

'New Speakers' of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow

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1 Introduction

This report presents the results of a small-scale investigation into the backgrounds, experiences and views of a group of ‘new speakers’ of Gaelic in the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The research was funded by a small grant from Soillse, the research network to promote research to sustain Gaelic in Scotland, and is being taken forward within the research programme of COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action IS1306, ‘New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges’, which brings together researchers from 23 European countries.¹

The term ‘new speaker’ has come to the fore in sociolinguistics in recent years (see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 2013; O’Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo in press) and there is as yet no universally applicable and agreed definition. For the purposes of this report, the term ‘new speaker of Gaelic’ is used to refer to people who did not acquire Gaelic in the home when growing up, but have nevertheless acquired Gaelic to a significant degree of competence and are now making active use of the language in their lives. This is itself a fairly expansive definition, and there are significant divergences in the learning trajectories and usage patterns of the participants in this study.

In the past, the ‘new speaker’ category has been examined using other terms and concepts, some of them more familiar, including ‘non-native speaker’, ‘second-language speaker’, ‘L2 speaker’, ‘learner’ and so on. The use of the term ‘new speaker’ can be understood as an attempt to move away from some of the older labels and concepts which have been shown to be problematic, including ‘native’ speaker and ‘nativeness’ (see Davies 2003 for critique)

The structure of the report is as follows. Beginning with a summary of previous relevant research, the design of the study is presented, together with an overview of the backgrounds of those who took part. The report then moves on to consider:

- participants’ Gaelic learning trajectories and motivations
- participants’ use of Gaelic in their family, social and work lives
- participants’ views on issues of identity and classification, such as what it means to be a ‘Gael’ or a ‘(new) speaker of Gaelic’
- participants’ perceptions of different varieties of Gaelic, including the Gaelic of new speakers
- participants’ perceptions of the relationship between new speakers of Gaelic and traditional or native speakers
- participants’ perspectives on the nature of urban Gaelic communities
- participants’ views on the situation of Gaelic in Scotland, including views on current Gaelic development policy and the possible impact of Scottish independence

The report concludes with a summary of further work that is planned, including additional work with the data already gathered and plans for new research on this topic. This report is

¹See http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1306.

essentially a summary overview of key issues that arose from this research and more refined analysis will follow in subsequent publications.

2 Previous research on ‘new speakers’ of Gaelic and adult Gaelic ‘learners’

The current research is groundbreaking in Scotland in that it focuses specifically on adults who have learned Gaelic to a significant degree of competence and are making active use of the language in their lives. Earlier research has either tended to focus on individuals who are actively engaged in the process of learning the language, some of them at an elementary stage (McEwan-Fujita 2010; McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim 2010), or has not differentiated between those who are ‘learning’ Gaelic and those who might be said to ‘have learned’ the language (MacCaluim 2007). Of course, as pointed out by several participants in this study, the process of learning a language – Gaelic, English, or whatever – never comes to an end, even for the ‘native speaker’, but there is an obvious difference between people who are attending classes or engaged in other programmatic learning activities and those who have ceased such activities after reaching what they consider to be an acceptable level of competence (Morgan 2000).

The commonly used term ‘Gaelic learner’ is partly to blame for this confusion. The shortcomings of the term ‘learner’ have been apparent for some time, leading some to search for alternative labels. The Gaelic organisation Clì (originally Comann an Luchd-ionnsachaidh, now Clì Gàidhlig) attempted to popularise the term *Gàidheal Ùr*, literally ‘New Gael’, in the early years of the 21st century, but this usage did not become widespread.² The term ‘new speaker’ is as yet not well known among Gaelic speakers, whether ‘new’ or ‘old’, and its potential usefulness is compounded by the the linguistic unwieldiness of the Gaelic equivalent, *neach/luchd-labhairt ùr(a) na Gàidhlig*. This was vividly demonstrated by one of the participants in this study, who struggled to articulate the phrase *luchd-labhairt ùra na Gàidhlig* and then made a mock gagging sound following her attempt to do so. An additional difficulty with the term ‘new speaker’ (as with ‘new Gael’) is the possibility of an unfortunate semantic contradistinction with what might implicitly be understood as ‘old’ speakers, with the accompanying suggestion that the ‘new’ is somehow more interesting or attractive than the ‘old’.

