina leith (Ní Laoire 2015: 89). Ar an ábhar sin, bhí an moladh seo a leanas déanta aici ag deireadh na tuarascála: "Ba cheart gearradh siar ar líon na sraitheanna pictiúr má táthar chun cloí leis an gcóras reatha. Ó thaobh deachleachtas de, a bhfuil bunús faoi sa teangeolaíocht fheidhmeach, níor chóir go bhfeicfí na sraitheanna roimh ré, ionas go mbeadh iarrthóirí ag labhairt Gaeilge go nádúrtha seachas bheith ag déanamh athrá ar ábhar a bheadh foghlamtha de ghlanmheabhair acu" (Ní Laoire 2015:98).

Tá fianaise láidir go háirithe i Staidéar B go bhfuil cur siar (*washback*) i gceist i gcás na béaltrialach í. Imríonn sé tionchar láidir ar eispéireas scoláirí sa seomra ranga. Caitheann ceisteanna a chur mar sin faoi fhiúntas an chineál teagaisc atá dírithe go hiomlán ar an triail nó an teagasc triaildhírthe (Hughes 2003; Alderson & Wall 1993) agus tionchar diúltach a d'fhéadfadh sé imirt ar an sealbhú teanga a chur san áireamh i gcónaí.

Tá faictéirí eile a chaithfear a chur san áireamh chomh maith maidir le béaltriallach agus uirlisí measúnaithe béaltriallach a dhearadh agus a roghnú. Ní mór cuspóirí, téarmaíocht agus cur chuige na tástála labhartha bheith iomchuí agus soiléir (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; McNamara 1996).

Ní sé chomh furasta sin ar ndóigh tástáil atá iomlán iontaofa agus bailí a dhéanamh ar inniúlachtaí labhartha sa dara teanga (Bygate, 2009:413; Roca-Varde & Palacios, 2013). Tá sainmhiniú inspéise tugtha ag Cox (2017:85) ar an inniúlacht labhartha mar seo a leanas: "...the ability to use a language to communicate meaningful information in a spontaneous interaction, and in a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language". Ach d'fhéadfadh sé bheith níos casta ná sin. Ní mór i dtosach tuiscint chruinn bheith againn ar a bhfuil i gceist le hinniúlacht teanga sa chéad áit agus ar na difríochtaí a mhaireann idir inniúlachtaí áirithe. Ní mór cáilíocht na teanga agus cainníocht na teanga a chur san áireamh (Hulstijn, 2007). Chuige seo, tá géarghá le tasc bailí a úsáid chun an inniúlacht teanga a thomhas mar imríonn an tasc a úsáidtear ar an gcineál teanga agus inniúlachtaí is gá chun é a chomhlíonadh, mar a mheabhraíonn Bygate (2009:414) dúinn: "...tasks influence the language used, and so to appraise students' language we first need to understand the linguistic demands of our tasks". Ní mór aird a thabhairt, ní amháin ar cháilíocht na teanga (the repertoire) ach ar na coinníollacha inar ndéantar scrúdú ar an teanga féin (ról idirghábhlaíthe -an scrúdaitheora san áireamh). Caithfear féachaint chuige nach n-imríonn an teanga scríofa an iomarca tionchar ar roghnú na dtuairiscíní gnóthachtála atá in úsáid againn (Hughes 2003).

Cé nach raibh aon mhórdhifríocht i Staidéar A idir ghnóthachtáil scoláirí sna scoileanna ar fad a bhí rannpháirteach (scoileanna Bhéarla agus scoileanna Ian-Ghaeilge); léiríodh i Staidéar B go raibh difríochtaí áirithe le sonrú maidir le dearchtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na bealtriallach i scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla agus scoileanna Ián-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta. Ní mór, mar sin, breis machnaimh agus plé a dhéanamh, ní amháin ar éifeacht na béaltriallach comónta (ar ardaíodh mórcheisteanna faoi sa dá thuarascáil) ach ní mór iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na torthaí foghlama agus ar na cuir chuige teagaisc agus measúnachta i gcoitinne atá in úsáid ag an tsraith shinsearach, faisnéis an eolais san áireamh.

## **11. Aitheantas a thabhairt do chomhthéacsanna éagsúla teangeolaíochta éagsúla fhoghlaim na Gaeilge**

Ní mór plé cuimsitheach a bheith ag geallshealbhóirí Ghaeilge na Sraithe Sinsearaí chun tógaint go córasach agus go comhleanúnach ar an tionscnamh nuálach curaclaim a bhfuil tús curtha leis sa Sraith Shóisearach, áit a bhfuil sonrúcháin ar leith ann do scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla agus trí mhéan na Gaeilge faoi seach.

