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Language policy and prospects: Metalinguistic discourses on social disruption and language maintenance in a transatlantic, minority community

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Abstract

Language activists, teachers and policymakers in Scotland and Nova Scotia often allude to the role that new speakers may play in ensuring the future maintenance of Scottish Gaelic on either side of the Atlantic. In many ways, globalisation and greater digital connectivity have mitigated the effects of physical distance between Gaelic speakers on either side of that ocean, whilst simultaneously cementing the dominant position of English. Meanwhile, second language teaching is increasingly utilised to create new cohorts of speakers, as intergenerational transmission continues to decline. Based on five years of ethnographic research in Scotland and Canada, this paper examines six new speaker narratives concerning future prospects for language revitalisation in each country. Challenging sociodemographic circumstances in the remaining Gaelic-dominant communities contrast with current discourses concerning the language's future prospects. In particular, I consider Nova Scotian new speakers' relative sense of optimism for the future of their language in the province.

Keywords: Language revitalisation; new speakers; Language policy; Gaelic

1. Introduction

The continuous presence of a Scottish Gaelic speaking minority in Nova Scotia since the 18th century is a notable, if largely unexplored consequence of mass emigration from the Highlands and Islands at the height of British colonial expansion. While Scotland's 2011 census recorded 57,602 Gaelic speakers, the 2016 Canadian census recorded an additional 910 speakers in the province of Nova Scotia (National Records of Scotland 2013; Statistics Canada 2020). Of this total, only 145 individuals reported that Gaelic was their 'mother tongue', with the majority having instead learned Gaelic as a second language in adolescence or adulthood. Nova Scotia's contemporary Gaelic community is therefore considerably smaller than Scotland's, having declined in speaker numbers by over 99% in the last century. Given rapid language shift in both Scotland and Nova Scotia, Gaelic language teaching has become a priority objective in strategic policy to revitalise the language. This article will examine effects of that policy in the two contexts, contrasting the continuing decline of Gaelic in heartland areas with new speaker discourses concerning community and future prospects for language vitality.

New speakers are defined as individuals who have learned a language other than that of their primary socialisation to high levels of proficiency, and subsequently make frequent use of it

(O'Rourke & Ramallo 2013; O'Rourke et al. 2015). In Scotland and Nova Scotia, policymakers within respective national and provincial governments often refer to the significance of language education in ensuring that future generations continue to speak Gaelic (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2014, 2018; Office of Gaelic Affairs 2018). Yet educational opportunities are limited in Nova Scotia by comparison with Scotland, where over 6000 children are currently enrolled in bilingual Gaelic-medium education ('GME'). Whilst bilingual Gaelic education of this kind is unavailable to Nova Scotians at present, immersion programmes for Mi'kmaw children have become available in certain areas, and French-medium schools are accessible to children of ethnic Acadian origin. Formal Gaelic language teaching, on the other hand, is confined to a small number of schools, extracurricular 'Saturday' classes, residential immersion and university courses.

As a result of this disparity, a crucial objective of my research since 2015 has been to examine the language learning motivations that have informed Scottish and Nova Scotian new speakers' acquisition and use of Gaelic, their sociocultural identities in the language, and their attitudes to revitalisation objectives in each territory (see Dunmore 2020).

Notwithstanding the limited number of reported Gaelic speakers in the 2016 census, the Nova Scotia Office of Gaelic Affairs estimates that at least 230,000 inhabitants are descended from families who once spoke Gaelic in the province (Office of Gaelic Affairs 2018). In response to language policy priorities in both polities, and building on research that has previously examined language ideologies in respect of Gaelic and cultural identity (see Dunmore 2017, 2019, 2020) this article presents a comparative analysis of new speaker stances concerning future prospects for Gaelic in both territories.

2. Language shift and its reversal: Sociolinguistic perspectives

In neoliberal late capitalism, language shift and institutional efforts to reverse it have become matters of increasingly pressing concern internationally (Nettle & Romaine 2000; Romaine 2000; 2008, 2013; Fishman & García 2010, 2011; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Costa 2017; Dunmore 2019). Initiatives to halt the decline of linguistic diversity worldwide have increasingly turned to second language acquisition as a strategy for shoring up speaker numbers, a phenomenon documented extensively among Indigenous peoples in North America and Polynesia, as well as national minorities on the Iberian peninsula and in Celtic-speaking countries (García 2009; Baker 2011). An increasing reliance on L2 acquisition efforts in these settings tends to reflect tacit acknowledgement by policymakers that once the intimate processes of intergenerational transmission are disrupted in the private home

domain, they are extremely hard to re-establish. In Scotland, for instance, GME is regarded as one of the principal policy instruments at policymakers' disposal for creating new, fluent speakers of Gaelic (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2014, 2018; Scottish Government 2014). On the basis of a large research literature, however, numerous scholars have observed that the efficacy of language education in determining speakers' actual language practices is often undermined by complex socio- and psycholinguistic factors (cf. Harley 1994; MacFarlane & Wesche 1995; Johnstone 2001; Edwards 2010; Baker 2011; Dunmore 2019). Most prominently, Fishman (1972, 1991, 2001a, b, 2010, 2013) theorised unfailingly that education-focused policy interventions would ultimately prove insufficient without adequate supports in the home-community domain.

