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An Nádúrachas agus lucht labhartha Ghaeilge na hAlban

Ann an: *An Meon Folaithé: Idé-eolaíochtaí agus iompar lucht labhartha na Gaeilge*

Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin agus John Walsh

Cois Life

Naturalism and New Speakers of Scottish Gaelic

Timothy Currie Armstrong
Soillse, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Introduction

The challenges of learning and speaking a threatened minority language like Scottish Gaelic are unquestionably different from the challenges of learning and speaking a national language like English in the United Kingdom because the target speaker communities are so fundamentally different. (Armstrong 2013; McEwan-Fujita 2010, 35, 53) This is particularly true if the demographic attrition of the threatened language has progressed to the point that the language is no longer spoken anywhere as a default community language. Depending on how we define a ‘default community language’ in this context, the demographic attrition of Scottish Gaelic has either passed this milestone or will pass this milestone very soon. The most recent census data (2011) shows that the percentage of residents in Gaelic’s traditional heartland, the Western Isles, recorded as able to speak Gaelic fell from 61.1% to 52.2% in just ten years. (Mac an Tàilleir 2014, 9) In 2010, Rothach (Munro) and colleagues conducted comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research on one demographically strong, traditional Gaelic speaking community on the Island of Lewis, Siabost (Shawbost), and found that although 66% of the adults in the community were proficient Gaelic speakers, proficient Gaelic speakers were now a minority among respondents 49 years old and younger, community use of the language was becoming very limited, and intergenerational transmission of the language in the home had all but ceased. (Mac an Tàilleir, Rothach & Armstrong 2010; Munro, Mac an Tàilleir & Armstrong 2011) In addition to their survey, Rothach and colleagues conducted extensive interviews with community members that further documented the shift from Gaelic to English, and as one subjective index of community language use, this older community member reported that community meetings do not take place in Gaelic anymore:

Bho chionn dusan bliadhna, bhithinnsa a’ cumail a h-uile coinneamh air an robh mi .. is ann ann an Gàidhlig a bha a h-uile coinneamh. Ach chan eil gin a choinneamhan air an cumail ann an Gàidhlig an-diugh no bho chionn fhada.

[Twelve years ago, I would hold all meetings I attended .. every meeting was in Gaelic. But none of the meetings are run in Gaelic today or in a long while.]

(Mac an Tàilleir *et al.* 2010, 84)

Taken together, the survey data and the interview data strongly indicate that the village of Siabost is swiftly shifting to English as the default community language, and there is no reason to believe that Siabost is exceptional in this respect. It is very likely that Gaelic is shifting from a default community language to a network language throughout the Western Isles. As Scottish Gaelic is increasingly spoken as a network language throughout all of Scotland, this presents new speakers of Gaelic with a complex landscape to negotiate as they chart a path from acquiring the language to using the language in their daily lives. If they can successfully navigate down this path, new speakers of Gaelic can potentially play a significant role in strengthening existing networks of Gaelic speakers, and even in creating new networks of Gaelic speakers, but in Scotland, adult learners have not always been accorded a central place in Gaelic development planning (MacCaluim 2006), and often face daunting challenges, both structural and ideological, along the way to becoming active speakers of the language. New speakers of Gaelic are also an increasingly common and important subject of inquiry, and in this chapter I will review recent research on this subject, concentrating particularly on two of my own studies: one researching heritage learners of Gaelic (Armstrong 2013; 2015; Smith-Christmas & Armstrong 2014); and the other, researching parents who are learning Gaelic along with their children (Armstrong 2014). In this chapter, I will highlight the role that linguistic naturalism plays in framing new speakers' understanding of language use and value, and I will draw on a number of recently published reports to illustrate how this ideology can complicate the task of learning and using Gaelic.