Chomh fada siar le 2003 i dtuarascáil taighde don Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (CNCM), mhol Little go mba chóir go mbeadh siollabais ar leithrigh do Ghaeilge T1 agus Gaeilge T2 ar fáil do scoláirí agus d'áitigh sé go raibh scoláirí i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán iontu thíos leis, toisc go rabhadar ag gabháil do shiollabas dara teanga: "...the continued insistence on a single syllabus for native and non-native speakers of the language, Irish-medium and English-medium students, achieves the worst of both worlds, offering the minority of native speakers and Irish-medium students what is effectively a foreign language syllabus" (Little 2003: 9).

Táthar ag díriú le roinnt blianta anuas ar na dúshláin atá roimh scoileanna Gaeltachta; ina measc: an éagsúlacht teangeolaíochta i measc na scoláirí agus an meath ar úsáid agus inniúlacht na Gaeilge i measc na bhfoghlaimoirí (Mac Donnacha et al, 2005; Ó Giollagáin et al, 2007, Péterváry et al, 2014). Ach sa *Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030* (Rialtas na hÉireann 2010) agus sna próisis pleanála teanga atá ar bun faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, tá tábhacht faoi leith á samhlú le ról na scoileanna Gaeltachta i gcothú na hinniúlachta agus na húsáide Gaeilge chun tacú leis an teanga sa phobal Gaeltachta i gcoitinne. Sa *Pholasáí Oideachas don Ghaeltacht 2017-2022* (ROS, 2016), cuirtear béim ar an ról lárnach atá ag an gcuraclam don Ghaeilge sa tacú "...le forbairt ar inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge i measc na bhfoghlaimoirí agus na gcainteoirí dúchais i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus i measc na scoláirí san earnáil a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge i gcoitinne" (ROS, 2016). Moltar curaclam Ghaeilge a áiríonn torthaí foghlama do scoláirí i scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge atá difriúil leis na cinn i scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla. An buntáiste a bhainfeadh lena leithéid ná ionchais a ardú d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge agus "...tacú le soláthar eispéireas foghlama teanga saibhrithe do na scoláirí uile i scoileanna Gaeltachta, go háirithe iad siúd atá ina gcainteoirí dúchais Gaeilge" (ibid). Luaitear na sonrúcháin idirdhealaithe a ullmhaíodh don tsraith shóisearach agus déantar trácht ar an obair atá le déanamh chun sonrúcháin idirdhealaithe a chur ar fáil sa tsraith shinsearach. Luaitear go dtosóidh obair ar shonrúcháin idirdhealaithe T1 agus T2 a fhorbairt don Ghaeilge nuair a bheidh na sonrúcháin idirdhealaithe don Ghaeilge sa tsraith shóisearach forbartha agus iad ag obair go maith sna scoileanna. Ar aon dul leis an tsraith shóisearach, beidh ar scoileanna atá aitheanta mar scoileanna Gaeltachta an sonrúchán curaclaim T1 a chur ar fáil dá scoláirí agus spreagadh do líon níos mó scoláirí rogha an tsonrúcháin T1 a dhéanamh.

Mar sin is mithid tús a chur le plé chun aghaidh a thabhairt ar na mórcheisteanna, ina measc:

1. Conas a thabharfar faoi fhorbairt a thionscnamh ar shonrúcháin idirdhealaithe na Sraithe Sóisearaí ag an tSraith Shinsearach ionas gur féidir comhleanúnachas a dheimhniú idir sonrúcháin na Sraithe Sóisearaí agus na Sraithe Sinsearaí?

2. Cén taighde is gá a dhéanamh chun forbairt an chomhleanúnachais seo a chinntiú. Ní gá tabhairt faoi thaighde úr chuige seo mar gur féidir leas a bhaint as na léargais atá curtha ar fáil cheana féin ag staidéir ábhartha náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta.
3. Cad iad riachtanais na ngeallshealbhóirí uile: scoláirí, múinteoirí, tuismitheoirí, pobal na Gaeilge, an breisoideachas agus an t-ardoideachas?
4. Conas a dhéanfar forbairt ar uirlisí measúnaithe chun torthaí foghlama a mheas ag an tsraith shinsearach, an bhéaltrial san áireamh?
5. Cad iad na torthaí foghlama a bheidh i gceist agus á scrúdú sa bhéaltrial agus cad é an raon tascanna measúnaithe a úsáidfear? An é caighdeán agus cineál teanga an chainteora dhúchais amháin a úsáidfear mar shlat tomhais sa bhéaltrial nó an úsáidfear slat tomhais an chainteora mhaith dara teanga chomh maith?
6. Cad iad na critéir chumais agus inniúlachta a mbeifear ag dréim leo ag an tSraith Shinsearach agus conas a rachaidh siad chun tairbhe phobal na Gaeilge?
7. Conas a dhéanfar forbairt ar Ghaeilge na sraithe sinsearaí ag cur ilteangachas agus trasteangú san áireamh?

