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Complementary RLS strategies in education: The importance of adult heritage learners of threatened minority languages

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Heritage learners of minority languages can play a lynchpin role in reversing language shift (RLS) in their families; however, in order to enact this role, they must first overcome certain barriers to re-integrating the minority language into the home domain. Using a combination of conversation and narrative analysis methods, we demonstrate how both enacting this lynchpin role, as well as the specific barriers to its enactment, unfolds at the microlevel for heritage learners of Scottish Gaelic. We then turn to Gaelic language planning at the macro- and meso-levels, and argue that Gaelic language education policy does not explicitly recognise this potential lynchpin role, nor does policy or pedagogy specifically address the particular interactional challenges that heritage learners face. We argue in order to best maximise Gaelic education as means to RLS, the education of adult heritage learners needs to be seen as a complementary strategy to childhood education, not as a secondary (and often lower priority) tactic to ensuring the vitality of the language.

Keywords: adult language learning; heritage learners; Gaelic; intergenerational transmission; RLS

1 Introduction

It has long been recognised that the provision of formal childhood education in a minority language is integral to minority languages' long-term vitality. As Baker (2007, p. 142) observes, 'heritage language schools are a major component in language planning. The survival, maintenance, and revitalisation of the large number of dying languages in the world require bilingual education to play its part in producing new speakers.' Fishman (1991), however, cautions against over-reliance on formal childhood education, observing that language planning efforts often fall into the trap of using childhood education as a fix-all solution to the various and interrelated problems that arise when a language community contracts. Fishman (1991, 2001) is adamant that the vitality of any minority language hinges on the successful intergenerational transmission of that language (Stage 6 in his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), describing this stage as the 'fulcrum' (2001, p.467) in terms of reversing language shift (RLS). In other words, if this stage is not achieved, the long-term survival of the contracting language is unlikely. In order for childhood education in a minority language to serve as a successful tactic for RLS, Fishman argues that education of young people in the language must be complemented by the use of the language in the home, predicated on *adult* language learning. He writes:

[School] must be preceded by (or at least accompanied by) adult language learning of the threatened language as a second language [...] and then by substantial child acquisition of it as a first language [in the home ...] *even before the pupils-to-be show up at school.*
(2001, p. 14-15, emphasis Fishman's)

This sentiment is echoed by Edwards and Newcombe (2005), who discuss the necessity of complementary home and institutional maintenance efforts in the context of language revitalisation in Wales. In this paper we will further advance this argument by analysing

language education policy and practice for another Celtic language, Scottish Gaelic. We will show that while Gaelic language development policy at the macro-level recognises the importance of intergenerational transmission to the vitality of the language, both macro- and meso-level Gaelic education policy misunderstand and underemphasise a key agent in the intergenerational transmission process: the adult heritage learner.

Following Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), we define adult heritage learners as speakers who have a direct family connection to the language (i.e. the learner's parents or grandparents speak the language),ⁱ but who learned or re-learned the language in an institutional context as adults. According to McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim's report (2010, pp. 23–4) on adult Gaelic learning in Scotland, 43% of adult Gaelic learners surveyed had at least one Gaelic-speaking relative. As we will illustrate in this paper, by virtue of having Gaelic-speaking relatives, heritage learners are in a unique position to facilitate the creation of a home environment where intergenerational transmission of the language can take place. However, we will show that macro- and meso-level development policy for Gaelic in Scotland does not fully recognise this potential role of heritage learners, nor does it fully appreciate the value of *complementary* adult learning when planning for language revitalisation through childhood education. Drawing on two separate data-sets – conversations analysis of natural Gaelic speech in one family with a key adult heritage learner (Smith-Christmas, 2012) and narrative life-history interviews with seventeen adult heritage learners (Armstrong, 2013) – we will illustrate the special challenges that heritage learners face when using Gaelic in the home environment, and we will show how adult heritage learners of Gaelic must take an agentive role in re-negotiating language norms in the family and re-establishing Gaelic use in the home domain. We will then argue that in order to maximise heritage learners' positive impact on intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in the home, these special challenges need to be directly addressed in Gaelic development and education policy, as well as Gaelic language-learning pedagogy. Our paper will underscore two main points: first, that adult learners, and particularly heritage adult learners, have the potential to play a lynchpin role in ensuring the intergenerational transmission of a threatened minority language, and second, that in order to fulfil this role, adult learners' own language education must prepare them for the special challenges involved.

