Gàidhlig: Foghlaim air Astar
(Gaelic Distance-Education)

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Introduction
Historically the number of Gaelic speakers outside of Scotland and Nova Scotia has been so small that those who wished to learn the language had to either move to an area with Gaelic speakers or learn from a book. It is naturally easier to learn a language if you are surrounded by fluent speakers of the language and immersed in the culture associated with it. Those who choose to learn a language at a distance usually do so because their contact with fluent speakers is limited. There are some distinct advantages of learning at a distance: you do not have to relocate or travel great distances to receive instruction, you can usually learn when it is convenient for you and at your own pace, and distance learning options are often cheaper than tuition fees for "in person" lessons.

Distance language learning has its disadvantages as well, but these are usually outweighed by the desire of the learner to master the language. Some of the disadvantages encountered when learning a language at a distance are:

- The learner may not have opportunities to hear the language. This makes it more difficult to learn correct pronunciation, phrasing, and tonal qualities of speech.
- The learner often is not able to see a fluent speaker's mouth and body language.
- There is usually a lack of additional sensual stimuli. (Other visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory stimuli associated with a word, phrase, or concept.)
- Learning is often out of context. This includes out of cultural context.
- There is often a lack of repetition and reinforcement.
- Most distance courses lack the opportunity for creativity.
- Many courses suffer from the lack of feedback from experienced fluent speakers.

For many years, Gaelic grammars and "teach yourself" type books were the only option available to those wishing to learn the language at a distance. With advances in communications and technology over the last twenty years, the options for language learning in remote areas have increased dramatically. The current study will survey distance language learning materials for Gaelic from the early years, when books were the only medium available, to the latest technology. The future of distance language learning will also be addressed.

Text Based Courses
The oldest method of learning Gaelic at a distance was through text-based only courses. At first this was the only option, and the early courses suffered from all the above disadvantages of distance language learning. Most text-based only courses have both grammatical and conversational components, but they are usually weighted towards one approach more than the other. The grammatical texts are heavily based on learning the rules of the language and information is often given in list form. For example, the text will list the forms of a noun in the nominative, dative, genitive, and vocative case. Grammar texts do not concentrate on phrases, idioms, or dialogues. Historically, most of the older text-based courses tended to be more grammatical and were modeled after Latin grammars; very few utilized the conversational approach. Today the pendulum has swung in the other direction and most of the texts introduced in the last twenty years have been conversational in nature, including many phrases, idioms, and copious dialogues.

The oldest published Gaelic teaching device was Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair's (Alexander MacDonald's) Leabhar a Theagasc A'inninnin (A Book to Teach Nouns) or A Nuadh Fhlochain Gaidheil agus Beurla: A Galick and English Vocabulary. This small book was written for use by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in their charity schools in the Highlands and was published in Edinburgh in 1741. This is not a grammar or a dictionary, but is more of a phrase book in structure. The vocabulary and short phrases are organized around topic headings such as "The Heavens" (words for moon, star, etc); "Water" (snow, rain, dew, etc); "Man" (man, woman, old man, youth, etc); "Kindred" (mother, father, sister, brother, etc); "Victuals" (foods); and "Drink" (beverages). The book also includes examples of the most common verbs. The "Appendix" consists of Gaelic words associated with religion, weights and measures, and money, as well as a table of consanguinity and affinity (a list of whom one is and is not allowed to marry). The drawback of this book is that it teaches you no grammar, pronunciation, or phrases. It is simply an aid to learn the Gaelic names for things.
Not long after MacDonald's book appeared, William Shaw published a Gaelic grammar in 1778 called *An Analysis of the Gaelic Language*. This was followed up in 1801 by the famous work by Alexander Stewart, *Elements of Gaelic Grammar in Four Parts*. A number of other grammars were to follow over the years, but a grammar alone is not the most suitable format for learning a language. George Calder's *Gaelic Grammar* published in 1923, for example, is intended for use by advanced students of Gaelic and would be very difficult for a beginner to use. Early grammars did not allow for any opportunities to hear the language, to learn from pictures, to do exercises, to make up one's own sentences, or to receive feedback.

The first Gaelic-medium grammar was recently published in 2000, which is certainly a milestone for the language. This is *Facal air an Fhàcal* by Michel Byrne from the University of Glasgow. This book would also be of little use to someone not already fluent in Gaelic, since it is written completely in the language. This updated modern grammar does have things like pictures, idioms, and copious examples, however. Byrne followed up in 2002 with a grammar written in English called *Grámar na Gàidhlig* that is much more accessible to Gaelic learners, since the ability to read Gaelic is not required.

