



## REVIEW

Dunmore, Stuart S. 2019. *Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 224 pages. ISBN: 978-1-474443111

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Dunmore's recently published book: *Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology*, with its stated aim of exploring the long-term outcomes of bilingual education in Scotland and the subsequent implications for the revitalisation of the Gaelic language, appears at a particularly opportune moment. Gaelic-medium education (GME) has been offered in Scottish primary schools since 1985, and has developed beyond its modest beginnings to become a well-established component of the Scottish educational system, even if only about 3% of children in Scotland attend GME (2018 / 2019) (Galloway, 2019)<sup>1</sup>. This book examines in depth the language use and attitudinal perceptions of a sample of 130 adults who had previously received GME at primary school, and furthermore elucidates the author's 'ethnography of speaking' approach to explore 46 interviewees' beliefs and ideologies about Gaelic. Overall, the book provides a cohesive discussion and analysis of narratives of the research participants in order to demonstrate their present-day relationships to the languages they speak or with which they have some sort of connection.

Chapter 1 of the book contextualises the key themes within the sociological and historical setting of Gaelic in Scotland and locates the role assigned to bilingual immersion education in the context of language revitalisation in general. Chapter 2 situates and contextualises the book in the wider sociolinguistic fields it is related to. Chapter 3 introduces the specific context and research design of the study, starting with a condensed overview of GME in Scotland, and then moving on to summarise the overall design of the research, which uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. This chapter also includes

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<sup>1</sup> Galloway, J. (2019). *Dàta Foghlam Gàidhlig / Gaelic Education Data*. Retrieved from Inverness: <http://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dàta-Foghlaim-AM-FOLLAIS-2018-19-egn-2-PUBLIC-Education-Data-1.pdf>

an outline and a description of the group of participants who were involved in the research. Chapter 4 provides a qualitative analysis of interviewees' Gaelic language use, socialisation experiences in the home and community, and within the school setting. Chapter 5 then moves on to analysing the language ideologies that participants demonstrated (both overtly and covertly) in the interviews, and explores the relationship between these ideologies and the participants' attitudes towards Gaelic. Finally, Chapter 6 draws together conclusions from the previous chapters in order to make recommendations for policymakers, language advocates and educators.

Chapter 1, as mentioned above, sets the scene for the background of the book, and covers what the author describes as a 'lacuna' (p. 1) in the examination of the long-term effects and outcomes of GME and further notes that little research has been carried out on the life trajectories of Gaelic learners/new speakers (p. 3). Over the course of the chapter, Dunmore considers the shift of Gaelic towards Scots and English and notes that this is not a recent phenomenon, since the roots of the shift can be traced back to just under 1000 years and which he places in a comparative context with other situations of language shift (p. 4). The chapter includes a succinct discussion on the link between language and identity (p. 8), which leads him on to consider the sometimes 'hybrid nature' of many learners of Gaelic, and that what counts as being a 'bilingual' in one context (e.g. in a traditional Gaelic speaking community), may look very different in other, more urban contexts (pp. 9-10). The author is to be congratulated for his careful and sensitive handling of the topic of additive bilingualism, since he successfully avoids the polemics of certain acerbic debates which circulate in Scotland (and elsewhere) over the nature of minority language acquisition. The remainder of the chapter engages with the Fishmanian concept of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) (Fishman 1991, 2001)<sup>2</sup> and which he critiques based on work by Romaine and Edwards, *inter alios*. Sometimes the critique holds back a little – for example, his example of Fishman's lack of enthusiasm for 'specific non-mother-tongue functions' as the aim of some revitalisation programmes could easily have been balanced by exploring more Dorian's (1987)<sup>3</sup> work on the ways community and school support of a threatened language can mitigate some of the negativity

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<sup>2</sup> Fishman, J. A. (1991) *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. / Fishman, J. A. (ed.) (2001) *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? Reversing Language Shift Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

<sup>3</sup> Dorian, N. (1987) 'The value of language-maintenance efforts which are unlikely to succeed', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68: 57-67.

surrounding the language and its speakers – surely a worthwhile aim in itself. Moreover, the chapter could have benefitted from a little more exploration of Hornberger’s (2008)<sup>4</sup> edited volume on the role of schools in helping ‘save’ minority and indigenous languages in strengthening the overall perspective of the chapter.

Chapter 2 discusses in detail the multidisciplinary relationship of language and identities, examining in particular how research in socio- and applied linguistics, anthropology, psychology and sociology has consistently demonstrated that the nexus of language, culture and identity is profoundly complex. Dunmore asserts – correctly – that while identity can be conveyed, communicated and constructed through particular languages, language can also have a distinctly separate role as a symbol of group identity, irrespective of its continued use or otherwise in social contexts. A particularly useful discussion in this chapter focuses on the ways in and extent to which children and other learners are exposed to and immersed in a particular language throughout the lifespan can have important implications for their attitude toward and use of minority languages in later life. Dunmore argues that longitudinal studies which explore the relationship between minority language acquisition, socialisation and ideologies and attitudes held by learners/new speakers toward their target language are sorely lacking, a point it is hard to disagree with.