2 Scottish Gaelic and education

Scottish Gaelic is spoken by less than 59,000 people, according to the most recent census data available (2001, see General Register Office of Scotland, 2005). The language was once spoken over most of what is modern-day Scotland, but its fortune began to decline in the twelfth century with the adoption of Norman French as the language of the Scottish court; the language shift was further precipitated by the emerging divide between the more urbanised, predominantly Anglophone Lowlands and the rural, mainly Gaelic-speaking Highlands. Gaelic speakers were specifically targeted in legislation and actively repressed by governments in Edinburgh and in London, and during the 'Clearances' in Scotland (1792-1886) whole communities of Gaelic speakers in the Highlands were removed from their homes and forced to emigrate. Poverty and underdevelopment in the Highlands and especially in the Hebrides accelerated emigration from Gaelic-speaking communities. (see MacKinnon, 1991, for a social history of Gaelic in Scotland) The landmark 1872 Education Act made no provision for Gaelic and its use was actively discouraged within the education system; reportedly as late as the 1930s children were physically punished in school for using their native language (MacKinnon, 1974, p.55). A combination of active suppression and a long-standing association with poverty and underdevelopment lowered the prestige of the

language in core Gaelic-speaking communities to the degree that from the 1950s to 1970s there was rapid shift from Gaelic to English at the community and family level in the Western Isles and Skye (see MacKinnon, 1977, p. 93; see also the report for the Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1961).

By the end of the twentieth century, significant revitalisation efforts were underway, predominantly in terms of what Fishman (1967) would call the H(igh) functions of language use. In 2005, the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act was passed. This act, modelled on the Welsh Language Act of 1993, made Gaelic an official language of Scotland for the first time and also set up Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the Gaelic language planning body, which was charged with coordinating the promotion of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland with a special responsibility for Gaelic education (Dunbar 2010, Walsh and McLeod 2008). The establishment of the national Gaelic radio station, Radio nan Gaidheal, in 1985 (Lamb, 1999), and the establishment of the national digital Gaelic television station, BBC Alba, in 2008 (Cormack, 2010), were important developments for securing the language's presence in mass media. Yet despite these advances in a wider sociocultural context, the vitality of the language remains precarious at the family and community level, as most recently demonstrated in Mac an Tàilleir, Rothach and Armstrong's (2011) study of the core Gaelic-speaking community of Shawbost (Siabost), on the Isle of Lewis, which found that intergenerational transmission of the language had all but ceased and that community use of the language was weak and declining.

Efforts to revitalize Gaelic through childhood education began in earnest in 1975. The establishment of the Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles saw the teaching of Gaelic in twenty primary schools, which in 1981 was expanded to all 54 schools within this area. Gaelic immersion education, referred to as Gaelic medium education (GME), was initiated first at the pre-school level (aged 3 and 4 years), then expanded to the primary level in 1985, with 24 students initially enrolled in either of two GME units located in Inverness and Glasgow (cf. O'Hanlon, 2010). GME remains strongest at the primary level; in 2011-2012, there were 2,418 pupils at the primary level receiving their tuition through the medium of Gaelic (0.7% of the total primary roll), while only 1,104 pupils at the secondary level were being taught through the medium of Gaelic (0.4% of the total secondary roll), although a further 2,643 secondary school pupils were taking Gaelic as a subject, as they would a foreign language such as French or German (Galloway, 2012). Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, part of University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), is the only GME college, although the universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow and Lews Castle College (part of UHI) also offer some classes taught through the medium of Gaelic.

Adult learners of Gaelic in Scotland are served by a complex and largely uncoordinated mosaic of providers, agencies and authorities that, for all their diversity and potential reach, as a whole fail to produce new proficient speakers of Gaelic in any significant numbers. In the most recent survey, McLeod et al. (2010) compiled a database of more than 160 courses offered by about 50 different providers, including universities, colleges, community learning centres, music and arts organisations and activist groups. Yet in spite of all this activity, MacCaluim (2007, p. 74) has estimated that each year 'the numbers of learners reaching fluency are still very small [...] dozens rather than hundreds', and well below the numbers required to make a real demographic impact on the attrition of the Gaelic-speaking population in Scotland (MacCaluim 2006, 2007).

This general structural failure of the Gaelic adult-learning sector has been a long-standing problem. In 1992, two Gaelic development organisations, Comunn na Gàidhlig (the umbrella Gaelic development body in Scotland at the time) and Comann an Luchd-Ionnsachaidh (the Gaelic adult-learner advocacy organisation), produced a report that characterised adult Gaelic learner provision in Scotland as follows: 'fragmented, lacks

coordination and needs a more structured approach' (Comunn na Gàidhlig and Comann an Luchd-Ionnsachaidh 1992, p.65). Writing 14 years after the publication of the report, MacCaluim (2007) observed that although several more structured learning pathways had been developed in the intervening years, by and large the assessment still stood. Courses on offer tend to be *ad hoc*, ephemeral and principally aimed at beginners, with relatively few offerings designed to take learners from beginner to advanced proficiency. Two principal exceptions are An Cùrsa Inntigidh, a distance course offered by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and Ùlpan, a course modelled on the Welsh Wlpan and on the Hebrew Ulpan courses, and available throughout Scotland. Unfortunately, several of the other comprehensive and structured courses noted by MacCaluim in 2007 as positive developments have since been discontinued (McLeod et al., 2010; see also Robertson, 2000).