Given the current absence of immersion education provision for Gaelic students in Nova Scotia, revitalisation efforts have increasingly coalesced around second language instruction in schools, extra-curricular immersion activities, and language learning initiatives for adults (MacEachen 2008; Dunbar 2008; Watson & Ivey 2016). Both the *Gàidhlig aig Baile* ('Gaelic in the home') mode of small-group language instruction in teachers' houses, and the *Bun is Bàrr* ('root and branch') master-apprentice programme, place particular emphasis on interaction between learners and native speakers in the home-community setting. Initiatives of this nature ultimately recall Fishman's (1991, 2001a, b) suggestions for the re-establishment of intergenerational interaction. Notwithstanding the province's substantially smaller speaker population, therefore, the community-focussed character of Gaelic revitalisation policy in Nova Scotia may thus be regarded, following Fishman's view, as more sustainable in the long term than revitalisation immersion schooling initiatives in Scotland.

Fishman (1991: 471) placed particular emphasis on 'prior ideological clarification' in language revitalisation initiatives, underscoring the importance of language ideologies in processes of language minoritisation and shift (cf. Silverstein 1979: 193). In recent decades scholars have identified how ideologies of this kind are conveyed in speakers' discourses as rationalisations for their language practices (Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Kroskrity 2000, 2004; Makihara 2010; Cavanaugh 2013). In particular, linguists and anthropologists have suggested that language ideologies can have a particularly significant influence on the ways in which plurilingual individuals in minority language settings identify with and make use of their languages (Fishman 1991, 2001a, b, 2013; Boudreau and Dubois 2007; Valdés et al. 2008; Makihara 2010; Cavanaugh 2013). In the remainder of this article I will introduce the

research settings under investigation (section 3) before outlining the analytic methods employed (section 4) and examining 6 extracts from interviews with Scottish and Nova Scotian new speakers of Gaelic (section 5). Finally, I will draw together overall conclusions and relate these to the wider theoretical framework of language revitalisation (section 7).

3. Gaelic revitalisation and new speakers in Scotland and Nova Scotia

In Scotland, previous research on new speakers of Gaelic has examined language learning trajectories, language practices and attitudes among individuals who have learned Gaelic as an L2 to a high level of proficiency. In their seminal study, McLeod et al. (2014) elicited illustrative discourse on the phenomenon from an emic perspective, using interviews and focus group discussions with Scottish new speakers, while variationist studies by Nance and colleagues (Nance 2015; Nance et al. 2016) compared the phonetic productions of new speakers with those of L1 Gaelic speakers in Lewis. Each of these studies emphasised Scottish new speakers' preferred identification as part of the 'Gaelic community' (*Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig*) rather than with the ethnolinguistic category 'Gaels' (*Gàidheil*), a label they generally associated with older, native speakers in remote locations. Whilst new speakers often viewed native speakers as the best target example for pronunciation, native speakers' greater use of language alternation and English loans was a communicative norm explicitly rejected by most new speakers interviewed (McLeod et al. 2014: 39; Nance et al. 2016: 181).

Second language acquisition research provides some particularly relevant perspectives in this regard. Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) identified 'integrative motivation' as a key factor in successful SLA, reflecting learners' aspiration to participate in and acquire the culture of a target L2 community. In the context of French-English bilingualism in Canada, this principle was found to exert a powerful influence on L2 learners' effective acquisition of the target variety. This model's applicability in the context of heritage language learning may be limited, however, regardless of how remote ethnocultural affiliations to the language community in question may be (cf. Valdés et al. 2008). In Nova Scotia, the government-funded *Gàidhlig aig Baile* and *Bun is Bàrr* programmes foreground the importance of constant contact between the remaining native Gaels and heritage learners, both for students' language socialisation in Gaelic, and their development of a sense of identity as Gaels. (This latter objective, in particular, is seldom encountered in Scotland at present.)

One relevant query in this regard relates to present understandings of multiple linguistic identities, and how these may impact upon the continued salience of the integrativeness model. A possible solution, developed by Dörnyei (2005) and Ushioda (2011; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009) conceives of the ‘motivational self-system’. This paradigm proposes that second language learners’ acquisition of an additional language is guided largely by their imagined plurilingual identities as ‘ideal’ and ‘ought to’ L2 selves. The distinction between these imagined ‘selves’ contrasts second language speakers’ own (emic) conceptions of their ‘ideal’ target identity in the second language with the (etic) identities they feel they ‘ought to’ aspire to, as guided by external actors and influences. Within this framework, MacIntyre et al. (2017) investigated language learning motivations among a sample of Gaelic learners in Nova Scotia. They theorised that Nova Scotian Gaelic learners’ motivations were reflective of a notional ‘rooted L2 self’, distinguishing the heritage affiliations and orientations of such speakers from the integrative motivations of other kinds of L2 learners.