This study’s focus on people who have reached a significant level of competence also differs from earlier work on ‘learners’ in that the participants in this study all had extensive first-hand experience of the sociolinguistic dynamics of Gaelic over the course of several or many years and were less likely than early-stage learners to express views based on limited and perhaps unrepresentative personal experiences. In addition, they were often highly informed about policy and political issues relating to the language.

Three other studies should also be differentiated from the current one. One is a recent article by Timothy Currie Armstrong (2013) on ‘heritage learners’ of Gaelic, i.e. learners of the language who had extensive exposure to Gaelic while growing up but did not acquire active competence in it. There is only a small overlap with the current study, as very few of

²The term ‘*Gàidheal ùr*’ does retain limited currency, however, as demonstrated by the fact that two participants in this study spontaneously produced it when interviewed.

the participants here had significant exposure to Gaelic in their childhood, as discussed in section 3 below, and in addition a number of the participants in Armstrong's study had not (yet) reached a high level of competence in the language. The second work is Irene Pollock's analysis of the role of new speakers as teachers in immersion classrooms (Pollock 2010), but this was a study in educational policy and practice and did not involve qualitative work with the teachers themselves. The most relevant recent study is probably Gordon Wells' report for Soillse on perceptions of Gaelic learning and use in Uist (Wells 2011), although it focuses on a traditional Gaelic community in the Western Isles, and includes data from native speakers and intermediate learners as well as the more linguistically functional 'new speakers' considered in the current research. No attempt is made in this report to compare the data collected in this study with the data presented by Wells but the two studies may profitably be considered together.

3 The research process and the research participants

This research involved semi-structured interviews with 23 individuals (50 minutes in duration on average) and two focus group sessions involving an additional 12 people (7 in Edinburgh, 82 minutes in duration; 5 in Glasgow, 60 minutes in duration).³ This fieldwork was conducted between February and August 2013. Fifteen interviews were conducted by Wilson McLeod, who also facilitated the focus group sessions, seven by Stuart Dunmore and one by Joan Macdonald. The interviews were transcribed by an external agency, which was unable to complete the transcription work before 25 February 2014, with a consequent delay in the submission of this report.⁴ The focus group sessions and all but one⁵ of the interviews were conducted in Gaelic, which demonstrates that all participants had reached a significant level of ability in Gaelic. One interview was conducted by telephone but the remainder in a mix of locations, including interviewees' homes or workplaces, cafés, or the department of Celtic & Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University. The Edinburgh focus group meeting was also held in the department of Celtic & Scottish Studies while the Glasgow group meeting was held at the department of Celtic & Gaelic at Glasgow University.

Some topics, such as current patterns of language use with partners and children, were explored in depth only in the interviews rather than the focus group sessions and thus some issues are referred to in the context of 'participants' (i.e. both interviewees and focus group participants, 35 individuals in total) and some in the context of 'interviewees' only (23 individuals).

The research was conducted in accordance with Heriot-Watt University's Code of Ethical Practice for Research with Human Subjects. For ethical reasons all participants are anonymous and some identifying details (including linguistic usages) have been altered or obscured. To this end all participants are referred to with female pronouns though in fact a majority were male. Each participant has been assigned a code beginning with A or F: the

³An additional short interview was conducted with one of the focus group participants at her request following the group meeting.

⁴Given the delay, we have not identified the agency here or in the acknowledgements.

⁵One interview was conducted partly in Gaelic but largely in English, at the request of the interviewee. This participant uses Gaelic regularly in her work, however, and her choice of English would not appear to be based on perceived linguistic inability.

23 interviewees (luchd-agallaimh) are coded A1-A23 and the focus group participants are coded F1-F12. The initial R means *rannsaiche* or researcher.

The sample was essentially one of convenience. In the first instance, a number of individuals known to the research team (personally or by reputation) were contacted by e-mail and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. Information about the project and a request for participation was also posted on several Gaelic social media sites and to various Gaelic organisations in Edinburgh and Glasgow. 17 participants were living in Edinburgh at the time of the research, 16 in Glasgow and the remaining 2 elsewhere in Central Scotland, but many do not originally come from the area, as discussed below.