The Gaelic adult-learning sector is also generally weakened by an outmoded and inappropriate pedagogy. Many courses still rely on traditional structural/analytical methods (MacCaluim, 2007), and while there has been a notable improvement in available teaching materials of late, there is still no nationally recognised training and validations scheme for tutorsⁱⁱ and no uniform system for testing the progress of learners, and therefore, for evaluating the effectiveness of the different courses on offer (McLeod et al., 2010). The structure of adult educational provision in Scotland is unlikely to produce substantial numbers of adults who are proficient enough in Gaelic to significantly contribute to the intergenerational transmission of the language. In the next two sections, through an analysis of actual language use in a bilingual family, contextualized by data from language-learning narratives by adult heritage speakers of Gaelic, we will first illustrate the lynch-pin role that proficient adult learners can play in the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic, then discuss the challenges they face when enacting this process.

3 Talking language maintenance into being: Reversing language shift in the family

Through a detailed interactional analysis of actual language use, Garafanga (2010) shows how Kinyarwanda-French bilinguals in Belgium 'talk language shift into being' by capitulating to their children's implicit requests to use French, not Kinyarwanda, as the medium of interaction. In this section, using a similar analytic strategy, we will show how heritage language learners can reverse this process and talk *language maintenance* into being in their families. Below, our analysis will draw on two data sets: a corpus of language-learning narratives from interviews with 17 adult heritage learners of Gaelic (Armstrong, 2013), and a case study of the 'Campbell Family,' which consists of ten hours of recorded conversations in the home environment within three generations of a family living on the Isles of Skye and Harris, whose language use was documented in July of 2009 (Smith-Christmas, 2012). Through a detailed analysis of this interactional data, and in light of the context provided by the narrative data, we will show how heritage learners can play a lynchpin role in RLS within their families.

Adult heritage learners are often well-situated in the family to facilitate minority-language use between generations, but only if they can first successfully renegotiate long-established patterns of language use with other family members. In the following excerpt drawn from the narrative data, a heritage learner describes the difficulties she encountered when negotiating Gaelic use between her L1 Gaelic-speaking grandmother and her own children in Gaelic-medium education:

It took a long time actually to get [my grandmother] to adapt to [speaking Gaelic], it was really strange, I think just because she was so used to speaking to us in English she found

that a bit strange – speaking Gaelic to us. And I think because she was older as well, she used to get quite annoyed with me because I would be so determined that we had to keep going in Gaelic, and she maybe wouldn't be understanding what I was saying, and she would say, "Oh for goodness sake just say it in English until I understand you." Because I would maybe be three attempts at saying one sentence and I still wouldn't be getting it right. But because obviously I've got a little bit better as time's gone on, and she is understanding more now, she kind of has kept it up, so I'm really pleased we've achieved that. And I'm glad that she's kind of seen how determined I am and accepted that I am quite determined to keep it going. Albeit that it's caused a few arguments between us too because I'll try and push that she speaks Gaelic to the kids and sometimes she doesn't but then she says that's just what comes ready to her as opposed to trying to be awkward about it, it's just what comes out first kind of thing. And then I get a bit angry with her and then I have to think, "Well for goodness sake she's old and I should be pleased that she's just able to converse with me, never mind stipulating that it has to be in Gaelic." But she does, she makes a much bigger effort now.

(Armstrong 2013 and unpublished data)

In this excerpt, the heritage learner narrates an account of her lynchpin role in RLS in her family. Although it apparently caused some conflict, the heritage learner worked to broker Gaelic use between her grandmother and her own children, ensuring that her children would have a source of native Gaelic input in the home, and helping to further reverse the process of language shift underway in the family. It is also apparent in this narrative that RLS in the family was not a seamless, easy process, but that it required determination and persistence on the part of heritage learner in continually re-negotiating the medium of interaction (see also Armstrong 2013).