Linguistic naturalism is an ideology that is often affiliated with the notion of authenticity. Authentic speech is traditionally understood as natural speech and the authentic speaker is understood as someone who unreflectively speaks a native vernacular, someone who speaks a local language conservatively and without individual agency. In a similar way, an ideology of naturalism is also fundamental to how language is typically understood as an object of inquiry in scientific linguistics. (Eckert 2003) However, Coupland argues that the taken-for-granted certainties of identity and membership in traditional communities are ever more giving way to the diverse possibilities of multiple identities and fluid, multiple community memberships that typify late modernity, and therefore, authenticity is ever more difficult to identify, both for speakers and for sociolinguists. But he argues that this does not mean that authenticity is no longer important. Recognizing that authenticity is increasingly performed by speakers, rather than naturally given, does not mean that authenticity is any less significant to those speakers, or any less worthy of study. Authenticity remains a hugely important social value for speakers, with a particular saliency to speakers of languages under threat, and it would be a grave error to simply dismiss authenticity as essentialist, and therefore impossible. (Coupland 2003; 2010; see also Jolly 2000; Linnekin 1991) Linguistic naturalism is a unique ideology in that it can operate on two complementary levels. As defined above, linguistic naturalism is an ideology where 'real' or authentic language is understood as a natural behaviour, as something native speakers acquire in early childhood and use without apparent artifice. But at the same time, naturalization is an ideological process in itself. The dominant ideologies in a society are typically those that have been naturalized, dehistoricized, depoliticized and made common-sense in that society, so that most of the time, they go unchallenged and are simply taken for granted. (Eagleton 1991, 58-61; Schmidt 2007, 204-5; Woolard 1998, 10) In this way, a whole range of language values and practices may be described as 'natural' if they conform to the dominant language ideologies locally (e.g.: see Ní Ghearáin's (2011) discussion of naturalism and Irish-language corpus development). It is the connection between naturalism and nativism that can make authenticity founded on naturalism particularly problematic for new speakers. Native authenticity can be understood in at least two ways in this respect: someone can be regarded as a natively authentic speaker if they have an ancestral connection to the speaker group; or

someone can be regarded as a natively authentic speaker if they have acquired the language in early childhood, particularly from native-speaking carers in the home. In the strictest formulation, speakers must fulfil both conditions to be considered truly authentic, and this would exclude most or all new speakers from the authentic-speaker group.

In the specific case of Scottish Gaelic, McEwan-Fujita traces the use of nature metaphors in redemptive discourses about Gaelic back to the romantic period, and argues that these metaphors characterize Gaelic as a product of the natural world rather than as a human behaviour in a social context. (McEwan-Fujita 2011, 54) In her research on one traditional Gaelic-speaking community on the Isle of Skye, Macdonald found that native speakers of Gaelic in that community often understand Gaelic as an important part of their identity as ‘locals’, but critically, as a natural and taken-for-granted community practice, an understanding that Macdonald in turn contrasts with revivalist and romantic nationalist conceptions of identity founded on a link between a specific language, a specific culture and a specific national identity. (Macdonald 1997, 219-220) In his analysis of the linguistic ideologies of high-school-aged fluent speakers, learners and non-speakers of Gaelic, Oliver uses Ferdinand Tönnies’ concepts of *Gemeinschaft* (traditional, private and organic) and *Gesellschaft* (modern, public and artificial) to describe how Gaelic is being symbolically re-imagined, from a marker of bounded, local Gaidhealtachd community (*Gemeinschaft*), to a marker of national, inclusive Scottish society (*Gesellschaft*). (Oliver 2005, 5 and footnote 8; 2006, 157) Oliver examines how this transformation raises the questions, who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’ the legitimate Gaelic user group, and fundamentally, “who does Gaelic belong to?” (Oliver 2005, 3) In the course of this re-imagining, as Gaelic shifts from a community language to a network language throughout Scotland, and as agents of the Gaelic Revival endeavour to reverse this shift from English to Gaelic, how do adult new speakers of Gaelic fit into this complex sociolinguistic and ideological flux? Are adult new speakers understood (by themselves and others) as legitimate Gaelic users, and how do ideologies of linguistic naturalism factor into these questions? In the next three sections, through a review of my own and others’ research, I will attempt to address some of these issues.

