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11 Scottish Gaelic

Claire Nance

11.1 Introduction

Scottish Gaelic is a Celtic language closely related to Irish and Manx. These languages form the Goidelic family of Celtic languages. Scottish Gaelic is usually referred to by speakers simply as 'Gaelic' [galɪk]. The Goidelic language family, and the Irish language, are also sometimes referred to as 'Gaelic' but pronounced [geɪlɪk]. Here, I discuss the language Scottish Gaelic and refer to it as 'Gaelic' as is customary in the community. Gaelic had 57,602 speakers in Scotland according to the most recently available data from the 2011 census (i.e. roughly 1% of the population; Scottish Government 2015a). Although the majority of Gaelic speakers reside in Scotland, there is also a sizeable population in Nova Scotia, Canada. In this chapter, I first outline the historical context of Gaelic in Scotland (Section 11.2). Section 11.3 describes the contemporary situation of the language and its speakers, including those in Canada. In Section 11.4, I outline the major linguistic characteristics of Gaelic, and finally Section 11.5 describes recent research into linguistic innovation in Gaelic.

11.2 Historical Context

This section outlines the history of Gaelic in Scotland (see also Russell, this volume). For Gaelic in Canada see Section 11.3.4. For more in-depth information and discussion, see McLeod (2020). Gaelic was originally the Irish language of migrants and colonisers who travelled back and forth between Ireland and Scotland from around the fifth century CE (Campbell 2001; Dumville 2002). Their language expanded across much of Scotland from the early medieval kingdom of Dál Riata in Argyll (MacKinnon 1974:14). The Latin name for Gaelic-speaking people in Scotland was the *Scotti*, and their language was the 'Scottish' language. Between the fifth to eleventh centuries Gaelic-speaking people gradually achieved political, religious and cultural supremacy over previously mainly Pictish-speaking Scotland (Woolf 2007). By 1000 CE, it is thought that the majority of the people living in what is now

Scotland were Gaelic-speaking, with areas of Cumbric, Norse, Old English and possibly Pictish remaining (MacKinnon 1974:15). Ó Maolalaigh (2008b:187) argues that there is evidence of Scottish Gaelic being linguistically distinct from Irish in the twelfth-century text *The Book of Deer*. When Scottish Gaelic came to be recognised as a socially distinct language is a slightly different question. Horsburgh (2002:239) suggests this occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through the translation of religious texts into a distinctly Scottish language.

From the eleventh century onwards, the political, cultural and geographical prestige of Gaelic has largely declined. There are several possible reasons for this (Withers 1984:19). Firstly, the Scottish court was moved from the Highlands to English-speaking Lothian. Secondly, religious practices were increasingly oriented southwards towards the Roman Catholic Church and away from Celtic Christianity. Also, in 1071 the Scottish king Malcolm married an English-speaking wife who knew no Gaelic. Finally, the medieval period was marked by a cultural change from tribalism to feudalism and increasing trade with the English-speaking south. Around the 1300s, we begin to see a division of Scotland into Highlands and Lowlands appearing in texts (MacInnes 1989:90). This ideological and geographical distinction was first created around a linguistic division. Significantly, during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, Gaelic gradually stopped being referred to as the 'Scottish' language and started being called 'Irish', marking a weakened association between Gaelic and Scottish national identity (Withers 1984:22).

In the eighteenth century two large political events had significant consequences for Gaelic. Firstly, the Act of Union in 1707 linked Scotland and England under one parliament. This further aligned the Scottish court with the English-speaking south (Ó Néill 2005:341). Secondly, in 1746 the Jacobite army lost the Battle of Culloden over the English/Scottish throne, despite support from many Highland clans (Withers 1984:104). After Culloden, wearing Highland tartan and playing the pipes was forbidden, and large areas of land were divided into private estates.

As well as official policies, an effective measure for anglicising Gaelic speakers was a general cultural downgrading, referred to by McIntyre (2009:144) as 'a nearly 400-year pogrom of cultural genocide'. The culture of Gaelic-speaking Scotland, which was traditionally and simplistically viewed as an oral song and story-telling culture, became portrayed as inferior and impoverished (MacKinnon 1974:43). Highland areas have been referred to as subject to 'internal colonialism' in the British Isles and within Scotland (Connell 2004; Hechter 1999). The internal colonialism model describes how the Highlands were made a 'peripheral' region with systematic disadvantage in terms of economic development and social capital, and othering in terms of cultural heritage. When schools were first built in an organised way in

Gaelic-speaking areas, the education provided was largely in English. The aim of such schools, mostly run by Christian charities, was to educate the local people in English (MacKinnon 1991:74).

Dividing highland Scotland into large private estates after Culloden paved the way for what has come to be known as the 'Highland Clearances'. From the mid eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century, communities across highland Scotland were moved from economically valuable land into other places. Sometimes, this was to less valuable land in nearby areas, sometimes to lowland cities such as Glasgow, or sometimes to Canada, Australia or New Zealand (Hunter 2010; Richards 2012). Similar to Ireland, the nineteenth century also witnessed a potato famine in highland Scotland and subsequent loss of mainly Gaelic-speaking life. The legacy of these events remains to this day. For example, Chalmers and Danson (2006:240) report that the Highlands and Islands is one of the least densely populated regions in the EU, with an average of 9 people per km^2, compared to the EU average of 116 people per km^2. Chalmers and Danson demonstrate that this sparse population and lack of access to resources has led to unequal development across Scotland in recent times.