This same need for determination and persistence to RLS in the family can be seen in the conversational data collected from the 'Campbell Family'.ⁱⁱⁱ The focus of this particular case study is Peigi,^{iv} aged 31, a heritage learner who starting learning Gaelic in an institutional context at the age of 21. Both Peigi's parents speak Gaelic, but because of the low prestige of the language when Peigi was growing up, they spoke English to Peigi and her older sister (who is not a part of this study but who also learned Gaelic to advanced proficiency in an institutional context). A detailed study of language practices in the Campbell family (Smith-Christmas, 2012) reveals that not only does Peigi use a high amount of Gaelic with her two children, Maggie (3;6) and David (7;11), but also that her language practices and ideologies are influential within the family sphere, resulting in other family members also occasionally using Gaelic with the children, further talking language maintenance into being in the extended family. The following conversational excerpt illustrates how Peigi maintains the use of Gaelic even while Maggie responds in English:

Example 1

- | | | |
|-------|--------|--|
| 1 | Maggie | will it be a toy? |
| 2 | Nana | maybe mmm-hmm |
| 3 | Peigi | <i>chan fhaigh <u>thusa</u> chan eil thu modhail gu leòr</i> <i><u>you</u> won't get you're not behaving enough</i> <i>thalla 's cuir- na coinnlean air ais <u>right now</u></i> <i>go and put the candles back</i> |
| 4 | Maggie | ok |
| • | | |
| (2.8) | | |
| 6 | Peigi | <i>[[suidh] sìos</i> <i>sit down</i> |

- -
 -
 -
 -
 -
- 12 Peigi [[right *tha sin gu leòr a-niste*]
that's enough now
- 13 Maggie no it's not
- 14 Peigi ok *ceart gu leòr chan fhaigh thu toy a-màireach*
fine you won't get a toy tomorrow
- 15 Maggie yes I am

In this excerpt, Peigi's admonitions to Maggie in Gaelic (Turns 3, 12, 14) are met by Maggie's replies in English (Turn 4, 13, 15). However, this does not undermine the importance of Peigi's persistent dual-lingualism (i.e. one person speaking one code and the interlocutor answering in a second code; cf. Saviile-Troike, 1987). Gafaranga's (2010) has shown how parents' capitulation to the child's preferred (majority language) code is one way children and parents talk language shift into being in day-to-day interaction. Not only does Peigi refuse to participate in this process of 'talking language shift into being,' but by actively displaying her desire for her children to be raised as Gaelic speakers, she is promoting Gaelic as the child-centred language in her family, a practice which, as previously discussed, is sometimes adopted by other family members. Thus, Peigi is facilitating multiple opportunities for Maggie to receive Gaelic input. Peigi is the lynchpin in terms of language maintenance within the Campbell Family; if Peigi had not learned Gaelic to advanced proficiency as an adult, it is likely that Maggie would have very limited Gaelic input within the family sphere.

It is particularly noteworthy that since this conversation was recorded in 2009, Maggie has been observed using Gaelic more frequently in the home. Maggie's caregivers believe her increased use of Gaelic is linked to her attendance at a Gaelic-medium school. This observation illustrates the importance of complementary (adult and childhood) education in efforts to reverse language shift, as suggested by Fishman (1991). In the case of Maggie, her use of Gaelic depends on RLS efforts on *two* fronts: in the family and at school. Without the complementary support facilitated by an adult learner in the family, it is much less likely that the desired outcome (Maggie using Gaelic in the home), would be achieved. On the one hand, on evidence of the 2009 recordings, Gaelic input from caregivers, and particularly from her mother, does lead Maggie to productively use Gaelic in her bilingual home, but on the other hand, if a child like Maggie only attended GME without home support for Gaelic, it would be unlikely that she would productively use much Gaelic outside of school. (see Stockdale, Munro, and MacGregor, 2003; and also Ó hIfearnáin, 2007, for a similar discussion on Irish RLS efforts within the family) Complementary support is available because Peigi has learned Gaelic to advanced proficiency and is successful in spite of the challenge presented by Maggie's persistent use of English with her caregivers. We suggest that successful RLS efforts for Gaelic revitalisation hinge on this kind of complementary support, and adult heritage learners like Peigi can be particularly important in this respect, not only as active Gaelic users in their own right, but also as new speakers who play a lynchpin role facilitating Gaelic use in the home and in raising the next generation of Gaelic speakers. However, this is only achievable if the heritage learners first reactivate Gaelic use in this private domain, a challenge we will examine in the next section.