## **12. Conclúid**

Ní léir go bhfuil aon mhóráthru ar ghnóthachtáil sa Ghaeilge de bharr na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm 2012. Tugann an dá thuarascáil léargas ar chuid de na dúshláin a bhaineann le comhthéacs reatha churaclam na Gaeilge sa tsraith shinsearach. Tá léiriú ann ar chuid de na cleachtais reatha teagaisc agus foghlama agus ar dhifríochtaí idir na cleachtais agus na dearchthaí i leith na trialach ag múinteoirí agus scoláirí idir na scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge agus na scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla.

Ardaíonn an dá thuarascáil taighde roinnt ceisteanna faoi theagasc agus faoi mheasúnú na Gaeilge ag an tsraith shinsearach atá pléite anseo: an fhoghlaim de ghlanmheabhair, an raon tascanna atá in úsáid sa mheasúnú agus comhthéacsanna agus cúlraí éagsúla teangeolaíochta scoláirí. Ní mór aghaidh a thabhairt ar na ceisteanna seo agus breis plé agus machnaimh a dhéanamh orthu. Is mithid i gcomhthéacs an pholasaí oideachais don Ghaeltacht agus na pleanála teanga plé a dhéanamh ar na riachtanais agus ar na cuir chuige a bhaineann le múineadh na Gaeilge i scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge agus i scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla.

Molann an dá thuarascáil taighde athruithe ar fhormáid agus ar chuige na béaltrialach. Ach d'fhéadfadh gur athruithe eatramha a bheadh ina leithéid mar ní mór sonraíochtaí úra a fhorbairt do mhúineadh na Gaeilge do scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge agus do na scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla agus iad a bheith réidh le cur i bhfeidhm don chohórt reatha scoláirí atá ag gabháil don chlár nua ag an tSraith Shóisearach agus a

bheidh ag tabhairt faoin tSraith Shinsearach sa bhliain 2020. Toisc go bhfuil amlíne agus spriocam an-docht i gceist, arbh fhearr dul ag obair ar na hathruithe seo laistigh den fhráma agus de na forbairtí athleasaithe agus athnuachana fadtéarmacha a bhainfeadh le sonraíochtaí comhleanúnacha ón tSraith Shóisearacha a chur ar fáil don Ghaeilge ag an tSraith Shinsearach? Tugaimis faoin bplé seo le fonn agus le dúthracht chun tairbhe ár scoláirí uile agus phobal na Gaeilge.



**Issues around Teaching and Assessment of Irish in Senior Cycle:  
A Discussion Paper in Response to two NCCA Research Reports**

Prepared for:

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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## Issues around Teaching and Assessment of Irish in Senior Cycle: A Discussion Paper in Response to two Research Reports

### 1. Introduction

This discussion paper was written as a response to two research reports commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment which sought to examine the potential impact of the amendments to the Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus, implemented in 2012, on the achievement of students and on pedagogical approaches in preparation for the oral examination: *Impact of Revised Oral Irish at Leaving Certificate Level* (Ó Curraoin et al, 2017) and *Léargas ar thaithí, ar dhearcthaí agus ar pheirspictíochtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm i 2012 ar Bhéaltríail Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta* (Nic Eoin 2017). The results of both reports are discussed together and implications and issues arising from the findings are explored. It is hoped that this document will encourage and generate further discussion, not only on the revised oral examination itself, but also on significant aspects related to the teaching and assessment of the language at Senior Cycle level.

### 2. The background to both research studies

A significant change took place in the assessment of Irish in the Leaving Certificate in 2012. This change related to the distribution of the percentage of the marks for the oral test. Up to that point, the oral examination was weighted at 25% at Higher, Ordinary and Foundation Levels. In Circular 0042/2007, it was specified that the marks for oral examinations be increased at Higher, Ordinary and Foundation levels from 25% to 40%. To this end, the marks apportioned to other parts of the examination were reduced. This was seen as a significant change that could impact the teaching and learning of Irish in the classroom both for teachers and students.