Although Gaelic grammars can be a helpful aid in learning a language, they are not ideal when used by themselves. In order to speak the language, a student needs more vocabulary, pronunciation hints, conversational phrases, and idioms than would be included in a strictly grammatical text. The first book whose primary design was for teaching the Gaelic language and the first book to approach "teach yourself" status was *A Gaelic Primer* by James Munro (1794-1870) published in 1828. The rest of the title of the book describes its contents: *rules for pronouncing the language; with numerous examples; Also a copious vocabulary; ... a list of primitive and derivative pronouns; the conjugation of the verb "to be"*. Munro's *Primer* is a combination of grammar and phrase book. The vocabulary is given with phonetic renderings of pronunciation to help those without access to a teacher. In 1854, Munro expanded and revised his book under the title *A New Gaelic Primer*.

In 1876, Lachlan MacBean came out with his *Elementary Lessons in Gaelic*, which was heavily grammar-based. This book includes a pronunciation key followed by lessons organized by grammatical categories. For example, there are lessons on the article, the noun, gender of nouns, adjectives, etc. Each lesson or chapter also has a vocabulary list and exercises.

In 1905, MacBean followed up his grammar-based text with his *Guide to Gaelic Conversation*, an English-Gaelic handbook of phrases and dialogues aimed at the visitor to the Highlands. It is apparent that MacBean was influenced by phrasebooks from other European languages that were in vogue at the time. English sentences are presented according to categories like fishing, shooting, buying, etc. and then their Gaelic equivalents are given. A long list of idiomatic phrases is included. MacBean also provides a fifty page vocabulary list, which consists entirely of words in everyday use. Phonetic transcription of pronunciation is given for these words to help those without ready access to a native speaker.

Another one of the heavily grammar-based courses is *An Introduction to Gaelic for Beginners* by James MacLaren. This was first published in 1911, but by 1923 it had evolved into what is now known as *MacLaren's Gaelic Self Taught*. MacLaren's book is still in print today, both as *MacLaren's Gaelic Self Taught*, which is published in Britain, and *Beginner's Gaelic*, which is published in New York. The information on the cover of this book suggests that it is a modern course, but in reality it is quite old fashioned. There is as yet no audio accompaniment to this book.

Perhaps one of the most popular of the Gaelic instruction books of the twentieth century was *Gaelic Without Groans* by John MacKechnie, published in 1934. This book is broken up into 29 lessons. Each lesson has a discussion of vocabulary as well as some grammar points. At the end of each lesson there is a passage to translate into English and one to translate into Gaelic (with the solution provided). This is not really a grammar, but then it is not really a conversation-based course. The author discusses the grammar points in an informal dialogue with the reader. The approach is similar to Paterson's *Gaelic Made Easy* discussed below.

The first Gaelic instructional book to be published outside of Britain was *Gaelic Lessons for Beginners* by James MacNeill from Cape Breton. This was first published in Sydney, Nova Scotia in 1939 and re-released in the 1980s. This too is a grammar-based course.

*Gaelic Made Easy* is a self-instructional Gaelic course by John M. Paterson that first appeared in 1954. The author discusses the grammar points and then gives vocabulary and examples. This book has been revised over the years and is still in print. It now consists of four booklets, each accompanied by a tape to make it...
easier to learn at a distance.

In the 1960s, the first of several books entitled *Teach Yourself Gaelic* appeared. The National Library of Scotland received a book for their collection by that title written by a woman named Phyllis Saunders that was published in 1965. This was probably a private printing, since it was in typescript. The popular *Gaelic (Teach Yourself Books)* by Roderick MacKinnon came out in 1971. This is a very good, user-friendly grammar-based Gaelic course. Although it has been out of print for a while, copies can still be obtained through the used-book market. MacKinnon’s book was replaced by another “Teach Yourself” book in 1993, which I will discuss later.

