

Dear Sirs,

having studied the Draft National Plan for Gaelic in Scotland, I hereby make certain observations, hoping you may overlook my choice of an anecdotal method of presentation.

I am 80 years old, born and raised in England of Irish parents. My mother was bilingual, for as a child of a village tailor she heard his older clients speaking Gaelic. She also witnessed the shooting by the Black and Tans of someone for speaking Gaelic, preceding Heydrich in Czechoslovakia who attempted to obliterate any language other than German. Her brother escaped chasing Tans who were on horseback by diving into a muddy ditch which the horses jumped over in the chase. However, apart from just a few phrases, she made no attempt to teach us Gaelic. I myself made no attempt to learn Gaelic until after her death in her nineties in 1981.

Since then I have tried to learn both Irish and Scottish Gaelic, with scant success in either. Why I have so far failed is pertinent to your deliberations. In my opinion, Irish textbooks are far superior to Scottish ones, whereas vice versa seems true of tutors of the Gaelic language(s). One major defect of many ScG textbooks is that oodles of space may be devoted to relatively easy (to learn) material, but far less space and only superficial explanations to more difficult and complex subject matter. Moreover, I doubt if any learners using eg Hugo's Gaelic in Three Months or Teach Yourself Gaelic could in fact teach themselves or learn much unaided by a live tutor to supplement those texts.

It may be relevant that I hold the RSA Diploma and the Trinity College Diploma for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). I taught English for two years in Italy, at the Scuola Interpreti di Cremona and at the now defunct Englis Centre in Parma; and for three years in Portugal (in Benfica, Lisbon, and Setubal). I must digress now to make that relevance clearer.

The only foreign language I am fluent in is Italian. On my first visit to Italy I went there knowing not more than a dozen or so words of the language. On arrival in Trieste, unable to obtain a hotel room, I luckily met a local barber who had learned some English from Americans at the fag end of the war. He introduced me to a nearby family and arranged for me to stay with them in Via Udine. They spoke no English, and most of the visitors to Trieste were German speaking Austrians. So I was totally immersed in Italian (specifically the Triestine dialect) for 3 weeks, by the end of which I could converse in very bad pidgin Italian on almost any subject. My hosts invited me to return the following year(s). In the year before I did so I studied Italian grammar, eliminating all the major deficiencies in my repertoire. Within two years I was fluent.

When I taught English in Cremona I utilised my fluent Italian, too much so for my pupils. In fact I then had little idea how best to teach a language to non-speakers of it. That fault, in my view, still typifies many teachers of Irish, some of whom are qualified teachers but not specifically trained in how to teach a language!

Later I attended courses in TEFL. The one at International House near Green Park in London was ingeniously devised. In a class of no more than 8 students, no 2 were allowed to be of the same tongue, so there might be one Spaniard, one Frenchman, one Chinaman, one German, but no 2 Frenchmen nor 2 German women, etc. So (a) all students were obliged to speak the target language (English), even to converse with one another and (b) since it was unlikely any tutor would know 8 languages, the tutor had to use the direct method, i.e. teach English through English exclusively. Forgive my hubris, but I doubt if many Gaelic speakers could teach Gaelic exclusively through Gaelic!

My students in Portugal reaped the benefit of my new teaching know-how. One of them gained an A grade in Cambridge First Certificate and none failed utterly. That may have implications for how to succeed in teaching Gaelic. If, say, 8 foreign students from different countries could be offered free tuition in Gaelic in a class in Scotland, the tutor should have to teach them Gaelic through Gaelic. Once having mastered how to do so, the tutor could pass on the skill to other tutors. An idea of how could also be gained if a would-be tutor took a TESOL class in London to see how it is done for English, then apply similar techniques to Gaelic.

I receive the magazine *Cathriom*. Where there are parallel texts I find it very useful albeit where there are not I struggle even aided by a dictionary. I strongly recommend parallel texts. From your draft I extracted much recondite vocabulary (comparing the Gaelic and English versions) - under separate cover I show the result (warts and all).

I hope you may dig out some implicit suggestions from all the above.

Yours sincerely, Leo Desmond/

a. Stead
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