The events of the medieval period and subsequent centuries led to a gradual decline in Gaelic usage across much of Scotland. In the twentieth century this decline became more rapid: widespread social and economic change opened up travel and employment opportunities outside the Highlands as never before. Increased mobility and changing economic circumstances, coupled with the cultural persecution of previous centuries and gradual erosion of Gaelic's prestige, have led to some of the most severe drops in speaker numbers happening very recently: in 1881 the census recorded 231,594 Gaelic speakers, which dropped to 57,602 in 2011 (Scottish Government 2015a)

11.3 Current Context

The most recent available figures on numbers of Gaelic speakers come from the 2011 census. This census indicated that there were 57,602 people in Scotland who could speak, read or write Gaelic, down from 58,552 in 2001. There is a tendency towards an ageing population – in the 2011 census, 45 per cent of Gaelic speakers were aged fifty and over (37% of the total Scottish population is aged fifty and over; Scottish Government 2015a:13). The number of Gaelic speakers recorded in the census from 1881–2011 can be found in Figure 11.1. More detailed analysis of Gaelic in the 2011 census is available in Scottish Government (2015a, 2015b).

Since the later part of the twentieth century, Gaelic has been undergoing a targeted programme of revitalisation in Scotland. Several authors have used the term 'Gaelic renaissance' to refer to the period from around the 1980s to

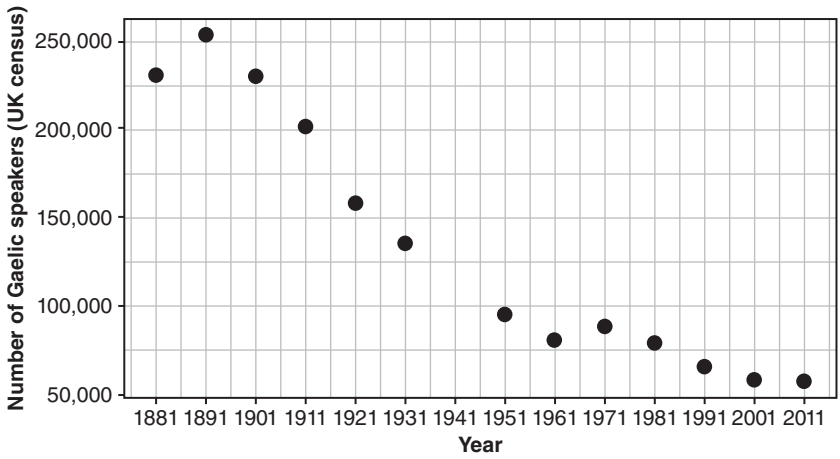

Figure 11.1 Number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland according to UK national censuses.

the present where Gaelic enjoys unprecedented (in modern times) political support, funding and cultural promotion (Macdonald 1997; Oliver 2002). Institutional support for Gaelic increased after Scottish devolution in 1997 and the appointment of a minister responsible for Gaelic (Oliver 2002:15). The Gaelic Language Act in 2005 formalised a desire to secure 'the status of Gaelic as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language' (Scottish Parliament 2005). The Act contained legislation for the formation of a public body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, responsible for the protection and promotion of Gaelic, and the drawing up and implementation of Gaelic Language Plans.

Gaelic Language Plans are produced by organisations when requested to do so by the Bòrd, or they can choose to do so. Language Plans allow an organisation to develop a strategy for an increase in the use and promotion of Gaelic. National Gaelic Plans are produced every five years to set short-, medium- and long-term strategy for revitalisation. The most recent national plan states two clear aims: 'Increase the use of Gaelic' and 'Increase the learning of Gaelic' (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2023:8). The plan covers specific ambitions and targets for Gaelic in the areas of use and learning across communities, homes, media and the arts, business, public authorities, schools and post-school.

11.3.1 Education

Gaelic was not mentioned in the 1872 Education Act for Scotland, but since 1918, schools in Gaelic-speaking areas have been required to teach the subject

in one form or another. This was, however, often very minimal and involved teaching Gaelic language and literature through the medium of English (MacLeod 2003:1). Perhaps the most important development in the Gaelic revitalisation movement has been the creation and expansion of Gaelic-medium education (GME), a form of immersion schooling, where children can receive their education in Gaelic. Unlike some other immersion schooling systems (see Lyster and Genesee (2019) for an overview), the GME model mixes children from all language backgrounds from the onset. Most schools teach exclusively in Gaelic for the first three years of primary school, and then English is gradually blended in. Secondary education is almost exclusively in Gaelic, and pupils are able to sit Gaelic-medium standard grades (exams taken at ages fifteen–sixteen) in many subjects.

The first Gaelic-medium playgroups were set up in 1980, and the first GME primary classes opened in Glasgow and Inverness in 1985. Since then, GME uptake and provision has been steadily increasing. In 2022 (the latest available data), there were 3,781 children attending GME classes at primary level (0.97% of pupils) and a further 3,692 children learning Gaelic in primary school through other means. This means 1.92 per cent of primary children are learning Gaelic in some way. At secondary level, there were 1,329 pupils in GME in 2022, and 3,070 pupils learning Gaelic in other ways at school. This means 0.43 per cent of secondary pupils were in GME, and 1.44 per cent of pupils were learning Gaelic overall, including GME and other forms of learning (Scottish Government 2022).

The majority of Gaelic-medium provision occurs within already existing English-medium schools, but there are currently free-standing Gaelic-medium primary schools in Inverness, Edinburgh, Fort William and Portree, and three in Glasgow. Currently, the only free-standing GME secondary school is located in Glasgow. All parents in Scotland now have a legal right to request GME, but the provision of GME is subject to there being reasonable parental demand as ascertained by local authorities (Scottish Parliament 2016).

Two studies notably have looked at the attainment of pupils in GME compared to English-medium pupils of similar demographic characteristics. Both of these studies found that GME pupils performed similarly to English-medium pupils and even achieved higher than their English-medium counterparts in several areas (Johnstone et al. 1999; O'Hanlon 2010). Many children attending GME are not from Gaelic-speaking families. Stockdale, MacGregor and Munro (2003) studied Gaelic-medium provision in Ullapool (Ross and Cromarty), Laxdale (Isle of Lewis) and Castlebay (Isle of Barra), and report that 56 per cent of children were from families with no Gaelic at all. In Glasgow, previous estimates suggest that around 80 per cent of the children in GME are from English-speaking families (Glasgow City Council 2010:63). The long-term outcome of GME is examined in Dunmore (2015, 2019). This

research suggests that, overall, continued use of Gaelic into adulthood is relatively low, but former pupils maintained a strong sense of pride at having attended GME and intend to offer the GME opportunity to their children.