Chapter 3 provides a very useful overview of the development of GME in Scotland, particularly for those readers who might be less than familiar with the Scottish education system. The chapter is rich in detail – not only is the history of the GME initiative given, the reader is further treated to wider, societal attitudes towards the establishing of GME units in Glasgow, and is referred to the viewpoints of government ministers, parents and other key stakeholders regarding the initiative (pp. 47-48). Just as importantly, Dunmore also brings to the fore the limitations of the impact of immersion education for the revitalisation of the Gaelic language (pp. 49-53), in a balanced way that characterises much of the author’s style of writing. The remainder of the chapter provides the reader with a clear and transparent exposé of his methodology, which is carefully triangulated and also mixed – both quantitative and qualitative analyses have been employed with regard to the data generated. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the analysis of the sociolinguistic questionnaire Dunmore gave to his research participants. He concludes that there is a “clear picture of limited ongoing Gaelic use among the majority of [the] 130 Gaelic-medium educated adults who participated in the study, particularly in respect of

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<sup>4</sup> Hornberger, N. (ed.) (2008) *Can Schools Save Indigenous Languages? Policy and Practice on Four Continents*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

the key domains of home and community, which [...] have frequently been theorised to be crucial to language maintenance” (p. 107), which he foregrounded in the previous chapter.

Chapter 5 examines the language ideologies expressed by the research participants during Dunmore’s study. A very important and over-arching point which he makes about ideologies, and which appears to have been overlooked in previous studies concerning revitalisation which is heavily dependent on immersion education, is that the attitudes expressed “appeared in many instances to rationalise the language use patterns observed in Chapter 4, particularly in respect of interviewees’ somewhat limited identification with the language in cultural terms” (p. 140). Dunmore has thus identified a particularly important dynamic for many new speakers of minority languages which sees them trying to ‘make sense’ of their linguistic practices in ways which allow them to still identify as speakers, but in ways which often fall short of an (imagined) ideal of the ‘perfect speaker’. Another important point he makes in this chapter is that, while on one level new speakers of Gaelic can coherently rationalise their sometimes non-traditional linguistic practices, a sense of guilt and of duty toward the language are *also* apparent in their discourses, suggesting many new speakers have to self-negotiate their positions and work to achieve a legitimate sense of ‘self’ in many Gaelic-language settings. This apparent contradiction could have been further drawn out in this chapter, particularly with reference to Bourdieu’s (1998 [2001])<sup>5</sup> work on emotions, whose approach allows for the recognition of the politics of emotion; and, as Reddy’s (2001)<sup>6</sup> work has convincingly shown, dissonance between feelings and thoughts is a kind of clash of practices that can generate personal, social, and historical change. Such an approach would have allowed a more insightful commentary on, for example, the ‘extreme’ statement of the research participant on page 132, who did not see Gaelic as a national language of Scotland.

Finally, in Chapter 6, Dunmore draws a number of conclusions from his discussions in previous chapters. Dunmore notes that his own volume, “provides robust empirical evidence for the first time of the likely long-term social and linguistic outcomes, not only of GME, but also of minority language ‘immersion revitalisation’ education [...] in comparable contexts throughout the world” (p. 152), and there is little doubt that this book advances our knowledge of the field considerably. Recognising the limitations of his study, he calls for

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Masculine Domination* (trans. Richard Nice, 2001). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Reddy W. M. (2001) *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

further “fine-grained ethnographic and longitudinal research [which] would yield invaluable data on the relationship of these variables to Gaelic language use in school years, after GME, and further along, when greater proportions of GME leavers have started families of their own” (p. 153).

Throughout his volume, Dunmore cautions against an “over-reliance on the education system as a means of creating new speakers of minority languages” (p. 154) and when he writes that “the generally limited Gaelic language use that former Gaelic-medium students report in this investigation is likely to be a source of considerable disappointment and frustration” (p. 153), one senses that Dunmore shares this sense of disappointment. The study most certainly points to a lack of prior ideological clarification in the efforts to revitalise Gaelic in Scotland in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and it feels as if Dunmore has adopted the intergenerational transmission model of language revitalisation as the de facto aim that revitalisation efforts *should* have been producing. Such an ideological stance on the part of the author is, of course, perfectly understandable, but I am left wondering if the other outcomes of Gaelic revitalisation, which Dunmore mentions in passing, could have been discussed a little more. For example, he recognises that while “the majority of participants would struggle to provide a Gaelic-rich home environment for potential children in future, in spite of their beliefs and best intentions in this regard” (p. 152), they **are** able to use their Gaelic by participating “in Gaelic employment or study [which] appeared also to facilitate access to networks in which the language is used socially” (p. 152). It could be argued that this aspect was not the primary focus of the study itself, but I do feel that researchers, especially those working in comparative fields, would have liked to have heard a little more about these networks, especially in the ways that they operate at the current time. After all, there has long been an underlying assumption, not made explicit by the language planning body for Gaelic, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, but which was implicit from their first Gaelic plan – see Dunbar (2006)<sup>7</sup> – that it is the “Strubellian model of revitalisation” (Catherine wheel) that is being followed. Marsaili MacLeod (2009)<sup>8</sup> has also written about the importance of employment as creating new social networks and thus (potentially) the (increased) use of Gaelic. But such a study may in fact

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<sup>7</sup> Dunbar, R. (2006) Gaelic in Scotland: the legal and institutional framework. In W. McLeod (ed.) *Revitalising Gaelic in Scotland – Policy, Planning and Public Discourse* (pp. 1-25). Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

<sup>8</sup> MacLeod, M. (2009) Gaelic Language Skills in the Workplace. In J. M. Kirk & D. P. O Baoill (Eds.), *Language and Economic Development: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland* (1 ed., pp. 134-152). Belfast: Clo Ollscoil na Banríona.

cover enough material for a further book by the author. This is not to detract from the overall impact of the volume, however, which is very accessible for a number of different audiences, and as the author himself states, provides us with such data on GME for the first time. The book will prove to be a very valuable resource for language educators, policy makers, and scholars of language death and revitalisation for many years to come.