Gaelic in contemporary Scotland: contradictions, challenges and strategies

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Since the mid-1970s, efforts to sustain and revitalise Gaelic in Scotland have gained new momentum and prominence, even as the language has continued to decline in demographic terms. Public and institutional provision for Gaelic, especially in the fields of education and broadcasting, has grown substantially in recent years, and Gaelic has increasingly been perceived as an essential aspect of Scottish cultural distinctiveness, and as such connected (indirectly rather than directly) to the movement for Scottish self-government. Since 2005 this recognition of Gaelic has been formalised in legislation, the Gaelic Language Act (Scotland) 2005, which establishes a Gaelic language board, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, with powers to undertake strategic language planning for Gaelic at a national level. The continuing decline in speaker numbers and language use suggests that the policies put in place up to now to sustain and promote Gaelic have been inadequate; better integrated and more forceful strategies are urgently needed if the language shift in favour of English is to be reversed.

Historical and demographic background

Scottish Gaelic (*Gàidhlig*), a member of the Goidelic branch of the Celtic languages that is closely related to Irish and Manx, is generally believed to have been brought to southwest Scotland by settlers from Ireland in the early centuries of the common era, although a minority view questions the Irish origin and suggests that Gaelic may have reached Scotland many centuries earlier (McLeod 2004a: 15).

Linguists have disagreed as to how and when Scottish Gaelic came to diverge from Irish. The once widely accepted theory of 'Common Gaelic' asserted that significant divergence did not begin until *c.* 1300 (Jackson 1951); more recently, some scholars have challenged this model, arguing that differentiation probably began as soon as Gaelic speakers began to settle in Scotland (Ó Buachalla 2002; cf. Ó Maolalaigh 2008). Certainly by the early seventeenth century Irish speakers perceived Scottish Gaelic as a distinct, though perhaps still mutually intelligible, variety.

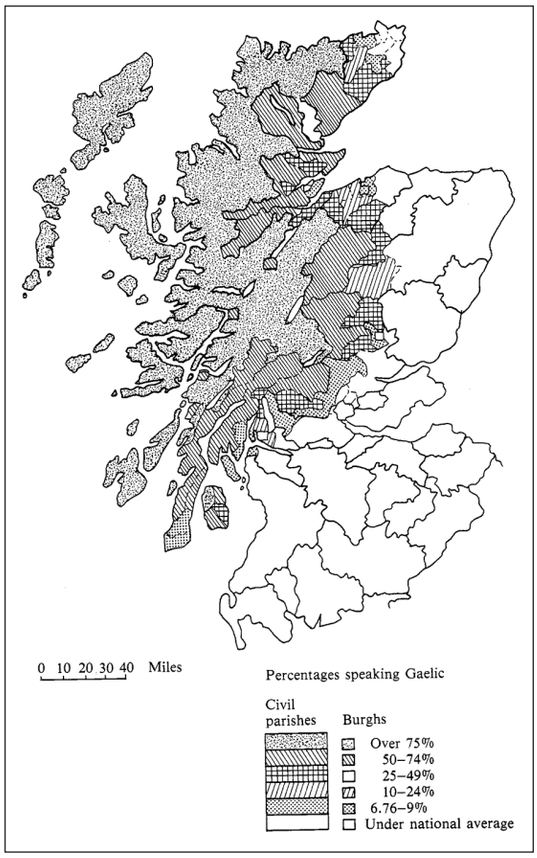
By the eleventh century CE, Gaelic had spread throughout almost all of what is now mainland Scotland and had become established as the language of the Scottish monarchy, but language shift in the south and east of the country during the late Middle Ages, driven by a range of economic and political factors, meant that from the fourteenth century onwards Gaelic became largely confined to the mountainous north and west (the 'Highlands' or *Gàidhealtachd*) (McLeod 2004a: 15–18). Beginning in the late 1300s, commentators from the Scots-speaking[1]) Lowlands (or *Galldachd*) began to develop strongly negative attitudes towards Highlanders, whom they had come to consider backward, violent, even barbarous. These prejudices intensified in the later sixteenth century, when the Reformation transformed Lowland Scotland into a bastion of reformed Protestantism, and new ideologies of kingship and government gave new impetus to the imposition of 'civility' on the *Gàidhealtachd*. Increasingly repressive measures were adopted, notably the Statutes of Iona (1609), which placed strict controls upon the Highland chiefs and required them to educate their heirs in the Lowlands (Withers 1984: 22–30; MacGregor 2012).

