GAELIC LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE
TYPOLOGIES AND CONSTRUCTS

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Reported within this paper are the qualitative results of a 1995-1997 ethnographic study of seventeen Gaelic language users living within English speaking areas of Canada and Scotland. Subjects Àileas, Aonghas, Artair, Anna, Aigneas, Tara, Tollaidh, Cairistiona, and Colla (all names are fictional), were observed for a period of nine days. The subjects kept a written journal in which they recorded their thoughts and feelings about Gaelic, their Gaelic worlds in the English community, and their Gaelic language maintenance within an English community. These records formed two typologies, 'Levels of Gaelic Speech Competence' and 'Gaelic Social Roles'; and two language maintenance constructs, 'Interactive Gaelic Work' and 'Interlinguistic Relations'. The typologies and constructs of these successful Gaelic language maintenance users interact dynamically to identify other speakers' reference groups and, based on the reference group identified, whether the user would choose to engage in a sustained Gaelic conversational episode with the other speaker. Results identified a 'common sense' ethnographic method of evaluating levels of Gaelic speech ability and Gaelic roles by using the natural terms of the lesser-used language community studied.

INTRODUCTION

The following socioethnographic study of Gaelic language maintenance explores the Gaelic worlds of seventeen Gaelic speakers living within English dominated communities. Àileas, Aonghas, Artair, Anna, Aigneas, Tara, Tollaidh, Cairistiona, and Colla are just nine of the subjects who will be introduced within this paper. (All of the subjects names, and the names of individuals connected to the subjects, have been changed in this writing for the purpose of anonymity.) During the two-year period of observation, the subjects kept written journal records where they recorded their own thoughts and observations about Gaelic language maintenance within an English environment, and where they commented on their own local Gaelic communities. The purpose of the research was to explore the 'isolated' Gaelic world and to identify ways in which that world could be construed. This marked the beginning of greater insight into successful Gaelic language maintenance in English communities.

Due to the qualitative and individual nature of the study, unique research literature was used to gain a greater understanding of the individual and her/his Gaelic language maintenance process. Individual members, and respected authors, of the Gaelic community, such as Anne Lorne Gillies (1991), Angus MacLellan (1997), Margaret Fay Shaw (1993), and Mary & Hector Maclver (1990), who had written autobiographies about their Gaelic lives, along with local ethnic Scottish and Canadian newspaper editorials, were used to validate the common terms and constructs identified in the research findings. In this way, the published autobiographies of Gaelic community members, printed letters to newspaper editors, and the journals and observations of the subjects themselves, provided a rich ethnographic resource of the typologies and constructs used by Gaelic speakers to identify language development, and skill, and to enable language maintenance opportunities. Being able to identify these community language constructs allowed Gaelic learners to evaluate their own language acquisition progress alongside the 'common sense' terms and standards that they would encounter within the Gaelic world itself. The typology, 'Levels of Gaelic Competency' identifies the terms commonly used to evaluate a Gaelic speaker's ability; the typology, 'Gaelic Social Roles' identifies the titles commonly given to specific members of
an isolated Gaelic community. These two typologies interact dynamically, for a speaker, to help match the 'ability' and 'role' of another speaker with the former's reference group. A match typically results in a sustained Gaelic language maintenance episode. Two constructs, 'Interactive Gaelic Work' and 'Interlinguistic Relations' describe the most prominent challenges that a Gaelic speaker encounters while trying to maintain her/his level of Gaelic within an English speaking milieu.

LEVELS OF GAELIC COMPETENCY

Gaelic speakers attempting to maintain their language within an English environment, construe their world in one of two typologies which makes reference to several categories of ability. The subjects participating in this study, and Gaelic autobiographers (Gillies, 1991; MacLellan, 1997; Shaw, 1993; Maclver & Maclver, 1990), use a common-sense method of identifying and locating one's Gaelic speech ability in relation to the social world of Gaelic speakers. Identifying a person's 'level of Gaelic competency' within this typology is a critical feature for making decisions about what to say to whom, and whether the individual addressed fits one's conception of a Gaelic speaker within one's reference group. This, in turn, determines whether Gaelic maintenance will occur. It is this insider typology for identifying language progress or development which becomes one of the first identifying characteristics in Gaelic language maintenance.

The subjects within this study categorise knowledge of Gaelic into four levels of speech ability. Those levels have been defined by the subjects in the following order of speaker competence: 'Gaelic', 'Good Gaelic', 'Plenty of Gaelic', and 'Beautiful Gaelic' (as illustrated within the figure on the following page). Within each of these four categories of Gaelic competency, there are several additional definitions of speaker ability (as further defined in the next section, 'Gaelic Social Roles'). These 'Roles' become a self-referencing, or self-identifying, framework which enables the speaker to categorise her/his, and others, knowledge of Gaelic in relation to the social language framework established by the group.