### 3. The two research studies

To investigate these potential implications, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment commissioned two research studies. The first study, (*Impact of Revised Oral Irish at Leaving Certificate Level*, (Ó Curraoin et al, 2017)<sup>6</sup> explored the impact of the changes in the weighting of marks in the oral, on the quality of achievement in written and spoken language by students at Higher and Ordinary levels. The results of the Leaving Certificate candidates in Ordinary and Higher Level Irish were examined, firstly in 2011, before the changes were implemented, and secondly, the results in 2015, three years after implementation in order to assess any possible impact. The second research study, *Léargas ar thaithí, ar dhearcthaí agus ar pheirspictíochtaí múinteoirí agus scoláirí i leith na leasuithe a cuireadh i bhfeidhm i 2012 ar Bhéaltríail Ghaeilge na hArdteistiméireachta* (Nic Eoin, 2017)<sup>7</sup> investigated the attitudes and perspectives of teachers and scholars in respect of the

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<sup>6</sup> Henceforth Study A

<sup>7</sup> Henceforth Study B

amendments. Three major areas that were closely related to the main research question were explored. The implications for both teaching and learning were examined. In this context, students' motivation, confidence and involvement in the learning process were discussed, and in addition, the impact of the amendments on the teaching, learning and assessment strategies deployed in the classroom was considered. The study also focused on a possible contribution to language acquisition and to students' competence in the Irish language in the long term, including ability to participate actively in the life of the Irish language community and the development of key skills.

Although each study had a specific focus, with a particular emphasis on quantitative aspects (analysis of marks) in Study A, and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in Study B (opinions, perceptions and feelings of teachers and students); similar recommendations were made in the light of the results obtained.

#### **4. The discussion paper as response**

In this discussion document which is a response to both studies, the results and recommendations of both studies are discussed. In addition, the implications of the insights provided in both studies into the teaching and learning of Irish at Senior Cycle are emphasised, with a view to generating innovative debate and discussion among the relevant stakeholders regarding their current approach to assessing oral language and promoting quality teaching and learning.

#### **5. Common findings and recommendations**

It is interesting to note that both studies had results and recommendations in common:

1. While the oral exam in general motivated students, there were, nonetheless, widespread concerns about the amount and content of the picture sequences used to elicit descriptive language from candidates. It was reported that students experienced difficulties in having to memorise or rote learn the picture sequences in preparation for the oral.
2. More time is required. Since the picture sequence and conversation now constitute the oral examination, which formerly comprised just the reading and conversation elements, it is recommended that extra time be allocated to the oral. It was suggested that candidates are not being allowed sufficient time for the conversation or interview component.
3. There was a significant imbalance and lack of consistency in terms of language challenge and content between certain pictures used in the picture sequences. In other words, some of the pictures were harder and more demanding to describe than others.
4. Students in Irish-medium schools were not as anxious about the oral and picture sequences as were students in English-medium schools.
5. The percentage increase in the oral examination to 40%, motivated 60% of students in Study B to speak Irish. The majority enjoyed the class preparation, notwithstanding the

preparation of the picture sequences. This revised percentage also appeared to encourage more schools to take up the optional oral test in the Junior Certificate.

6. Rote learning was the strategy most frequently used in preparation for the oral examination, with 62% of teachers giving prepared notes for memorisation to students.

7. The lack of opportunities to use Irish outside of the school is one of the main obstacles in preparation for the oral examination.

8. In terms of the quality of spoken and written Irish, there is some evidence in the examination data of deficits in student ability in grammar and accuracy. This was the case, especially in English-medium schools.

9. Study B shows that the current oral examination does not contribute to the long-term Irish language competence of students. In other words, there is no evidence that they acquire the language. This is true for students in English-medium schools, in particular. However, it is interesting that Study B noted that this cannot be attributed to the oral exam alone, but is also a consequence of the lack of opportunities to use the language meaningfully outside the classroom.

10. Overall, even though the picture sequence presents certain challenges, as outlined above, a large majority of teachers (81%) and students (90%) were of the opinion, that the conversation or interview component in the oral provides candidates with an opportunity to demonstrate their oral skills and competences. However, it is noteworthy that the report criticises "... the shortage of time, the tendency to rote learn and narrowness in the content of the questions posed in the conversation" (Study B p.19).

The two studies have some common recommendations arising from these research findings:

1. A greater consistency across the picture sequences is recommended to guarantee that disadvantage does not occur in the case of candidates choosing a particular sequence that is more challenging than others in terms of language and content.