3.1. Gaelic in Scotland

From around 500CE, the Gaels (or ‘Scots’) gradually expanded their dynastic influence over mainland areas of northern Britain (*Alba*). Over the next five centuries, Gaelic language use spread over the majority of that territory, as Gaels emerged as the predominant ethnolinguistic group north of the Tweed, assimilating Pictish and Brythonic kingdoms to consolidate their hegemony (Dumville 2002; Ó Baoill 2010; Clancy 2011). The Gaelic-dominant Kingdom of Alba underwent sweeping socioeconomic changes from the early twelfth century, as its royal family and ruling nobility became increasingly Normanised. Community Gaelic use, meanwhile, became increasingly restricted to the Highlands and adjacent Hebridean archipelago (Barrow 1989). The early modern Scottish state adopted increasingly antagonistic policies towards Gaelic in an effort to eliminate political resistance to the centralisation of state power. Anti-Gaelic policies pursued throughout the seventeenth century are characterised by Withers (1984) as an early manifestation of the state’s proto-capitalist ‘improvement’ policy, which accelerated as a result of Gaels’ perceived support for Jacobite rebellions in the eighteenth century. With the emergence of market capitalism in the nineteenth century, this established dynamic led landowners to instigate comprehensive restructuring of land use on their estates, with no regard for living communities (Withers 1984; Glaser 2007; Richards 2007). The mass evictions that ensued have subsequently been termed the Clearances; as landlords increasingly coerced their former tenants to emigrate to the Lowlands or overseas, language shift in Highland Scotland intensified considerably.

In the 2011 UK census, 57,602 people were recorded as being able to speak Gaelic, amounting to just over 1% of the Scottish population (National Records of Scotland 2013). The importance attached to developing second language education in strategic policy to revitalise Gaelic was emphasised in the most recent iteration of the National Gaelic Language Plan, which states:

Gaelic education is central to the ambition of Gaelic growth and for this reason education and learning will remain central to this Plan, as they were to the previous Plan... Our clear view is that Gaelic education makes an important contribution to the aim of increasing the numbers of those speaking, using and learning the language (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2018: 32).

Under the rubric of ‘Gaelic education’, GME has tended to receive policy emphasis in Scotland in a way that has not been true of adult learner education, or second language instruction for non-GME pupils. On the basis of several studies examining immersion education in Canada, however (e.g. Harley, 1994; MacFarlane & Wesche, 1995; Johnstone, 2001), Edwards (2010: 261) has observed that despite exhibiting generally higher levels of fluency, immersion pupils appear not to make greater use their second language than other sorts of language students. In light of these limitations, Scottish policymakers’ emphasis on immersion education, to the detriment, arguably, of community development, adult learner education, or other forms of Gaelic acquisition, has been found to have important policy consequences for the revitalisation of Gaelic (Dunmore 2019; Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020).

3.2. Gaelic in Nova Scotia

The term Nova Scotia (‘New Scotland’) was first coined in reference to the territories of the Indigenous Mi’kmaw people between ‘New England’ and ‘Newfoundland’ in 1621, when James VI and I issued a charter for their colonisation by Scots (Campbell & MacLean 1974: 35). Gaelic speakers first arrived in Nova Scotia in 1629, and although early endeavours to establish a sizeable Scottish colony there were unsuccessful, small numbers of Highlanders continued to colonise the region during the 17th and early 18th centuries (Campbell & MacLean 1974; Ó hÍfearnáin 2002; Graham 2018). Transatlantic immigration by Gaels to eastern Nova Scotia increased after 1770, as middle class migrants arrived in search of better personal and professional prospects. Highland immigration continued into the nineteenth century, but by the 1840s colonial settlers increasingly comprised the destitute masses evicted from Highland estates during the Clearances, as landowners’ capitalist aspirations fatally undermined the traditional, kinship-based social order (MacKinnon 1996, 2001; Kennedy 2002).

At the apex of Gaelic colonisation between around 1770 and 1850, it is thought that over 50,000 Highland Scots immigrated to Antigonish County on the Nova Scotian mainland, and on Cape Breton Island across Strait of Canso (MacKinnon 2001: 20; Kennedy 2002: 20-21; Ó hIfearnáin 2002: 65). Gaelic-speaking communities in these relatively isolated areas initially thrived as sites for language transmission, although socioeconomic circumstances were often fragile (Mertz 1989; MacKinnon 1996, 2001). The cultural homogeneity of Gaelic-speaking communities in Nova Scotia was amplified by the chain migration patterns that characterised their settlement in the nineteenth century; Highland communities that were relatively uniform in terms of their linguistic practices and religious observances were often essentially transplanted into similarly homogeneous communities in eastern Nova Scotia (Edwards 2010; Kennedy 2002; MacKinnon 2001; Ó hIfearnáin 2002).