The first level of Gaelic competency, 'Gaelic', or 'having the Gaelic' (without any preceding adjectives), describes an individual who possesses the basic grammatical structure of the language, but lacks an extended vocabulary or the ability to form complex sentences. For example, one subject, Àileas, evaluated her friend's level of Gaelic ability as '[having] Gaelic', basic Gaelic. She stated, "Jimmy doesn't have very good Gaelic, but he has it." Àileas, herself, has attempted to learn more songs and vocabulary so that she may progress to the next level, "Good Gaelic".
Angus MacLellan (1997), in his autobiographical discussion of Perthshire Gaelic, also describes this initial stage of Gaelic ability with the term 'Gaelic'. He states, "[their] Gaelic couldn't be worse if they had learnt it from the crows", and "...the Gaelic there in Perthshire, indeed it wasn't good Gaelic" (MacLellan, 1997: 42-43). Here, he identifies both the first and second levels of the social typology of Gaelic levels of competency. The individuals in Perthshire "had Gaelic", but they did not have "Good Gaelic". Thus, their Gaelic ability had been posited by MacUllian in the first level of competency in the Gaelic social world.

Similarly, Anne Lorne Gillies describes the beginning stages of Gaelic learning in Oban, as "having the Gaelic" and "awful pidgin Gaelic" (Gillies, 1991). According to Gillies's social account (1991), this beginning stage of Gaelic competency is simply called "Gaelic", so basic in its form that it is "pidgin", or an underdeveloped hybrid of Gaelic and English. For the 6-year-old Gillies recalling this level of speech ability, this was a pejorative value judgement. For a language to survive in a real speech community, it must have a number of speakers who are highly fluent; however, it merits mentioning that "pidgin" or basic 'Gaelic' may illustrate a dynamic process at work in which the speaker is highly engaged in language maintenance and attainment. Gillies' comment, in this sense, could be understood as a developmental process. For example, a person with 'pidgin' or basic 'Gaelic', from a linguist's view, may simply be acquiring language through Selinker's (1992) successive interlanguage process. The elementary 'Gaelic' may be the result of the creation of a set of rules, which, over time, allows the speaker to learn the language. As a value judgement, this first level of 'Gaelic' ability may sound crude to a native speaker, but it is quite possible that the individual is simply exhibiting her/his ongoing development of language acquisition.

Within this first category of Gaelic competence, we may discuss two other distinctions - "school Gaelic" and "everyday Gaelic". An adolescent Scottish subject, Tolla'ldh, best describes the difference between these two social typologies of speech when she explains her fears of speech inadequacy with her cousins in Uist:

Their Gaelic is just so good. They have plenty of Gaelic. Sometimes I think that my accent sounds stupid...because my Gaelic is school Gaelic, and they know how to say things in everyday Gaelic which is much more cool (Tolla'ldh, 1997).

Tolla'ldh feels that she lacks the "everyday" vernacular to sound "cool"; that her "Gaelic" only contains features learned in school, rather than common, pop idiom. Byram (1989) describes this phenomenon as "referential meaning". To be maintained and thrive, a language must include the features necessary for individuals at all ages and in all contexts (Moffatt, 1999). If the subject Tolla'ldh, in this case, were more familiar with the local Gaelic idiom of her peers in Uist, then she would feel more confident in using it, and in return, in maintaining it.

The second level of Gaelic competency, 'Good Gaelic', contains the "everyday Gaelic" mentioned above by subject Tolla'ldh. It is a non-institutionalised vernacular possessing the basic grammatical structure of the language. One Canadian subject, Anna, for example, is cautious about being interviewed on the BBC Highland radio programme, Radio nan Gaidheal, because she wants her Gaelic "to be good". Anna states:

I had to be careful about what I said because I knew that all of my friends back home would be listening and I wanted my Gaelic to be good (Anna, 1997).

In Anna's case, "Good Gaelic" is the acceptable level of Gaelic speech ability for a radio interview. Anna also reported that '[her] Gaelic is good due to all of her trips home' to Lewis. Another adolescent Scottish subject,
Teàrlag, reported that "[she] wished she could speak good Gaelic, but right now she just barely has it." A child, Canadian subject, Cairistiona, was convinced that "good Gaelic" could be inherited genetically, since she related that her "uncle spoke good Gaelic, so [she] will probably speak good Gaelic as well some day!" Finally, an adult Canadian subject, Artair, further defines this level of Gaelic ability by including specific 'Gaelic social types' (discussed further in this paper) within his narrative. Artair says of another speaker, "James has incredible modern Gaelic. It's good, yes, he has a Gaelic word for everything from electronics to subways." Thus, although James possessed a fluent command of the language, Artair was puzzled by James' diction. "James has good Gaelic", but it would be unlikely that he would ever be capable of attaining the highest level of ability, 'Beautiful Gaelic'. 'Good Gaelic', then, refers to basic fluency. Speakers at this level of ability are beyond the beginning stages of learning, are capable of conversing fluently, but are yet to possess the natural idiom and flow of the language.