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, a destructive combination of military repression, dramatic economic change, heavy, sometimes forced emigration, persistent material deprivation, and diverse cultural pressures have brought about ongoing language shift from Gaelic to English within the *Gàidhealtachd* (Withers 1984; MacKinnon 1991). The general trajectory has been one of slow recession towards the northwest, so that the last Gaelic-speaking areas in the Western Isles (the archipelago in the far northwest of Scotland, also known as the Outer Hebrides) are now showing language transmission and use patterns that would have been apparent two hundred years previously in some eastern districts adjoining the Lowlands. However, 'the decline of Gaelic … should not be seen as the simple „retreat" north-westwards of a *Gàidhealtachd* in which Gaelic was uniformly spoken and common in all domains'; instead the *Gàidhealtachd* as a whole became 'less and less strongly Gaelic', with English becoming more

1) Scots is a Germanic speech form closely related to English, often characterised (in Scotland at least) as a distinct language. Following the decline of Gaelic in Lowland Scotland from the twelfth century onwards, Scots became the language of administration and commerce before gradually losing its prestige from the sixteenth century due to Anglicising forces (see Millar 2005). Although it is arguably much more widely spoken than Gaelic today (as suggested by the 2011 census, which indicated 1,537,626 speakers), provision for Scots is minimal, and efforts on its behalf tend to focus on corpus planning and literary matters.

widely known and penetrating into an increasing range of domains (Withers 1998: 326–8).

Map 1 – Parishes in Scotland by the percentages of people aged 3 and over who spoke Gaelic, 1891



(Source: MacKinnon 1993)

Table 1: Historical demography of Gaelic

Date	Total Gaelic speakers in Scotland	Proportion of total Scottish population
1500	150,000?	50?
1755	290,000	22.9
1806	297,823	18.5
1891	254,415	6.3
1951	95,447	1.9
1981	79,307	1.6
1991	65,978	1.3
2001	58,652	1.2
2011	57,375	1.1

The number of Gaelic speakers fell sharply over the course of the twentieth century, and many formerly Gaelic-speaking areas in the *Gàidhealtachd* have become entirely English-speaking. The 2011 census showed approximately 57,375 Gaelic speakers aged 3 and over in Scotland, a mere 1.1% of the national population.[2]) 32,191 people could speak, read and write Gaelic; 18,966 could speak Gaelic but not read or write it; 6,218 could speak and read Gaelic but not write it; 1,678 had other skills in Gaelic; and a further 23,357 could understand Gaelic but not speak, read or write it (National Records of Scotland 2014: Table QS211SC). The rate of decline has now slowed considerably, however. Between 2001 and 2011 the number of Gaelic speakers decreased by only 2.2%, following a 11.1% drop between 1991 and 2001 and a 16.8% drop between 1981 and 1991. The proportion of Gaelic speakers in the younger sections of the Scottish population (those between 3 and 19 years of age) is increasing slightly, as a result of Gaelic-medium school education, which has developed since 1985 (National Records of Scotland 2014: Table DC2120SC; MacKinnon 2004: 24, 27), with the decline concentrated in the older sectors of the population. This trend notwithstanding, the Gaelic-speaking population is skewed to older age-groups, with some 53% of speakers in 2001 aged 45 or over (General Register Office for Scotland 2005: Table 4).

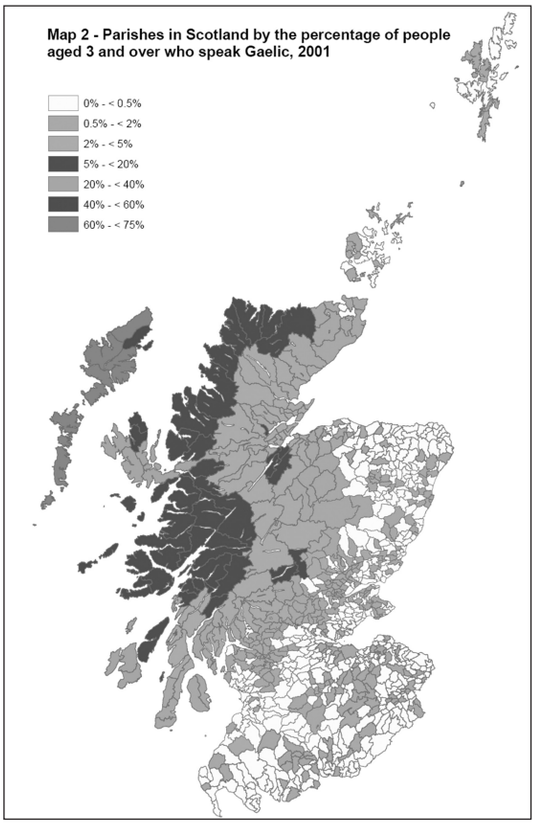
The heartland of the language now lies in the Western Isles, where 52% of the 2011 population (down from 62% in 2001) could speak Gaelic, but with proportions over 80% in some rural districts. Some Inner Hebridean islands, notably in Skye and Tiree, also contain dense concentrations of Gaelic speakers (29% and 38% respectively), while the highest level of any mainland parish in 2011 was recorded in Ardnamurchan (19.3%). At the same time, some 48% of Gaelic speakers now live in the Lowlands, with significant concentrations in the larger urban areas, particularly greater Glasgow (home to some 10,000 speakers) (National Records of Scotland 2013: Table QS211SC). In these Lowland areas, however, the proportion of Gaelic speakers in the population is extremely low, generally 1% or below. The dispersed nature of today's speech community presents significant challenges for Gaelic development efforts.