4 Overcoming the ‘inertia condition of language choice’ and the agentive role of adult learners of a threatened minority language

In this section, we will illustrate how overcoming the ‘inertia condition of language choice,’ (Spolsky, 1991, p. 146) is one of the main challenges that face adult heritage learners of Scottish Gaelic. Adult heritage learners of Gaelic, after all, have previously-established relationships through the medium of English, and as Spolsky observes, once a relationship is established in a particular language, speech partners tend to prefer to use that language with each other. In the following excerpt from the narrative data, an interviewee explains the ‘inertia condition of language choice’ in her extended family and the difficulty it presented when she sought to change the language of interaction from English to Gaelic:

But in terms of – following into the extended family, [my cousin] put it very well to me once. He said, “Well, there’s people I speak Gaelic to and there’s people I speak English to,” and for a long time, I was one that he spoke English with. [...] So you’ve got to establish some credibility, I think, even within the family. You’ve really got to sort of make them feel that it’s worth doing it. So it’s quite interesting. I mean, in a sense, they take their lead from you.

In the Campbell Family case study, Peigi has commented that while she tries to use Gaelic exclusively with her mother, she finds that they often ‘drift’ into English. Peigi observed that her older sister, who is also a heritage learner of Gaelic, is ‘good at getting them back on track’ and re-initiating the use of Gaelic. These metalinguistic comments not only illustrate that speaking Gaelic is a very conscious choice on Peigi’s part, but also that this choice is sometimes challenging to maintain. This is illustrated in this example, where the conversation has ‘drifted’ to English, but Peigi re-negotiates the use of Gaelic as the language of interaction:

Example 2

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Peigi | did you see I put the table cloth on? |
| 2 | Dolina | oh did ya? no |
| 3 | Peigi | <i>rinn mi an rud a thuirt thu</i> I did the thing you said |
| 4 | Dolina | oh (.) did ya? |
| 5 | Peigi | so (.) <i>tha e gu math fad air a’ chùlaibh(.)</i> it’s quite far from the back <i>chan eil thu ga fhaicinn co-dhiù</i> you don’t see it anyway (.) so (.) ^o <i>duilich</i> sorry |
| 6 | Dolina | <i>dh’fhaodaidh tu (?) a’ cuibhrige</i> could you (?) the table cloth |
| 7 | Peigi | no (.) <i>’s e sin an shape a th’ ann</i> that’s the shape |

In this excerpt, Dolina does not meet Peigi’s use of Gaelic with overt resistance; nonetheless, this particular conversation extract illustrates what we will call the *agentive role* that heritage learners must take in overcoming the ‘inertia condition of language choice.’ First, as this excerpt demonstrates, it is the heritage learner, not the native speaker, who negotiates the use of Gaelic (Turn 3). Second, the heritage learner’s use of Gaelic is not necessarily met with a

response in Gaelic. A Gaelic learner may need to take a particularly agentive role in interactions because speaking Gaelic can potentially violate pre-existing community norms of diglossic use of Gaelic and English in different domains. (cf. McEwan-Fujita, 2010) Also, all adult speakers of Gaelic are also completely fluent in English, so when difficulties in communication arise, switching to English is always available as an option. (cf. Wells, 2011) A pervasive norm of accommodation can mean that ‘mistakes’ on the part of the Gaelic learner will trigger a switch by native speakers to English. This particular challenge is illustrated in the following excerpt drawn from one of the narrative interviews with an adult heritage learner:

The hurdle was actually getting the opportunity to speak and make mistakes and actually get a bit – get my fluency up. That just wasn’t something that you were going to naturally be able to get, because as soon as you hesitate with a Gaelic speaker, they will revert to English.

This excerpt not only illustrates how mistakes and lapses on the part of the learner can trigger a switch to English, but also illustrates the reflexive relationship between a lack of proficiency in Gaelic and lack of use of Gaelic with native speakers. With fewer opportunities to use the language with a native speaker, learners will struggle to develop proficiency; and with less proficiency in the language, learners will struggle to maintain Gaelic use with native speakers, and the cycle continues. The following excerpt demonstrates how Peigi appears to be aware that any indications of lack of proficiency might trigger a switch to English, and thus, maintains the use of Gaelic despite difficulties:

Example 3

- 1 Dolina /mmm-hmm
a bheil idir eye patch agad ann a sheo (.)
do you have an eye patch in here
you know::w (.) even refreshing mask
no càil mar sin (.)
or something like that
I bet you *gu bheil anns a’ bathroom*
there is in the bathroom
- 2 Peigi mmm-hmm.
- 3 Dolina *shuas an staidhre*=
up the stairs
- 4 Peigi *=dh’ fhaodadh dìreach plaster a chur air ’s toilet roll*
perhaps just put a plaster and toilet roll on it
- 5 Dolina uh-huh
- 6 Peigi *dìreach*-
just
- 7 Dolina *a bheil e goirt ga fhosgladh?*
does it hurt to open it?
- 8 Peigi well (.) *’s e dìreach gu bheil e- seòrsa dè tha e*
it’s just that it’s a sort what’s it doing
a’ dèanamh irritation air ach
irritating it isn’t but
bhiodh e nas fheàrr dùinte (.)
it would be better closed
sin a tha iad ag ràdh ma tha thu ga cleachdadh no
that’s what they say if using it or
a’ dèanamh cus blinkadh

| | | |
|----|--------|---|
| | | doing too much blinking |
| 9 | Dolina | uh-huh |
| 10 | Peigi | <i>dùnadh- a' priobadh do shùil</i> closing- blinking your eye |