The third level of Gaelic social speech ability was identified by the subjects as 'Plenty of Gaelic'. This stage meant that the speaker was capable of conversing in complex grammatical forms, had an extended vocabulary in several vernaculars and argots, and/or used Gaelic more than English as a form of communication. This, for most accomplished and educated Gaeils, is the top level in Gaelic competency. Its institutionalised equivalent might be "advanced Gaelic" or a "Gaelic higher", as those categories may be defined within the curriculum or syllabus of the time. This level, like the previous two, is also a social construct, rather than an empirical measurement of one's linguistic ability. Tollaidh, a Scottish adolescent subject, uses this qualifier to describe her Uist cousins who have "everyday Gaelic" (as mentioned earlier). She says of the teenagers on Uist, "kids there have plenty of Gaelic". When asked what this means, Tollaidh responds, "they know all kinds of words and sayings I've never heard of, and they use Gaelic all the time - more than English!"

Tara, a Canadian adolescent, states that her friend, Tòmasina, has "plenty of Gaelic". She says, "Tòmasina has plenty of Gaelic because she worked on Skye. She knows all kinds of phrases that I've never, ever learned." Thus, "plenty of Gaelic" indicates a level of Gaelic speech ability which includes both fluency, local idiom, and traditional expression. Speakers at this social level of speech competence not only possess a strong grammatical command of the language, they possess something of greater importance within Gaelic circles - the natural, organic method of communicating through Gaelic.

There are also two other terms commonly associated with Gaelic speech ability which may be mentioned here. Among social speakers, there is a distinguishing feature between an 'Original, Native Gaelic Speaker' and a 'Gaelic Learner'. For example, if Gaelic was the speaker's birth language (L1), and the speaker still had Gaelic fluently as an adult, then s/he may be called either a 'Native' or a 'Gaelic Speaker'. If, however, the speaker learned Gaelic as the second or third (L2 or L3) language, that is, it was not the birth language (L1), then s/he would always be a 'Gaelic Learner', regardless of fluency in the language. One Scottish subject, for example, consistently identifies herself as a 'Gaelic Learner' even though she has spoken, and worked in the medium of Gaelic for 10 years. Without the 'Plentiful' vernacular, or being born to it, "[she] was not a Gaelic speaker." An L2 (or L3) speaker, regardless of how advanced her/his Gaelic, could never progress past the third level of ability, 'Plenty of Gaelic'. An L1 speaker, or 'Native Speaker', however, might be categorised as having 'Beautiful Gaelic'.

The fourth, and final, stage of Gaelic competency is 'Beautiful Gaelic'. This level is reserved, socially, for accomplished Gaelic speakers, or writers, who have the gift of poetry in their words. Similar to Abraham Maslow's 'Actualisation Stage', it is not attained very often. Having 'Beautiful Gaelic' is the ultimate in creative Gaelic language...
language, but they have important, distinguished 'roles' in the community as figures of Gaelic skill and prominence. Amongst the subjects studied, it was unheard of an L2 speaker to have 'Beautiful Gaelic'.

Thus, to some extent, the level of someone's Gaelic speech ability (defined in this section) also provides the speaker with an indication of the speaker's role in the community as well. It is, in this way, that the typology of 'Gaelic speech competence' and the typology of 'Gaelic social roles' interact. Together, the two typologies form the early part of an individual’s Gaelic language maintenance process. They enable the speaker to make decisions about other speakers, how they will interact with her/him, and how long s/he may sustain the conversation based on this evaluation.

GAELIC SOCIAL ROLES

The two typologies, 'Levels of Gaelic Competency' and 'Gaelic Social Roles', dynamically interact with one another in the language maintenance process to identify a speaker and confirm a subject's identity status within her/his symbolic reference group. The following is a typology which has been constructed to represent and define the stereotypical roles identified within the isolated Gaelic community. The typology, in connection with 'Levels of Gaelic Competence', attempts to illustrate how some of these roles interact with the process of Gaelic language maintenance.