In the 1871 census Scots constituted the largest ethnic group in Nova Scotia, and an estimated 80,000 Gaelic speakers had settled in the colony by 1880 (Shaw 1977; Kennedy 2002; Graham 2018; Dunmore 2020). When state schools had been inaugurated in 1864, however, no form of Gaelic education was mandated in the colony (Edwards 2010: 156-7; Kennedy 2002: 61). Edwards (1991: 273) finds evidence that intergenerational transmission was already declining within Gaelic-dominant communities in Nova Scotia by the 1870s. Kennedy (2002: 51) argues that after state education started, Gaelic-speaking children learned next to nothing about their native language at school, and developed correspondingly negative attitudes regarding its relevance in wider society. MacKinnon (2001: 19) observes that from a population of over 70,000 in the late-nineteenth century, Cape Breton's Gaelic-speaking population had fallen to just 24,000 in the 1931 census, a figure which continued to fall by around 50% each subsequent decade of the twentieth century.

Assessing the underlying reasons for rapid language shift, Mertz (1982, 1989) investigated linguistic ideological and metapragmatic processes by which Nova Scotia Gaels were prompted to assign relative values to their languages during this period. Her analysis (Mertz 1982: 311-2) demonstrates convincingly that the most consequential 'metapragmatic filter'—the sets of 'folk theories' and language ideologies that speakers' held concerning Gaelic—developed at the time of the Great Depression. The 1930s economic downturn led Nova Scotia Gaels to re-evaluate their relationship with Gaelic, the language becoming increasingly viewed as either an irrelevance or burden to their children's future as a consequence (Mertz 1982, 1989). As the sociolinguistic tipping point was surpassed, language shift from Gaelic to English accelerated even more rapidly. Gaelic-speaking Nova Scotians began once again to

emigrate en masse, relocating to growing towns in Nova Scotia, or further afield to Ontario, New England, or the Canadian prairies (Kennedy 2002: 73; Edwards 2010: 154). Kennedy (2002: 75) observes that such urban environments ‘proved particularly hostile to the socialization of children in Gaelic’, hastening language shift to English among new arrivals there, while Gaelic use in the rural districts they departed continued to decline.

Language policy and planning for Gaelic in Nova Scotia started with grassroots efforts in the 1970s and 80s, supplemented at the start of this century by increased official provision (Dunbar 2008; Edwards 2010). In 2006, *Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig* (The Office of Gaelic Affairs) was established within the provincial government as a civil service unit to support the work of a new ministerial portfolio for Gaelic Affairs. In its own words, the *Oifis* exists for the purpose of helping ‘Nova Scotians reclaim their Gaelic language and identity as a basis for cultural, spiritual, community and economic renewal [...] and providing tools and opportunities to learn, share and experience Gaelic language and culture’ (Gaelic Affairs 2018). Policymakers’ aims for Gaelic in Nova Scotia therefore go far beyond the objective of creating new speakers, and the perceived importance of celebrating the language as a distinctive aspect of the province’s identity, economy and spiritual life is clear from the above statement (cf. Graham 2018).

Clearly, however, stimulating ownership of and proficiency in Gaelic even among the estimated 230,000 inhabitants with Gaelic ancestry presents significant challenges, to say nothing of Nova Scotia’s (750,000) other citizens. Yet the emphasis placed on language learning, reclamation and ‘renewal’ in the above quote highlights the perceived importance of new speakers to the future of Gaelic in the province. Whilst the 2016 Canadian census recorded 910 speakers of Gaelic in Nova Scotia (145 of whom reported it as their ‘mother tongue’) only 60 reported Gaelic as the language that was ‘spoken most often at home’ (Statistics Canada 2020). With the usual caveats that apply to census data, we may tentatively infer a small but growing new speaker population from these figures. Whilst this growing demographic would appear to relatively outstrip the small remaining population of native speakers, until recently there has been very little evidence relating to either the demographic extent or linguistic practices of Nova Scotia’s new speakers. Watson and Ivey (2016: 184) summarised this deficiency, asking ‘who are these speakers? Why are they learning Gaelic? How fluent are they? And how often do they use it?’ (my translation).

