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“Why won’t you speak to me in Gaelic?”  
Authenticity, Integration and the Heritage Language Learning Project

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The last speakers of an endangered language often include many individuals who have acquired less than full productive proficiency in the language, language users Nancy Dorian (1977) called semi-speakers. When these individuals enter formal education and seek to learn or relearn their endangered heritage language, they are often frustrated by challenges to their authenticity as legitimate language users and by difficulties in effecting integration into local language networks. This study investigates the unique language learning task faced by heritage learners of an endangered language, Scottish Gaelic, and shows how this task differs significantly from the task of learning and using a foreign language. I will argue that the results of this study have important implications for pedagogical practice and curriculum development for the teaching of endangered languages, particularly where language learning is understood, at least in part, as a strategy for language revitalization.

Key words: ideology, metaphor, Scottish Gaelic, authenticity, identity, community

Beginning in the early 1960s, Nancy Dorian (1973, 1978, 1981, 1994) conducted ethnographic and linguistic research on remnant and marginal Gaelic-speaking communities of fisherfolk in East Sutherland on the northeast coast of Scotland. In the course of her research, she observed that a significant minority of these Gaelic users had far greater receptive knowledge of the Gaelic language than their productive knowledge of the language. Dorian (1981) documented a wide range of Gaelic abilities in these declining speech communities, what she called the “Proficiency Continuum of Speakers.” (p. 114) Dorian observed that individuals across this continuum could follow, and to an extent, participate in Gaelic conversations and she argued that all of these Gaelic users were, in one way or another, active members of the East Sutherland fisherfolk Gaelic speech community, regardless of their ability. Dorian (1977, 1980, 1982) labelled these particular Gaelic users semi-speakers, and argued that in situations of language endangerment, semi-speakers often form a significant subset of the remaining speech community, and therefore, that any complete understanding of an endangered language community must include this class of language user.

When these individuals enter formal education and seek to learn or relearn their heritage language, either as children or as adults, they are typically classed as heritage learners. Heritage learners of a threatened language present activists, educators and policy-makers with both an opportunity and a challenge. If these speakers can learn their heritage language and integrate or reintegrate into local speech communities, they are well positioned to add to the vitality of the endangered language. A desire to integrate into and possibly identify with a community is an important motivation for learning a language (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Feuerverger, 1991; He, 2006; Kanno & Norton 2003), but as I will show in this report, integration and identity may not be straight-forward for heritage learners of an endangered language. The connection between language and identity in Scotland is complicated and fraught. Gaelic-speaker identities are particularly contested and heritage language learners’ identity connections to the Gaelic language are potentially more fragile and complex yet. How do heritage language learners understand their identity as Gaelic speakers?

And as they learn Gaelic, into what sort of speech community are they seeking to integrate? Gaelic has almost no territorial base left. Even in the Scottish Western Isles, the traditional Gaelic heartland, there are very few (if any) communities remaining where Gaelic functions as a community language. (Mac an Tàilleir, 2007; Mac an Tàilleir, Rothach & Armstrong, 2010) All adult speakers of Gaelic are bilingual in English. But at the same time, as the Gaelic Revival progresses, Gaelic is increasingly used in a limited number of non-traditional contexts; particularly in the media and in education. How successful are heritage language learners in integrating into local Gaelic-speaker networks and using Gaelic in their daily lives?

The purpose of the following study is to examine this unique language learning project (Coffey & Street 2008) and understand how it differs from foreign language learning. I will present data from interviews with heritage language learners of Scottish Gaelic and I will analyse these data drawing on two ontological metaphors of language community: the territorial metaphor and the network metaphor. I will discuss how identity and integration issues impact the efficacy of the Scottish Gaelic Revival. I will argue that the results of this study have pedagogical implications

for the teaching of endangered languages to adults and that this research forms part of a larger effort to understand good practice in teaching minority languages specifically as a strategy for language revitalization.

## SCOTTISH GAELIC IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Scottish Gaelic is an autochthonous language spoken in Scotland from at least the sixth century and possibly much earlier. (Campbell, 2001) From its height in the twelfth century, when it was spoken at all levels of Scottish society, and to some degree or another, throughout the Scottish mainland, Gaelic use in Scotland has been ever declining and its status as a Scottish language ever weakening (MacKinnon, 1991), to the extent that in the 2001 census, less than 2% of the population of Scotland (58,652) reported themselves as Gaelic speakers, a little more than half of whom live in the Highlands and Western Islands. (Mac an Tàilleir, 2010, pp. 20–21) As Gaelic-speaking communities have declined, they have also fractured. Kenneth MacKinnon presents an analysis of census data that shows that in 1881 more than 65% of Gaelic speakers lived in communities that returned 70% or more Gaelic speakers, but that in 2001 less than 10% of Gaelic speakers lived in communities that returned 70% or more Gaelic speakers. And at the same time, the centre of gravity of the Gaelic population has been moving south from the rural Highlands and Islands to the Lowland urban belt between Edinburgh and Glasgow. (MacKinnon, 2011, pp. 215–216) The attrition of the Gaelic language has progressed to the point that it is unlikely that there are any communities remaining in Scotland that still use Gaelic as the default community language. (Mac an Tàilleir, 2007; Mac an Tàilleir, et al., 2010)