2. There is a need to re-examine the time allocation for the oral to allow sufficient time for the conversation/ interview component. Currently, there is a common oral exam at Ordinary and Higher levels, but it is recommended to investigate the provision of an examination to meet the needs of students studying in different linguistic contexts and from different linguistic backgrounds i.e., English-medium and Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools.

4. Concern is expressed in Study A that current provision may not be suitable for a significantly large cohort of students: “At the same time there is another very large cohort of students at the opposite end of the scale with a very limited level of understanding and fluency in the language and yet very many of this cohort of students have a positive attitude and goodwill towards the language. For many of these weaker students the oral examination, as presently constituted, could be an entirely negative experience. This experience, coming at the end of their second level schooling, could colour their attitude towards the Irish Language in later life. This report recommends that the current practice of having a common oral examination at both Higher and Ordinary Level be reviewed” (p. 60).

The results and recommendations of both studies require further reflection and discussion since they highlight a number of current issues and challenges related to the teaching and assessment of Irish at Senior Cycle. These will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

## **6. Is there discernible change in student achievement in Irish since the implementation of the changes?**

There is no clear evidence that the achievement of students in Irish has changed significantly since the changes were implemented. We need to be cautious, however, in our interpretation of achievement in this context. While the national Leaving Certificate examination, year after year, provides a benchmark for the normative achievement of students, there is no evidence that the learning outcomes achieved through that examination in Irish are embedded in a wider or broader framework such as the Common European Framework (CEFR)<sup>8</sup> or The Languages Ladder. Thus, it is difficult to compare the levels of achievement in relation to an objective framework and initiate a valid discussion around trends of change.

As it stands, however, a comparison between the results of 2011 and 2015 showed statistically that there was no significant change in achievement between the two cohorts of students. While there are some minor statistical modifications in marks awarded to the different skills, it is not clear, however, that there has been significant adverse or positive change.

This finding echoes the results found in the study by Ní Mhaoinigh (2013), where similar research was undertaken. After examining the Leaving Certificate 2011 (prior to the change) and 2012 students (after the change), now as first year university students, using a standardised test, the study concluded that the revised oral examination did not have any significant bearing on students’ proficiency in Irish and that very little difference in the oral test was measurable between the 2011 and 2012 groups.

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<sup>8</sup> There is currently no objective evidence indicating the level students of Irish achieve in state examination in relation to the CEFR.

Given the results of both studies, it is not possible to infer any significant impact of the revised oral examination on student proficiency and achievement.

## **7. Current Practice**

Both reports yield insights into current practices related to the teaching and assessment of Irish at senior cycle. The data from both reports indicates that there are three challenges<sup>9</sup> that need to be examined and discussed:

1. Current practice related to rote learning;
2. Range of assessment tasks and instruments currently being used;
- 3 The various linguistic contexts in which the learning of Irish takes place.

These challenges will now be explored in more detail in the remainder of this discussion paper.

## **8. Rote learning**

In Study B, there was a very clear indication of how widespread rote learning is used as a strategy by students preparing for the oral exam. According to Nic Eoin (2017), the practice of memorisation "... fosters a culture... that does not coincide with the emphasis in international research on the importance of autonomy in the language acquisition process. This raises an issue about the aim of language learning in general in both first language acquisition and second language learning "(p. 73).

The ultimate purpose of teaching Irish as a second language is to enable students to acquire the language. The aim of teaching Irish as a first language is to further enrich and develop the language students have already acquired. The vast majority of students study Irish as a second language. In the case of these students, current approaches, like those described in Study B, do little to facilitate the acquisition of Irish as a second language. If a student commits a text to memory, be it based on the picture sequence or an essay or prepared answer on a literature text, to reproduce it in an examination situation, unknowingly, he is almost "pretending" to have acquired the language when, in reality, he has not.

To acquire any language, the student must make his own of it. In other words, he must be able to compose his own sentences by retrieving the vocabulary and structures he needs to communicate, from long-term memory. The sentences he produces may initially be defective and inaccurate and contain obvious errors. Gradually, however, if the learner is helped to persist in language production, he is enabled to produce his own sentences by

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<sup>9</sup> This discussion paper focuses on aspects of teaching and learning here referenced in the two research reports. Other important aspects of the teaching and learning not discussed here, for example, corrective feedback, the CLIL (integrated language and subject learning) the influence of the teacher, the development of literacy in the second language, etc. Cf. Harris and O Duibhir (2011). Neither is the role of ICT examined.

retrieving acquired language stored in long-term memory. If required, therefore, in any situation, including an examination situation to “produce” language, the learner can talk about a picture or about any topic in a conversation using his own acquired language. This obviates the need for rote learning.