4. Methods

The interview data which form the basis of the analysis in this article are drawn from two speech corpora compiled over the past 5 years in Scotland and Nova Scotia. The first such corpus is referred to here as the ‘CLAG corpus’, which in its entirety consists of detailed linguistic interviews recorded with 120 participants throughout Scotland as part of the wider, policymaker-funded CLAG project (*Comasan labhairt ann an Gàidhlig*, or ‘Gaelic speaking abilities’). This project ran from 2014 to 2019 and was hosted at the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen (cf. MacLeod & Carty 2019). This collection of interviews employed five distinct tasks to build a corpus of spoken L2 Gaelic at different levels of proficiency, with the overall aim of assessing proficiency in Gaelic adult learners and developing a framework resource on par with those available for most other European languages. With the further written permission of fifteen interviewees, I compiled a subset of interview transcripts with some of the most proficient new speakers in the corpus. These fifteen interviews were recorded throughout Scotland by CLAG researcher Nicola Carty between 2014 and 2016. Participants’ ages in this subset ranged from 27 to 60. 9 were male and 6 female.

Each interview consisted of an informal interview or chat, the performance of several grammar elicitation tasks, and completion of one ‘narrative’ task, in which the participant was offered a choice of 8 topics to discuss for an extended period (two of which focused specifically on areas of Gaelic language policy). All fifteen interviewees in the subset I discuss here completed the narrative task as a response to one of the following two propositions:

- “*Bu chòir don Rìaghaltais barrachd airgid a chosg air a’ Ghàidhlig*” (The Government should spend more money on Gaelic.)
- “*Gheibh a’ Ghàidhlig bàs am broinn lethcheud bliadhna*” (Gaelic will die out within fifty years.)

The fifteen narratives produced by advanced new speakers on these topics constitute metalinguistic narratives regarding Gaelic policy in Scotland, allowing for the analysis of their language ideologies in respect of language and culture change, the perceived importance of the traditional speaker community, and long-term prospects for the maintenance of Gaelic as a spoken vernacular in Scotland.

The second corpus consists of thirty semi-structured interviews I conducted in Nova Scotia between 2017 and 2018 as part of a British Academy-funded postdoctoral fellowship (‘the BA corpus’). These interviews were conducted with new Gaelic speakers in the provincial

capital of Halifax, as well Antigonish County and Cape Breton Island in eastern Nova Scotia. Most participants had grown up in Cape Breton, and ranged in age from 17 to 73; 11 were male and 19 female. These interviewees' Gaelic learning experiences and language attitudes are notably different to those of most Scottish-based participants in the CLAG study; in Nova Scotia most acquired Gaelic through a mixture of community classes and immersion classes outside of the school system. All interviews across the two corpora were fully transcribed using the software package Elan, and coded thematically by the author. The analysis presented below assesses both the content and linguistic form of narratives, employing a methodological framework based on Hymes's (1974) ethnography of speaking.

In the following sections of this article I analyse the language ideologies that 3 Scottish, and 3 Nova Scotian new speakers from these two studies convey when describing their perceptions of future prospects for Gaelic in each polity. Whilst these six interviewees give particularly interesting insights in the extracts discussed, their views are representative of the wider samples they are drawn from. I argue that whilst the Scottish new speakers tend to view the language's prospects as inseparable from the ongoing decline of the ethnolinguistic L1 community, Nova Scotian new speakers seem markedly more positive concerning the future of Gaelic in the province, due perhaps, I suggest, to the local L1 community's decline being virtually complete already. Pseudonyms are supplied for all interviewees.

5. Analysis

The six interview extracts I introduce in the following analysis illustrate broadly contrasting ideologies in relation to language policy objectives in Scotland and Nova Scotia. Firstly, in the three accounts taken from the 'CLAG corpus', interviewees develop narratives with reference to language revitalisation in Scotland, emphasising their perception that in spite of language policy to encourage the creation of more new speakers, ongoing linguistic and cultural decline in heartland areas threatens the short-term survival of Gaelic.

5.1. Scotland: Gaelic language & community decline

In the first interview extract, below, my interviewee 'Dòmhnall' elucidates his overarching impression of the wider state of Gaelic in Scotland at present, and of likely future prospects for the language. He is notably pessimistic, stating his fear that there will be nothing left of the language once its eldest and most fluent speakers die out in the coming years:

Ex. 1.

Dòmhnall: *Nuair a gheibh (.) daoine (.) a tha fìor fileanta [...] nuair a gheibheas iadsan am bàs – na seann daoine agus na daoine a tha- a tha uamhraidh foghlaimte a thaobh na Gàidhlig – chan eil mise am beachd gum bi rud sam bi ann [...] Is e] na theireadh iad an-diugh am facal ‘coimhearsnachd’- b’ àbhaist sin (.) a’ chànain a chumail beò agus fallainn ach a-nis leis gu bheil na h-uile duine air am beò-ghlacadh air fad le gnothaichean (.) Ameireaganach agus- agus gnothaichean na Beurla feumaidh ceangal gu ìre a bhith ga stèidheachadh [...] Tha] na daoine a tha air a’ Ghàidhlig ionnsachadh- tha sin air (.) dol am meud gu mòr (ach) an seòrsa Ghàidhlig a tha iad ag ionnsachadh- chan eil e uamhraidh math [...] Bidh mi fhathast ag ràdh fad na h-ùine **lowest common denominator Gaelic**- feumaidh gum bi caochladh ìrean dhe Ghàidhlig ann.*

When people (.) who are really fluent [...] when they die – the older people and the people who are really educated in Gaelic – I don’t think there will be anything left [...] What they call ‘community’ today – that used to be the thing that (.) kept the language alive and healthy but now since everyone is so completely obsessed with (.) American things and- and English language things a certain connection [to the language] has to be established [... The] people who have learned Gaelic- that’s (.) grown hugely (but) the type of Gaelic they learn- it’s not very good [...] I still say all the time [it’s] **lowest common denominator Gaelic**- there has to be lots of different levels of Gaelic.