While GME and trajectories through to higher education in Gaelic are a vital strand of the revitalisation effort to increase speaker numbers, another crucial aspect is increasing the number of adult L2 users of Gaelic (Carty 2015, 2018). Four universities in Scotland provide degree courses in Gaelic and Celtic studies: Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and the University of the Highlands and Islands. The universities of Dundee, St. Andrews, the West of Scotland and Strathclyde also provide some Gaelic courses, but not a full undergraduate degree. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is a college on the Isle of Skye, part of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), which provides immersion courses in Gaelic language and culture at a variety of levels. UHI also provides Gaelic language courses at a number of its other colleges, such as Lews Castle College in Stornoway. Other providers of Gaelic classes for adult learners include a large number of local authorities as well as private providers. It is difficult to determine exactly how many people are learning Gaelic through night courses, summer courses, university courses and the like, but MacCaluim (2007) estimated that there were around 8,000 adults learning Gaelic in 1995. Sellers et al. (2019:7) estimated that there were 3,935 people learning Gaelic in Scotland in 2019. (The discrepancies between MacCaluim and Sellers are likely due to methodological differences rather than a huge drop between 1995 and 2019.) A large recent development for Gaelic L2 learning has been the introduction of a course via the language learning app Duolingo. Since its launch in 2019, the Gaelic language course has grown rapidly, and at the time of writing, there were 479,000 active learners (Duolingo 2023). Of course, it is difficult to know how many of these people will continue learning Gaelic and go on to use the language.

11.3.2 Culture and Media

Gaelic enjoys a very strong cultural profile, with many learners citing Gaelic music in particular as what first encouraged them to learn the language. An Commun Gàidhealach (The Highland Society) organises the largest Gaelic cultural event annually, the Mòd. This is a Gaelic traditional music and singing competition, with medals for group and individual performances. The Mòd is televised and is attended by thousands of participants and spectators. As well as singing competitions, a number of music festivals are organised annually with a strong Gaelic component. The largest Celtic music festival in Scotland is Celtic Connections in Glasgow. This festival takes place in January every year over three weeks, and a number of the events are in Gaelic or played by Gaelic-speaking musicians. Gaelic music is perhaps the liveliest

and most active sector of the Gaelic arts, but Gaelic theatre and other cultural Gaelic events are also vibrant, and groups such as the Fèis movement coordinate such activities for young people.

Gaelic in the media has a long history and this is perhaps one of the areas most widely visible and commented on by the general public in Scotland. Currently, there is a BBC Gaelic radio station, Radio nan Gàidheal, and a BBC Gaelic television channel, BBC Alba. The BBC first formed a Gaelic radio department in 1935, and Radio nan Gàidheal was formed from several existing Gaelic services in 1985 (McLeod 2020:225). In 1989 funding was provided by the Westminster government to form the Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig, a service dedicated to providing television in Gaelic, which broadcast its first Gaelic programmes in 1993 (Cormack 1993). The entirely Gaelic channel, BBC Alba, was created in 2008. This channel currently broadcasts for most of the day every day in Gaelic, with some English coverage being given to sports at the weekend.

11.3.3 Generational and Geographical Diversity

The experience of Gaelic speakers today varies widely according to factors such as age and geographical location. Census data shows that Gaelic speakers are geographically concentrated in the Highland and Island north-west of Scotland. Figure 11.2 shows the percentage of Gaelic speakers in each parish in Scotland. The most densely concentrated region is the chain of islands off the north-west coast, the Outer Hebrides. Scottish Government (2015b) provides some more in-depth analysis of the profile of Gaelic speakers. Recent surveys of language use in the Outer Hebrides, Skye and Tiree suggest that Gaelic usage is concentrated in the fifty+ age bracket and tails off among younger generations (Munro, Taylor and Armstrong 2011; Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020). Gaelic usage is most common in home domains rather than in public spaces (Birnie 2018).

Older generations of Gaelic speakers in Outer Hebridean communities typically grew up in Gaelic-speaking environments. It was usual to learn English on entering the school system and use Gaelic as a family and peer-group language. Outside of larger towns such as Stornoway, acquisition of Gaelic in this manner is common in anyone aged over fifty (Munro et al. 2011; Nance 2013). However, the picture is now changing, as demonstrated in the census and survey analysis. Munro et al. (2011:11) refer to intergenerational transmission in the community they studied as 'broken' and demonstrate that although this is numerically one of the densest Gaelic-speaking communities, it is rare for a child to grow up in a Gaelic-speaking household.

As discussed above, archaeological and place-name evidence suggests that Gaelic was spoken as a community language across present-day Scotland in