At the same time, Gaelic is the focus of a modern revival movement. While the Highlands and Islands have a long history of social activism and popular uprisings against the Highland Clearances and landlordism (Buchanan, 1996; Grigor, 2000), social activism focusing on the Gaelic language is a more recent phenomenon, particularly gaining strength in the 1970s. In 2005, after years of campaigning, Gaelic was granted official-language status by the Scottish Parliament, and in the same act, some measure of official government recognition and protection. (Dunbar, 2011; Walsh & McLeod, 2008) Whether the modest gains of the Scottish Gaelic Revival will be sufficient to halt the precipitous decline of the use of the language is very much an open question. In the midst of this complex context of simultaneous attrition and revitalization, formal opportunities for adults to learn Gaelic continue to diversify and expand. (MacCaluim, 2007; McLeod, Pollock & MacCaluim, 2010) In 2009–2010, McLeod and colleagues surveyed all available Gaelic-for-adults learning opportunities in Scotland and found more than 160 different courses offered by about 50 different providers that included universities and colleges, local authorities, community education centres, Gaelic advocacy organisations, music and cultural festivals and activist groups. (McLeod et al., 2010, pp. 12–18, 88–111)

People may choose to learn a language for any number of reasons; integrative or instrumental, but in the case of an endangered heritage language like Gaelic, the language's role as an index of an important identity is undoubtedly a central motivation. In John Edwards' words, "people go to the barricades over ideas, not over tools." (2009, p. 247) Yet, in some respects, the connection between language, nationality and identity is more complex for Gaelic speakers in Scotland than

it is for speakers of other heritage languages elsewhere in the British Isles. In addition to at least 134 immigrant languages (Scottish Government, 2009, table 1.14), three widely-recognized indigenous languages are spoken in the home in Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English. While Gaelic is possibly the oldest modern indigenous language spoken in Scotland, it is not homonymous with the Scottish nationality in the same way that Welsh is in Wales or Irish is in Ireland. Through an ethnolinguistic transformation driven by the politics of national identity at the time of the Wars of Scottish Independence and the Scottish Reformation, that important symbolic distinction now belongs to the Scots language. (Costa, 2009; MacKinnon, 1991, pp. 26–53) Indeed, Gaelic’s status as an indigenous or national language of Scotland continues to be a subject of popular, political and academic debate (McEwan-Fujita, 1997, 2011; McLeod, 2001), and at times, Scottish Gaelic may still be referred to pejoratively as Erse (Irish), repositioning Gaelic as a foreign or immigrant language. Gaelic has an associated emic identity, the Gael, but this identity is not currently coterminous with the Scottish national identity, and is itself in flux and very much contested. (Glaser, 2007, pp. 92–97, 258–262; MacCaluim, 2007, pp. 76–107; Morgan, 2000; Oliver 2005) Further, Gaelic learner identity is complicated in the Gaelic language itself. The word for a fluent speaker, *fileantach*, is also the word for a native speaker, and some in the Gaelic communities hold the view that no non-native speaker can ever really be fluent.

This short introduction gives some sense of the complex ideological and sociolinguistic circumstances in which semi-speakers of Scottish Gaelic find themselves as they learn their heritage language and seek to use it. In order to better understand how heritage learners of Scottish Gaelic navigate their way through this complexity, life-history narrative interviews were conducted with Gaelic users who had been exposed to the language in the home as children and who then went on to learn Gaelic further as adults. In the following discussion of the interview data, I will focus on two related themes: how do heritage language learners understand their identity as Gaelic speakers and how do they negotiate integration or reintegration into relevant Gaelic speech communities?

## RESEARCH METHODS

Researchers and theorists studying semi-speakers and heritage learners confront difficult theoretical questions of concept and terminology, questions that challenge how we understand language ability, bilingualism and authentic speakerhood. (Armstrong, 2010; Bialystok, 2001, pp. 10–26; Coppieters, 1987; Eckert, 2003; Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Piller, 2002) Of course, all categories of language users – including ‘fluent speaker’, ‘semi-speaker’ and ‘learner’ – are unavoidably reductive, but that does not mean that they are meaningless. In the following analysis I take the view that social agents situationally negotiate and contest speaker identities, but that these identities are not constructed *ex nihilo*. Language competence is one of the objective features that structures social space and delimits the scope of these contests. (Bourdieu 2005)