**Gaelic Courses with Audio**

**LP Courses**

Although text-only courses are useful, they do not provide any way for the student to hear what the language sounds like. Mastering the sounds of a language is difficult, and learning the sounds of Gaelic can be particularly difficult because there are so few native speakers. With an audio component included in the lessons, the learner is able to mimic the pronunciation, stress patterns, phrasing, and tonal qualities of the native speaker. Sound recordings accompanying Gaelic lessons first appeared in the 1950s. Major Calum Ian MacLeod produced an LP record in the early 1950s in Nova Scotia called *Scottish Gaelic for Beginners*. The record was accompanied by several pages of text. Then, in 1969, the comprehensive Gaelic course *Sàth!* by Calum Ferguson was published in Scotland. It consisted of four 33 1/3 LP 12-inch discs accompanied by four separate books – Script (text), Grammar, Vocabulary, and Glossary. The course contains seventy lessons consisting of narration and dramatized scenes which build up a picture of life in the Highlands & Islands at that time. The text was full of idioms and a number of different Highland dialects are presented on the discs. This was definitely the finest course of its time, and a forerunner for the *Gàidhlig Bheò* audio-cassette series.

**Cassette Tapes**

Although there are many Gaelic courses which have appeared over the years, they differ in suitability for use in distance-learning. With the ever-shrinking number of native Gaelic speakers and qualified teachers and the new interest shown in Gaelic by those far removed from the Gaeltacht in Scotland and Cape Breton, the need for distance learning materials has seen a sharp increase in the last twenty years. The invention of the cassette tape greatly enhanced the ability of those interested in learning Gaelic to teach themselves the language. Cassettes are more portable than LP records and they can be easily copied.

*Gàidhlig Bheò* by Jake MacDonald, first published in 1978, was the first comprehensive course to use the new cassette technology. It consisted of three books, an exam booklet, and six tapes, and was originally designed as a Scottish “O” grade course that was administered through the National Extension College in Cambridge, England. Students were assigned a tutor and submitted tapes by mail for correction and help. This was an excellent course; its main drawback was its high cost. The National Extension College stopped accepting students about four or five years ago, but the books may still be obtained through used book dealers.

Once cassette tapes became popular, someone privately created tapes to go along with the old *Teach Yourself Gaelic* book by Roderick MacKinnon – a course which is still very popular. Donald MacDonald from Montreal produced these tapes and they can still be purchased from him. In 1993, however, a new version of *Teach Yourself Gaelic* came out written by Boyd Robertson and Iain Taylor. This replaced Rodenick MacKinnon’s version and it included its own cassette tape. Where MacKinnon’s book was grammar-based, the new *Teach Yourself* is conversation-based. The Robertson and Taylor book has been marketed very widely and is still available in most book stores. Some students criticize the tape that accompanies the course, however. The spoken Gaelic starts out at a slow pace, but quickly accelerates to a speed that is difficult for the beginner to keep up with.

In 1996, the grammar-based course *Scottish Gaelic in Three Months* by Roibeard Ó Maelalbhagh was first published. This was part of the Hugo Series of language books. Known in Gaelic learner circles as “The Hugo Book”, it remains a very popular course and is often out of print. The book has tapes that can be purchased separately, but few Gaelic learners that I have spoken to have found the tapes very helpful. The tapes are probably not worth the purchase price, since only a small sample of what is in the book is given on the tapes, rather than the complete text. They should be redone – this time in CD format following the text much more closely. As a grammar-based Gaelic course it ranks as one of the best – concise and easy to use, while very inexpensive to purchase when the tapes are not included.
The newest entry into the “teach yourself” books is Colloquial Scottish Gaelic by Katherine Spadaro and Katie Graham. This was published in 2001 as part of The Colloquial Series of language instruction. It is similar to the Teach Yourself Gaelic book by Robertson and Taylor, in that it is conversational in nature, but is much less cluttered and a little easier to use. It is accompanied by cassette tapes with exercises and examples. The tapes are superior to the tapes that accompany both the Robertson and Taylor and the Ó Maoïlathaigh books. It is certainly one of the best courses currently available.

The availability of cassette tapes changed the face of classroom materials as well. In 1989, two Gaelic courses designed to be used in the classroom came out which employed cassette tapes—one from Scotland and one from Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia, Catriona Parsons developed a Gaelic course in three volumes called Gàidhlig Troinbh Chomhradh (Gaelic Through Conversation) for use with students enrolled in her summer Gaelic classes at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in St. Ann’s, Cape Breton. They are currently also used as textbooks for the first-year and second-year Gaelic courses at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. Parson’s course consists of three volumes accompanied by tapes. There is not a lot of grammar in these books, but they are rich in spoken drills. They are best used in conjunction with a teacher, but some have used them to learn Gaelic on their own. In 1989, the same year, Annie MacSween from Lews Castle College in Stornoway also produced a course known as Siúthadh! This series was produced for use as modules with the Scottish Department of Education. Like Parson’s course, MacSween’s course was really designed for use with a teacher, but some may have tried to use these alone to teach themselves.