Heritage Language Learners and Naturalism

Heritage learners are an interesting subject with respect to the concept of ‘new speakers’ of a language because this group, however defined, straddles the distinction between new speakers and traditional speakers, both in terms of identity, and also often, in terms of ability. To better understand how adult heritage learners of Gaelic work to integrate or reintegrate themselves into local Gaelic networks, semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted with 17 heritage learners of Gaelic, defined as adults with one or more Gaelic-speaking parents or grandparents in their family, and who had been exposed to some Gaelic spoken by family members, and perhaps in the community, as children, but who did not reach full adult proficiency in the language, and who were (re)learning, or had (re)learned Gaelic as adults. Defined in this way, these new speakers may fulfil both an identity-based and an ability-based definition of a heritage learner (cf. Van Deusen-Scholl 2003), but in selecting interviewees, I used a very broad definition of what constituted ‘exposure’ in childhood, and the sample included individuals who had overheard some Gaelic, but never spoke it, to individuals who had spoken Gaelic as children with at least some family members, but who had then dropped the language at some point and relearned it as adults. In this respect, my sample was designed specifically to investigate reintegration into Gaelic networks and I was particularly interested in speaking with individuals who might have Gaelic speakers around

them in their family or in their community with whom they could initiate or reinstate Gaelic use. (Armstrong 2013)

People with a heritage connection to a language can face particular challenges to their identity and sense of self as they learn and seek to use that language outside of the classroom. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer explain how native learners of native languages in Southeast Alaska may assume that, as learners with an ancestral connection to the language they are studying, they should have an easier time in acquiring the language. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer call this the “genetic fallacy” and argue that this assumption can set native learners up for a serious blow to their self-esteem if, in the end, they fail in their efforts to acquire their heritage language. (1998, 84; see also McEwan-Fujita 2010, 39) In the 20th century and continuing into this century, the ideological connection between ancestry and identity has been ever strengthened by advances in molecular and behavioural genetics. Bodwin observes that after the discovery of DNA, and critically, the development of inexpensive DNA sequencing technology, questions around genetics, ancestry, and identity have acquired a new scientific underpinning that gives these questions a particular new power: "Not surprisingly, contemporary debates over claims of identity (who I am, fundamentally) and of social connection (who I belong with, fundamentally) have very high stakes." (2002, 324) Bodwin laments that as the social sciences put ever more emphasis on the social contingency of identity, the general public seems to be heading in the other direction. Post Watson and Crick, our 'real' identity is now scientifically verifiable making race, ethnicity and heritage appear much more material and objective, much more a product of nature. (Bodwin 2002)

These questions are particularly troubling for new speakers if they have a heritage motivation for studying and using their new language. Petrucci reviews research on diasporatic heritage learners who were studying abroad in their ancestral home countries, and he explains how studying abroad was high stakes for these students because failure to be accepted as a legitimate speaker in the home country could seriously threaten their identity. (Petrucci 2007) As speakers of a local autochthonous language, the stakes for heritage learners of Gaelic in Scotland may be higher still because the relationships involved are often so *intimate*. As heritage learners of Scottish Gaelic seek to use Gaelic outside of the classroom and work to reintegrate into local Gaelic speech networks, failure may mean rejection by intimate relations, family and close friends, and therefore be particularly hurtful and damaging to their sense of self. (Armstrong 2013, 340-1) In the following excerpt, a heritage learner of Gaelic narrates a vignette describing a community member's diminishing reaction to the heritage learner's attempt to hold a Gaelic conversation:

Interviewee: I will tell you a really strange thing, you will have come across this, is that if people have known you all your life as a non-Gaelic speaker, they find it very hard to adjust to the fact that you have got a bit of Gaelic, you come across that. They will be embarrassed or they will laugh. I have people laugh at me and I have felt like crying. I had someone I know and I was speaking to her outside the [supermarket], I said a wee bit in Gaelic and she started giggling at me. I thought I would carry on speaking to her in Gaelic and we were having a conversation and she carried on giggling and laughing at me and said something about my Gaelic. It's a local person.

TCA: What did she say?

Interviewee: “Ha, ha your Gaelic,” she said like that.