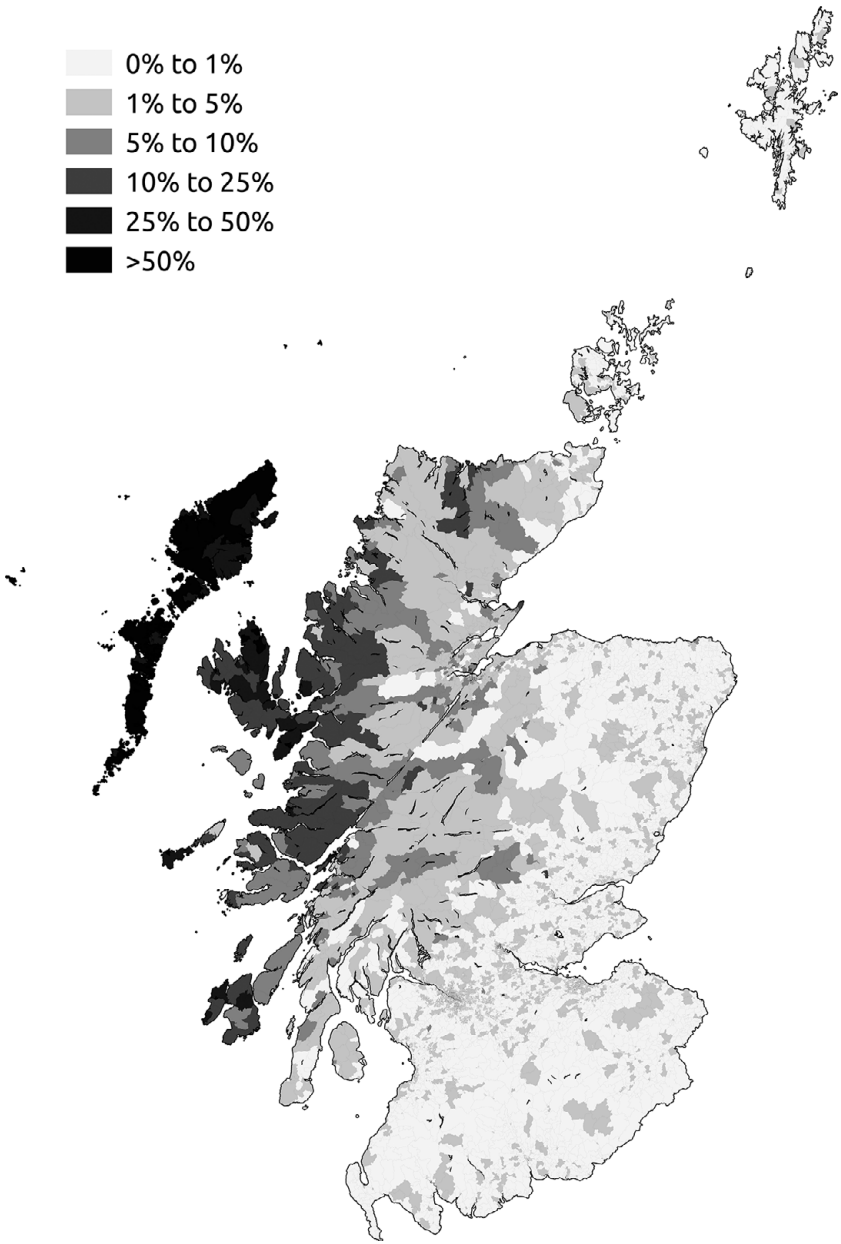

Figure 11.2 Percentage of Gaelic speakers in each parish in Scotland according to the 2011 Census.
Attribution: SkateTier (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/). Licensed under https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode

early medieval times, around 1000 CE. In living memory, however, the Gaelic communities in cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh have been largely immigrant communities. Glasgow especially has been a natural destination for migrants from the Highlands seeking work since at least the seventeenth century (Withers 1998).

In recent times, Glasgow has been a focal point for Gaelic revitalisation programmes, including GME, and has been referred to as 'City of the Gaels' (Kidd 2007). Cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh also now provide ample opportunity for acquiring Gaelic as a second language. Thriving university departments, cultural scenes, Gaelic employment in politics and media, and parents with children in GME all contribute active communities of speakers. Additionally, Gaelic speakers from the north-west of Scotland continue to migrate to lowland cities to take up employment or study opportunities (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014; Nance et al. 2016).

Another location which has recently seen changes in the make-up of the Gaelic-speaking community due to revitalisation measures is the Isle of Skye. In terms of the concentration of speakers, census data suggests that Skye has been more anglicised than the Outer Hebrides, but Skye was chosen as the location for the Gaelic-medium college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which is now part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Founded in 1973, the college has continued to expand to provide Gaelic intensive courses and is a hub for those acquiring the language and also those extending their skills (Hutchinson 2005). The majority of the adult fluent L2 speakers discussed in McLeod et al. (2014) and Nance et al. (2016) had spent a year studying at Sabhal Mòr, and in the Gaelic L2 community it is almost seen as a rite of passage to have spent time, usually a year, on Skye to attend Sabhal Mòr.

11.3.4 Gaelic in Nova Scotia

The discussion so far has considered the context and revitalisation of Gaelic in Scotland. Another notable community of Gaelic speakers exists in Nova Scotia, Canada. The most recent data from the Canadian census recorded 1,545 people who identified Scottish Gaelic as their mother tongue (0.17% of the population in Nova Scotia) (Statistics Canada/Statistique Canada 2016). The name Nova Scotia 'New Scotland' refers to the provinces colonised mainly by Scots. The number of Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia reached its peak in the early twentieth century, with an estimated 80,000 speakers in the province (Kennedy 2002). Gaelic speakers emigrated to Canada, especially Nova Scotia, from as early as the 1600s, and emigration increased especially during the Highland Clearances in the first part of the nineteenth century (MacKinnon 2001). During the nineteenth century, emigration was such that homogeneous Gaelic-speaking communities were established across large areas of Nova Scotia (Kennedy 2002:277).

A recent analysis of the contemporary situation in Nova Scotia, and comparison to Gaelic revitalisation in Scotland, is presented in Dunmore (2021a, 2021b). The context of Nova Scotia differs from that of Scotland in many ways, especially as Canada is extremely multilingual and home to multiple indigenous languages as well as immigrant communities such as Gaelic speakers. Dunmore discusses how an active revitalisation programme centred around heritage and ancestry in Nova Scotia has been successful in increasing Gaelic speaker numbers and reviving interest in Gaelic culture.

11.4 Linguistic Characteristics

This section provides an introduction to the main linguistic aspects of Gaelic in terms of syntax, morphology, phonology and phonetics. For further introductory reading about the linguistic aspects to the language, see Lamb (2002), Ó Maolalaigh (2008a), Gillies (2009), and Watson and MacLeod (2010).