Dòmhnall goes on to explain his view that whilst on the one hand, the traditional community (*‘coimhearsnachd’*) was the key element of past maintenance of Gaelic language and culture, the impact of globalisation and of mainstream Anglo-American culture (*gnothaichean Ameireaganach agus gnothaichean na Beurla*) is perceived to have weakened this dynamic considerably. Lastly, he states his opinion unequivocally that whilst numbers of learners have increased considerably, the quality of language they acquire is ‘not very good’ (*chan eil e uamhraidh math*); indeed, he goes as far as to state that it is ‘lowest common denominator Gaelic’. In somewhat less reproachful terms, ‘Rab’ similarly states his view, in the following extract, that new speakers outside of the traditional heartland areas are unlikely to replace generations of vernacular speakers in the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland:

Ex. 2.

Rab: *Anns na h-Eileanan Siar (.) na **traditional heartlands** mar a- mar theireas iad ris- uill riutha- tha a' Ghàidhlig (.) a' dol sìos agus tha e a' dol a bhàs (.) ann an tòrr sgìrean. Thuirt cuideigin uaireigin (.) nach ann às na h-Eileanan Siar a bhios ginealach ùr na Gàidhlig a' tighinn- ginealach ùr nan Gàidheal mar gum biodh agus tha mise den bheachd gu bheil sin fìor [...] sin gu math duilich gu seach àiridh nuair a tha thu a' smaoinichadh (.) "uill mura h-ann às na h-Eileanan Siar a thig an ath ghinealach mar gum biodh, an ann às na bailtean mòra a bhios e a' tighinn?"*

In the Western Isles (.) the **traditional heartlands** as they call it- or call them- Gaelic is (.) declining and it's going to die (.) in lots of areas. Someone once said (.) that the next generation of Gaelic won't come from the Western Isles- the next generation of Gaels as it were, and I think that's true [...] that's quite sad especially when you think (.) "well if the next generation won't come from the Western Isles (.) will it come from the cities?"

Rab observes that as Gaelic continues to decline in the traditional heartland areas of the Western Isles, it is very unlikely that the next generation of speakers will be reproduced there. He then asks rhetorically where such a generation is thus likely to come from, implying that it's unlikely to be in Scotland's urban centres, where numerous GME units have now been established, for example. In remarkably similar terms, 'Flòraidh' reflects in the following extract on the decline of the Gaels as a cultural and linguistic group in contemporary Scotland:

Ex. 3.

Flòraidh: *[Tha] na th' ann de Ghàidheil aig a bheil an cànan gu fileanta air bàsachadh (.) so chan ann a' Ghàidhlig nas motha a tha a' bàsachadh ach na Gàidheil, agus (.) chan eil mi cinnteach an tèid againn an suidheachadh atharrachadh a-nise. Chan eil (.) mòran de Ghàidheil a tha air fhàgail airson an cànan a chleachdadh agus seirbhisean a chleachdadh so tha e coltach ri seòrsa dhe seòrsa **vicious cycle**. Ach co-dhiù tha mise ann agus (.) uill fhad 's a tha- a bhios mi beò no ma mhaireas mi beò gu deireadh na bliadhna co-dhiù (.) bidh mi ag obair air.*

The Gaels who spoke the language fluently have died (.) so it's not just Gaelic that's dying out anymore but the Gaels, and (.) I'm not sure we'll be able to change that situation now. There aren't (.) many Gaels left to use the language

and use services [through the medium of Gaelic] so it's a kind of **vicious cycle**. But I'm here in any case, and (.) well as long as I live or if I survive to the end of the year at least (.) I'll be working on it.

Flòraidh unambiguously states her view that 'the Gaels', the ethnolinguistic group of vernacular Gaelic users, have now mostly died, meaning that less and less Gaelic is now spoken or used in communication with official bodies or service providers. This situation is likened to a 'vicious circle', which use of code-switching can be interpreted to emphasise her view. In contrast to the rather doubtful views of interviewees in previous excerpts, however, Flòraidh reflects on her own agency as a new speaker, stating in any case that as long as she lives she will continue working for the good of the language.