The Gaelic community, like many other isolated minority language communities, is filled with an assortment of role players. While a couple of the 'Gaelic Roles', identified below by subject Aileas, are disparaging, each holds a unique agenda and valuable function within the Gaelic community. Aileas, describes various Gaelic stereotypes, or roles, as she commonly perceives them, and comments on her concerns for the lack of organisation and vision amongst role players. Aileas feels that a more common perspective is needed within the Gaelic community before Gaelic will
have the social support and health it requires to become a living language in Canada. The following is the narrative taken from Áileas’ interviews and journal writings:

They’re ‘the Gaelic Mafia.’ If anything is happening in the world of the Gael, then they know about it first, and will quietly give their opinion on it. They reject anything that is institutionalised. ‘To be a true Gael, you must live as they did,’ which, I guess, is on the verge of poverty, and perhaps they’re right. There are a lot of things that I don’t like about the school and the Gaelic college either, mainly the fact that they cater to Beurla, alienating a lot of ageing speakers, but that’s something you can work with. It can work. There are just so many different opinions. On the one hand, there is Mary and her Gaelic Mafia, who form the core of young speakers. Then there’s people like James and Brendon, the nouveau Gaels or business men, who view Gaelic as some large, hippie money-making grant venture. Then Isobel, who believes that we should revitalise Gaelic by importing the language and material from Scotland. There are storytellers like Seumas and Donald, now passed, who volunteered at the school and gave unselfishly of their time. I don’t know (Áileas, 1997).

Áileas calls these roles “denominations of Gaelic”, which is particularly useful because it connects the concept of a philosophical approach to language maintenance and the Gaelic role one plays in accordance with the ‘religious’ position, or vision, of the language’s goal in the community. As there are varying degrees of Christianity, so there are as many interpretations and visions of what Gaelic should be. The speakers and players whom Áileas describes are

commonly recognised amongst Gaelic community members through eight common terms. These terms represent the typification of categories of Gaelic members as represented in the research. They are: the Mafia leader, the academic, the businessman or media type, the nouveau Gael, the storyteller, the native speaker, the learner (mentioned in the previous typology with ‘natives’), and the imported Gàidhealach. Each of these roles has been documented in one or more of the subject’s narratives (Smith, 1997), as well as in research literature, autobiographical literature, literary texts, and Gaelic newspaper commentaries.

The ‘Gaelic Mafia’, or sometimes the ‘MacMafia’, is often used as a term for those selected, few individuals who control public funding for Gaelic organisations and causes, or who control the various political wings of Gaelic opinion within larger, governmental functions. It is a term often used in resentment, and will often describe a feeling for what is believed to be a non-democratic, non-accountable process within the Gaelic community at large. Neil Gunn (1987) writes of the ‘Gaelic Mafia’ and their numbers that can be “counted on your fingers” in a letter to C.M. Grieve (1932, July 9). Also, one letter from a K.G. Finlayson to the Editor of the Stornoway Gazette (1997, January 1) accuses members of the Comhaine of being part of the “Gaidheilig Mafia” intent on using public funding without accountability. Artair, a Canadian adult subject, reported that he recalls a figure commonly known as “Sam Bananas” (not his real name), as the first “Gaelic Mafia member” he remembers. Artair states that at the turn of the 20th Century, the priests from a county in Nova Scotia, a Gaelic bloc at the time, would always receive places of prominence in the Dioceses, and due to these prestigious appointments, they became known as “the Gaelic Mafia”. Today, “the Gaelic Mafia”, in Canada and in Scotland, refers not to priests, but to individuals who control public funding for Gaelic initiatives without the benefit of democratic accounting.

‘The academic’ describes that individual who is an accomplished, institutionalised Gaelic scholar, and who, perhaps, holds an academic post or Celtic chair in one of the
mainland's universities. It may also describe an individual who is commonly associated with Gaelic research within the Gaelic community. Frank Vallee (1954) first documented this term in his Ph.D. research. Vallee describes the 'Gaelic scholar' as one who is 'immersed in the traditions and literature, self-consciously Gaelic, and assertive of standards of purity'. In interview, adult Scottish subject, Aonghas, also describes the 'academic' as someone who is 'assertive of standards of [language] purity', but who is more commonly viewed through her/his post of employment, rather than an ideal philosophical image.