By the broadest definition, most people in Scotland who learn Gaelic as adults might be considered heritage learners. Most could, and many do, make heritage claims to the language

based on recent family history, or simply by virtue of being a Scot. (cf. McLeod et al., 2010, pp. 25–26) However, here I will define heritage learners of Gaelic by childhood exposure, as individuals who were exposed to Gaelic in the home, and also possibly in the community, before adolescence, and who then went on to further learn Gaelic as adults. This could then be classed as a narrow, ability-based definition (Carreira, 2004; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Valdéz, 2005; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003; Wiley, 2008), although I have defined ‘exposure’ quite broadly. Interviewees heard and used Gaelic in many different ways as children, from those who overheard extended family members and community members using the language but who never spoke the language, to those who were productive Gaelic speakers as children but who then stopped using the language in childhood or early adolescence for some reason. I chose this definition because I am particularly interested here in questions of language use and reintegration. I wanted to interview learners who were to some extent already embedded in Gaelic-language networks, who would have family and community members to hand as potential speech-partners, and investigate the process of changing, restarting or initiating Gaelic use in this context.

Narrative, life-history interviews (Bruner, 2004; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, pp. 155–161; Prior, 2010) were conducted with 17 heritage language learners of Gaelic. This group was a convenience sample and therefore may not be representative, but the interviewees were not selected without thought. The first round of interviewees was located through contacts at my home institution and through friends and colleagues in the Gaelic community. Additional interviewees were located by snowballing from interview to interview. At each step in the selection process, I aimed at what Klaus Bruhn Jensen has called “maximum variation sampling” (Jensen, 2002, p. 239) in that I attempted to interview as wide a cross-section of potential learners as possible within my sampling criteria, including a diverse range of ages, professions, class, location in Scotland (Highland and Lowland, city and rural) and initial exposure to Gaelic. The sample is biased to women (12 women and 5 men) and I struggled to identify men to interview. Although reliable figures are lacking (MacCaluim, 2007, pp. 112–115), there is anecdotal evidence that more women are learning Gaelic than men. Each year at my home institution, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, we typically have many more women students than men in the full-time courses (2010–2011: 43 women, 15 men), and Mòrag Stiùbhart (2011, pp. 281–282) in her research with high school students studying Gaelic found many more girls were attracted to the language than boys. Although outside of the scope of this study, the question of the gender imbalance in Gaelic learning is pressing, and further research on this subject would be of particular interest to Gaelic development bodies.

Interviews were conducted in English<sup>1</sup> and transcripts were coded thematically. The interview data were read for narrative history of language use and learning as well as instances of language ideology bearing on that history. In this analysis, language ideology is understood as meta-linguistic talk concerned with the value and proper use of language. The study of the ideology of

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<sup>1</sup> I am a competent L2 speaker of Gaelic; however, I interviewed in English because some of the interviewees, while comfortable conversational speakers of Gaelic, might be intimidated by speaking Gaelic in a formal interview situation. I feared that the norms of the Gaelic Revival could lead some interviewees to consent to an interview in Gaelic even if they would be more comfortable in English, so I felt that it was safer to conduct all of the interviews in English.

language is confounding in its breadth (Kroskrity, 2004; Woolard, 1998; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994), and definitions differ from field to field and even from analyst to analyst within a given field. Here, I am interested in the prescriptive and explicit aspect of language ideology, and I have not collected first-hand data on language use, nor do I attempt to read ideology from language use. Rather, I conceive of language ideology the other way around: as an imperfect yet pervasive guide to the socially appropriate use of language. (Armstrong, 2012) I read these interviews with a focus on the ontology of language and norms of language use as they impact interviewees' approaches to language learning and integration into Gaelic-speaking networks or communities. In the following analysis, I understand heritage language learners as social agents who actively interpret their world and use language ideology both to make sense of learning and using Gaelic, and as a guide to using English and Gaelic together in a society where the English language and a monolingualist English-language ideology are dominant.

## RE/INTEGRATION, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

As I conducted the interviews, I was struck by the many different ways interviewees answered my seemingly simple question: "How was Gaelic used around you when you were young?" Interviewees described language use and language relationships in their families and communities that were often complex and that changed over time. All reported being spoken to and understanding Gaelic as children to some level or another, from those who heard and understood Gaelic greetings, endearments and short commands, to those who were spoken to exclusively in Gaelic by at least some adults. Some interviewees reported that extended family members, particularly in the grandparent generation, were important early sources of exposure to Gaelic. This would add support to Dorian's observation that in situations of language contraction, the endangered language sometimes skips a generation, that semi-speakers often acquire the language from the grandparent generation (Dorian, 1980, pp. 89–90, 1981, pp. 107–108), and as I will show below, interviewees also reported that the grandparent generation was often important for reintegrating into Gaelic networks, both practically and symbolically.