11.4.1 Morphology and Syntax

This section provides an overview of the morphology and syntax of Gaelic. For further introductory reading, see Ó Maolalaigh (2008a) and Gillies (2009). For more detailed information, see Lamb (2002) (aimed at linguists), Byrne (2002) (aimed at Gaelic learners, in English) or Cox (2017) (for linguists, in Gaelic). Abbreviations in the following examples are from Lamb (2002).

Gaelic word order is VSO:

chunnaic	*mi*	*cat*	'I saw a cat'
see-PAST	1S	cat	

and the progressive can be expressed with a verbal noun:

tha	*mi*	*a'*	*coiseachd*	'I am walking'
be-PRES	1S	PROG	walking-VN	

Generally, verbs do not have a lot of inflectional morphology. Person is mainly expressed with personal pronouns. The past tense is either expressed by initial mutation on the verb root form, as in

choisich	*mi*	'I walked'
walk-PAST	1S	

or by changes to the auxiliary verb 'to be':

bha	*mi*	*a'*	*coiseachd*	'I was walking'
be-PAST	1S	PROG	walking-VN	

The future tense is also expressed by changes to the verb root:

coisichidh	*mi*	'I will walk'
walk-FUT	1S	

or by changes to the verb 'to be':

bidh	mi	*a'*	*coiseachd*	'I will be walking'
be-FUT	1S	PROG	walking-VN	

The verb 'to be' itself has two forms, *tha* and *'s e*. *Tha* is referred to as the substantive and is used to express what someone is doing or experiencing or where something is located. This is the most common form and is often used as an auxiliary verb as above. *'S e*, the copula, is used to describe someone or something, for instance:

is	*mise*	*Dòmhnall*	'my name is Donald'
COP-PRES	1S	Donald	

's e	*tidsear*	*a*	*th'*	*annam*	'I am a teacher'
COP-PRES	teacher	REL	be-PRES	in-1S	

Gaelic has no verb 'to have' but instead this concept is expressed using the verb 'to be' and the preposition *aig* 'at':

tha	*cat*	*agam*	'I have a cat'
be-PRES	cat	at-1S	

There is no single word for 'yes' or 'no' in Gaelic. These concepts are expressed by repeating the inflected verb from the question instead. For example, to answer the question *A' bheil thu ag èisteachd?* 'Are you listening?', you could say *Tha* 'I am' or *Chan eil* 'I am not'.

Nouns are declined for number, case and gender. There are some remnants of a dual number, but mainly nouns are only declined for singular and plural (e.g. *balach* 'boy', *balaich* 'boys'; *faoileag* 'seagull', *faoileagan* 'seagulls'). In terms of case, Gaelic has a nominative, vocative, genitive and dative. The dative is commonly used after prepositions (e.g. *am balach* 'the boy' but *air a' bhalach* 'on the boy'). The genitive is used as the object of a verbal noun (e.g. *an doras* 'the door' but *tha mi a' dùnadh an dorais* 'I am closing the door' (lit. *I am closing of the door*)). An interesting feature of the Celtic languages is that prepositions also decline for person, gender and number (e.g. *aig* 'at', *agam* 'at me', *aige* 'at him', *aice* 'at her', *aca* 'at them').

There is no indefinite article in Gaelic. The definite article declines for number, case and gender, and varies according to which vowel or consonant occurs at the start of the noun. Initial consonant mutations often occur with forms of the definite article. For example, *an doras* 'the door (masculine nominative)' *an t-aran* 'the bread (masculine nominative)' *a' ghrian* 'the sun (feminine nominative)', *an t-sràid* 'the road (feminine nominative)'. For a full list of different forms, see Byrne (2002:36–7).

11.4.2 Phonetics and Phonology

This section gives an overview of the sound system of Gaelic. For further information, see Ladefoged et al. (1998), Ternes (2006), and Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021).

11.4.2.1 Consonants

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Gaelic phonology, and the Goidelic languages generally, is the system of consonant contrasts between palatalised and non-palatalised, often referred to as 'slender and broad' respectively in the Celtic literature. The majority of consonants in Gaelic have both a 'broad' and 'slender' realisation, which mostly correspond to non-palatalised and palatalised respectively. In orthography, broad consonants are surrounded by orthographic <a>, <o> or <u> and slender consonants are surrounded by <i> or <e>. For detailed information on orthography in Gaelic, see Ó Maolalaigh (2008a) and Gillies (2009).

The consonant phonemes are shown in Table 11.1. This table is based on the dialect descriptions of Lewis Gaelic in Borgstrøm (1940) and Oftedal (1956) as well as more recent phonetic analysis such as Ladefoged et al. (1998) and Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021). These studies focus on Lewis Gaelic; for analysis of Applecross, see Ternes (2006). Table 11.1 shows broad consonants at the top of each box and their slender counterparts below. Note, there is some debate over the phonemic status of palatalised labials in the literature, which are either analysed as combinations of labial + /j/ or palatalised labials (Borgstrøm 1940; Ladefoged et al. 1998; Gillies 2009). These now require detailed phonetic research.

Plosives in Gaelic are not voiced, even in word-medial position (Nance and Stuart-Smith 2013). Orthography uses the symbols <b>, <d> and <g> but these sounds are produced as [p], [t̪] and [k] respectively. As well as the voiceless unaspirated stops, Gaelic has a series of voiceless aspirated stops, which are realised as pre-aspirated in word-medial and word-final contexts (Nance 2020; Nance and Moran 2022; Nance and Stuart-Smith 2013). The realisation of pre-aspiration varies dialectally (Ó Murchú 1985), but in Lewis it is usually produced as a period of breathy voicing followed by a voiceless glottal fricative.