Intergenerational transmission of the language is weak; according to the 2001 census, only 69.6% of children aged 3–15 living with two Gaelic-speaking parents could speak Gaelic, as against 36.3% of those living with a lone Gaelic-speaking parent and a mere 22.1% of those living with two parents, only one of whom spoke Gaelic (with this last being the most common arrangement, some 61% of the families in which at least one parent could speak Gaelic) (General Register Office for Scotland 2005: Table 15).[3]) The 2011 census showed that only

2) There are no reliable data for the numbers of Gaelic speakers outside Scotland. In particular, questions concerning Gaelic language ability are not included in the census form used in other parts of the United Kingdom. There are now only a few hundred Gaelic speakers remaining in Nova Scotia, although there were some 50,000 speakers in there at the turn of the twentieth century, following heavy emigration from the *Gàidhealtachd* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Kennedy 2002).

3) Conversely, in 2001 32% of the Gaelic speakers aged 3–15 came from families in which neither parent could speak Gaelic (General Register Office for Scotland 2005: Table 15), reflecting the decision of non-Gaelic-speaking parents to send their children to Gaelic-medium education.

29.5% of the 3–4 age group in the Western Isles could speak Gaelic, which gives a rough indicator of the level of home (rather than school) based language acquisition (National Records of Scotland 2013: Table DC2120SC). Gaelic thus appears to be seriously threatened in the very last districts where it remains a majority language.



(Source: General Register Office for Scotland 2005)

All Gaelic speakers today are effectively bilingual in English, with monoglot speakers having disappeared from the scene in the last quarter of the twentieth century. During the last few decades almost all Gaelic-speaking children have acquired English in infancy rather than in school (Lamb 2008: 44–6; Gillies 2008: 299). Although many older speakers are Gaelic-dominant, most younger speakers are strongly English-dominant in all domains (Lamb 2008: 44–6). L2 speakers of Gaelic are relatively rare, perhaps comprising 25% of the speaker population; this low level reflects the traditional exclusion of Gaelic from the Scottish education system, but proportions are now increasing due to the expansion of Gaelic-medium education, as discussed below.

Literacy levels are also fairly low: according to the 2011 census, only 67% of Gaelic speakers could read Gaelic and only 56% could write it (National Records for Scotland 2014: Table QS211SC), although literacy levels among learners of the language tend to be significantly higher. At the same time, many of those who can read and/or write Gaelic do not necessarily do so frequently or comfortably (Lamb 2008: 49–50), a pattern that poses considerable challenges for language development strategy.

The 2011 the Scottish census asked questions about language use for the first time. Respondents were asked whether they used a language other than English at home, and 24,974 people indicated that they used Gaelic, some 43% of the total number of speakers (National Records for Scotland 2014: Table KS206SC). This census question was open to different interpretations, however, and this figure may be less than entirely reliable; but it is understandable in view of the fact that many Gaelic speakers live in households in which no one else speaks Gaelic (MacKinnon 2008). The census data on usage showed significant variation in different areas; as might be expected, in areas with dense concentrations the proportion of Gaelic speakers who reported using the language at home was much higher than in areas of low density. 77.3% of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles reported using the language at home, while the proportions in different parts of Lowland Scotland varied between 10 and 40% (National Records for Scotland 2014: Table KS206SC).

Other evidence makes it abundantly clear that Gaelic is in severe decline as a community language. Research in the Western Isles heartland suggests a significant and ongoing decrease in the level of community Gaelic use since the 1970s (MacKinnon 2006; NicAoidh 2006; Munro et al. 2011). Disturbingly, Western Isles residents who participated in a recent survey indicated that they tend to use English even in circumstances or settings when they are aware it is possible for them to use Gaelic (NicAoidh 2006: 79, 85; Western Isles Language Plan Project 2005: 23–4).

In summary, every sociolinguistic indicator suggests that Gaelic is now in a severely weakened state and that its decline is ongoing, despite the revitalisation initiatives of recent years. Policies and programmes to strengthen the position of Gaelic therefore function within a very challenging sociolinguistic context.