Many of the interviewees lived outside of the traditional Gaelic-speaking communities for some or most of their lives. At the time of research, only one interviewee was living in what would be considered a core Gaelic-speaking area where Gaelic might still be used to some extent as a community language. The rest lived in the Highlands, but in communities where Gaelic is demographically weaker, or in the cities of the Lowlands, and many interviewees were also brought up in urban areas outside of the Highlands and Islands. The interviewees described Gaelic functioning as a network language in urban areas and that these networks would be organized around key sites of Gaelic use such as Gaelic church-services, Gaelic schools and Gaelic-speaking pubs, sites where Gaelic speakers would congregate and where Gaelic-speaking relationships were made and strengthened. And interviewees reported that Gaelic was also used in networks based around family. Interviewees reported having Gaelic-speaking relatives living nearby when they were children and also several of the interviewees reported that their families would habitually vacation in the Highlands and Islands with or near extended Gaelic-speaking family members and in Gaelic-speaking communities, and that this was an important opportunity to hear and speak Gaelic when they were young.



Interviewees also differed in their self-assessed Gaelic ability when young. Some of these interviewees reported that they never acquired Gaelic to full proficiency in childhood, but achieved some ability, perhaps a passive ability in the language, and others reported that they were reasonably proficient at a point, but then stopped speaking sometime during childhood, and had to relearn Gaelic as adults. Reasons given for stopping speaking Gaelic and switching to English varied. For some, the switch coincided with changes in family circumstances such as the illness of a key caregiver, extended family members without Gaelic moving into the home, or the family moving out of a core Gaelic-speaking community. Some interviewees explained that attending a monolingual English school catalysed the switch from Gaelic to English while others reported that they themselves initiated the switch to English, often when they were still quite young. And still others reported that parents, grandparents or other family members made a deliberate choice not to pass Gaelic on.

Collectively, interviewees followed the full diversity of learning pathways including full-time immersion courses, distance learning courses, night and weekend courses, university-level courses and self-directed learning. All of the interviewees reported that they were learning Gaelic to speak it, and that they had specific reintegration goals, that they were learning Gaelic to speak it with friends, family and co-workers and re-embed themselves into the Gaelic networks around them in their lives. This may seem like an unremarkable observation but historically Gaelic was often learned as a scholarly pursuit or as a hobby, to better understand Gaelic poetry or Scottish placenames, but this was not the case, in any event, with the interviewees in this study. While several of the interviewees reported an interest or active involvement in Gaelic arts and literature, they all reported that they used Gaelic or intended or hoped to use Gaelic as a spoken language in their day-do-day lives.

In comparison to non-heritage learners, heritage learners may often have better access to other Gaelic speakers and may already be surrounded by Gaelic-speaking networks. And as Dorian (1982) discovered in her work, semi-speakers of Gaelic often have a good understanding of the norms of appropriate Gaelic use, even if they don't speak the language itself very well. Yet in spite of this privileged access and special knowledge, reintegration is not always easy or automatic for heritage learners, as this interviewee explains:

And I think when you saw people who'd come through Gaelic-medium education and things like that, who wouldn't speak Gaelic to you, you kind of felt a bit like, well, "What are you doing? Why won't you speak to me in Gaelic?" So, I think that was probably the toughest thing. I don't think the, sort of, learning of it was too tough, but it was, sort of, getting an opportunity to use what you've learned, I think.

I asked this interviewee if she had any difficulty learning Gaelic, and she reported that it was relatively easy for her, but that she found using Gaelic more difficult. She mentions other young speakers on her college course, Gaelic speakers who have come up through Gaelic-medium education, and relates how some refused to speak Gaelic with her and how this surprised her. This would bring me to my first theme, that using Gaelic involves integration or reintegration

into networks of speakers, and that heritage learners have to reorient themselves and adjust to this process. If heritage learners base their expectations on, perhaps, their memories of using Gaelic with relatives in the home from birth, or perhaps by analogy with the relative ease with which one can use English in Britain, if they expect that Gaelic use will happen readily with other speakers, by default, or apparently naturally, they will have to adjust their expectations and develop strategies for negotiating integration. This next interviewee explains his understanding of this negotiation process and relates two examples,

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."

This interviewee describes the reintegration process as negotiating an agreement, and then describes two explicit agreements that he made with close family members, one with his sister and one with his mother, to switch to Gaelic at the New Year. He relates that the agreement with his sister still stands and that they speak in Gaelic, in his estimation, about 70% of the time. This short narrative is an example of a happy, successful account of reintegration, but it would be fair to say that, over-all, the experience reported by interviewees was generally more difficult than this, sometimes much more difficult. This next interviewee explains one such difficult reintegration experience, in this case with her paternal grandmother,

It took a long time actually to get her 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."