Gaelic sonorants are described as not only having palatalised and non-palatalised phonemes, but also a velarised phoneme. This three-way contrast is the result of sound change from a hypothesised four-way contrast in Old Irish (Borgstrøm 1940; Oftedal 1956; Thurneysen 1946). As such, many modern Gaelic dialects have three-way contrasts in laterals, (non-bilabial) nasals, and rhotics (Kirkham and Nance 2022; Nance 2014; Nance and

Table 11.1 *Consonant phonemes in Gaelic*

	Bilabial		Labio-dental		Dental		Alveolar		Post-alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
Plosive	pʰ pʰʲ	p pʲ			t̪ʰ	t̪			tʃʰ	tʃ	cʰ	c	kʰ	k	
Nasal	m					n̪ˠ n̪ʲ		n							
Tap/trill								rˠ r rʲ							
Fricative			f fʲ	v			s		ʃ		ç		x	ɣ	h
Approximant												j			
Lateral approximant						l̪ˠ l̪ʲ		l							

Table 11.2 *Initial consonant mutation changes*

Plosives		Fricatives and sonorants	
Consonant	Lenited realisation	Consonant	Lenited realisation
pʰ	f	m	v
p	v	f	Ø
t̪ʰ	h	s	h
t̪	ɣ	ʃ	ç
tʃʰ	h	l̪ˠ	l
tʃ	j	l̪ʲ	l
kʰ	x	n̪ˠ	n
k	ɣ	n̪ʲ	n
cʰ	ç	rˠ	r
c	j		

Kirkham 2020, 2022). For example, we find a contrast between *càl* /kʰaːl̪ˠ/ ‘cabbage’ vs. *caill* /kʰail̪ʲ/ ‘lose’ vs. *càil* /kʰaːl/ ‘anything’.

Initial consonant mutations are a phenomenon which encompasses both phonology and morphology. As in all the Celtic languages, word-initial consonants in Gaelic undergo a series of changes in certain morphophonological contexts. Gaelic has only one mutation recognised in orthography, usually known as lenition. Lenition occurs in contexts such as the dative case with the definite article, feminine singular nominative nouns after the definite article, the vocative of proper nouns, and adjectives modifying a feminine noun. For full details of lenition contexts, see Byrne (2002) and Ó Maolalaigh (2008a). Table 11.2 summarises the changes which occur with consonant phonemes in lenition contexts. For examples and sound files, see Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021).

Another mutation, not shown in orthography, is known as nasalisation or eclipsis. This mutation occurs after items that are closely grammatically related, such as nouns following the definite article *an*, or nouns immediately following a modifying adjective ending in a nasal consonant. There is some dialectal variation in the realisation of eclipsis and some dialects or speakers do not produce it. For further details, see Gillies (2009:251–2) and Ó Maolalaigh (1996).

11.4.2.2 Vowels

Gaelic has nine oral monophthongs, which can be phonemically long or short; however, many speakers do not produce a distinction between /ɛː/ and /ɛ/. These vowels are shown in Table 11.3. For phonetic analysis, see Ladefoged et al. (1998), Nance (2011), Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021). Figure 11.3 shows the measures of the first two formants from the sound files in Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021).

Table 11.3 *Vowel phonemes in Gaelic*

Oral monophthongs		Nasal monophthongs		Diphthongs
i	iː	ĩ	ĩː	iə
e	eː	ẽ	ẽː	ia
ɛ	ɛː	ɛ̃	ɛ̃ː	uə
a	aː	ã	ãː	ua
ɔ	ɔː	ɔ̃	ɔ̃ː	ai
o	oː	õ	õː	ei
u	uː	ũ	ũː	əi
ɤ	ɤː	ɤ̃	ɤ̃ː	ui
ɯ	ɯː	ɯ̃	ɯ̃ː	au
				ɔu

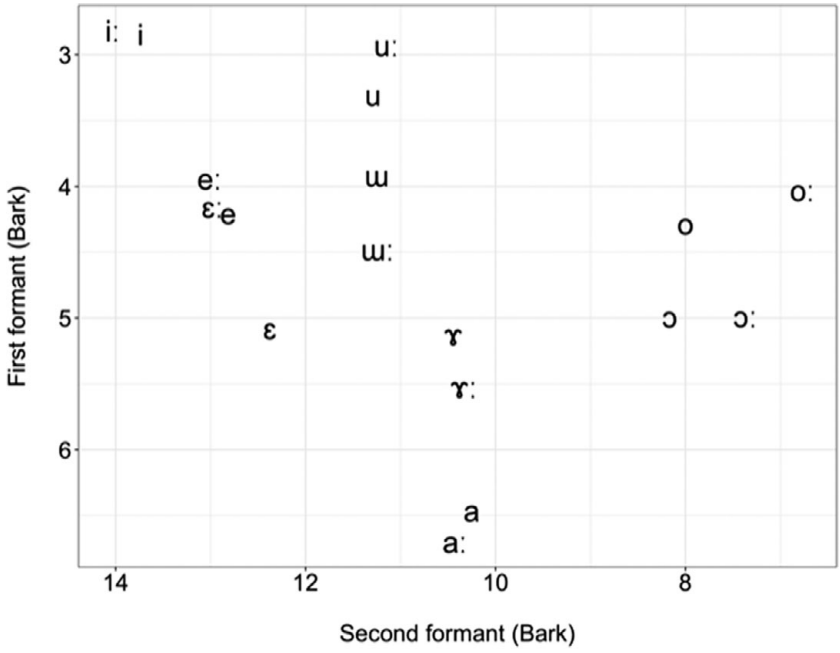

Figure 11.3 F1 and F2 measures of Gaelic oral monophthongs.

Gaelic has an extremely rich diphthongal system, shown in Table 11.3. Vowels can also be nasalised. Derived from historical nasal consonants, vowel nasalisation is now to some extent lexically, dialectally and even idiolectally specific. Oftedal (1956:40) notes that it is 'one of the most elusive features' of

Gaelic phonemics. Phonemic nasal vowels as shown in Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021) are in Table 11.3. Some diphthongs may be nasalised, though this appears to be lexically specific rather than phonemic.