'The storyteller', albeit common in Canada and Cape Breton, is not often heard in Scotland. Joe Neil MacNeil, of Cape Breton, for instance, was often called, 'a storyteller' and his level of Gaelic ability, according to Canadian subject Àileas, was 'Beautiful'. Another subject's great grandfather, from Ontario, "old Mr. MacLeod", was also known locally as a 'storyteller' (Smith, 1997). "The storyteller's, what used to be known as a 'bard' in Scotland, is an individual who possesses a 'Beautiful Gaelic' ability. S/he has the gift of lyrics, her/his speech is "peppered with Gaelic idiom" (as Canadian subject Àileas describes), and s/he speaks the aboriginal form of the language. In Canada, a 'storyteller' is best known for her/his ghost stories, and when present at a ceilidh, attracts a large crowd of listeners. The 'storyteller' is a socially prized commodity. The term was used frequently in the Winter 1996/97 edition of Am Bràighe to describe Eòs MacNill of Big Pond, Nova Scotia. 'Storytellers' have not been educated formally, like 'the academic', but nevertheless, possess the depleting 'turns of phrases' and old stories of the Gaelic community which make them truly Gàidhealach. 'Sàr-seulaiche' is still a term heard frequently to describe the old, aboriginal speakers of Cape Breton, Canada.

'The businessman' or 'media type' is a role that is commonly described in Scotland, but not in Canada. Subjects Àileas and Aonghas use this term frequently to describe those individuals who are thought to take advantage of public money and funding for Gaelic initiatives, which, currently in Scotland, is usually television and radio programming. These speakers, like the 'academic', are identified according to their occupation. They are also very well known for their curious Gaelic vocabulary which is used to modernise the language in competition with English media technological advances.

A 'native speaker', as the term has been defined in the previous section, such as Scottish subject Aonghas, may often be heard speaking about a 'media type' as follows, "indeed, he has good Gaelic, but I cannot understand a word he says." The vocabulary and grammar is precise, but it is not organised in a method which would be natural for organic Gaelic speech.

'A nouveau Gael', or occasionally, 'a new-age Gael', describes a Gaelic 'Learner' (L2/3 speaker) who is perceived to be a part of a popular, 'hippie' Celtic cultural movement. Sometimes, a 'nouveau Gael' may describe an individual who has an arresting facility for the language and who has an equivalent Gaelic word for every contemporary technological English word unknown to 'Native Speakers' (L1). This role was described earlier in the previous section by Canadian subject Artair, and is recounted here as follows, by Scottish subject, Aonghas:

[A nouveau Gael] is a zealous learner who is adamant about the use and endless promotion of the language, sometimes to the point where such militancy becomes frightening or uncomfortable for older, native speakers who are not accustomed to such interest in the formerly teuchter language (Aonghas, 1997).

Such 'fanaticism' is unusual to encounter for many older, reserved native speakers. Thus, to distance themselves from this unusual phenomenon, they identify this role rapidly and will often code switch to English when they feel uncomfortable in the conversation. At the outrage of
several members of the Gaelic community in Scotland, one P.H. Hainsworth used this term recklessly in a letter to the editor of the West Highland Free Press (1996, 20 September). Hainsworth describes a "nouveau Gael" as a "Gaelic hippie zealot".

'The import', or 'imported Gàidhealach', is reserved almost exclusively for the Canadian Gaelic community. 'The import' refers to the Gaelic dialect of the Western Islands of Scotland to the Cape Breton dialect of Canada. The term, 'imported Gaelic' is often used in a derogatory fashion, since there is a general desire to preserve that dialect of Gaelic which is natural to Canada, rather than relying on 'imported' versions of the language from 'the old country'. For example, one subject, Àileas, uses it with disdain when she discusses a teacher who is teaching the 'imported Gaelic' at the local college, rather than the 'Cape Breton Gaelic'. For the most part, there is a recognition that 'Cape Breton Gaelic' originated from Barra, and other parts of the island; however, since, in some cases, the transfer was over six generations ago, subjects feel a more intense attachment to the Cape Breton bloc than 'the old country', there is a desire to preserve the Gaelic that was original to that part of Canada. One would not say that, socially, the 'importer' is not welcome, but that the 'aboriginal' is more welcome because it is more rare.

These eight typifications of Gaelic speaker roles form the stereotypes of the Canadian and Scottish Gaelic communities living within English dominated areas. These roles relate interactively with the typology of 'Gaelic levels of competence' (discussed in the previous section), as a method by which speakers identify each other. This is an important, ongoing social interaction because identifying one with the speaker's own reference group prolonged Gaelic conversational episodes, which, in turn, increased successful language maintenance. Meetings outside of the speaker's self-identified reference group shortened the Gaelic conversational episode and decreased language maintenance. For example, the two typologies interact with each other in the following illustrated manner:

As mentioned previously, and as is illustrated above, a 'Learner' (L2/3 speaker) cannot attain the level of 'Beautiful Gaelic' competency, which is commonly reserved for 'Native (L1) Speakers' with exceptional language ability. An individual described as having 'Everyday Gaelic' would commonly be evaluated as 'Good' or 'Plenty of Gaelic' ability. Many of the roles, with the exception of the 'storyteller' exist somewhere between the Gaelic speech levels of 'Good' to 'Plenty of Gaelic'.

