



# Pimsleur®

Irish 1

Reading Booklet

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*Travelers should always check with  
their nation's State Department for  
current advisories on local conditions  
before traveling abroad.*

Booklet Design: Maia Kennedy

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## Introduction

Pimsleur's *Irish* Compact Program contains ten units on 5 CDs. These ten 30-minute sessions provide an introduction to the language, and make it possible to gain sufficient spoken-language proficiency to be able to have basic, but essential communication with local speakers. This program provides the beginning language strategies that will allow you to greet native speakers, to make your needs known, and to satisfy your basic requirements when traveling in the Gaeltacht areas in Ireland.

## The Irish Language

The Irish language belongs to the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is closely related to Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. The earliest written form of Irish, known as Old Irish (c. 500–900) represents the earliest recorded written European vernacular north of the Alps. Toward the end of the first millennium, several factors, including internal linguistic pressures, especially a simplification of the verbal system, and external contacts (Viking raiders and settlers) led to the emergence of Middle Irish (900–1200).

Despite the social and political upheaval of this period, the Irish language continued uninterrupted. In the middle of the twelfth century, a new literary

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standard emerged which persisted until the mid-seventeenth century, when both the arrival of new continental religious orders and the development of lay schools led to a new literary linguistic standard. By the end of the twelfth century, the result, known as Classical Irish, had been adopted.

The Early Modern / Classical Irish period (1200 -1650) is a highly significant era in the language's history, for both political and literary reasons. The arrival in Ireland of the French-speaking Anglo-Normans resulted in greater linguistic diversity, but Irish remained the dominant language and gradually absorbed competing linguistic groups. By the early sixteenth century, almost all of the population was once again Irish speaking, although English had become entrenched as the language of law and international politics. Irish, however, remained the language of religious worship and literature.

The Tudor and Stuart conquests and plantations (1534–1610), the destruction of the learned classes, the Flight of the Earls (1607), the Cromwellian settlements (1654), and the Williamite War (1689–91), followed by the enactment of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws (1695) combined to result in the loss of both the Irish-speaking intelligentsia and ruling classes and their cultural, social, and literary institutions. The position of Irish as the dominant language on the

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island was deliberately and systematically undermined. Still spoken by the poorest classes and the rural majority in early nineteenth-century Ireland, Irish ceded almost all cultural capital to English, considered as the language of advancement and material progress.

The greater social and economic mobility, made possible by a relaxation of the Penal Laws, ironically encouraged middle and upper-class Catholics to adopt English as their first language. The Great Famine (1846–1848) hit the remaining Irish-speaking areas the hardest and led to mass emigration from these regions. Consequently, the Irish language was perceived as the language of the poor and backward. Ability in English was required for emigration to America or to England, necessary for employment in urban centers in Ireland, and vital for legal and economic transactions.

The language appeared doomed after the Great Famine, as it hemorrhaged speakers to the United States and Britain, but the foundation in 1893 of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) and a widespread project of cultural nationalism inspired a linguistic and cultural revival. This revival helped to awaken a sense of pride among native speakers and a desire to see value and utility in the indigenous language. *Conradh na Gaeilge*, established by

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Douglas Hyde, Eoin Mac Néill, and Father Eugene O'Growney, among others, became a mass movement committed to teaching and promoting Irish language and culture.

The foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 saw the Irish language receive state support for the first time, and its revival was a stated national goal. The new independent government set about protecting those economically depressed areas where Irish remained the dominant spoken language (known as the Gaeltacht – *An Ghaeltacht*), using the educational system as the springboard for reviving the language.

However, the initial enthusiasm wavered in the face of global recession and the immediate lack of results. Government support for the linguistic revival project waned in the 1970's and 1980's, and several controversial policies designed to reward competence in Irish were abolished. More recently, the rise in *gaelscoileanna* and similar grassroots movements has led to renewed interest, and forced such important government initiatives as the establishment of radio programming in Irish (*Raidió na Gaeltachta* – 1972), followed by television (TG4 -1996), and the Official Languages Act (2007).

The 2004 census conducted by the Irish government reports that speakers of the three



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dialects of Irish (Connemara, Munster, and Ulster) number 1.6 million, in a population of 4.3 million. 350,000 report speaking Irish daily, but this figure includes children studying at school. The number of speakers for whom Irish is a primary means of communication is estimated to be between 70,000 and 100,000. There are 25,000 speakers of Irish in the United States.

## **The Ghaeltacht (*An Ghaeltacht*)**

*An Ghaeltacht* is the Irish name for the parts of Ireland where Irish is the dominant language and is officially recognized. The current population of *An Ghaeltacht* is approximately 85,000, with major concentrations of Irish-speakers in the western counties of Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, and Cork. There are smaller concentrations in the counties of Waterford in the south and Meath in the east. *Ráth Cairn*, an artificial *Gaeltacht*, was established in County Meath in the 1930's when the government transplanted forty-one families from Connemara and Mayo. However, it was not recognized as an official *Gaeltacht* area until 1967.