The University of Edinburgh has used Cothrom Ionnaidhaidh by Ronald Black as their first-year Gaelic text. This is a very comprehensive grammar-based course, but is best used in conjunction with a tutor. It is not designed to be a “teach yourself” type book. Black’s course has been out for a number of years and updated versions continue to come out. There are tapes that go along with the books, but they are reportedly not that helpful.

Although most consumers in North America and Britain now have audio equipment to play CDs, it seems that the course manufacturers do not feel comfortable enough yet with this medium to switch from cassettes. One exception to this rule has been Muriel Fisher with her Gaelic learner’s course simply titled Scottish Gaelic. Muriel is a native speaker from the Isle of Skye who now lives in Tucson, Arizona, where she teaches Gaelic classes through the University of Arizona’s Critical Languages Program. Muriel’s course currently consists of three levels, with a fourth in the process of being compiled. Each level consists of a textbook, a workbook, and audio CDs. Her students listen to the audio CD’s, which parallel the textbook, and complete exercises in the workbook. If students have particular questions, they can contact Muriel by email. The audio CDs included in Muriel’s course are particularly helpful - her pronunciation is good and very clear. However, as Fisher states herself on the first CD, her Gaelic is just as she learned it growing up. Therefore, her grammar and spelling do not always agree with the official standard currently used in schools, universities, and publishing. If one is willing to overlook the idiosyncratic and inconsistent spelling and grammar, this is a good course by a very good teacher, with probably the clearest examples of native Gaelic speech currently available in any Gaelic course. The cost for Muriel’s course is $80.00 US for each level and is available from her website http://www.murielofskye.com/.

Gaelic TV Instructional Programming
In the 1970s, the medium of television began to be used to facilitate Gaelic learning at a distance. The addition of a video component to distance courses allowed the learner to observe the speaker’s mouth and body language, an important part of learning a language. The program Can Seo (Say This) first aired in 1978 and consisted of twenty-half-hour programs. Produced by the BBC, it was designed to bring complete beginners up to the level of a relatively good understanding of Gaelic. Humorous skits, dramas, and monologues were used to introduce the language. The programs also included material on Highland culture. Although it has been more than twenty-five years since this series was produced, the BBC is still reluctant to release these programs for sale to the public. They can be obtained on loan in the NTSC format from An Comunn Gaidhealach, America at http://www.acgamerica.org. In addition to the television program, a set of books with tapes drawn from the program were also once available.

The Speaking Our Language Television program was the next Gaelic course made for television. It was produced in the early 1990s and consisted of 72 half-hour shows, divided into four series. The programs are marketed by a company called Cànan, located at Sàbhal Mòr Ostaigh, the Gaelic college in Skye. There are two videotapes per series. Cànan also publishes workbooks and audio tapes to accompany the series, all of which must be purchased.
separately. The videotapes include little grammar, but the series is a good conversation-based course. Additional grammar explanations are provided by the workbooks and the audiotapes afford additional listening practice. Although the dialogue is quite repetitive and slow, many students have sung the praises of Speaking Our Language because it gives them a chance to both hear and see Gaelic spoken at the same time in everyday situations. The program also presents a number of different Gaelic dialects as well. Căan currently offers the first two series in the North American NTSC videotape format. The last two series can be obtained in NTSC format from Siol Enterprises in St. Andrews, Nova Scotia through their website http://www.gaelicbooks.com/.

Another television series for Gaelic learners produced in 1990 is called Abair! Written by Annie MacSwee, it was specifically produced for the intermediate to advanced Gaelic learner. Not much grammar is included in this course. Instead, emphasis is placed on listening skills and gleaning Gaelic idiom. The texts of the dialogues are included with the course, so the student can read along as the dialogue is presented. The videotapes for this program have been available for sale in Scotland, but they were never produced in the NTSC format used in North America. Unless a student has a decent grasp already of the language, the Gaelic on these tapes will be difficult to understand at times. The dialogues are true to the way native speakers speak, without slowing down or simplifying the language for beginners.