Gaelic as an ambiguous national language

As outlined above, Gaelic has been a minority language in Scotland for several centuries, and it has not been widely spoken in the economically and politically dominant regions of the country for even longer. Its position thus differs considerably from its sister Celtic languages Welsh and Irish, for example, which were until relatively recently the languages of the majority of the population, spoken in almost all parts of the national territory, and which retain a largely unchallenged symbolic authority as national languages despite their minority status. The significance of Gaelic in Scottish national life and Scottish national identity, in contrast, is somewhat tenuous, and its proper role is much contested; for some Scots, Gaelic is of merely regional rather than genuinely national importance, and a small but vocal sector of Scottish opinion is persistently hostile to the language (McLeod 2001b; see O'Hanlon et al. 2013).

At the same time, the so-called 'Gaelic renaissance' of recent decades is clearly connected to strengthening perceptions of Gaelic as a national language, something of importance to Scotland as a whole; it is also related to the increasing emphasis on Scottish political and cultural distinctiveness in general, a shift made most manifest in the devolution settlement of 1998, which led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.[4]) Reflecting these shifting outlooks, the authoritative Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 2012 showed that 76% of the Scottish population felt that Gaelic was very important or fairly important to Scottish culture (O'Hanlon et al. 2013: 3–4; see also MacKinnon 1981, West and Graham 2011). Public support for Gaelic often tends to be shallow and vague, however, and does not necessarily translate into backing for proactive language revitalisation measures (McLeod 2001b). Nevertheless, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey did give some indications of surprisingly strong support for such policies. At the moment Scottish parents have no right to choose Gaelic-medium education for their children, but 48% of respondents felt that parents should have this right wherever they live in Scotland; a further 43% felt that such a right should apply if they live somewhere where Gaelic is spoken; and only 8% felt there should be no such right (O'Hanlon et al. 2013: 5).

At the same time, the link between the Gaelic language and Scottish nationalism – in the conventional sense of the term in Scottish parlance, i.e. support for the establishment of a Scottish state independent of the existing United Kingdom – is a relatively weak one. Although supporters of Gaelic appear disproportionately likely to support Scottish independence, according to Scottish Social Attitudes Survey data, 48% of those who expressed support for Scottish independence did not wish to see an increase in the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland over the next fifty years (Paterson et al. 2014). Conversely, many Gaelic speakers do not support Scottish independence. Gaelic revitalisation efforts in Scotland thus have little connection to the nationalist cause, and are not associated with any one political party or shade of political opinion. Gaelic finds supporters (and detractors) on both the left and on the right, among both unionists and nationalists. Language issues have played only a minimal role in the public debate on the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, and the Scottish National Party government's detailed proposals for an independent Scotland suggest policy continuity in relation to Gaelic rather than any transformative change (Scottish Government 2013: 314, 449, 532, 564).

The Scottish National Party government that has held power since 2007 has largely continued the policies of the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat governments and has not implemented any major new policy measures to support Gaelic. Despite general cuts since the international financial crisis of 2008, funding for Gaelic has been fairly well protected, however, and capital grants for the expansion of Gaelic schools have been particularly helpful. The government appears to place particular emphasis on the symbolic value of Gaelic. The presence of Gaelic in official signage (on roads and trains, on government buildings and so on) has increased considerably. In a speech to a Gaelic audience in December 2007 First Minister Alex Salmond asserted that 'a vibrant Gaelic language and culture are central to what it means to be Scottish in the modern world' (Salmond 2007). While it is true that rhetoric of this kind does not necessarily lead to strong language promotion policies, it is equally true that leading Scottish politicians simply did not speak in this idiom in the past.

A common metaphor used with regard to Gaelic is that of 'raising the profile' of the language – the idea that the language has become more prominent and more visible in Scottish life. This heightened profile can be seen in myriad places and ways, from increased bilingual signage to award-winning television programmes to intensified consideration of Gaelic issues by the new Scottish Parliament. The danger comes in assuming a direct connection between this increasing visibility of Gaelic and its actual functioning as a living language in families and communities.

Official and institutional status

The most significant formal statement of Gaelic's status as a national language is given in the preamble to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, which declares Gaelic to be 'an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect with the English language'. This legislation, which followed a decade-long campaign by Gaelic organisations, is a historic step forward for the language, even though it is weak in comparison to language legislation in jurisdictions such as Catalunya and Canada, or even Wales, whose Welsh Language Act 1993 provided a model for the Gaelic Act (see Dunbar 2006: 13–20; Dunbar 2010). This statutory recognition follows the United Kingdom's 2001 ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and designation of Gaelic under Part III thereof (Dunbar 2003a; Dunbar 2010).