11.4.2.3 Prosody

Gaelic syllables are described as having a VC structure rather than the much more typologically common CV (Bosch 1998; Clements 1986; Hammond et al. 2014; Smith 1999). For example, a word such as *aran* 'bread' would be syllabified as [ar.an]. Svarabhakti (vocalic epenthesis) vowels break up certain consonant sequences in Gaelic, and usually phonetically repeat the preceding vowel; for example, *Alba* 'Scotland' [alˠapə], dorcha 'dark' [t̪ɔrɔxə]. For further analysis of svarabhakti, see Bosch (1998), Bosch and De Jong (1997), Hall (2006) and Morrison (2019).

A second group of words which behave interestingly in terms of syllabification are referred to as 'hiatus' words, and historically contained an intervocalic consonant which is no longer pronounced. For example, *leabhar* 'book' [l̪ɔ.ər] ('hiatus' word) compared to *gu leòr* 'enough' [kə l̪ɔːr] (no hiatus). Hiatus words are produced in Lewis dialect with the word accent for multisyllabic words whereas a non-hiatus word such as *leòr* would be considered monosyllabic (Borgstrøm 1940:153; Bosch 1998). In non-Lewis dialects, hiatus is realised phonetically with an inserted glide, period of glottalisation, or a glottal stop (Holmer 1938; Iosad 2021; Jones 2000; Mandić 2021; Morrison 2019; Scouller 2018).

Stress is almost always on the first syllable of the word. Exceptions include some borrowings, such as *buntàta* 'potatoes' [punˈt̪ʰaːʰt̪ə], and compound words, such as *an-diugh* 'today' [ənˈtʃu]. Some dialects of Gaelic such as Lewis and the north-west mainland are described as using contrastive pitch accents on words of different syllable counts (Iosad 2015, 2021; Ladefoged et al. 1998; Morrison 2019; Nance 2015b; Ternes 2006). In monosyllabic stressed words, pitch is level low or rising, and in polysyllabic stressed words, pitch is high, falling or rise-falling. This contrast leads to near-minimal pairs such as *bò* 'cow' [↗poː] and *bogha* 'underwater rock' [↘po.ə]. While it is possible to find near-minimal pairs like the words here, they are not very great in number, unlike, for example, in dialects of Swedish which have a similar word accent system. For further examples and sound files from Gaelic, see Nance and Ó Maolalaigh (2021). In terms of sentence-level intonation, it has been suggested that the default pattern in declaratives is a phrase-final fall (Dorian 1978; MacAulay 1979; Oftedal 1956).

11.5 Language Change and Linguistic Innovation

The context of Scottish Gaelic is well known in the sociolinguistic literature through Dorian's seminal work, *Language Death* (Dorian 1981). Dorian

demonstrated the linguistic outcome of language obsolescence in East Sutherland Gaelic. The linguistic structure of East Sutherland Gaelic had undergone a series of changes, including lesser use of the conditional, the passive voice and the case system, and phonological change such as a reduction in the number of contrastive sonorants. Dorian attributed these changes to the decreasing use of Gaelic, increased use of English, and the rapid simplification and reduction of complex contrasts in contexts of language obsolescence (see also Dorian 1989, 2010). Dorian's work was instrumental in documenting this kind of change and bringing language obsolescence contexts to a wider linguistic audience.

Dorian's important fieldwork was conducted in the 1970s and reflected the context of a peripheral Gaelic dialect in East Sutherland. More recently, sociolinguistic work on Gaelic has focused on change in west Highland and Island Gaelic-speaking communities (Section 11.5.1), Gaelic in new settings such as immersion education (Section 11.5.2), and Gaelic in new geographical locations such as Glasgow and Edinburgh (Section 11.5.3).

11.5.1 Variation and Change in Highland and Island Gaelic

Variation and change in the traditional phonological structure of Gaelic in speakers from the Highlands and Islands has been investigated in a series of studies by Nance and colleagues. These studies investigated older speakers aged sixty–eighty in comparison to young adults (Nance and Stuart-Smith 2013), adolescents (Nance 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Nance and Moran 2022), and children (Nance 2020, 2022). Analysis suggests that young adult speakers do not produce as long pre-aspiration in word-medial and word-final stops in comparison to older speakers (Nance and Stuart-Smith 2013). Adolescent speakers do not use Lewis Gaelic's traditional word accent system, instead adopting an intonation-based prosodic structure (Nance 2015a). While older speakers consistently produce the three-way lateral contrasts, this is only the case in some adolescent and child speakers (Nance 2014, 2020).

One outcome of the language revitalisation programme for Gaelic has been the expansion of Gaelic use into new contexts. The language has adapted and developed in order to reflect these new settings. Development of new registers for Gaelic is explored in (Lamb 1999, 2008). Lamb (1999:161) discusses the history of how a specific media register for Gaelic was developed 'from the ground up'. Newsreaders on the radio were required to translate news bulletins into Gaelic from 1959 onwards and developed a consistent, formal register for broadcasting. Characteristic of this register are use of the passive voice, borrowings, glossing and calques for new lexical items, and decreasing conservatism in the use of the genitive case. This study is extended in Lamb (2008) and identifies a continuum of conservatism in morphology and syntax

from conversation to formal prose. These results are clearly reflective of sociolinguistic approaches to style such as that of Labov (1972). However, authors such as Dorian (2010) suggest that endangered languages can become 'mono stylistic'. Lamb demonstrates that this is not the case in the context of Gaelic.

Cole (2013, 2015) investigates the possibility of morphosyntactic change in Uist (Outer Hebrides) Gaelic due to language contact and minoritisation. Cole's work shows that the context of Uist today is not similar to that of East Sutherland in Dorian's work. Cole investigated production of word-initial mutations and found no differences between older fluent adults (aged sixty–eighty) and younger fluent adults (aged thirty–fifty). Cole concludes that the social context of Gaelic and revitalisation strategies may lead to speakers consciously adhering to possible 'standards', a factor which would not have been relevant when Dorian's work was conducted.