**CD-ROMS**

One of the most recent formats for distance learning is the CD-ROM. This allows for instant access of multi-media learning materials on disk. CD-ROMs combine aspects of audio, video and textual learning formats and the more recent programs even allow students to compare their own pronunciations to that of a native speaker. Căan, the media company that markets the videotapes of the television series Speaking Our Language, produced a CD-ROM a few years ago at the beginner’s level based on the first five lessons of the Speaking Our Language course. This CD has not seen the commercial success that their videotapes have. Another CD-ROM based course to appear recently is Talk Now! Learn Scottish Gaelic and was produced by EuroTalk Interactive, who also produce CD-ROMs for many other European languages. The Talk Now! course does not include any grammar, but it teaches simple everyday vocabulary through games and quizzes. It was designed for those who simply want a basic taste of the language; it does not go into any great depth.

Probably the best CD-ROM Gaelic course to date is TeachMe! Gaelic, part of the TeachMe! series produced by Cambridge Educational. The course consists of a package containing a CD-ROM, an audio CD and a short booklet. There are twenty levels of grammar exercises with an explanation of the grammar for each level. There are also twenty levels of Vocabulary exercises as well. In the vocabulary exercises, the student is presented with a word or phrase in English. If he/she does not respond by typing the correct Gaelic equivalent, the student sees the word/phrase written and hears it pronounced. He/she must then type the correct response into the computer. The next time the word/phrase is presented, hopefully the student will remember and type in the correct Gaelic answer without prompting. For practice in speaking Gaelic, the learner is presented with a Gaelic word – both in written and spoken form. The learner must then repeat the word into a microphone, trying to match the pronunciation of the native speaker on the program. After the response is given, the learner is able to see the waveform that their voice produces on the screen. This is compared with the waveform of the native speaker’s pronunciation using voice recognition software and the learner can quickly see just how good his/her pronunciation is compared to the model. The audio CD which is included contains nine short readings from the small booklet which are used for listening practice. After listening to the stories and reading along, the CD-ROM presents the learner with the stories in incomplete form and asks him/her to fill in the blanks left in the story by dragging and dropping the missing words into the correct place in the story. The stories on the audio CD are followed by twenty additional tracks. These tracks contain content similar to the twenty grammar lessons on the CD-ROM, so you can listen while you are in the car or otherwise engaged.

The TeachMe! program allows you to see the words to be learned, hear them, and to write them. This multi-sensory approach to learning has been proven quite successful. Another advantage of this format is that you receive immediate feedback and are retested on the items that you missed initially to make sure that you have learned them before moving on. The stories are also quite helpful. Although the TeachMe! Gaelic CD-ROM has a few advantages over other learning formats, there still are some improvements to be made in order to match some of the other courses currently available. One thing missing is an overview of the course or even a proper introduction. In order to find out how the course operates, you have to access the Help menu, but nowhere in the program...
does it instruct you to do so. There are many mistakes in the program and bugs that need to be ironed out as well. For example, sometimes the text and the spoken word do not match. Sometimes you get the written word without the expected audio. When you consult the dictionary, sometimes the word is provided and sometimes not. The audio function on the dictionary does not operate consistently. A few of the vocabulary words given are not what would be commonly used, and many native Gaelic speakers and fluent learners would not recognize them. The majority of the vocabulary words are common and useful, however, so the occasional strange word should not put one off from using the program. TeachMe! Gaelic is very good for learning vocabulary and can be somewhat helpful in learning basic grammar. It also offers valuable listening practice. For the most part the Gaelic pronunciation is good and the CD-ROM provides an interesting format for learning. The program just needs a little debugging, polishing, and editing. I anticipate that this type of learning format will only continue to get better in the future. Teach Me! Gaelic is available on the web at http://www.linguashop.com/en/learn-gaelic.php.

Internet Learning Sites

The rise in popularity of the Internet in the 1990s brought a whole new dimension to Gaelic distance-learning. The main advantage of Internet learning is that most Gaelic lessons and content are offered completely free of charge and can be accessed by anyone. It is only when tutors are involved that money is requested. The Gaelic language discussion list Gaelic-L appeared in the mid-nineties, to be followed by similar lists like Gaidhlig-B, and Gaidhlig4U. The Internet discussion list is a format where learners can try out their Gaelic and receive help from other more experienced learners. One must first subscribe to join the discussion list. Once a member of the list, you are able to receive messages which other members post to the list and you are also able to post messages yourself. The discussions are usually moderated, in other words, the list administrator monitors the list to make sure that the discussions do not get off topic and that the rules of the list are followed. Some lists are Gaelic exclusive – English messages are not allowed. Other lists allow you to post in English as long as the topic is related to Gaelic. On some learner lists, they encourage you to post messages in Gaelic, but they also ask you to give an English translation of your posting. The big advantage of the Gaelic discussion lists are that most of them are free and one can come and go on the lists as you please. Unfortunately, the anonymity afforded by the discussion lists allows people to be argumentative, aggressive, and sometimes
downright rude. The irony is that most of these individuals argue about Gaelic grammar or idiom in English, not Gaelic. They put themselves up as experts but they are unable to speak the language. True Gaelic speakers are often put off by these lists because of these self-proclaimed experts. For the most part, however, the lists are a helpful tool for learners. To learn more about these discussion lists and to find out how to subscribe to them, see the following web page: http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/liosta/.