The two interactive typologies are used by speakers to ascertain whether another speaker is a member of her/his particular Gaelic-speaking reference group. For example,
a question subconsciously being asked by the subjects studied in this process is, 'Can this person help, through a conversational episode, help to confirm my [Gaelic] identity?' Two case examples may be examined to view this process in action. Àileas, a Canadian adult speaker, for instance, will first evaluate an individual according to her/his appearance and perceived 'role'. Based on the 'role' she identifies in the other speaker, Àileas proceeds to evaluate the 'person's level of Gaelic competence'. If, upon this second evaluation, she regards the speaker as a member of her own perceived reference group, she will then proceed to engage in a sustained Gaelic conversation. If, however, the individual is not a member of this reference group, she will then proceed to code switch to English. With Àileas, this process is carried out consistently, except in the case of encountering a 'storyteller'. A 'storyteller' would not be a member of Àileas' reference group, but would still be an individual with whom she would wish to learn from and sustain a conversation. Thus, with the exception of a superior speaker, Àileas' evaluation of the role, then the level of ability, must be in accordance with her own perception of her role and ability prior to a successful language maintenance episode occurring.

Aonghas, on the other hand, a Scottish adult 'academic', will evaluate the other speaker in a slightly different fashion. Aonghas will not code switch due to an incongruence in reference group identification, but will code switch to English should the other speaker initiate the switch because s/he felt uncomfortable. This distinction is due largely to Aonghas' own role, and preference towards meeting other unique individuals (not necessarily of his own reference group). Thus, in consideration for the other speaker, Aonghas will first evaluate her/his level of speech ability. This will determine the level of conversation with which to proceed. Following this evaluation, the 'Gaelic role' is determined, which will decide the topical area for conversation. If, by chance, the speaker is a member of "Aonghas' reference group, that is, another 'academic', then the conversation is sustained for a longer and more involved time period. If, however, the other speaker is not a part of Aonghas' perceived reference group, then the conversation will continue at another level until it comes to its natural conclusion, or until the other speaker code switches. In this manner, Aonghas maintains Gaelic conversational opportunities by adjusting to the 'competency' and 'role' of the speaker he encounters; whereas, Àileas will only maintain Gaelic conversational episodes if the speaker encountered is evaluated to be a member of her same, social Gaelic reference group. Subjects make decisions about their Gaelic language usage and maintenance based upon their primary goals for sustaining their identity through desired reference group confirmations. Each decision made about another speaker is designed to enhance the subject's own Gaelic language identity construct. Recognition of these 'levels of Gaelic competency' and 'Gaelic social roles', existing in Gaelic communities isolated from a bloc group of speakers, are important for increasing successful language maintenance opportunities within the community amongst reference group members. The ability to identify the skill level and role a speaker has within the community will enable the chances for prolonged Gaelic conversational episodes (leading to greater maintenance) and greater tolerance by accomplished speakers for learners unfamiliar with this ethnographic strata.

INTERACTIVE GAELIC WORKERS

Code switching from Gaelic to English provides particular difficulties for successful Gaelic language maintenance within an English speaking area. One construct providing greater insight into Gaelic code switching is that of 'interactive work' (Fishman, 1978). 'Interactive work' is a term borrowed from feminist writing. It is not surprising, then, that the subjects who most often exhibited 'interactive work' were indeed female.
Interactive work refers to those social language tasks which seek to include isolated community members in the conversation. Subjects Àileas, Tollaith, and Colla, most notably, switch from Gaelic speech to English speech for the following two reasons:
1. "To be polite"
2. "To include English speakers in the conversation"

As one might imagine, in predominantly English speaking areas, this 'interactive work' occurs quite frequently since English speakers involved in the periphery conversation are numerous. Àileas, for example, explains why a group of five conversing Gaelic speakers would suddenly switch to English upon the arrival of only one English speaking individual. She states, "John's wife doesn't speak Gaelic so you wouldn't want to exclude her ... it's only right." Similarly, Tollaith "gets used to speaking English out of habit because it's polite...if someone talks to you in one language, then it would be rude to answer in another." Interactive Gaelic work, or code switching, is viewed as the only method for making an external language member feel included within the dynamics of the Gaelic speaking group. The subjects here, who were all living in English speaking areas, switched consistently from Gaelic to English to include unknown members who were assumed to be English monoglots. This construct also interacts frequently with the typology of 'Gaelic social roles'. Àileas, as mentioned in the previous section, for example, will code switch to English upon identifying the 'role' of the other speaker. In this case, the 'role' that is identified, is that of an 'English speaker', and hence, the code switch would occur immediately (prior to any conversation).