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## ***Údarás na Gaeltachta***

*Údarás na Gaeltachta* is the government agency responsible for the economic development of *An Gaeltacht* with a brief to preserve and extend the Irish language as the principal language of the *Gaeltacht* regions. It promotes employment through the development of local natural resources, skills and entrepreneurial abilities, and the attraction of mobile investment (American, European and Asian companies) to *An Gaeltacht*. In recent years, *Údarás na Gaeltachta* has invested particularly in cultural tourism and technology-based industry.

## ***Irish Dialects***

The three major dialects of Irish are:

- Connemara (spoken in the west of Ireland and centered around the city of Galway),
- Munster (spoken in Counties Kerry and Cork),
- Ulster (spoken in County Donegal).

All three dialects are heard in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland. In this course, we use the Munster dialect.

It is unclear when the dialects first emerged, but they all appeared in written form in the eighteenth century and have continued to develop from that

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time on. The standard literary dialect was less commonly used, due to the growth of English in political and cultural life.

Debates as to the superiority and relative merits of competing dialects provide much entertainment for Irish speakers, and only die-hard adherents promote dialectal purity. No dialect is considered "more correct" than any other, and all are heard and understood equally. The creation of Irish-language radio and TV stations has led to a greater awareness of the various dialects, and television and radio programs are broadcast in each of the three major dialects.

## **Irish Language Media**

### **Television – TG4**

The establishment of an Irish language television station on October 31, 2006 is regarded as the most positive and high-profile government language initiative since the foundation of the Irish state. *TG4* has had a tremendous impact, not only on the language, but on its perception and function in Irish society. Initially launched as *Teilifís na Gaeilge*, but re-branded as *TG4*, the Galway-based station now represents 3.5% of the national television market. The

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core daily schedule features six hours of innovative quality programming in Irish, supplemented by a wide range of material in other languages, particularly American soap operas and westerns. The channel is available worldwide via a webcast at [www.tg4.ie](http://www.tg4.ie). Acknowledged as one of the most cost-effective television stations in Europe, TG4 offers 16 hours of service daily. Its programs have garnered prestigious national and international awards, with the channel's music, documentary, and sports programming receiving specific recognition. The soap opera *Ros na Rún* and the daily news service *Nuacht TG4* have won particular acclaim.

## **Radio – RnaG**

*Raidió Na Gaeltachta* was established in 1972 to provide a national Irish language radio service as part of RTÉ's public broadcasting. With studios in each of the three major *Gaeltacht* areas, the station provides a comprehensive radio service for the people of the *Gaeltacht* and for Irish speakers internationally. During the early years, broadcasting was restricted to a couple hours a day and available only in *Gaeltacht* areas. *Raidió na Gaeltachta* is now available worldwide on the web at [www.rng.ie](http://www.rng.ie). In addition, *Raidió Na Life* ([www.rn1106.com](http://www.rn1106.com)), founded in 1988, now serves the Dublin metro-politan area.

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Two national newspapers serve Irish-language readers – *Foinse* ([www.foinse.ie](http://www.foinse.ie)) and *Lá* ([www.nuacht.com/home.tvt](http://www.nuacht.com/home.tvt)). Several journals are published for cultural and literary audiences – *Comhar*, *Feasta*, and *An tUltach*. The on-line journal *Beo* ([www.beo.ie](http://www.beo.ie)) is popular with students and learners of Irish throughout the world. *Cló Iar-Chonnachta* ([www.cic.ie](http://www.cic.ie)) *Clóchomhar*, *Cois Life* ([www.coislife.ie](http://www.coislife.ie)) and *Cosicéim* are the major publishers of literature in Irish. Poetry has long been the dominant genre, although prose and drama have become more popular in recent years. Recent trends include the publication of novels for adult learners of Irish.

## Twentieth Century Literature

Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–1970) is commonly regarded as the greatest writer of Irish-language prose in the twentieth century. As an author, he is best known for six collections of short stories and three novels. His literary work covers diverse ground, ranging from rural naturalism to urban realism to fantasy, in language that is rich, idiomatic and uncompromising. A selection of his short stories entitled *Road to Brightcity* was translated into English by Eoghan Ó Tuairisc in 1981.

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Seán Ó Ríordáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill are regarded as the two leading Irish-language poets. Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916–1977) was born in Múscraí, a County Cork Gaeltacht, but moved to the city of Cork in 1936 where he worked in a motor taxation office. He suffered from tuberculosis throughout his life and struggled with his doubts about Catholicism, and his four collections of poetry contain poems born of a sense of Catholic guilt and uncertainty about an afterlife.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill counts Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Michael Hartnett among her translators. Her work draws heavily on Irish folklore – the fairy woman and the mermaid tradition – and combines these themes in a Freudian and Jungian framework to explore the modern human condition. Her startling and vivid imagery draws on Irish literary tradition, yet infuses it with a modern cosmopolitan sensibility. She has published several books of poetry and a collection of essays, and her work has been translated into numerous languages.

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