One needs to ask, therefore, whether students spend too long committing texts to memory when that time could be more profitably spent producing their own language? Memorising prior to an examination may increase anxiety among learners that the “learned off essay” will not appear on the examination paper or the perfectly prepared picture sequence will not be asked at the oral examination.

This does not mean that rote learning does not play a role in the acquisition of a second language. Memory plays a considerable role in L2 acquisition. There will always be a need to memorise nouns, phrases, patterns and other parts of language. This was referred to as “drilling” over the years. However, one must question the merit of committing *full or large texts* to memory, since such practice does not allow students to produce their own language meaningfully. This practice is not recommended, even if the student understands the meaning of the text memorised. As the text is not produced by the learner himself, it, more likely than not, will be stored in the short-term memory rather than in the long-term memory where acquisition occurs.

Rote learning or so-called chunking, however, can facilitate the acquisition of language if scaffolding is provided to enable the learner to analyse the language memorised. (Myles et al, 1998; Clark, 2016). This means that the learner can memorise formulaic language, patterns, phrases, etc., and can benefit from breaking down the chunks memorised. According to Dörnyei (2009), chunking can make acquisition more efficient, since a set of words is commonly stored together as a phrase and rules do not need to be applied every time that phrase is retrieved.

But overall, rote learning is not regarded as good practice. Transfer is regarded as being more important than retention in the higher cognitive skills such as problem solving. Retention is the ability to remember material at some later time in much the same way it was presented during instruction, whereas transfer is the ability to use what was learned to solve new problems, answer new questions, or facilitate learning new subject matter (Mayer, 2002; Clark, 2016). When the goal of instruction is to promote transfer, assessment tasks should involve cognitive processes that go beyond recognizing and recalling (Mayer 2002:232).

Therefore, the issue of promoting rote learning as a preparation strategy for the oral and other exams requires much examination and debate.



## 9. The acquisition of language in the classroom

The practice of rote learning or memorisation of text(s) does little to facilitate second language acquisition, but what are the most effective practices that promote it in the classroom? There is much emphasis on input and output in contemporary research on second language acquisition (Antonova Ünlü & Wei, 2016; Meisel, 2011). This means that a learner must have as many opportunities as possible in the classroom to absorb the second language and to produce it. When someone is raised in a community language, he has a wealth of input and has many output opportunities in the language in a wide variety of contexts. But this does not apply in the case of the second language learner in the classroom. Here, the natural environment of acquisition is absent. Singleton and Ryan state in this regard (2004: 115): "L2 exposure-time involved in studies focusing on formal learning situations never approaches that involved in long-term naturalistic studies." In other words, learning the language in the classroom is not really comparable to the natural acquisition of the language outside.

The following elements, however, help to promote language acquisition in the classroom:

1. Real communication
2. Language awareness and learner self-awareness.

While the "natural language environment" is missing in the classroom, a language community can, nevertheless, be created there through opportunities for real communication and through a collaborative task-based approach (Ellis, 2003; Robinson, 2011). Every student in the classroom is a potential language user. This is the theoretical basis of the current Leaving Certificate syllabus and the new Junior Cycle specifications in Irish. The development of communicative competence must always be to the fore in class activities and interactions. Communicative competence encompasses the abilities and mastery of the student in the five language skills: listening, reading, speaking, speaking interaction and writing. *Spontaneous language* is produced in real communication. Students need constantly to practise the language or to be scaffolded to achieve the spontaneous production of language in communication.

The new specifications in Irish in the Junior Cycle not only emphasise communication, but also have a sustained focus on language awareness and learner self-awareness. When students produce their own sentences other than language that is committed to memory, grammatical, orthographical and syntactical inaccuracies are often noticeable. But to acquire accuracy, the student must take note of the aspects of the language that are not comparable to English (lexis, grammar, morphology and pronunciation). This attention to, or noticing language is known as language awareness. It is now accepted that learners need to focus on the forms of the target language if they are to acquire the language in the context of the school. The acquisition of grammar, language syntax and accuracy are part of the acquisition of a language. These aspects of language are acquired through reflection,

alertness to difference (e.g. differences between English and Irish) and awareness of language as system. Language interference from English is often the cause of mistakes and lack of accuracy. Study A showed that students' knowledge of grammar and accuracy was generally weak (p. 59). To counteract this, it is recommended, therefore, to provide opportunities and a space for students to cope with their lack of accuracy and grammatical difficulties.<sup>10</sup> Through systematic contrasts between Irish and English or between Irish and other languages, students can arrive at an understanding of the causes of error and inaccuracy.