This learner related that switching to Gaelic with her grandmother took a long time and was a challenge on two fronts. In the beginning the grandmother struggled to understand this learner's Gaelic and the learner reported that the grandmother would sometimes request to switch to English rather than continue in Gaelic with difficulty. Joseph Gafaranga (2010) has coined the term, *medium request*, to describe the request for English the grandmother makes in this narrated vignette. Gafaranga shows that medium requests of this kind are a common feature in discourse when a language is contracting, what he calls, "talking language shift into being," (pp. 263–267) and that the vitality of a language may hinge on how speakers negotiate these misalignments in language use.

Also, this interviewee reported that it was strange speaking in Gaelic with her grandmother at first. This is notable because this learner reported earlier in her interview that her grandmother was her main source of Gaelic when she was young, but perhaps tellingly, her grandmother would speak Gaelic in short bursts to her, but at that time, the interviewee would always answer her grandmother in English. In the remainder of her interview, this interviewee reported that she did eventually establish Gaelic use with her grandmother, but that it took time, persistence and caused many arguments.

Reintegration is high-stakes for heritage language learners because the language is closely connected to identity and self-image at a very personal and intimate level. This interviewee explains why she keeps going learning and using Gaelic:

Another thing, I remember when I didn't have Gaelic how – I remember some people being quite disappointed that I didn't have Gaelic and I was really, really disappointing my mum. I really don't want to disappoint my mum again, because my mum is lovely. I think people were quite disappointed that the only Gaelic I had was so shockingly bad.

These heritage language learners of Gaelic occupy a shifting third space (Jo, 2001) in terms of their identity as Gaelic speakers, describing themselves as neither exactly native speakers or complete learners. The interviewees used a number of labels to describe their identity as Gaelic speakers, and some discursively used more than one label at different points in the interviews. Some embraced the label, Gaelic learner. A few also used the labels fluent speaker or native speaker, but often with careful qualification. The following interviewee reported speaking Gaelic until he was four, and then relearning the language as an adult:

I suppose now I would characterize myself as a fluent speaker. But I don't think I'm a native speaker. I think I'm a fluent speaker rather than a native speaker. [...] I can when I want, I can speak with a very clear [Specific Island] dialect so I suppose I'm quite fortunate in that and the way the language has come back to me and I've engaged with it. So I'm, I suppose I'm almost a – I can pass myself off as a native speaker but strictly speaking I definitely amn't. I am a re-learnt fluent speaker.

This interviewee explained that his specific island accent and dialect allowed him to pass as a native speaker (cf. Piller, 2002) but that he still did not think of himself as a native Gaelic speaker, in spite of his current ability and also in spite of speaking Gaelic as a first language in early childhood. In addition to “re-learnt fluent speaker,” others used different creative labels to describe this third-space identity: relearner, fluent learner and fluent listener. Some of the interviewees also identified themselves as Gaels, although others were more ambivalent, and interestingly, several made no reference whatsoever to the identity in the course of the interview until I specifically asked about it toward the end of the interview session. The following interviewee captures some of the ambivalence expressed by many,

TCA: Do you have a circle of people in [a Lowland City] that you do speak Gaelic

with?

Interviewee: There are people who I meet who I would speak Gaelic to, yes. But not necessarily. I am not a very Gàidhealach Gael I am afraid. There is something about those people that I am not 100% about sometimes.

The word *Gàidhealach* is the Gaelic adjectival form of Gael, and so the interviewee is saying in effect, that she is not a ‘very Gaelish Gael.’ When I asked her to explain this comment later in the interview, she connected the label Gael more with an island upbringing and outlook than specifically with the Gaelic language, even though in this quote she appears to connect Gaelic use with being *Gàidhealach* and to use Gaelic as an index of the Gael identity.

As detailed in the introduction, the relationship between language and identity in general is very complex in Scotland. Because the links between the Gaelic language and the national identities, Scot and Gael, are so weak, there would be a correspondingly greater imperative to be accepted into local Gaelic-speaking networks for legitimacy as an authentic Gaelic speaker. In this way, the Gaelic-speaking parent, grandparent or fellow community member would not simply be a convenient partner for practicing the language, but would also be a gateway into salient local Gaelic-speaking networks, legitimacy and authenticity. All this leaves heritage learners on shifting, unstable ground as they negotiate integration and their place in the Gaelic community. Interviewees reported that some other Gaelic speakers consistently rebuffed attempts to use Gaelic, positioning heritage learners on the margins or on the outside of the speaker group, as explained by this interviewee, in her attempts to speak Gaelic with her aunts,

I know they think it is strange. I am not sure whether or not it is because they think “Well a Dhia [God], you would think that [our brother’s] daughter would have much better Gaelic than that!” Which was definitely there. Or, you know, “Oh my God! I didn’t realize she had any, or could say that much.” You know. Whatever it is, you don’t know. But there is definitely something going on there that is not about accepting. [...] It depends how sensitive you feel on a day, you know, whether you come away from that with a positive or a negative attitude or laugh about it. But it is definitely still there with them.