(Armstrong 2013, 348, and unpublished data)

Reintegrating into local Gaelic networks may require renegotiating long-standing language-use relationships with family and friends, and as this interviewee explains and then illustrates in her vignette, that is not always easy to do, and when it fails it can be very hurtful. McEwan-Fujita argues that heritage learners may feel a particular shame when they fail to initiate Gaelic with family and in their daily lives, a “sense of social incompetence and personal inadequacy” (2010, 42), and as illustrated in the vignette above, these failures may be very painful and might damage heritage learners confidence in using the language outside of formal education.

On the whole, the individuals in my sample reported successfully using Gaelic in their daily lives, but they also reported that this was sometimes a struggle, and that they did not always succeed in every case. Interviewees framed their successes in at least two different ways: either emphasizing their skilful or determined social agency in altering established patterns of language use; or attributing their success to the naturalness and unselfconsciousness of using Gaelic with particular speech partners. The following excerpt is a good example of the first frame, a narrative of skill and agency:

I think whether it is spoken or unspoken, you have to have an agreement with the people around you, that that’s what you’re doing. For example, my sister, when I started on [my Gaelic course], she was like “Right, okay [...] From January onwards, from the New Year, I will only speak in Gaelic to you,” and did that, and again, we do speak in English quite a lot, but I’d say probably about 70% of our communication now is in Gaelic because we set that day and said “Right, from that point on,” and [...] with my mum as well, because my mum heard about that, she said “Oh that’s a good idea, right that’s what we’ll do.”

(Armstrong 2013, 346)

In this case, the interviewee drew up explicit plans with his sister and with his mother to self-consciously alter their established patterns of language use and speak more Gaelic in the New Year, and the interviewee reports, that while they do not speak Gaelic all of the time, they were largely successful in re-establishing Gaelic as a family language. In contrast, in this next excerpt, an interviewee describes her re-establishment of Gaelic with her parents as an unselfconscious and apparently natural process, to the degree that she often is not aware of which language she is using with them:

TCA: And then you say you also speak Gaelic with your parents. How did that transition work?

Interviewee: I think it sort of came quite naturally. I think as soon as I sort of started getting a bit more confident I think they would just speak to me in Gaelic and then you’d go home for holidays and you would sort of speak in Gaelic. And, it wouldn’t really, it didn’t really seem sort of unnatural and now it’s just sort of just second nature that you speak in Gaelic and when I, it’s quite strange that sometimes I don’t notice that I am speaking in Gaelic, you know. And sort of, because I was on the phone to my mum the other night and I was speaking in Gaelic and I hadn’t even thought about it. And my flatmate came in and said, “Were you speaking Gaelic there?” And I was like, “Well, I must have been if you didn’t recognise what I was saying,” but, you know I don’t think about it. I think it’s just the fact that, you know mum will answer the phone and I’ll just speak to her and it’ll be, you know whatever comes out my mouth whether it’s Gaelic or English. I don’t think I make a conscious decision in my head what I’m going to speak, if you know what I mean.

On the whole, interviewees in my sample did not explicitly voice ideologies quite as deterministic as the genetic fallacy as described by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998, 84), but interviewees did use a language of naturalism to describe their own language use and Gaelic use in general. And of course, there is nothing intrinsically ‘wrong’ about either of these frames, the agency frame or the naturalistic frame. Indeed, heritage learners may find that for both linguistic and sociolinguistic reasons they do have a relatively easy time establishing or re-establishing Gaelic-speaking relationships with friends and family, but at the same time, there are other factors that may make their task more challenging. (Basham & Fathman 2008, 592) After all, with family and friends, they are not forging new relationships in a language, but trying to shift long-standing relationships from one language to another, and as discussed above, this can be a difficult thing to do. (cf. MacCaluim 2007, 79; Smith-Christmas & Armstrong 2014) This may be particularly difficult because for some time the learner will be much more proficient in English than Gaelic, and both partners would have to selfconsciously avoid the temptation to ease communication by switching to English. This will not just happen ‘naturally’ as this interviewee explains:

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.