Learner self-awareness is also of particular importance in classroom-based language acquisition. It is suggested that the student be given every opportunity to become an autonomous language learner in the classroom and outside of it. Through interaction with the teacher and his fellow students and through reflection, the student's understanding of himself as a language learner can be fostered. He gradually identifies his learning strategies and personal learning style. By completing different language tasks, the student understands the skills that have improved and addresses the areas that require further improvement and how to achieve that improvement.

If too much memorization is encouraged in the classroom, the student will not be afforded the opportunities to communicate, to foster language awareness and develop self-confidence as a learner. This question needs to be raised and discussed by all stakeholders who are involved in Irish in the Senior Cycle.

### **10. The range of assessment tasks used**

If the pitfalls of memorisation are to be eschewed, then we need to avoid using assessment tasks that encourage it. Rote learning does not apply in the case of the receptive skills (listening and reading). But in the case of assessing the productive skills of speaking and writing, we must strive to avoid the use of assessment tasks and instruments that stimulate memorisation. It could be argued that the traditional essay, used to test the skill of writing, stimulates rote learning. But there is a range of assessment tasks *other* than the essay that could be used to assess written language (Hughes 2003).

The same is true in the case of the oral examination. As suggested by Maunsell (2009), there is a need for a variety of measures and methods to test speaking skills other than the conversation or interview (Hughes 2003; Underhill 1993, etc.). Maunsell (2009) describes the different models of interview that can be used in the oral exam and suggests that "...a range of language functions are being considered with more insights into 'real' communication ability." (Maunsell 2009: 16).

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<sup>10</sup> See the work of Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017; Ó Duibhir, Ní Dhiorbháin, & Cosgrove in this area.

In 2012, the picture sequence was added as an additional measure to test oral proficiency as well as the dialogue, conversation or interview. From the present studies, it is apparent that this picture sequence is undoubtedly promoting or encouraging rote learning, since it is seen and prepared in advance.

It is interesting to note from Study B that the picture sequence did not cause anxiety in all-Irish medium schools. In these schools, rote learning does not appear to be prevalent due to the fact that students, by and large, already possess a certain fluency and ease in the language, enabling them to talk spontaneously about the picture.

It is recommended in Study A to use an assessment tool other than the picture sequence (p. 61). The picture series is a valid tool to test students' ability to produce language spontaneously, provided that it is neither seen nor prepared in advance. It is noteworthy that Ní Laoire (2015) in a research study on the attitude of teachers in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools in relation to the updated syllabus, found that most teachers (67.4%) in these schools did not want the picture series to be seen in advance by their students. Accordingly, she made the following recommendation at the end of the report: "The number of picture sequences should be reduced. In terms of good practice, which has a basis in Applied Linguistics, the sequence should not be seen in advance, so that candidates can speak Irish naturally rather than repeating what they have learned from memory "(Ní Laoire 2015: 98).

In Study B, there is strong evidence of the washback effect of the oral on classroom practice. One must question the merit of this type of teaching that is fully test- focused (Hughes 1989; Alderson & Wall 1993) and which has a negative impact on language acquisition. Other factors need to be considered in the design and selection of oral tests and assessment tools, for example, the objectives and approach of the oral test must be valid, relevant and reliable (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; McNamara, 1996). It is not easy to design a reliable and valid test of complete language competences in a second language (Bygate 2009: 413; Roca-Varde & Palacios, 2013). Cox (2017: 85) provides a good definition of oral competence as follows: "... the ability to use a language to communicate meaningful information in a spontaneous interaction, and in a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language ". The objective is the production of spontaneous language in interaction. But it is more complicated than that. Initially, we must have a clear understanding of what constitutes language competence and we must be cognisant of the differences that exist between certain oral competences. Both the quality and quantity of the language must be measured (Hulstijn 2007). To this end, it is essential to use a valid task to measure the language competence, as Bygate (2009: 414) reminds us: "... tasks influence the language used, and so to appraise students' language we first need to understand the linguistic demands of our tasks ". We must also examine the conditions under which the oral

examination takes place, including the role of the examiner as interlocutor. We need also to ensure that the written language does not exert undue emphasis in formulating attainment descriptors (Hughes, 2003).

Although Study A showed that there was no significant variance between the achievement of students in all the participating schools (English-medium schools and Irish-medium schools); Study B showed, nonetheless, that there were some differences in relation to teacher and student attitudes between schools that operate through the medium of English and Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools. Therefore, further reflection and discussion is necessary to focus on the effect of the common oral examination on the learning outcomes and the teaching and assessment approaches at Senior Cycle.