This interviewee explains that when she tries to use Gaelic with her aunts, the conversation always breaks awkwardly. The interviewee reports that these aunts use Gaelic around her, and expect that she will understand, but as a former passive Gaelic user, they do not expect her to reply in Gaelic, and when she does, it breaks the flow of conversation in a way that leaves the interviewee feeling as if she is not accepted as a legitimate Gaelic speaker. More confident learners may persist and eventually win over those speakers who initially refuse to engage in Gaelic conversation, but not all heritage learners would be confident enough, and some would be muted by this sort of resistance. The interviewees reported a mix of success and failure in both integrating and learning Gaelic, and the following interviewee explained that it was often difficult to switch to Gaelic with fellow community members, diminishing her confidence as a Gaelic user,

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.

At the time of research, this interviewee lived a few miles from her childhood home on the island where she was born, and reported community members sometimes rebuffed her attempts to use Gaelic, particularly if she already had a long-established relationship with them in English. She narrated two vignettes to illustrate her difficulty and I have included the second vignette here:

I had another man in [my island home town] he said “How did you say that?” I must have said something about, it was *nas blàithe neo nas blàithe*. [warmer or warmer; she illustrates two different dialectically marked pronunciations] It’s warmer, the weather, and whatever I said, he said it the other way. And he laughed at me, “Where did you learn *that* Gaelic?” So that is a thing, you will have maybe had that yourself Tim. That is difficult, especially if it is people you have known all your life. You have got to be quite thick skinned and a lot of locals are not thick skinned, they are very sensitive and lacking in confidence, very much lacking in confidence.

She reported that a neighbour did not accept her pronunciation of a particular word, *blàithe*, as local, and ridiculed her Gaelic, discursively positioning her outside of the authentic local Gaelic user group. Other interviewees who grew up outside of the Highlands and Islands reported Gaelic speakers would ridicule their Lowland or urban accent in Gaelic.

Interviewees reported that accent, ancestry and upbringing worked both in their favor and against them at different times and in different situations as they negotiated language use and discursively sought to authenticate themselves as legitimate Gaelic speakers. In two separate narrative vignettes, the following interviewee reports how he was positioned outside of the authentic speaker group while visiting a traditionally Gaelic-speaking island. This interviewee was brought up in the Lowlands, but his mother was from this island and he would visit the island often as a child. In both vignettes, he is discussing his experience of using Gaelic while he was living briefly on the island as an adult and learning the language,

Even though everybody knew that I’d been [on a Gaelic course] and everybody knew that I was kind of doing my damndest to learn Gaelic, people still – [...] you know my Gaelic wasn’t that brilliant at that point, but I could string a sentence together you know. I could certainly talk to you about the weather. So why are you coming and saying that to me in English? It was really, really strange. But I guess it’s just what people are used to and how people perceive you and all through my childhood I was perceived as *Gallda* really.

[...]

And then there was another point, at that point as well, and again my Gaelic wasn't all that brilliant, but we were doing our best, we were out in the pub and somebody – I can't remember how they put it, but it was really, really interesting. It was about, "So you've come to conquer our culture now," and it was really weird and I've not really processed it since then. I do just remember – I mean at the time I think it was an awful lot to do with that kind of 'mine, mine, mine' thing.

In the first vignette, he uses the word *Gallda* to describe how he believed others understood his identity, a word that is the converse of the word *Gàidhealach*, and could mean Lowland, English-speaking or uncouth, depending on discursive context. In the second vignette, he describes how an islander made an authenticating move (Shenk, 2007, p. 194), contesting his legitimacy as an authentic Gaelic speaker. Jane Hill (1985) called similar attacks "linguistic terrorism" (p. 735) and argued that such an attack would have a powerful negative impact on a speaker's confidence in using the language (see also Krashen, 1998).

To succeed in reintegrating into Gaelic networks, heritage learners have to both orient themselves to the task and develop strategies for dealing with those speakers who are initially reluctant to switch to Gaelic. In general, the task of learning and using a networked minority language is qualitatively different from learning and using a language that functions as a default community language locally. The following interviewee illustrates this distinction with his reference to Gaelic use on three islands, two islands where Gaelic was (at the time) still used as a community language and one island where Gaelic was demographically much weaker,

And [in the island where I lived, one] had to make an effort. [...] If you were in North Uist or in Barraigh, you'd go to mass or church and you would've heard Gaelic used all the time. You didn't have to make an effort to find Gaelic. Whereas in [the island where I lived] it was something you had to look for distinctively. And I would say this is where I, my own psychology and the whole thing, I've almost enjoyed that search for Gaelic.