In this example, Peigi and Dolina are discussing the possibility of Peigi having to wear an eye patch. Although Peigi is a highly proficient speaker of Gaelic, this excerpt contains a number of repairs and disfluencies, such as the initial part of Turn 8. However, despite the disfluencies, Peigi maintains nearly monolingual use of Gaelic with the occasional English borrowing (i.e.: ‘contact’, ‘irritation’) employed. It is evident from Peigi’s correction of ‘*blinkadh*’ (blink with a Gaelic present progressive suffix) to *dùnadh* (closing) and then *a’ priobadh* (blinking) that she finds the use of ‘*blinkadh*’ problematic, even though Dolina neither indicates its use is ‘faultable’ (cf. Goffman, 1981) nor that Dolina cannot semantically parse ‘*blinkadh*.’ In contrast to Peigi’s nearly monolingual use of Gaelic, Dolina alternates languages freely, inserting English phrases such as ‘you know even refreshing mask’ and ‘I bet you’ (Turn 4) into her Gaelic discourse, which is consistent with the ways in which Dolina’s first generation peers in the Campbell Family code-switch for effect (see Smith-Christmas, 2012). In contrast to Dolina’s code-switching, Peigi’s apparent resistance to code-switching indexes a need to assert fluency in Gaelic, perhaps fearing that lapses (such as in Turn 8) or filling of lexical gaps with English equivalents might cause Dolina to switch to English. Even if Peigi does not think that Dolina will switch to English at this particular moment in time, it is possible that Peigi has cultivated a monolingual speech style in reaction to previous switches to English on the part of native Gaelic speakers, as explained by the interviewee in the narrative data presented above.

It is clear that reactivating Gaelic use the home is not necessarily a seamless process for heritage learners. First, there is the challenge of overcoming the ‘inertia condition of language choice’ and mastery of the agentive role that heritage learners must play in establishing Gaelic as the language of interaction; second, there is the need to maintain Gaelic use despite occasional proficiency issues; and finally, there is a potential conflict between a discursive strategy of using mostly or only Gaelic for the purpose of ‘talking language maintenance into being’ and prevalent community speech norms *vis-à-vis* code-switching and accommodation. These issues are pertinent to adult learners in general (cf. MacEwan-Fujita, 2010; Wells, 2011) but we argue that these issues are particularly salient in the case of heritage learners because heritage learners are often re-negotiating language use in relationships with family members specifically (parents, grandparents, siblings) — relationships that were long-established through the medium of English. As we will now discuss, all of these language use issues have pedagogical implications, and in order to better prepare heritage learners for their potential lynchpin role in RLS and in reactivating Gaelic use in the home, these issues could be explicitly addressed in Gaelic education policy and in pedagogical practice.

5 Heritage and adult learners: From macro-policy to pedagogy

Macro- to meso-level policy development for adult Gaelic learning in Scotland involves an array of government and semi-government bodies from the Council of Europe at one end to local county councils at the other. At a supra-national level, the UK government has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, including declarations with respect to Gaelic that broadly oblige the government to encourage Gaelic adult education (cf. Dunbar, 2011; McLeod, 2002). There is also a constellation of national organisations that are

involved to a greater or lesser extent in monitoring, validating, funding and regulating adult Gaelic-learning provision in Scotland that includes the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, and Education Scotland/Foghlam Alba. However, it is the Gaelic development board, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, that sits at the apex of national policy for Gaelic learning specifically. Bòrd na Gàidhlig sets macro-level priorities and targets for Gaelic learning; therefore, it is the organisation that potentially has the most direct impact on the general development of adult Gaelic learning provision and practice in Scotland.