### **11. Acknowledging the various sociolinguistic contexts of the learning of Irish**

The stakeholders involved in Senior Cycle Irish could very usefully engage in comprehensive discussion to systematically and consistently build on the innovative curriculum initiatives that have begun in the Junior Cycle, where there are separate specifications for schools that operate through the medium of English and through Irish respectively.

As far back as 2003, in a research report for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Little (2003) suggested that separate syllabuses for Irish L1 and Irish L2 should be available to learners, and argued that students in Irish medium schools were disadvantaged as a result "... the continued insistence on a single syllabus for native and non-native speakers of the language, Irish-medium and English-medium students, achieves the worst of both worlds, offering the minority of native speakers and Irish-medium students what is effectively a foreign language syllabus "(Little 2003: 9).

The challenges facing Gaeltacht schools have been well documented in recent years. These include linguistic diversity and the decline in the use and competence of Irish among the learners (Mac Donnacha et al, 2005; Ó Giollagáin et al, 2007; Péterváry et al, 2014). In the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* (Irish Government 2010) and in the language planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, the role of Gaeltacht schools in supporting proficiency and use of Irish in the Irish language is underlined. According to *Polasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022* (Education Policy for the Gaeltacht 2017-2022) (ROS 2016), the core role of the Irish curriculum in supporting the language is highlighted: "... to develop competence in Irish among native speakers and speakers in Gaeltacht schools and among the students in the sector that operate through the medium of Irish in general" (Government of Ireland 2017: 33). A separate curriculum for students in schools that operate through the medium of Irish is called for. The benefit of this would be to raise expectations for the learning of Irish and "... support the provision of an enriching language learning experience for all students in Gaeltacht schools, especially those who are native speakers of Irish" (ibid). It also stated that work will commence on the development

of separate L1 and L2 specifications for Irish at Senior Cycle when the new specifications are implemented and working well at Junior Cycle. As is the case of the Junior Cycle, schools designated as Gaeltacht schools will have to provide the students with the L1 curriculum and encourage them to opt for it.

Discussion among the various stakeholders might be guided by consideration of some, or all of the following questions which emerge from the two research studies and which are relevant to the NCCA's review of Leaving Certificate Irish at Senior Cycle:

1. How can the Junior Cycle specification be developed at the Senior Cycle to ensure continuity and alignment?
2. What background research is needed to inform the development of the specifications? This may entail the deployment of findings of current research conducted in Ireland and internationally to inform debate, rather than commissioning new research projects.
3. What are the needs of all stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, the Irish language community, further education and higher education?
4. How can assessment tools be developed to evaluate learning outcomes, and conduct the oral examination (including the possible use of ICT)?
5. How can an appropriate range of assessment tasks be used to measure the spontaneous production of language? What will be the benchmark for assessing oral competence: the language of the native speaker or the language of a good second language speaker?
6. What assessment criteria will be expected at Senior Cycle and how will they interrelate with the needs and dynamics of the Irish language speech community?
7. How might the curriculum at Senior Cycle take account of the bilingual as well as multilingual and translanguaging contexts in contemporary Irish society?

## **12. Conclusion**

The overall results of Report A would suggest that the amended Leaving Certificate curriculum implemented in 2012 has not resulted in any significant change in student achievement. The research highlights some differences in practices and attitudes in relation to the oral examination and Irish curriculum by teachers and students in Irish and English medium schools. Both reports taken together illustrate some of the challenges facing the teaching and learning of Irish at Senior Cycle, some of which are highlighted in this discussion paper, i.e., rote learning, the form of assessment tasks that encourage memorisation rather than generating language acquisition and the different sociolinguistic contexts in which Irish is studied. These questions need to be addressed in further discussions, research and reflection. It is timely, therefore, to initiate innovative and engaging discussion and debate on Irish at Senior Cycle, ultimately to benefit students'

needs and those of the Irish language speech community. The reports recommend short-term changes to the format of the oral examination. There is, nonetheless, a pressing need to commence the development of Irish L1 and Irish L2 specifications ideally in time for the present cohort completing the new Junior Cycle programme in June 2020. Given this tight timeframe, if adopted, the question also arises of whether there is sufficient value in devoting the time and energy to devising and implementing the interim or short-term changes when at best they might serve only one or two student cohorts, i.e. students completing the Junior Cycle programme in 2018 and 2019. The changes required to address the issues raised in this response paper should ideally emanate from, and be planned within an overall approach to curricular rethinking and reform of Irish at Senior Cycle.

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