In our ideologies of language, we commonly draw on two different ontological metaphors of language community: language community as a physically extensive *territory* and language community as a *network* of connections between speakers. Here I am not so much concerned with how language communities and networks are theorized by social researchers (cf. Coupland, 2010; Eckert, 2003; Laponce, 1987), but rather, how regular language users understand language community in their daily lives and as they orient themselves to the problem of learning and using language. These two metaphors are often contrasted drawing on a third metaphor, the metaphor of language as a natural, living organism (cf. Armstrong, 2010, pp. 92–93; Edwards, 2009, pp. 232–234; May, 2001, pp. 3–5; McEwan-Fujita, 2011, pp. 53–54), as illustrated by the following interviewee who discusses her daughter's Gaelic use and contrasts that with Gaelic use on her island when she was younger,

Well, I don't know. One minute I'm very optimistic. I think to myself, you know [my daughter], well how easy it was, or seemed to be, for her. To be able to do what she's

done, I think that's just amazing. But I don't know. I don't know what's going to – The thing is it's not – when I was young it was very much a living – everybody did everything in Gaelic.

[...]

And she talks to all her buddies. She writes in Gaelic online and she's got lots of Gaelic buddies. [...] But I don't know that the culture of Gaelic – Oh, I'll tell you, where I live here, when I was young, this is where my granny lived and my ancestors for many, many moons. But all the houses around here were filled with grannies and children and mums and dads and everything else. They all went to church. They all went to school. They were a community.

While the previous interviewee reported that he enjoyed building Gaelic-language relationships and using Gaelic as a network language on the island where he lived, this interviewee was conflicted about the vitality of the Gaelic language, and on the one hand, marvelled at how her daughter has been able to build a network of Gaelic speakers in her life in urban Scotland, but at the same time, mourned the decline of Gaelic as a community language on her island and questioned whether Gaelic can really be considered “living” as a network language in an urban environment.

The data from the interviews demonstrates that the problem of learning and using a threatened minority language includes negotiating integration or reintegration into salient minority-language networks and I suggest that this process would be obscured by the metaphor of language as a territory. As an ontological basis of a language ideology, one cannot say that either the territorial metaphor or the network metaphor is true or false, but one can say that these metaphors are either useful or hindering, appropriate or misleading, and in this limited sense, right or wrong. Indeed, language communities are not ‘really’ either networks or territories. These are just metaphorical abstractions we use to orient ourselves to the problem of understanding language use, and in this way, the territorial metaphor has its place. I have used both the network metaphor and the territorial metaphor throughout my own analysis in this report. One can recognize these metaphors as constructs with an ideological function and still use them appropriately.

We habitually think using metaphors, this colours our reasoning (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011), and that is probably unavoidable. These two metaphors of language community will inevitably influence how languages are learned and how languages are taught, and not always for the worse. The territorial metaphor would be an appropriate metaphor to use to orient students to the task of speaking a majority language that functions as a default language in a particular territory; for instance, to teach French as a foreign language to students who plan to visit Paris. But it would be a poor metaphor to use to orient students to the task of learning and using an endangered minority language and the network metaphor would be more appropriate in this case as it better frames the task of building language relationships and integrating. There has been much research on the value of teaching language-learning and communication strategies to improve the chances of success in language learning (cf. Macaro, 2006; Nakatani 2005, 2010),

and the results of this study suggest that integration strategies are also something that should be taught, particularly when the language being learned is lesser-used and endangered. In the final section, I will discuss how the above results may inform our understanding of what constitutes good practice in teaching an endangered minority language, particularly if language teaching is understood in part as a means to language revitalisation.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR LANGUAGE REVITALISATION

Adult learners of endangered minority languages are important agents of language revitalization. The Welsh language activist, Bobi Jones (1993) goes so far as to argue that language revitalization is built on adult learners rather than young speakers, that adult learners are important because they can alter ideology and language use in their communities and in their families in ways that children cannot. “They are the formers of opinion in a community. They plan. They can change the language of a household [...] and vote.” (p. 9) Adult learners come to an endangered language like Gaelic with the enthusiasm of a convert, and insofar as language revitalization succeeds as a bottom-up social movement, this enthusiastic engagement with the language is potentially very valuable. However, true second-language adult learners of Gaelic are sometimes frustrated in their efforts to use Gaelic and integrate into Gaelic-language networks. (MacCaluim, 2007; McEwan-Fujita, 2010a & b; Wells, 2011) The heritage language learners involved in this study often had very specific integration goals. They sought to integrate into Gaelic networks in their lives and drew on existing relationships with other Gaelic speakers to effect this integration. Straddling the distinction between adult learners and native speakers, heritage language learners of Gaelic are uniquely positioned to strengthen Gaelic-language networks and therefore, they represent an important target for Gaelic-language development efforts.