5.2. Nova Scotia: Optimism in Gaelic heritage and culture

Among new Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia, a palpable sense of optimism for the future survival of Gaelic in the province is observable, in spite of the local Gaelic community's substantially more minoritised condition in the present day. 'Coinneach' observes, below, that whilst Nova Scotian Gaels have tended to be rather reluctant to assert the value of their linguistic and cultural expressions relative to Scottish Gaeldom, there is in fact much to be celebrated in their Gaelic heritage:

Ex. 4.

Coinneach *Tha sinn caran diùid ann an- an-seo ann an Alba Nuaidh a thaobh [dualchas nan Gàidheal] is a sealltainn (2.9) air- air a' bhràthair mhòr mar gum biodh ann an- air a' Ghàidhealtachd fhèin*

We're rather shy in- here in Nova Scotia in terms of [Gaelic culture and identity] and we look (2.9) to- to our big brother as it were in the [Scottish] Highlands

SD Hmm

Coinneach *Agus dh'fhaoidte a' smaointinn nach- nach eil dad againne ri thoirt seachad a tha luachmhor [...] ach chanainnsa gu bheil oir 's e (grunn rud) a bh' ann san sgìre seo- an dàimh a th' ann eadar- (.) eadar dualchas nan Gàidheal- dualchas na Gàidhlig (.) agus an cànan [...] Ma thèid thu dha na dannsaichean ann am **Brook Village, West Mabou** chì thu cho domhainn 's cho daingeann 's cho làidir 's a tha an ceangal a th' ann fhathast eadar- eadar na ginealaichean eadar-dhealaichte*

And we perhaps think we don't have anything to contribute that's valuable [...] but I'd say we do because there were many things in this area- the connection between- (.) between Gaelic heritage- Gaelic culture (.) and the language [...]

If you go to the ceilidh dances in **Brook Village, West Mabou** [Cape Breton] you'll see how deep and enduring and strong the link still is between- between the different generations

Coinneach thus contrasts a perceived tendency among Nova Scotia Gaelic speakers to feel shy (*diùid*) about the value of their language and culture, with the strength of local connections between language and cultural heritage. This dynamic is best reflected, to his mind, in the popularity of traditional community dances in rural Cape Breton Island. The importance of such connections is described in terms of their value across generations (*an ceangal a th' ann fhathast eadar na ginealaichean eadar-dhealaichte*) although as described in section 3.2, intergenerational transmission of the language itself was critically disrupted in the early 20th century. Nevertheless, Coinneach remains overtly optimistic about the value of Nova Scotia Gaelic in spite of the small numbers of speakers there. Possible reasons for this sense of optimism are further discussed by 'Max' in response to my question in the following excerpt:

Ex. 5.

SD *An tig an latha far am bi àite sònraichte dhan a' Ghàidhlig ri taobh na Beurla is na Fraingis cuideachd ann an [[Albainn Nuaidh?]*

Will Gaelic ever be recognised as occupying a unique space alongside English and French in [[Nova Scotia?]

Max *[[Ann an Albainn Nuaidh] fhèin? Uill bhiodh sin math [...] Bho chionn (.) fichead bliadhna uh: (1.4) cha robh mise smaointinn gum biodh (.) àite againn am measg an riaghaltas*

[[In Nova Scotia]? Well that'd be good [...] twenty years (.) ago uh:
(1.4) I never thought we would (.) have a position within the Government

SD Mm- mm hmm

Max **You know** *cha bhiodh um (.) [[Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig]*

You know (.) there wouldn't have been [[the Office of Gaelic Affairs]

SD *[[Is tha sin air] atharrachadh=*

[[And that has] changed=

Max *=Fhuair sinn sin- bha sin mìorbhaileach really- chuir sin iongnadh ormsa nuair a thàinig sin a-staigh so cò aige tha fios?*

=We got that- that was incredible **really**- it amazed me when that came in **so** who knows?

The establishment of the Office of Gaelic Affairs within the provincial government in 2006 is thus regarded by Max as an incredible achievement that would have been unimaginable twenty years ago. As such, the proposition of official status for Gaelic in Nova Scotia, whilst unlikely in the short term, is not altogether discounted as a possible future step for language policy in the province. Another area of future language development is touched upon in the following extract by 'Ceiteag', who lacks confidence to speak Gaelic but demonstrated advanced proficiency in conversation earlier in the interview.

Ex. 6.

Ceiteag I- I- I also have heard this um (0.7) sort of uh (0.8) contrast between what was done- what's being done in Scotland versus what's being done here [...] I think the evidence in terms of (0.6) that the ((GME)) schools aren't really (1.6) you know helping language revitalisation=

SD =Yeah hmm

Ceiteag Is strong- I think the evidence is strong

SD Yep

Ceiteag That being said ^even if you get a few ((children speaking the language))=

SD =That's right

Ceiteag You get 2 or 3 [[then]

SD [[Yeah]

Ceiteag That's still important

We may juxtapose this speaker's strong views regarding the importance of Gaelic education with her reluctance to use the language as a vehicle for the metalinguistic comment she makes in this extract. A reported lack of confidence in speaking Gaelic presently is ironically something that a formal Gaelic education may have remedied for Ceiteag, perhaps motivating the strength of feeling she conveys regarding immersion schooling. As such, Ceiteag contrasts current language policy initiatives in Scotland and Nova Scotia, explaining that whilst GME doesn't appear currently to contribute substantially towards Gaelic revitalisation, the possibility of it creating small numbers of speakers is seen as 'still important'. Ceiteag thus implies that establishing GME classes within Nova Scotia would have an important impact upon the local Gaelic language community, where speaker numbers are currently so small, as well perhaps as boosting the confidence of potential speakers to use the language.