This language construct is certainly 'polite' and 'nice', as the subjects explain, but it is also a detriment to sustained, successful maintenance. What if the new member of the conversational group wanted to learn Gaelic? If s/he requested that they continue in the Gaelic medium? Would the new member feel uncomfortable, as the speakers seem to think s/he would? Would the original speakers feel uncomfortable about continuing? If one wished to maintain the birth (L1) language, as a conservative Quebeçois might, should the medium conversation not be sustained until the majority of language speakers warranted a switch? While 'interactive work' is generous community building, it also sabotages Gaelic language maintenance opportunities within an English speaking area. Accommodating a minority member's feelings should not become so necessary that rare Gaelic language maintenance episodes are eliminated.

INTERLINGUISTIC RELATIONS

One final construct which has been construed as a challenge to successful Gaelic language maintenance is that of 'interlinguistic relations'. An item that was most notable about the successfully maintaining adults within this study is that they were all single, with the exception of 'Aonghas', whose marital and parental relationships were strained due to his language choice and commitments.

Gaelic spouses or peers who possess mono-English partners experience greater difficulty maintaining their Gaelic language than those who are partnered with another Gaelic speaker or learner (Gillies, 1991; MacLellan, 1997; Shaw, 1993; MacIver & MacIver, 1990). Finlay Macleod's 'theory of language bonding' and MacKinnon's (1997) review of the 1995 Euromosaic support this view.

Macleod maintains that if a 'Gaelic bond' is not established within the first few weeks of any personal or familial relationship, then it is unlikely that the relationship will continue within the medium of Gaelic unless a great deal of effort is made by both parties to ensure that the relationship is built within the medium of Gaelic. Yamamoto (1995) documented similar research between the language selection of children and parents. This 'language bond' is usually a conscious decision made by
the parents prior, or shortly after, the arrival of children. The linguistic choice of the parents and the children is dependent upon the emotional language bond originally established within the home. Heller (1995) found that the peer environment, especially during the period of early adolescence, was the determinant in support or elimination of the language chosen. Thus, each individual’s choice of the medium of language to be used within their personal relationship is immediately dependent upon the language first used in their bonding, or introduction, to another. For example, not one child or adolescent in this study possessed peers with whom they communicated in the medium of Gaelic. The pre-adults had all established ‘English bonds’ with their friends.

In general, English medium language between peers and spouses was quite pervasive amongst the subjects of this study. For example, Aonghas reported experiencing a great deal of inner anxiety over his own language maintenance and his relationship with his son and his English wife. One child’s mother, a Gaelic L2 speaker, who had raised her daughter in the medium of Gaelic, stated, "I think I could have been a better mother in English. I just didn’t know all of those little words like ‘nappie’, ‘pin’, ‘cuddle’, or lullaby’s which made my own relationship with my [English] mother so rich.” The subjects who did, in fact, possess Gaelic spouses or peers, such as adults Anna and Aingeas, experienced greater ease in maintaining their Gaelic and in making linguistic choices.

The linguistic choice that subject Aonghas experienced may have been created by anxiety (Lawrence, 1987), but more likely, it is created by the individual’s own wish to confirm his status and membership within the desired reference group of Gaelic speakers. Aonghas describes this linguistic tension best when he describes his relationship with his son. He is determined to establish a ‘Gaelic bond’ with his son, and as a result, speaks with him only in Gaelic. However, the child spends a greater proportion of his time with his English speaking mother. Aonghas describes this disunion as follows:

I know that he understands some Gaelic, however, I’m not certain how developed his Gaelic comprehension is. This scares and saddens me. Sometimes I wonder, ‘does my own son understand what I’m saying to him? Will he know when I’m telling him how much I love him?’ On a deeper level, I wonder sometimes whether this choice of language has harmed our relationship somehow. Does he resent me? Have I erected a wall between us that may have lasting consequences? How much has been robbed from our relationship by my [Gaelic] linguistic choice? (Aonghas, 1997)

Aonghas feels he has created a barrier, or “wall”, between his son and himself due to his decision to speak Gaelic to his son. Thus, there is a constant perception, with this “wall” of ‘Aonghas versus them - this side, that side’. It is an active, decision-making tool which separates reference groups for the purpose of identity confirmation. It is easier to confirm identity and status within the desired reference group if all of the relationships are a part of that same group. If none of the significant, personal relationships belong to that reference group, then there is more likely to be tension and anxiety regarding the linguistic choices made. Such is the case with subject Aonghas.