In recent years, a number of Gaelic learning programs have appeared on the World Wide Web. Some of these are just lessons taken from old books that are out of print. While some of these are actually written by Gaelic teachers, others are short introductions to Gaelic written by learners who want to share their love for the language with others. Probably the best of these World Wide Web programs is Beag air Bheag, which was produced and is hosted by the BBC. This consists of fifteen lessons with tests at the end, a phrase book, and a song box. Audio files are also included with the lessons, phrasebook, and songs. The BBC uses native Gaelic speakers to record the sound files as well. Access to the lessons is completely free of charge. The program is available at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/foghlan/beag_air_bheag/index.shtml

Besides the course Beag air Bheag, another interesting Gaelic learning tool can also be found at the BBC Scotland website. Ruari MacLean, a fluent Gaelic learner originally from Australia, has a radio program each week called Litir do Luchd-Iomnachaidh (Letter for Gaelic Learners). He discusses a new topic each week drawn from many different areas of knowledge – Highland folklore, geography, history, etc. These letters are targeted at intermediate to advanced learners, but they have recently added an additional letter called An Litir Bheag (The Little Letter) for those who find Litir do Luchd-Iomnachaidh too challenging. The radio programs are included on the BBC website with an archive going back a number of years. Audio files as well as the transcript for each program are available for download from the Internet. At the end of each week's letter, the author gives explanations for some of the grammar and idioms in the story. A translation is not given, however – that is up to the student. Litir do Luchd-Iomnachaidh is available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/foghlan/litir/. These programs are also available in CD form for members from An Comunn Gaidhealach – America, (The Highland Society, America) www.acgamerica.org/.
Another quite extensive online course is called Taic (Support). This was set up by Gaelic learners in Britain. The course is grammar-based and consists of 54 short text lessons. These lessons include sound files, but the sound files are not ideal, since the speaker does not appear to be a native Gaelic speaker himself. Taic can be accessed at: http://www.taic.btinternet.co.uk/.

Nova Scotia has two Gaelic learning sites on the Internet. Dr. John Shaw, now of the School of Scottish Studies, developed a Gaelic course while he was teaching and researching Gaelic in Nova Scotia. These Gaelic lessons have been put online and are hosted by the Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia at http://www.gaelic.ca. Shaw's course consists of twenty-two lessons which include vocabulary, phrases, and sentences. Gaelic stories from Nova Scotia are also included. No grammatical explanations are given, however. Although the course is not accompanied by sound files, cassette tapes of his lessons may still be obtained.

Neil MacEwen, a Gaelic learner from Nova Scotia, has also created a Gaelic learning site at http://www.contemporarypoetry.com/brain/lang/#Scots%20Gaelic. The lessons use examples gleaned from various grammars and textbooks. There are no audio files with these lessons, so learners have little way of knowing what the words sound like and the lessons include few readings.

There are now at least two Gaelic learning sites in languages other than English. Gaelic lessons in Spanish are available on the Internet through a site called Leasain 'sa Ghàidhlig (Lecciones Gaélicas) at http://www.terra.es/personal5/gaidheal/leasain/.

German speakers can learn Gaelic with a program called Gälisch für Einsteiger (Gaelic for Beginners) at http://www.hp.europe.de/kd-eurootravel/gaelic/gaelic0.htm.

**Online Courses with Tutors**

The distance-education programs that are probably closest to the classroom experience are the new programs that utilize tutors as well as written and audio materials. The audio component consists of cassette tapes, CDs, or computer sound files. A course called Gaelic For Beginners is offered by the Dalriada Celtic Heritage Trust (http://www.dalriada.co.uk/courses/Gaelic/gaelic.html).