6. Conclusions

Early processes of globalisation, colonisation, and the ideological precursors of neoliberal capitalism can be identified among the underlying reasons for the chequered trajectories of Gaelic use in Scotland and Nova Scotia traced in section 3. As such, there are complex socio-historical and cultural reasons for the contrasting evaluations of future Gaelic maintenance prospects among Scottish and Nova Scotian new speakers analysed in section 5. Varied perceptions, perspectives and ideologies among new speakers in each polity underscore the fact of new Gaelic speakers' heterogeneity as a linguistic and cultural sub-group within the wider Gaelic community, which itself comprises diverse voices and values. The transatlantic profile of this community in late modernity, resulting ultimately from historical processes of displacement, mass migration and colonisation, is one that is often overlooked. The unique history of Gaels in Nova Scotia provides a further source of cultural diversity within this minoritised language group. Although estimated numbers of Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia are small, such individuals and networks nevertheless constitute an important subsection of the world's Gaelic community in the twenty first century, with distinct traditions, idioms and world-views.

Whilst a certain activist mentality appears to be stronger among some Scottish-based new speakers than others, there is generally a widespread awareness among most speakers discussed here of the need for both native and new speakers to contribute to the future maintenance of Gaelic. It is perhaps ironic that in Scotland the possession of a strongly activist mentality, and with it a heightened awareness of ongoing community decline in heartland areas (cf. Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020) appears to promote a more pessimistic view of future prospects for Gaelic compared to Nova Scotia. This dynamic recalls Bostock's (1997) notion of 'language grief, since warnings of the imminent apparent 'death' of Gaelic in Scotland have been widely circulated and reported in recent decades, thereby impacting on speakers' linguistic ideologies concerning prospects for its revival. Similarly, a policy focus on the formal education system in Scotland would appear to require children to somehow acquire supportive ideologies and strong ethnolinguistic identities in the language, an objective which has rarely been explicitly addressed in GME (see Dunmore 2017, 2019). Adult learners in Scotland may be seen as more likely to acquire an implicit understanding of these issues, or indeed, to be motivated by them to take an interest in the language in the first place (McLeod et al. 2014).

In Nova Scotia, by contrast, while the few remaining native speakers have been at the heart of grassroots and government efforts to support Gaelic language learning and revitalisation, the Gaelic ‘community’ now exists almost entirely as a network of speakers rather than a geographically concentrated ethno-culture. Socially networked minority Francophone and Mi’kmaw cultures exist alongside Nova Scotian Gaels, and may be understood to provide a model for their language revitalisation aspirations. It is possibly due to this dynamic that the optimism of Nova Scotian new speakers stands in such stark contrast to the pessimism of Scots concerning long-term survival of Gaelic and its speaker community. Additionally, the future direction of Gaelic use in the province hardly seems likely to be on a downward trajectory; at this stage of language shift the community appears once again to be growing, notwithstanding the remaining ‘traditional’ native speakers have almost entirely passed away (Statistics Canada 2018). In this sense, there are clear parallels between Nova Scotia Gaelic and Manx Gaelic, as discussed by Ó hÍfearnáin (2015), and I would suggest that the perceived authenticity of heritage-motivated new Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia is less contested there than is the case in Scotland, in the virtual absence, in present-day Nova Scotia, of a native speaker community.

In Nova Scotia, therefore, the loss of native speaker communities is all but complete at the start of the 2020s, albeit this decline coincides with the creation of steadily increasing numbers of enthusiastic new speakers. Conversely, the decline of Gaelic communities in Scotland continues apace in the language’s heartland areas, in spite of official policy to bolster second language acquisition elsewhere. This dynamic appears to impact substantially on new speakers’ ideologies as to the language’s future prospects in Scotland. While more research is clearly required to consider these questions more fully, the results presented here are perhaps indicative of a noteworthy distinction in ideologies relating to Gaelic revitalisation activities on either side of the Atlantic.

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Key to transcription conventions

[[words]	overlapping speech
(.)	perceivable pause <1s duration
(2.0)	perceivable pause >1s duration
(word)	uncertain transcription
((word))	analyst's comments
^word	rising intonation
wo:	elongation
<u>word</u>	emphatic speech
word=	latched speech, no pause
words	codeswitch

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