(Smith-Christmas & Armstrong 2014)

If heritage learners bring expectations that integrating into family and local speech networks will be seamless and apparently natural, they may be frustrated and discouraged when it is not, and blame themselves for their inability to re-establish the use of their family language. (McEwan-Fujita 2010, 34, 41-2) And worse, if heritage learners encounter actual hostility and refusal when they try to use Gaelic, this can threaten their sense of legitimacy as authentic speakers of the language and seriously discourage them in their project to become active Gaelic speakers. (Armstrong 2013, 348-9)

Parents Learning Gaelic and Naturalism in Family Language Policy

In 1998-9, MacCaluim carried out an extensive and comprehensive questionnaire survey of 643 learners of Scottish Gaelic, and among the many interesting findings, MacCaluim identified strong support for Gaelic-medium education (GME) among the respondents. 70.3% of respondents with pre-school-aged children reported sending their children to Gaelic-medium playgroups or nursery schools or planning to send them in the future, and 44.7 % of respondents with school-aged children reported sending their children to Gaelic-medium units at their schools, and in both cases, the overwhelming reason stated for not choosing GME was that GME was simply not available in the area at the time. Further, 83.8 % of respondents who did not have children, but planned to in the future, indicated that they would like their children to be educated through the medium of Gaelic. (MacCaluim 2007, 191-4, 226) McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim recently conducted a similar survey of 216 active Gaelic learners, and in this survey, 13% of the learners reported that they had children in GME (McLeod *et al.* 2010, 24) and 10% of the learners indicated that “My children are in Gaelic-medium education” was their main reason for learning Gaelic. (McLeod *et al.* 2010, 25). Similarly, in an online survey of in-migrants to traditional Gaelic-speaking areas, Smith-Christmas found that 12.1% named “My children are enrolled in Gaelic Medium Education”

as a current or potential motivation for learning Gaelic. (Smith-Christmas 2014, 28-30) Taken together, this research strongly suggests that many adult new speakers of Gaelic in Scotland are raising children who are also learning to speak Gaelic in school, and that these families potentially have the opportunity to use Gaelic to some degree or another in the home. In addition, in Scotland, parents with children in GME are often encouraged to try to learn some Gaelic to support their children's developing bilingualism, and adult learning opportunities are sometimes offered at or advertised through GME providers.

This situation raises a number of interesting questions of micro-level language planning. If parents are learning Gaelic along with their children, can they successfully establish Gaelic as one of the home languages to some degree or another? If they so desired, could parents actually switch the principal home language from English to Gaelic? And as children's and parents' Gaelic skills develop over time, how might this impact family language policy and practice? The answers to these questions are significant not only for the individual development of bilingualism in these children, but also for the prospects of reversing the shift from Gaelic to English in Scotland. Families of adult new speakers of Gaelic with children in GME have the opportunity to initiate informal Gaelic use in the critical home domain, but is this actually possible? Given that switching languages in established relationships is so challenging, can parents and children successfully switch to using Gaelic in the home over time as their developing Gaelic abilities permit? To investigate these questions, semi-structured, narrative interviews were conducted with 14 mothers who had been or were actively learning Gaelic and who had children in GME, focusing particularly on the parents' Gaelic learning, their children's bilingual development, and the development of family language policy and practice in their homes.

The interviewees self-reported a range of Gaelic abilities and a diversity of Gaelic-learning histories. At the time of the research, some of the interviewees could be described as proficient conversational Gaelic speakers, while others, if not fully proficient and confident in conversational Gaelic, had at least acquired some basic Gaelic that they could use with their children. The interviewees also reported a range of goals for using Gaelic and English in the home. Some of the interviewees aimed to make Gaelic the principal language they used with their children; others aimed to introduce some Gaelic into conversation the home in certain situations; but on the whole, their narratives underscored the complexity and difficulty of the task of establishing new norms of language use in the family, and the interviewees narrated accounts of both success and failure, advances and retreats over time, in their attempts to use Gaelic with their children. (Armstrong 2014) Interestingly, some of the mothers framed their attempts to introduce Gaelic into the home in much the same way that some of the heritage learners above framed their attempts to integrate into local Gaelic speech networks. In the interviews, mothers narrated accounts of working selfconsciously to establish Gaelic use in the home, and learning and adapting over time, but also, some of the mothers voiced a reticence to 'force' Gaelic on their children (see also Macdonald 1997, 231-2) and/or commented positively on the naturalness of their children's or others' use of Gaelic. In the following interview, we can see these two frames appearing side-by-side, and indeed, somewhat in tension:

Interviewee: [...] So I suppose that's my attitude is that it's just a normal, natural part of our lives. That's the way I want it to be. I don't want it to feel like an extra special super-duper project, even though it is in a way, but I want it to feel, yes, natural.

TCA: Did that change over time? Did that evolve?

Interviewee: Yes, because it didn't feel natural at all first, at all because it wouldn't. It just felt, it felt weird to be speaking Gaelic with my son all of a sudden after spending all his baby days speaking in English, and all of a sudden I'm trying to speak this other language with him. It felt weird.

(Armstrong 2014 and unpublished data)

I asked the interviewee to describe her policy for using Gaelic in her family, and at first, she said that she hoped that her use of Gaelic with her son would feel normal and natural, but then tempered that aspiration with the observation that integrating Gaelic into their lives was a project, and that it did not always feel natural, particularly at the beginning. In the interview, she goes on to detail her doubts and her feelings of foolishness as she tried to use her second language with her son, and then recounts, how through patience and perseverance, she ultimately managed to normalize Gaelic use with her son to some degree. At the end of this particular section of the interview, she summarized her account of this process by describing it as long and hard work, but with clear rewards as well:

Interviewee: But it's been a long, it feels like we've been doing it for – well three years, I don't know two ... three years. [...] Yes it's hard work.

TCA: I'm sure, yes.

Interviewee: Yes it's hard work, but it's so great, so great. There's so many great feelings you get from it.

In her research on family language policy in an extended Gaelic-and-English-speaking family on Skye, Smith-Christmas (this volume) describes how the grandmother in the family characterized her use of Gaelic with her grandchildren as 'natural', but Smith-Christmas shows that in practice the grandmother's strict adherence to a strategy of dual-lingualism with her granddaughter (answering her granddaughter's English with Gaelic) was not 'natural' at all for the grandmother, someone who would habitually code-switch between English and Gaelic and linguistically accommodate other bilingual adults' code choices, and that by adhering to dual-lingualism, the grandmother was performing ideological work in support of Gaelic in the home. Again, much like the case of naturalism and heritage learners above, there is nothing intrinsically 'wrong' about the desire that family language use be natural and unaffected, but if parents and other care-givers come to the task of establishing new norms of language use in the home with the expectation that this can happen apparently naturally, then they may be unprepared for the difficulty of the ideological work involved. (Armstrong 2014) At the beginning of my interview with the following parent, I was explaining the aims of my study, that I wanted to discuss language use in the home and parents and children learning and using Gaelic together, and the parent expressed her willingness to be involved in the project as an opportunity to help others understand the difficulty of the task:

Interviewee: No, I'm quite happy about that, because things are much more complicated than they seem on the surface, and I think the more people understand how difficult it is, the better.

TCA: Yes. That's part of what I'm trying to get as is the complexity of the task, yes.

Interviewee: Minefield.

This parent had learned some Gaelic before her first child was born, and had tried to speak Gaelic with her children from the start (along with some English), but as her children grew and attended GME, she found more and more English was being used in the family, to the extent that, at the time of research, she estimated that, at best, she spoke Gaelic to her children about 15% of the time. She succinctly describes the task of learning Gaelic and using it in the family as a minefield. Given the challenges described by this parent and others, it seems unlikely that, without some planning and research and much deliberative effort, parents would be able to navigate this minefield and successfully establish Gaelic use with their children to any significant degree. Certainly this is not something they could do unselfconsciously and apparently naturally.