This course is designed for anyone who is interested in learning the basics of Scottish Gaelic. It has been developed for people who do not have access to classes or a teacher locally. The course consists of ten lessons, sent by email, plus a tape recording of the vocabulary and phrases covered in the lessons. Students have access to a tutor whom they can contact by email any time.

Telford College in Edinburgh has long been involved in Gaelic instruction and they offer a basic online Gaelic course and well as higher qualifications. The very basic online course requires three hours per week over 13 weeks. It is completely online with self-correcting exercises to help the student monitor their own progress. Formal assessment is done in person at the college, locally arranged, or in some cases by phone. Tutor support is available by phone, e-mail, or letter. Telford also offers additional Gaelic courses through Open University, including Standard Grade, Pre-Higher and the Scottish Higher national qualification. A booklist and audiotapes are supplied for these courses. Once again, formal assessment is done in person at the college, locally arranged, or in some cases by phone. More information about these courses can be found at http://www.ed-coill.ac.uk/.

Lews Castle College, Perth College and Inverness College in Scotland all offer Gaelic open-learning modules which were designed by Lewis Castle. Perth and Inverness offer two modules, Gaelic 1 and 2, while Lewis Castle offers three modules – Gaelic 1, 2, and 3. According to Perth College, each course requires about forty hours of study and should be completed in six months. The students are sent self-study materials and cassette tapes in the post. The cost of the course at Perth is £240 ($600 Canadian) per module if in Canada. Phone, letter, and e-mail tutorial support is available to the students enrolled in the course. Inverness College will not accept students outside of the UK. In addition to the three open learning Gaelic modules, Lewis Castle also offers the national Higher qualification in Gaelic. If you are a native speaker of Gaelic, but want to brush up on your skills in reading and writing the language, Lewis Castle now offers a free online Gaelic literacy course at their website.

http://www.perth.ac.uk/
http://www.inverness.uhi.ac.uk
http://www.lews.uhi.ac.uk/SCIR/LanguageSkills.asp

The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in Nova Scotia offers a Gaelic course known as Beul an Tobair (The Mouth of the Well) at: http://www.gaeliccollege.edu/gaidhlig_beul.html. It is offered completely online and consists of lessons, songs, reference materials, and ongoing tutorial support. The course is heavily con-
versational in nature with each lesson consisting of a conversation between Gaelic speakers and a vocabulary containing the words that are used in the conversation. Extensive notes on grammar and idiom are also included to help the student understand how the language works. The conversations and vocabulary in each lesson, designed to help the student develop listening skills, are presented as MP3 audio files. In addition, six traditional Gaelic songs are presented with accompanying audio files to allow the students to learn the songs as sung by traditional Nova Scotia Gaelic singers. The songs are accompanied by detailed explanations of the words, phrases, and idioms contained in the songs.

Students in the Gaelic College course are given exercises to complete and submit to the tutor for correction. A private online message board is available for the students to help them practice their Gaelic through conversations with other students and their instructor. The tutor monitors the message board daily and provides any necessary assistance to the students. The goal of the course is to help the students reach the point where they can engage in basic conversation with Gaelic speakers. At the present time, the course is composed of two levels. The students pay $350 Canadian and are given six months access to the website. It is expected that a student will complete each level within six months.

The best of the new Gaelic distance education courses, Cùrsa Inntrigidh (Access Course), is offered by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college in Skye. Students work their way through each unit in the course guided by MP3 computer sound files, audio CDs, and an online workbook. The sound files and CDs are designed to help develop listening skills. There are weekly telephone tutorials which last about 45 minutes, linking the student with his/her tutor and a small group of other students. In areas where there is a critical mass of students, regular monthly face-to-face tutorials are held as well. These last about two hours and are usually held on a Saturday. Students who cannot travel to one of these centers are offered an additional hour-long telephone tutorial instead. Optional weekend schools are held at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for each part of the course at no extra charge. Students in the course can also contact their tutors for help by e-mail. Additional backup materials and a bulletin board to keep in touch with other students in the course are also available online.

Currently Sabhal Mòr offers the course in three parts and two tracks—standard and accelerated, with a fourth part in the works. The accelerated track is for those who already have a little knowledge of Gaelic. Both the standard and accelerated programs start in September. Students in the standard track spend about eight hours per week on the course and take 14 months to complete. Students in the accelerated track can spend about 10-12 hours per week and finish in 10 months. The Cùrsa Inntrigidh students are required to complete self-assessment exercises for each unit of study. The tutor will also give their students oral and written assignments to complete, which they return at the end of the month.