Among the Act's key provisions are the following:

- The official language agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, initially established in 2003, was placed on a statutory footing and given a range of specified powers and responsibilities, including the preparation of a National Gaelic Language Plan every five years and guidance to education authorities with regard to Gaelic-medium education.
- The Bòrd may require any public body (including local administrative authorities) in Scotland to prepare a Gaelic language plan, although the terms of such plans may vary considerably according to the extent to which those whom the body serves use Gaelic and the potential for developing the use of Gaelic in

4) There is no comprehensive and satisfactory analysis of Gaelic and Scottish identity; for discussions of different kinds, see Macdonald 1999; McLeod 2001b; Oliver 2005; and Paterson et al. 2014.

connection with the body's work. This 'sliding scale' approach reflects the view of Gaelic organisations that different levels of provision are appropriate in different parts of Scotland, but that Scotland-wide coverage is essential given Gaelic's increasingly national rather than regional profile and the increasing dispersal of the Gaelic-speaking population.

In many respects, however, the omissions from the Act may be more significant than its actual provisions:

- The phrase 'equal respect' as used in the preamble (quoted above) has no clearly recognised meaning in law and was chosen in order to avoid any suggestion that Gaelic would have equal validity or parity of esteem with English, or that the Act might be construed as imposing a general duty to institutionalise Gaelic-English bilingualism. (In this respect the Act differs fundamentally from the Welsh Language Act 1993, which requires that Welsh and English are to be treated 'on a basis of equality', and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which provides that the Welsh language should be treated 'no less favourably than the English language').
- The National Gaelic Language Plan is not legally enforceable, and there is a risk it will not be fully implemented.
- The Act makes no requirements about the content of public bodies' language plans, and some plans adopted to date are very limited in their scope and do not involve the delivery of any Gaelic-medium services.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig's powers to enforce compliance with Gaelic language plans are weak in comparison to those of comparable agencies or offices in other countries.
- There is nothing in the Act establishing rights to receive, or obligations to deliver, Gaelic education or to use Gaelic in the courts; indeed, the Act creates no language rights at all.
- Because it was enacted by the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh rather than the Westminster Parliament in London, the Act covers Scottish public bodies only and does not extend to UK-wide bodies. As such, important authorities ranging from the Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions to the Maritime & Coast Guard Agency have no obligations under the Act. This makes it difficult to develop an integrated strategy for Gaelic development in the public sector, and may lead to confusion and frustration for Gaelic speakers.
- The Act does not address the private sector at all; indeed, the possibility of imposing Gaelic-related obligations on private companies was never seriously contemplated.

The first National Gaelic Language Plan ran from 2007–2012 and the second runs from 2012–17 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007a, 2012). The second plan builds on an interim strategy, *Ginealach Ùr na Gàidhlig* [The New Gaelic Generation], which was published in 2010 and which placed stronger emphasis – excessive emphasis in the views of some – on increasing the numbers of Gaelic speakers (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2010). The plan for 2012–17 identifies eight priority areas (home and early years; school education; post-school education; communities; workplace; arts and media; heritage and tourism; and corpus) and sets out detailed 'outcomes' and 'strategic priorities' in relation to each (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012). The second plan contains fewer specific targets than the first one, however, and on the whole is shorter and more summary.

To date approximately 40 public bodies have published Gaelic plans (including those agreed by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and nine of Scotland's 32 local authorities).[5]) These plans vary a great deal in their content, in accordance with the 'sliding scale' approach described above, though all make certain 'core commitments' in relation to the identity of the organisation (signage etc.), communications, publications and staffing, and set out the nature of their contribution to the National Plan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007b). To date, there has been no systematic evaluation of the impact of the Act or detailed studies of its effect on particular organisations (but see Milligan, Danson and Chalmers 2011). Although some commentators have expressed scepticism about the value of the Act, it is clear that the language plan process has caused public bodies that previously had little or no engagement with the language to make provision for Gaelic in different ways and to pay attention to the 'Gaelic agenda', creating opportunities for Gaelic use in new and often prestigious contexts. A number of major national organisations have formally adopted Gaelic names and use them in their corporate logos, for example (Puzey, McLeod and Dunbar 2013).

The growth of Gaelic education

Gaelic was initially excluded entirely from the public[6]) school system established in 1872 and it remained at the margins until the 1970s, even after a legal requirement to make provision for the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas was introduced in 1918 (MacLeod 2003). Although there had been limited initiatives from the early 1960s onwards, Gaelic-medium education in Scotland began only in 1985, building on the successes of Gaelic-medium pre-school playgroups organised by Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich (the Gaelic Pre-school Council). In the 2012–13 school year there were 2,474 primary school pupils in 60 Gaelic schools (or units within schools) across Scotland. Although all of these

5) For a list (not entirely up to date) of the organisations that have prepared plans see www.gaidhlig.org.uk/bord/en/our-work/gaelic-language-plans.php. A few organisations have now moved on to publish the first 'second generation' plans.