To date, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has delivered two *National Gaelic Language Plans* (covering 2007 to 2012 and 2012 to 2017, respectively), as well as an interim plan, *Ginealach Ùr na Gàidhlig* (The New Gaelic Generation), published in 2010. All three plans make reference to adult learners of Gaelic and make different proposals for addressing the structural deficiencies in the adult-learning sector, yet all three share a fundamentally demographic understanding of language vitality (cf. Urla, 1993). All three plans seek, above all else, to increase the gross *numbers* of adult learners of Gaelic. Interestingly, the latest plan (2012–2017) is the least detailed of the three in terms of structural recommendations for the development of the sector, but at the same time, it sets explicit numeric targets for the sector, seeking to ‘increase the number of adults acquiring Gaelic from the current total of around 2,000 to 3,000 by 2017’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012, pp. 8, 26–27). Clear macro-level targets for the sector could be valuable (McLeod et al., 2010, pp. vi, 62), but the plan does not detail how the baseline figure of ‘around 2,000’ learners was determined or how the target of 3,000 learners in 2017 will be assessed. The plan does not specify the intended proficiency of these adults, detail how the adults will reach that proficiency, nor does it address adult learners’ potential role in RLS. McLeod et al. (2010, p. 48) agree with Fishman (1991, pp. 14–15), and recommend that adults of child-bearing age are a particular priority, but unlike the first national plan, the most recent plan does not specifically address the linkages between adult learning and intergenerational transmission,^v nor does it make specific mention of adult heritage learners.^{vi} In other words, adult learning is seen as a separate piece in the broad mosaic of Gaelic language planning efforts, not as a key component to what Fishman (2001, p. 467) argues is ‘fulcrum’ to the maintenance of any minority language: intergenerational transmission.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig is constrained by a relatively small budget (£5.16 million in 2012–13; Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2013, p. 34), but much could be done to develop and organize the Gaelic adult-learning sector through partnering with other agencies, with Bòrd na Gàidhlig playing more of a planning and coordinating role than a major funding role. A number of very specific recommendations for the development of the Gaelic adult-learning sector have been made and then reiterated over the years, and principal amongst these is for the establishment of a national Gaelic tutor training and validation scheme that would ensure a supply of well-prepared educators for adult Gaelic courses. This recommendation was made over twenty years ago by the researchers behind the *National Survey of Adult Gaelic Learning* (Comunn na Gàidhlig and Comann an Luchd-Ionnsachaidh, 1992, p. 67), and then reiterated by MacCaluim (2007, p. 75) and most recently by McLeod *et al.* (2010, p. vii), but to date, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has not comprehensively implemented this recommendation. Based on the data presented in sections 3 and 4, it is clear that it would not be sufficient to simply adapt foreign language teacher training for Gaelic tutors, but that a substantially different curriculum would be required to specifically prepare tutors to educate adult learners about the special challenges that they will face as new speakers of a threatened minority language like Gaelic.

Another long-standing recommendation was for a validated and accredited certification scheme for adult learners (Comunn na Gàidhlig and Comann an Luchd-

Ionnsachaidh, 1992, p. 67; see also McLeod *et al.*, 2010, p. vii) and some progress has been made on this recommendation. In 2012, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published new adult-learner qualifications which were designed to address some of the structural weaknesses in the sector identified above (Section 2) by providing a clear assessment pathway for adult learners. The SQA developed these units as a direct response to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's national language plan (Scottish Qualification Authority, 2012), and in this respect, these qualifications can be understood as instances of meso-level language policy at the interface between education policy and pedagogical practice.

We have shown how the Scottish Government plans for adult Gaelic acquisition through the macro-level policy agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and we have also shown how adult heritage learners of Gaelic can play a lynchpin role in micro-level family language policy for the intergenerational transmission of the language, but standing between these two extreme policy levels are layers of meso-level agencies and educational bodies that translate macro-level policy into pedagogical practice. (cf. Milligan, 2009, pp. 331–2) Using an onion metaphor to describe the multi-layered character of education policy and planning, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) warn that it is a mistake to simply assume that macro-level education policy and planning flows unaltered down to the micro-level and that particular attention should be paid to the connections, disjunctures and gaps between the policy layers, as well as to how education policy and planning decisions are interpreted, altered and contravened between levels (see also Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). As explained above, macro-level policy for the provision of Gaelic learning for adults is largely focused on increasing the gross numbers of learners. Given that Gaelic is a threatened language, this focus on numbers is understandable, but when this macro policy is then fleshed out between policy layers and put into practice in the classroom, certain assumptions may be carried along, and others may be introduced, about the nature of Gaelic learning and about how Gaelic is used in Scotland in the 21st century.

