



# IRAAL

*Cumann na Teangeolaíochta Feidhmi*  
Irish Association for Applied Linguistics

## IRAAL ONLINE LECTURE

Guest link: <https://eu.bbcollab.com/guest/08f601529762469a91f3b0ffd1fcbf53>

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6:00 pm, 11th of June

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**Monolingualism: epidemiology, natural history, treatment and prevention.**

### Abstract

Although many people, particularly in the English-speaking world, perceive monolingualism as the natural “default” state of the human brain, mind and society, a broader historical as well as geographical examination will reveal exactly the opposite. There are good reasons to believe that human language developed in a multilingual context. Thus, learning and using multiple languages provides a natural form of mental exercise. In contrast, monolingualism, like the sedentary lifestyle, can be interpreted as a “disease of civilisation”, delaying cognitive development, impeding cognitive recovery after stroke and accelerating cognitive ageing and dementia. Fortunately, monolingualism is a treatable condition and learning languages, even late in life, can have beneficial effects. Based on the concept of a “healthy linguistic diet” I will discuss how we can develop a social and linguistic environment which can support the prevention of monolingualism.

### Brief Bio

Born and raised in Cracow, Poland, Dr Thomas H Bak studied medicine in Germany, UK and Switzerland. Since his doctorate on acute aphasia (language disorders caused by brain diseases), his main interest has been in the relationship between language, brain and mind. He worked clinically in psychiatry, neurology and neurosurgery in Bern, Berlin and Cambridge, before moving to Edinburgh in 2006. In the years 2010-2018 he was president of the World Federation of Neurology Research Group on Aphasia, Dementia and Cognitive Disorders and organised courses in cognitive neurology across Asia and South America. In recent years, his work, from Scotland, through India to Singapore, focused increasingly on the impact of language learning and multilingualism on cognitive functions across the lifespan and in brain diseases such as dementia and stroke. In his free time, he enjoys, not surprisingly... learning languages.

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