6) Note that the Scottish educational system is and always has been entirely separate from that of England. This is a key feature of the 1707 Union between Scotland and England. The term 'public school' is the proper usage in Scotland, as against the English 'state school'.

are public schools, there being no Gaelic provision in denominational or private schools, their geographical and sociolinguistic settings are very diverse: some are located in communities in which Gaelic remains widely used, some in areas of the *Gàidhealtachd* where language shift has occurred relatively recently, and some in Lowland towns and cities. Almost all the growth in recent years has occurred in the cities, especially Glasgow. The language profiles of pupils are equally varied: while a proportion, especially in Gaelic-speaking island areas, are first-language Gaelic speakers, in many schools a very large majority of the children enrolled come from non-Gaelic-speaking homes and are acquiring Gaelic through immersion. In line with international experience, research suggests that children in Gaelic-medium education keep pace with, and in some respects outperform, children in English-medium education (Johnstone et al. 1999; O'Hanlon et al. 2010).

Given the traditional exclusion of Gaelic from the Scottish educational system, the establishment and expansion of Gaelic-medium education has been a development of great significance for the language (see MacLeod 2003; Robertson 2001). Even so, the scale of provision remains very small; under 1% of Scotland's primary school children receive Gaelic-medium education, and very few of the rest acquire any knowledge of the language at all. Only 14 of 32 education authorities currently offer Gaelic-medium education at any of their schools, and there is no legal obligation to make it available.[7]) The numbers enrolled in Gaelic-medium education would need to grow significantly simply to maintain the existing Gaelic-speaking population, and even in the Western Isles, only a minority of children receive their primary education through the medium of Gaelic, as English-medium education remains the default option (MacKinnon 2006: 66).

Bòrd na Gàidhlig's National Gaelic Language Plan for 2012–17 has established the target of doubling the number of children entering primary 1 classes from 400 per year to 800 per year over the life of the plan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012: 22). A major constraint on the growth of Gaelic education has been the shortage of trained teachers, a common problem in minority-language education. Some improvements in training structures have been put in place in recent years, and new kinds of training programmes have been developed, but there has been no large-scale commitment of resources of the kind seen, for example, in the Basque Country (McLeod 2003; McPake et al. 2013).

One unusual feature of Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland has been its reliance on Gaelic-medium units within English-medium schools rather than free-standing Gaelic schools of the kind preferred in Ireland, Wales and other minority language jurisdictions (McLeod 2003). Because children in Gaelic 'units' are surrounded by English-monoglot fellow pupils and staff, language immersion is significantly constrained and Gaelic language acquisition may not be as effective as it might be (see MacNeil & Stradling 2000; cf. Johnstone et al. 1999). At present there are only three all-Gaelic primary schools in Scotland, in the cities of Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh (with a second school in Glasgow expected to open in 2015). Conversely, proposals to develop all-Gaelic schools in the *Gàidhealtachd* have encountered significant political opposition (much of it from local residents, including Gaelic speakers, concerned about the impact on local children receiving monoglot English education). Developing free-standing Gaelic schools has been identified as a policy priority by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Government, and the opening of Edinburgh's Gaelic school in 2013, after a long campaign, was viewed as a significant milestone.

As with most other minority languages, Gaelic-medium education is much less developed at secondary level than primary. A 1994 government report described the expansion of Gaelic-medium provision at secondary level as 'neither desirable nor feasible in the foreseeable future' (Scottish Office Education Department 1994: 3), a view that has only gradually been superseded. Only about 500 secondary students received even part of their education through Gaelic in 2011–12[8]) and only 17 secondary schools, a large majority of them located within the traditional *Gàidhealtachd* area, offered any Gaelic-medium education. Gaelic-medium provision, moreover, is overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower secondary levels; 75% of these pupils were in the first two years of secondary school. Provision for Gaelic as a subject is somewhat better: 1,083 pupils at 35 secondary schools were enrolled in classes for fluent speakers in 2011–12, and 2,643 in classes for learners of the language at 32 schools. Even so, only 42 secondary schools[9]) out of 367 in Scotland currently offer Gaelic in any form.

As at primary level, Gaelic-medium secondary education has hitherto been confined to units, with only a limited number of subjects taught through Gaelic, but the first all-Gaelic secondary school opened in Glasgow in 2006. This new school is increasing its provision incrementally and will eventually offer an entirely Gaelic-medium secondary curriculum. In 2011–12 the school offered nine secondary subjects through the medium of Gaelic (in addition to Gaelic itself) to some 170 pupils.

Perhap surprisingly, provision for Gaelic in further and higher education is in some respects better developed than in the school system. The Gaelic college on the Isle of Skye, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, now offers four degree courses taught entirely through the medium of Gaelic;

7) The UK government has, however, bound itself to article 8 a 1 and 2 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which requires it 'to make available' primary and secondary education in Gaelic. In its reports on the implementation of the Charter in the UK, the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts has ruled that these commitments have been only partly fulfilled (Council of Europe 2004: 33, 2007: 35–6, 2010: 34, 2014: 23–4).