Numbers are generated by measuring mastery of the language as a code (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 43–65); however, in order to succeed as active users of Gaelic, adult learners not only need to master Gaelic as a code but they also need to learn how Gaelic is actually used as a social practice; they need to understand how Gaelic is used as a threatened minority language in 21st century Scottish society. (c.f. O'Rourke, 2011, p. 249) Specifically, it is unlikely that the special difficulties that an adult heritage learner like Peigi encounters would be as salient in a traditional foreign language pedagogy. When learning a foreign language, the student's primary speech partners generally do not include family members who are L1 speakers. Furthermore, it is typically assumed that it will be monolingual native speakers, not learners, who will determine language choice in interactions. In a foreign language context, one does not expect that the learner's utterances in Language X (the learner's L2) will be met in with divergent language choice in the form of Language Y (the native speaker's L2), and one does not expect that even if the learner is successful in maintaining the conversation in Language X, any mistake on the part of the learner might result in the native speaker's switch to Language Y. We do not suggest that these interactional outcomes never occur in foreign language situations; however, we are suggesting that there are key differences between the assumptions that underpin foreign language learning pedagogy on the one hand and the realities of heritage language learning on the other (see also Armstrong 2013), and that these differences need to be taken into account when designing an effective pedagogy for adult heritage learners of a threatened minority language.

What is missing from the current national plan is specificity and an understanding that successful Gaelic development for RLS might require developing a qualitatively different kind of language learning pedagogy for adults, one that reflects the particular way a threatened language like Gaelic is actually used and one that prepares these learners for

reactivating Gaelic in the family domain. In the specific case of heritage adult learners, we have argued that altering the ‘inertia condition of language choice’ in their families requires that these learners adopt a particularly agentive role in re-negotiating norms language use in their lives, and we propose that these special challenges should be explicitly addressed in adult language education policy and practice. In Wales, for example, adult learners can follow the course ‘Welsh for the Family’, a comprehensive Welsh-learning pathway designed around the specific needs of parents who seek to use Welsh in the home with their children. (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2012) Our analysis shows that appropriate language learning pathways for heritage learners of Gaelic would not only include opportunities to learn the specific language skills needed in the private domain (the language of home, childrearing and family interaction) but would also explicitly discuss the challenges of brokering Gaelic use in the family and strategies for meeting these challenges.

7 Conclusion

Education can best serve to strengthen the vitality of a threatened minority language if both adult education and childhood education are strategically coordinated as complementary tactics for RLS. However, if adult education is understood as an isolated (and often lower-priority) element in RLS efforts, then formal childhood education is less likely to lead to intergenerational transmission in the home (cf. Fishman, 1991). We have shown in our micro-level analysis of family language practice that adult heritage learners can play a lynchpin role in facilitating intergenerational transmission of a minority language in the family; however, we have also shown that adult minority language learners generally, and adult heritage learners specifically, face unique challenges in negotiating minority language use in their daily lives, challenges that distinguish adult minority language learners from foreign language learners. We argue that if language education policy in Scotland is to contribute effectively to strengthening the vitality of the Gaelic language, policy needs to advance the development of a qualitatively different pedagogy for adult Gaelic learning, a pedagogy that brings adult learners to full proficiency *and* that prepares adult learners for the special challenge of speaking a threatened minority language. Adult heritage learners in particular will require advice and assistance in understanding and preparing for the difficult task of re-establishing Gaelic language use in the home and passing Gaelic on to the next generation.

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ⁱ Also following Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), the distinction is made between ‘heritage learners,’ as defined above, and ‘learners with heritage motivations,’ the latter of which, in the case of Scottish Gaelic, often includes a number of learners seeking to re-connect with their ancestral heritage (see MacCaluim, 2007, and Newton, 2005, for more on learners in the Gaelic diaspora).

ⁱⁱ However, it is important to note that the Ùlpan course has a program of training for its tutors. To date, there has been no independent evaluation of the effectiveness of Ùlpan or of its tutor training program.

ⁱⁱⁱ The recordings were made using an ethnographic, participant observation-based approach. The researcher had been working with the family since 2007, which played a large part in mitigating the effects of the Observer's Paradox. For more detail, see Smith-Christmas (2012).

^{iv} All names are pseudonyms.

^v The interim plan, *Ginealach Ùr na Gàidhlig* (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2010), did designate parents as adult learners as a priority; however, there has been no independent assessment of the implementation of this plan, it is unclear if some of the more ambitious recommendations of the plan were actually delivered, and this interim plan is now superseded by the most recent national plan.

^{vi} The first national plan covering 2007 to 2012 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007) adult heritage learners were generally designated as a priority; however, it is not clear how heritage learners were to be prioritised in the implementation of the first plan, and in any event, the first plan is now superseded by the most recent national plan.

Transcription Conventions

| | |
|-------------|---|
| : | Elongated Sound |
| - | Cut-off |
| <u>word</u> | Emphasis |
| = | Latching speech |
| [[]] | Overlapping Speech |
| (.) | Micropause (less than two-tenths of a second) |
| | Uncertainty in Transcription |
| / | Rising Pitch |
| (?) | Uncertainty in Transcript |
| • | Turns omitted |

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