Discussion

Authenticity is problematic for language revival movements because, depending on how authenticity is defined, the ideology may frustrate efforts to integrate new speakers of the threatened language. (Armstrong 2010) As shown above, the challenges of integration and the question of authenticity can be particularly problematic for heritage learners of Gaelic. Recently, Woolard has argued that a common ideology of sociolinguistic naturalism, rather than authenticity itself, is the fundamental problem that plagues both language revival movements and sociolinguistic inquiry. She cites research into language ideologies around Javanese and Hawaiian to illustrate that linguistic authenticity is not always founded on naturalism, but can be alternatively founded on effort and artifice, that authentic claims to legitimate speakerhood can be earned rather than naturally given, and Woolard contends that this alternative equation may provide a way out of the problem of authenticity for revival movements. By ‘delaminating’ authenticity from naturalism, and reconceiving authentic speakerhood as a teleological project, speaker identities can be redefined in ways that include new speakers as fully authenticated users of the threatened language. (Woolard 2013)

Recent research into Gaelic new speakers’ linguistic ideologies shows that naturalness is a common reference point for new speakers as they describe their ideal or target Gaelic proficiency and use. McLeod, O’Rourke and Dunmore conducted individual interviews and focus-group interviews with highly proficient new speakers of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and found that interviewees often measured their own Gaelic against their perception of native speakers’ more ‘natural’ Gaelic: “This term *nàdarra* (natural) was used again and again by interviewees to describe the desired kind of Gaelic and they tended to mark their own Gaelic as failing to satisfy this.” (McLeod, O’Rourke & Dunmore 2014, 35) At the same time, when new speakers seek to use their Gaelic with native speakers, native speakers may bring their own ideologies of naturalism to the exchange. In his research on learner/native-speaker interactions in traditional Gaelic communities in Uibhist a Tuath, Uibhist a Deas and Beinn nam Fadhla (North and South Uist and Benbecula), Wells found that native speakers were largely helpful to learners in their efforts to use the language informally in the community, but he also observed that these interactions might be challenging for native speakers because they would require native speakers to “make conscious decisions (to which they may not be accustomed), about language choice”. (Wells 2010, 32) So, as new speakers use Gaelic outside of the classroom, they may disrupt taken-for-granted patterns of Gaelic and English bilingualism, and although this may cause problems for new speakers as they work to integrate into Gaelic-speaker networks, this disruption of established patterns of language choice and use might not be altogether negative. MacCaluim argues that Gaelic learners can have a particularly important role in

reversing language shift in this respect. Learners, as outsiders to established patterns of community bilingualism, can raise awareness about language choices and “help to denaturalize social conventions concerning the use of Gaelic that are encouraging language shift.” (MacCaluim 2007, 90-1)

But this disruption, even if handled with tact and care by new speakers, may cause misunderstandings and even resistance. The interviewees in Wells’ study reported that learners and native speakers in Uist and Benbecula largely cooperated to use Gaelic in the community (Wells 2010; see also McLeod *et al.* 2014, 29-32), but it is fair to say that this sort of cooperation and mutual understanding is not universal, and other studies have reported that Gaelic learners can encounter difficulties when they seek to use Gaelic outside of the classroom and in the community. (Armstrong 2013; MacCaluim 2007; McEwan-Fujita 2010) At the furthest extreme, some may question the authenticity and legitimacy of the Gaelic Revival itself, to which new speakers are constitutively linked. Some 30 years ago, Macdonald conducted anthropological research in a strongly Gaelic-speaking traditional community on the north end of Skye, and reported much ambivalence at that time to the Gaelic Revival. She quotes this local resident as an example of some of the opinions she encountered:

I speak the Gaelic here with my parents and when I go up to the [Hotel bar]. I speak it not because I have to but because it is what we speak. I like the Gaelic. But if it is going to become something artificial, then, well, I won’t feel like speaking it at all. I don’t want Gaelic to be kept alive by making it artificial ... For myself, I’d prefer it if it died.