8) Information concerning secondary enrolments is based on data for 2011–12, the last year for which detailed breakdowns are available.

9) 30 secondary schools offer Gaelic classes both for fluent speakers and for learners, 6 offer classes for fluent speakers only and another 6 offer classes for learners only.

two of these are also available at Lews Castle College in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. Gaelic is also used as a teaching medium for some courses at the Celtic studies departments at the universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow (see Robertson 2001: 19–21; Scottish Funding Council 2007). Academic research on Gaelic, especially issues concerning language maintenance and revitalisation, have received a significant boost through the inter-university Soillse initiative (www.soillse.ac.uk), which involved total funding of more than £5.2 million (€ 6.2 million).

Up to now, there has been little national coordination in Gaelic education policy, partly because the Scottish education system is decentralised in many key respects and many important operational decisions concerning education provision are made by individual local authorities (Rogers & McLeod 2006). The National Gaelic Language Plans (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007a, 2012) may help develop a real system of Gaelic education, even if the Act does not require the inclusion of Gaelic in the curriculum or entitle children to study the language. The Scottish Government is also in the process of developing national guidance on Gaelic education for the first time, which may include a formal parental entitlement to Gaelic-medium education.

The Gaelic movement in Scotland has arguably placed excessive emphasis on Gaelic education within its revitalisation strategies. Leading sociolinguist Joshua Fishman has criticized the Gaelic movement as relying almost exclusively on 'higher-order props' (Fishman 1991: 380). Fishman makes clear that minority-language education must be connected to broader community-based language initiatives and intergenerational mother-tongue transmission in the home, and in their absence will lead to expensive and disappointing failure (Fishman 1991: 380). Thus, even if the numbers of children enrolled in Gaelic-medium education (including secondary and tertiary education), were to increase dramatically – tenfold or more – international experience makes clear that much more would still need to be done in order to ensure active, lifelong use of the language and transmission to future generations (McLeod 2003).

The expansion of Gaelic broadcasting

Although Gaelic broadcasting in Scotland began as early as 1923, it remained minimal in scale until the 1970s (Lamb 1999). From 1985 onwards, the BBC Gaelic radio service, Radio nan Gaidheal, has steadily increased the amount of hours broadcast and broadened its geographical range. Programming now exceeds 85 hours per week and is accessible not only to the great majority of Scotland's Gaelic-speaking population but also to the great majority of the Scottish population as a whole (although the service is still unavailable in some parts of the country). Radio nan Gaidheal is also available worldwide via the Internet. Radio nan Gaidheal has a very high level of audience penetration within the Gaelic community and (much more so than television) plays a key role in relation to the publicising and discussion of Gaelic affairs (Dunbar 2003b, 2006).

Gaelic television expanded rapidly as a result of the Broadcasting Act 1990, which established a Gaelic Television Fund (now known as the Gaelic Broadcasting Fund) currently worth £8.5 million (€ 13 million) annually. Although a government-appointed commission formally recommended in 2000 that a separate, dedicated Gaelic television channel should be established, and the government committed itself to this goal by acceding to paragraph 11 1 a 2 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,[10]) progress stalled for several years in the early 2000s, for a combination of political and financial reasons. A new digital channel, delivered by the BBC in partnership with the MG ALBA (the Gaelic Media Service), was finally launched in autumn 2008 (Dunbar 2010b). This new channel, BBC ALBA, broadcasts approximately six hours per day (including repeats), but was initially available only via satellite (and, for some programmes, on-line). Only in June 2011 was BBC ALBA launched on Freeview, the digital terrestrial system now used by most Scottish viewers. Making the channel available on Freeview has dramatically increased the reach of the channel, with some 15.6% of Scottish viewers (well over 500,000 people) accessing the service each week in 2012–13, some of them doubtless attracted by its sports programming (football and rugby matches with Gaelic commentary) (MG ALBA 2013: 7, 18). Despite this success in building its audience, BBC ALBA is struggling to provide an adequate service with the budget available (approximately £20 million (€ 24 million) per year) (Chalmers et al. 2013).

Broadcasting already consumes the lion's share of total public expenditure on Gaelic development, and this proportion has increased further with the establishment of the digital television service, even if the budget for the Gaelic television service is small compared to other minority language services, to say nothing of English-language channels.[11]) As in other minority-language jurisdictions, debates continue about the proper role of the Gaelic media in language revitalisation strategy. Proponents argue that investment in broadcast media, especially television, is necessary to promote a contemporary image for the language and to meet the needs of contemporary Gaelic speakers' lifestyles, but it is by no means clear that increased investment in Gaelic television will or can deliver concrete benefits in terms of Gaelic language acquisition and use (see Dunbar 2003b; Cormack 2006).

10) Article 11 1 a 2 provides that 'to the extent that radio and television carry out a public service mission' the government must 'encourage and/or facilitate the creation of at least one radio station and one television channel in' Gaelic.