The micro-interactional context of Gaelic usage across generations in contemporary Highland and Island contexts is examined in Smith-Christmas (2016). This long-term ethnographic study considers data from three generations of an extended family on Skye. Conversation Analysis of the recorded speech shows that the oldest speakers use Gaelic–English code-switching for interactional purposes as fluent bilinguals. The youngest generation, however, are socialised into associating Gaelic with discipline contexts, or educational settings (Smith-Christmas 2017). In this family, the Family Language Policy is directed towards the usage of Gaelic, though this is challenging among extended family members and demonstrates the wider minoritisation of Gaelic in communities such as Skye and the challenges of intergenerational transmission (Smith-Christmas 2014, 2019).

11.5.2 Gaelic in Immersion Education

As discussed above, GME is a major component of the revitalisation strategy for Gaelic. Even in communities in the Outer Hebrides, GME has become the principal route for language acquisition (Munro et al. 2011). A shift from community to school transmission of the language will understandably have consequences for language structure and production. GME pupils are confident and proud of their Gaelic usage (MacLeod and MacLeod 2019; NicLeòid 2015), and the linguistic form of this language is investigated in Nance (2014, 2015a, 2020), specifically focusing on phonetics and phonology.

As well as specific aspects of phonetics and phonology discussed in the previous and following sections, Nance (2020) also discusses the interaction between the bilingual nature of GME children and the social effect of acquiring Gaelic (almost) entirely through the school system. Notably, Nance (2020) does not find differences between children who acquired Gaelic at home and

those who acquired it through the school system in children aged seven–eleven considering pre-aspiration and laterals. This finding is mirrored in other minority-language schooling contexts (Mayr et al. 2017). Nance suggests that the peer group in a GME classroom and limited Gaelic usage outside of school acts as a levelling influence and allows children who did not acquire Gaelic in the home to attain similar levels (of phonetics and phonology) to those who did.

Such results allow consideration of the possibility of dialect levelling as a wider phenomenon resulting from widespread access to GME. This is discussed specifically in Lamb (2011) and McLeod (2017). Lamb provides systematic analysis of the origin of GME teachers and likely lessening of dialect diversity which might result from them educating children. Similarly, McLeod (2017) considers the wider context of Gaelic revitalisation including the development of a 'quasi standard' variety popularly referred to as 'Mid Minch Gaelic'. The Minch is the sea between the Outer Hebrides and the Scottish mainland and 'Mid Minch' provides a Gaelic analogy to 'Mid Atlantic English'. McLeod suggests that standardisation and levelling of traditional dialects may be an outcome of programmes such as GME.

11.5.3 Gaelic in New Locations

As well as expanding to new conceptual spaces such as education, politics and national strategy, Gaelic has also expanded to new geographical areas. Section 11.3.3 discussed the experience of Gaelic speakers in the lowlands in cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh. In this section, I consider the linguistic behaviour of such speakers. The Gaelic of adolescents in GME in Glasgow is discussed in Nance (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2018) and Nance and Moran (2022). Specifically, Nance finds that adolescent Glaswegians are less likely than age-matched counterparts in the Outer Hebrides (Lewis) to reproduce the Gaelic three-way lateral system (Nance 2014). The context in Glasgow does not, however, represent a simple case of the loss of complex systems (e.g. Dorian 1981). Nance (2015a, 2015b) demonstrates that the Gaelic spoken by these young people is distinctly Glaswegian, including use of Glaswegian rise-plateau intonation, extremely dark laterals, and distinct vowel realisations. It is argued that this is linked to identity and sociolinguistic factors in these young people from Glasgow (Nance and Moran 2022).

This Glaswegian innovation in Gaelic production leaves open the question as to whether revitalisation of Gaelic will lead to the development of new dialects in parallel with the potential levelling of traditional varieties discussed above. This question is discussed in McLeod (2017), Nance (2015a, 2018), and Nance and Moran (2022). They conclude that although Gaelic as spoken by young people from Glasgow is different from Gaelic spoken in the

Highlands and Islands, it is unlikely to become a new dialect as per the models of, for example, Kerswill and Williams (2000) and Trudgill (2004). Currently, few former GME pupils use Gaelic in later life and are unlikely to pass it on to their children via family transmission (Dunmore 2019). Although they seem motivated to send their children to GME, this does not provide the stage of transmission in the model of new dialect formation. The numbers of children being raised in Gaelic by speakers who learned the distinct Glaswegian GME variety is unknown but is likely to be extremely small. It is currently unlikely, therefore, that a focused new dialect of Gaelic will emerge in lowland cities at the moment.

As discussed above, a major development for Gaelic as a result of language revitalisation has been the creation of relatively large numbers of speakers who learned Gaelic outwith the home context. These new speakers are frequently extremely fluent, holding important jobs in the social hierarchy of Gaelic, such as in politics, education and at universities (McLeod et al. 2014). The linguistic productions of adult new speakers in lowland Scotland are explored in Nance et al. (2016). The authors compared productions of word-final rhotics to narratives about accent aim among the new speakers. They showed that some speakers specifically choose to acquire a traditional dialect, and can be successful in doing so, but others aim more for a new speaker model which is not linked to a specific dialect. This work indicates that new speakers are partly constrained by their bilingual status and show some effects of cross-linguistic influence from their L1. However, their high levels of motivation and political engagement in Gaelic activism have led them to make considered choices about the accent they are aiming for, and these are reflected in their speech.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical developments which led to the current status of Gaelic as a language simultaneously undergoing obsolescence and revitalisation. As well as outlining the traditional linguistic structure of Gaelic grammar and phonology, I have provided a summary of recent linguistic work which shows the exciting intersection of the social context of Gaelic and developments in language production. Research in the context of Gaelic continues to explore the legacy of language obsolescence but also the innovation occurring from the opportunity of revitalisation.

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