The cost of Cùrsa Inntrigidh is currently £225 per part or £675 for the three-part course for those in the UK. For those outside of the UK, the cost is £275 per part or £825 for the full course ($1500 US or $2055 Canadian). Copies of the material on CD are another £75. According to the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig website, following the successful completion of Part Three, students "can expect to participate in confidence in Gaelic conversation." A certificate will be awarded to completing students which qualifies as entry into the Cùrsa Comais at Sabhal Mòr, which is Level I of the degree programs in Gaelic and Related Studies offered at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig as well as at Lews Castle College and Inverness College. For more information, see http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/en/cursaichean/inntrigidh/.

**Private Phone Lessons**

There are now several private Gaelic tutors who conduct lessons over the phone. Since long-distance rates have become much cheaper in the last ten years, this is a good alternative to a live teacher. At present, I know of three tutors in Canada, one in the United States, and two in Scotland. These lessons are individually tailored to each student's needs and the cost is about $20 US per hour. The student also pays for the long-distance calls. For more information on how to obtain phone lessons, one can consult the website for An Comunn Gaidhealach America at http://www.acgamerica.org/language/distance.html.

**Private Tutoring using Internet Conferencing Technology**

There is a company located in the UK called Anysubject, at www.anysubject.com, which offers private tutoring in Gaelic over the Internet through Internet conferencing technology like the NetMeeting software. The students hook up a microphone and a camera to their computer in order to carry on a face-to-face conversation with his/her tutor. The lessons cost £16 ($40 Canadian) per hour.
Future Technology

The Internet is really still in its infancy at this stage, so there are many possibilities for its use in distance learning. While it is possible to offer real-time classes over the Internet at the present time, the quality of the picture and sound is still not very good. The voices may sound garbled and the video is jerky. With a slow phone-line connection from the computer to the Internet, the ability to receive good audio and video is very difficult. The current problems of real-time classes could be overcome by an increase in bandwidth, however. The greater the bandwidth is, the better the signal. Technology will certainly progress to the point that online classes and online tutoring will be a preferred method of distance learning. In fact, there is no reason that technology cannot one day be used to create a virtual-reality classroom where one can join the instructor and other students in a classroom learning environment. One would be able to see, hear, and converse with everyone present and be able to actively look around the room. That day will be here before we know it.

Summary

Those who wish to learn Gaelic today have a large number of distance learning options available to them that were not available thirty years ago. Gaelic texts alone, which were once the rule, are an important learning tool, but few ever gained fluency by simply reading a grammar text or phrase book. One can now add audio, video, computer, and personal tutor components to distance language learning programs which help the student overcome many of the disadvantages of distance learning. Although no distance learning format is quite as effective as total immersion in the language and its culture, the new tools now available make learning much easier and faster. This survey of learning tools will hopefully help the prospective distance learner of Gaelic to select the best methods suited to their own learning styles, tastes, and budget. The best advice is to utilize every learning format available to you. The more exposure to the language that you receive, the more likely you are to become fluent in the language.

References


The Construct of the Pedagogical Norm and the Teaching of Variability in Minority Languages: A Welsh Example

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The pedagogical norm was originally proposed (Valdman, 1988; 1989 etc.) to facilitate the decisions language teachers or writers of pedagogical materials must make regarding what to present in the classroom and how to prioritize variants that will be presented. The construct was originally developed to deal with highly variable phenomena in French, such as the teaching of the mid-vowels or of interrogative structures, but it can easily be extended to other languages and settings. The pedagogical norm seems particularly useful for the teaching of minority languages, as these are often less standardized and do not enjoy the same wealth of pedagogical materials as major European languages do. In this article I briefly discuss the criteria for determining a pedagogical norm and then I apply the construct to a highly variable structure in Welsh, namely tag questions attached to normal (VSO) clauses.

Introduction

One of the major tasks facing foreign language (FL) or second language (L2) teachers is the selection of appropriate linguistic forms to serve as the acquisitional targets for students in the classroom setting. In some ways this is less an issue for the major, familiar western European languages than for Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs), especially languages of linguistic minorities, such as the Celtic languages. This is in part because the major European languages currently taught in North America, particularly Spanish, French, and German, have long, well-established pedagogical traditions and are therefore endowed with extensive, and in many cases first-rate, pedagogical materials designed as ready-to-use, complete packages. Decisions about what forms to teach have necessarily already been made by the writers of these materials, thus the teacher adopting the materials need not necessarily confront issues of norm selection or ordering directly.