11) The budget for BBC ALBA in 2013 is approximately £20 million. The Irish-language channel TG4 receives approximately £30 million, the Welsh-language channel S4C £85 million, the evening-only digital channel BBC 3 £89.5 million, and the main BBC channel, BBC 1, £1,200 million.

Gaelic in print

The use of Gaelic in print media and in publishing is a good deal less impressive than the position in broadcasting, a consequence of both less generous funding and low Gaelic literacy levels. The sole all-Gaelic newspaper, *An Gàidheal Ùr*, which only appeared on a a monthly basis, closed in 2008 for financial reasons. There has never been a daily Gaelic newspaper, and weeklies have been very sporadic. Gaelic articles appear once a week in the the nationally distributed *Scotsman* newspaper, in the Highland edition of the Aberdeen *Press and Journal* and approximately half a dozen local papers. Gaelic periodicals are very scarce: the long-running Gaelic quarterly *Gairm* published its last issue in autumn 2002, and its replacement *Gath* appeared only sporadically over the following years. An on-line magazine, *Dàna* (http://danamag.org), was launched in 2014 but its impact and longevity remain to be seen.

Book publishing is on a very small scale, a few dozen titles a year, with almost no adult non-fiction being produced. Considerable emphasis has been placed on books for children and teenagers in recent years, and the success of the *Ur-Sgeul* initiative, which produced more than thirty novels and short story collections for adults between 2003 and 2013, has demonstrated how concentrated investment in Gaelic publishing can bring significant payoffs (Storey 2011). Academic writing in Gaelic, principally on linguistic, literary and historical topics, has also become considerably more common in recent years, in line with the growth in Gaelic-medium higher education (McLeod 2013).

As with other minority languages, the Gaelic presence on the Internet has expanded rapidly. Above and beyond the growing range of materials produced by Gaelic organisations and public bodies in Scotland, a number of Gaelic discussion groups have been established, together with scores of personal web pages and 'blogs' in Gaelic (many of them from outside Scotland) and Gaelic-language sections on web-based encyclopedias. When the growth of e-mail and social media is also taken into account, Gaelic may well be more widely written than ever before.

Issues in corpus planning

A striking feature of the Gaelic situation has been the relative neglect of corpus planning within revitalisation efforts. In contrast to many other minority language movements, there has never been any kind of linguistic academy, institute or unit with responsibility for the linguistic codification or elaboration of Gaelic, and initiatives in the fields of orthographic and grammatical standardisation, terminological development and lexicography have been limited in their range and characterised by occasional bursts of activity rather than integrated, cumulative endeavour. There is now a significant disjuncture between new status planning initiatives – the use of Gaelic in secondary and higher education and official business, for example – and the low level of corpus development, so that the language is sometimes not fully functional for these high-level purposes (see McLeod 2004b). Work is needed in a number of areas, perhaps most immediately in relation to terminological development and translator training, if Gaelic is to be successfully institutionalised in the wake of the Gaelic Language Act. Full-scale, fully functional dictionaries and guidebooks concerning grammar and stylistics are also urgently required. Such initiatives are likely to succeed only if a specialist coordinating body is established, perhaps under the auspices of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, perhaps under the universities' Board of Celtic Studies.

The commitments in relation to corpus in Bòrd na Gàidhlig's second National Plan for Gaelic are weaker than those given in the first one, which may suggest that the authorities do not see this area as an important priority (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007: 34–9; Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012: 46–7). On the other hand, the announcement in 2013 of £2 million of funding for a historical dictionary of Gaelic, Faclair na Gàidhlig, is an encouraging sign (Faclair na Gàidhlig 2013). A comprehensive set of proposals for institutionalising Gaelic corpus planning, based on extensive community consultation, has recently been sent to Bòrd na Gàidhlig and is awaiting evaluation (Bell et al. 2014).

Conclusion

The position of Gaelic in Scotland has become increasingly contradictory. Public support for the language, in terms of government financing, institutional provision and favourable attitudes among the general Scottish population has never been greater, but the language has continued to weaken in terms of speaker numbers and intensity of use, to the point where it now can hardly be said to function as a community language anywhere in Scotland. Rates of intergenerational transmission remain low, and any influx of new speakers via Gaelic-medium school education or adult learning can only be a very poor substitute. The main question now is whether the new policy paradigm that has been put in place with the enactment of the Gaelic Language Act and the creation of Bòrd na Gàidhlig will bring about real progress in confronting these challenges. There is a danger that language planning strategies may place excessive emphasis on formal policies and institutional provision by public authorities and fail to tackle the central problems of language acquisition and use in families and communities. There is also a risk that strategies adapted from countries where the minority language is relatively stronger – most obviously Wales – might not prove functional or successful in the Scottish context.

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