MacKinnon’s (1997) review of the 1995 Euromosaic study confirmed that there has been a decline in Gaelic use between peers and spouses. Thus, ‘English bonding’, as Macleod concludes is becoming more pervasive amongst friends and couples. The relationship is initially established in English and it continues in that medium. In mainland Scotland, for instance, only fourteen percent of spouses, with the potential to use Gaelic together, use Gaelic as a medium of communication (MacKinnon, 1997).
There is less Gaelic being spoken at meals in the home (only twelve percent)\(^8\), and only seven percent of children use Gaelic with their siblings. The _Euromosaic_ fails to document Gaelic use between children and their peers; however, the above figures illustrate an overwhelming establishment of English medium relationships between Gaelic speakers.

Skultnabb-Kangas (1981) argues that the reason so little Gaelic is being used between peers is because Gaelic is a ‘subtractive’ language; it is not perceived to be a popular medium of communication. For instance, following the introduction of television in the 1950's, children’s perceptions of language began to change. English became ‘pop’, and Gaelic became ‘thick’, or _teuchter_. Gaelic has managed to shed its _teuchter_ image recently with modern Gaelic medium television programming and elite educational Gaelic medium units (GMU’s) in Scotland; however, only Macleod’s theory regarding ‘language bonding’ (i.e. the language used upon establishing the relationship will be the language used in the relationship) best explains the persistence of an English, mono-cultural approach to linguistic interaction.

A similar ‘interlinguistic relations’ problem has occurred in other minority language communities. More than two decades ago, the province of Quebec; in Central Canada, was concerned about the lack of French used between spouses and families in the region. Birth rates amongst the francophone population had declined to such an extent that, for the first time in Canadian history, there was a serious concern for language shift within the province (Fishman, 1991). In an attempt to alleviate such a decline in ‘inter relational’ French, Premier Bourassa passed a bill which encouraged Quebeçois births by providing francophone families with an increase in ‘children’s allowance’, a stipend provided to families on a quarterly basis to aid in child care expenses. Thus, the more francophone children a family produced, the more government assistance they would receive. This bill is still warmly endorsed by the Pèquiste government today; however, francophone births have neither increased or decreased in comparison to anglophone birth rates. Why?

A person can no more decide with whom they will fall in love, English or French or Gaelic, than they can accurately predict the next government scandal. Feelings and attractions do not always follow the desired linguistic order.

If one knew for certain, for example, that s/he would fall in love with another Gaelic speaker, then Gaelic may stand a better chance at ‘inter relational’ reproduction. However, Fishman’s (1991) stage 6, inter-generational transmission, is critical for reversing language shift. Currently, Gaelic L1 speakers are less common and Gaelic ‘interlinguistic relations’ are becoming increasingly non existent within English speaking areas. Gaelic bonds (op. cit. Macleod) must be initially established and continued throughout the period of a relationship if successful Gaelic language maintenance is to occur for the individual making such linguistic choices within a predominantly English environment.

**CONCLUSION**

The two typologies and constructs of the successful Gaelic language maintainers within this study demonstrate that increased exposure to one’s self-identified reference group (‘role’ and ‘level of speech competence’) promotes prolonged Gaelic conversational episodes, and thus sustains maintenance. If educators can identify a learner’s potential ‘role’ and ‘level of speech ability’ within the local Gaelic community, as well as ‘interactional’ difficulties to encounter, then it may be possible to increase the chances of sustained Gaelic conversational episodes between group members. Technology may also play a valuable role in increasing exposure to minority language reference group members. For example, contact with bloc members through television, electronic mail, radio, video links, and even the telephone can aid in developing Gaelic maintenance opportunities (Edwards, 1991), as well as
providing a modern role for the language to advance 'intergenerational transmission' (Fishman, 1991). Knowing the socioethnographic language and identity marker's of one's [reference] language community plots the map to language maintenance success.

*When I began to look over what I had collected, I saw that it was a tapestry.*

*Their whole way of life was in a song.* (Margaret Fay Shaw, 1993, 'Academic')

NOTES

1 This term refers to 'original, native Gaelic speech' which has not been corrupted by contemporary changes to the language.

2 The Gaelic schism which Áileas describes is also documented by Neil Gunn as early as June 10, 1942 in a letter to Douglas Young (1987). Gunn feels that the 'fatal' schism in the Gaelic community (of Scotland) is the result of a lack of a central cohering body, or government.

3 There are many such examples of this term being used in letters to the editors of the both the West Highland Free Press and The Stornoway Gazette, but only one is cited here as an example.

4 Premier storyteller.

5 Macleod's theory has not been documented in published research literature, but has been orally chronicled amongst Gaelic Pre-school councils and parent groups within the Scottish Gaelic community.

6 The dinner table is one of the traditional places where families come.

REFERENCES