Here, Macdonald’s informant appears to make the prototypical link between Gaelic authenticity and unselfconscious, natural Gaelic use, and Macdonald reports that this informant also cited a contemporary news story about a Gaelic-learner couple in Edinburgh raising their child in Gaelic as an example of the kind of revivalist Gaelic use that made him very uneasy. (Macdonald 1997, 217-8; see also, MacCaluim 2007, 87) This informant’s views are certainly extreme, and it is possible over the intervening 30 years that the Gaelic Revival has become more accepted in traditional communities, but views like this are still sometimes expressed. For example, it is interesting to contrast the above comments with comments made by one of the heritage learners in my own research:

[...] perhaps the crux of it really is that with Gaelic development, you are putting something fake in place of something authentic – we’ve no choice in that any longer.
(Armstrong 2017)

This interviewee makes a very similar observation about the authenticity of the Gaelic Revival as Macdonald’s informant, but in the rest of the interview, he comes to very different conclusions. The interviewee acknowledges that the Revival is changing both how Gaelic is used and who uses Gaelic, and he concedes that this could be understood as ‘fake’ or inauthentic, but he certainly did not want Gaelic to die. Indeed, this interviewee was himself involved in Gaelic development, working in a high-profile job that required highly proficient Gaelic, and there was no question in the interview that he was very much in favor of seeing the Gaelic Revival succeed. One could speculate, does this attitude represent the first step in the ideological process that Woolard (2013) recommends, the process of ‘delaminating’ authenticity from naturalism? While the interviewee still uses the categories of authentic and ‘fake’ (inauthentic, artificial), he does not outright reject the legitimacy of the Gaelic Revival in the same way that Macdonald’s informant does, and hope that Gaelic just dies. Is this

informant searching for another way to be an authentic Gaelic speaker, a way that is ‘fake’ in the sense of acquired rather than naturally given, but that is still legitimate, an authenticity that is won through skillful artifice? This is speculation, but the tension in the quote above between traditional notions of authenticity on the one hand and the new sociolinguistic and demographic reality of Gaelic on the other is quite clear – “we’ve no choice any longer” – and how this tension is resolved (or not) will have a powerful impact on the success of the Gaelic Revival and also on new speakers’ place in that revival.

Conclusions

Scottish Gaelic is rapidly shifting from a default community language to a network language in the last communities where it has been traditionally spoken. In these communities, and elsewhere in Scotland, when Gaelic is spoken, increasingly, it is in new sites and situations of language use deliberately won through grassroots, micro-level language activism. Gaelic language activists throughout Scotland work to advance and defend new norms of language use in the family, in the community, at work, and in education, and these new sites of Gaelic use serve as nodes in shifting networks of Gaelic speakers who are drawn together both *by* the language, and very often, specifically *for* the language. But this new sociolinguistic reality is tenuous and complex, and it presents particular challenges to new speakers of Gaelic as they seek to use the language in their daily lives, to integrate into local Gaelic-speaking networks, and in the process, to negotiate their way through closely contested notions of authenticity and legitimate speakerhood. Tightly bound to the notion of authenticity is linguistic naturalism, a pervasive ideology that can frustrate new-speakers’ attempts to use Gaelic outside of formal education. Heritage learners negotiating integration into local Gaelic networks and parents establishing new norms of Gaelic use with their children in the home are both engaged in ideological work to alter existing patterns of language use. If new speakers come to this task expecting Gaelic use to happen unselfconsciously or apparently naturally, they will be unprepared for the difficulty of the ideological project they face. It is clear that adult learners of Scottish Gaelic require a specific pedagogy that not only helps them acquire Gaelic, but that also prepares them to succeed in using a threatened, network language like Gaelic outside of the classroom. Heritage learners, parents with children in GME, and other adult Gaelic learners would benefit from Gaelic learning that moves beyond the abstracted, foreign-language model, and teaches Gaelic as a social practice, with specific, tailored advice for using Gaelic in the home and community. (Armstrong 2013; Smith-Christmas & Armstrong 2014) Socially situated Gaelic learning would also be an opportunity to challenge ideologies of naturalism where they are judged to be unhelpful or divisive, and to advance a model of Gaelic-speaker authenticity that includes new speakers of Gaelic of all kinds.

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