Dorian (1982) observed that mastery of sociolinguistic norms and receptive ability may be more important than native-standard productive ability for membership in a speech community. This observation may help to explain the ‘naturalness’ of the commonly-observed three-generation pattern of language attrition. By natural here, I mean the unmarked nature of the patterns of bilingual use. It is not uncommon when visiting homes in traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland to witness near complete language shift enacted in one living room of a single family. The oldest generation will speak mostly in Gaelic where possible, the middle generation will deftly code-switch between the two languages, and the youngest generation will use mostly English, with short phatic or formulaic interjections of Gaelic, but all members understanding each other and taking part in bilingual family conversations. (cf. Dorian, 1982, p. 28) When observing a family having a conversation like this, it is remarkable how manifestly *unremarkable* this language shift is to the participants, how this pattern of bilingual language use is apparently natural to the family members involved. But what if one of the younger members chooses to learn Gaelic to productive fluency and speak only Gaelic in such a situation? Can this younger heritage language learner expect to integrate seamlessly, or will her new patterns of language use throw accepted norms into sharp relief and disrupt the unmarked ‘naturalness’ of language use in the family? The results of this study suggest that restarting Gaelic use may often be difficult for



heritage learners, and the notion that a living language is one that is used ‘naturally’ may make this process more difficult yet.

The territorial metaphor is a cornerstone in the ontological foundation of the dominant monolingual language ideology in Britain; however, in this study, the interviewees described Gaelic use in their lives in a way that contrasts with this common-sense, territorial understanding of what constitutes a naturally living language. Typically languages are understood as living only if they are spoken as a default community language in some discrete place. But this binary, territorial understanding fails to describe how languages might ‘live’ as network languages. All the interviewees described Gaelic as very much ‘alive’ around them (i.e. learned, spoken, passed on) but only one interviewee lived in a community where Gaelic might still function as the community language, and even there, only marginally. The rest of the interviewees lived in areas where English would be dominant, but all explained that they actively speak Gaelic in language networks that are woven around key sites of Gaelic use: bilingual homes, Gaelic-medium education, Gaelic-sector workplaces, and so on. Interviewees described these networks as fractured, contested and also continuously shifting. Speech relationships shifted between Gaelic and English as children were born, teenagers abandoned Gaelic, partners married or separated, found new work, or moved home.

In general, if learners of Gaelic expect to easily integrate into Gaelic speech communities orienting themselves to the task as they would orient themselves to the task of speaking a national language such as English in Britain, they will be unprepared and frustrated by the complexity and difficulty of integrating into a networked language community. As the interviewees explained, being a heritage learner of Gaelic does not guarantee problem-free integration into local Gaelic networks. Interviewees had to negotiate Gaelic use and at times struggle against hostility and refusal. And as these networks are in part structurally supported by Gaelic Revival initiatives, Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic-sector workplaces, the language-activist norms of the Revival will inevitably conflict with the older, more accommodating norms of diglossic Gaelic use that would have obtained in traditional communities and the Lowland diaspora of the Gaelic Twilight. Heritage learners of Gaelic would find themselves caught at the intersection of these different norms and interviewees clearly struggled to reconcile the sort of proactive Gaelic use advanced by agents of the activist Gaelic Revival and the older, more cautious patterns of use typical of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

The results of this study suggest that learners of all kinds may need help to understand the differences and difficulties of using a threatened minority language and could benefit from discussing integration strategies as part of the language learning curriculum (see also O’Rourke, 2011). This research represents further support for the basic axiom in language planning for language revival that language ability does not automatically translate into language use. Informants reported that they had to self-consciously negotiate their reintegration into relevant Gaelic networks and often had to struggle to win over key speech partners. I believe that this research represents one small part of a larger effort among researchers, educators and language activists to identify good practice in teaching threatened languages specifically for language

revitalization. In the Irish context, Muiris Ó Laoire (2005) poses the question, “[...] does the Irish language pedagogy prepare learners to integrate into the Irish language speech community outside [core Irish-speaking areas] if such were their choice?” (p. 277) and I believe that this is an interesting question in general. Learning to integrate into language networks may be a common feature of learning minority languages in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and this makes the minority language learning project qualitatively distinct from how we frame foreign language learning traditionally. Language learning for language revitalization would also need to pay particular attention to identity and ensure that pedagogical practice confirmed rather than negated (Carreira, 2004, p. 15) learners’ identity claims to the language. (Comanaru & Noels, 2009, p. 151) My research shows that failure to integrate can be a blow to heritage language learners’ identity and self-image as authentic Gaelic speakers and therefore that it may be helpful to raise awareness as part of the learning process that speaking a threatened language like Gaelic involves integrating into Gaelic-speaking networks, that this integration can be challenging, and that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gaelic use doesn’t happen by default or apparently naturally, but must be deliberately negotiated.

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