



Oisín Ó Doinn – 2017 Update

Research Title: Implementing a cultural historical activity theory approach in a blended learning course for ab initio learners of Irish

Since the beginning of 2016 I have made great progress towards the completion of my PhD. I have embarked on two field trips to conduct research in the United States and disseminated my research at conferences and seminars in Ireland and further afield.

In March and April of 2016 I conducted the pilot study for my project in the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (UWM). This pilot study was crucial in preparing for the main study. The results of the pilot study informed the design of my research instruments and the layout of the blended language course. It also influenced the ways in which I introduced different technologies into the course's learning environment and when. Finally, the pilot study helped me to identify areas where ab initio learners required additional assistance when beginning to learn the Irish language, such as with pronunciation or Irish orthography. This in turn directed me to develop online resources to address specific language learning issues in these areas.

I conducted the main study at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh in autumn of this year (September-October). The study ran without any issues and was successfully concluded in mid-October. I am currently working on analysing the data that I collected in order to identify the tensions and contradictions within the activity system of the course.

In order to conduct these studies it was necessary for me to complete three separate ethical applications for three different institutions. These applications varied in length and the type of information that was required. I prepared applications for DCU's Research Ethics Committee and for the Institutional Review Boards of CMU and the UWM. I received approval from all three applications.

Over the past year I have produced several draft chapters detailing my theoretical framework, and my methodology in pursuance of my research goals. Academic writing is a continuous process that is informed by extensive reading of subject matter and as such I have continued to familiarize myself with the literature related to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL) and methodological approaches to qualitative research. I have also contacted researchers in the field of CHAT and CALL to further my understanding of these subject areas. Additionally, I have worked closely with my supervisors relying on their feedback and constructive criticism to guide my efforts. I intend to submit a completed thesis at the end of this summer (2017).

Additionally, I would like to add that I have continued to contribute to the Irish course on the online language learning platform Duolingo.com. Working on the Irish course for Duolingo



has been an invaluable experience to me. Through this work I have gained a deeper more hands on understanding of designing and laying out applications for language learning. Working with a leader in this field has also given me the opportunity to learn of the latest developments in best practice and innovation in CALL. Furthermore, it has also served as a powerful platform with which to pursue future research topics and to disseminate my research. Finally, contributing to the course helped me to design my blended language learning (BLL) course for my main study. Such a platform for the Irish language did not exist before Duolingo and it is a major component of the complex learning environment implemented in my main study. On reaching two million users, on the 25th of November of 2016 Duolingo and the Irish team received official recognition from Conradh na Gaeilge and Uachtarán na hÉireann, Micheal D Higgins, for the positive impact the course has had on the language globally.