In the absence of sociolinguistic surveys concerning the demographics of Gaelic speaking in Edinburgh and Glasgow,⁶ it is impossible to know the total number of new speakers in the two cities and, therefore, the extent to which the research participants are representative of this wider group. It is very unlikely, however, that the total number of new speakers (as defined above in terms of linguistic ability in Gaelic and regular use of Gaelic) in the two cities exceeds a few hundred at most. The participants in the current study include many of the individuals who are most active and visible on the Gaelic 'scene' in Edinburgh or Glasgow, and several work in Gaelic-related jobs (including teaching Gaelic to children or adults). Only five participants were employed full-time in jobs that did not involve Gaelic to any significant extent, and only one of these was in the commercial sector.

In terms of gender, there was a slight imbalance, with more male participants (20) than female (15). The gender distribution and age range of participants is set out in Table 1:

Table 1
Age and gender breakdown of participants

20-30:	9 (4F, 5M)	(25.6%)
30-40:	11 (6F, 5M)	(31.4%)
40-50:	7 (2F, 5M)	(20.0%)
50+:	8 (2F, 6M)	(22.8%)

Overall, 57% of participants were under 40 and less than a quarter (22.8%) over 50. The female participants tended to be younger than the male ones. Only four of the 15 female participants were over 40, as against 11 of the 20 males.

All the participants could read and write Gaelic, as demonstrated by the fact that arrangements for interviews and other practical matters were all dealt with by email, in Gaelic. This pattern is quite divergent from the overall Gaelic population in Scotland:

⁶McLeod (2005) gathered data from 105 fluent speakers of Gaelic in Edinburgh (mainly native speakers but including some new speakers) but did not attempt to quantify the overall speech community in the city. Census data is of very limited use here as this includes native speakers of Gaelic and, very likely, a number of individuals who cannot in fact speak Gaelic fluently. The number of Gaelic speakers recorded in the 2011 census was 3,176 in Edinburgh and 5,907 in Glasgow.

according to the 2011 census, only 67% of Gaelic speakers could read Gaelic and only 56% could write it.

As set out in Table 2, the majority of the participants (18 participants, 51.4%) were brought up in Central Scotland⁷ and another sixth (6 participants, 17.1%) in Highland Scotland. None originated in other parts of Scotland. Perhaps surprisingly, almost a third of the participants (31.4%, 11 participants) were brought up outside Scotland (with only one of these having a Scottish parent or parents). The largest group of these came from England (11.4%, 4 participants) and others came from Germany, Ireland and the USA (2 each) and one from another non-European country.

Table 2
Participants' place of upbringing

Central Belt	18	(51.4%)
Highland Scotland	6	(17.1%)
England	4	(11.4%)
Germany	2	(5.7%)
Ireland	2	(5.7%)
USA	2	(5.7%)
Other	1	(2.9%)

Given the lack of general information about the Gaelic speech community in Edinburgh and Glasgow, as discussed above, it is not possible to know the extent to which non-Scots might be over-represented among the participants in this study. However, one of the interviewees who had also spent time in Ireland commented that non-Scots seemed to be much more prominent in Gaelic circles in Scotland than was the case in Ireland. More subjectively, in choosing participants for the study some care was taken to limit the proportion of non-Scots; it would not have been difficult to find more non-Scottish participants.

The participants were very highly educated. Only one of the 35 participants did not have a university degree, and 15 had more than one university qualification (including teaching qualifications and professional diplomas as well as advanced academic degrees).⁸

In terms of their family backgrounds, most of the participants came from the upper socio-economic strata. Using the classifications in the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, the large majority of the 35 participants' fathers⁹ had worked in traditional

⁷Two of the participants who were born in Central Scotland spent some years outside the UK when they were growing up. Another was born outside the UK, but returned to Scotland at the age of two, and a fourth was born in another part of the UK and spent part of her childhood there.

⁸Another three participants were working towards additional postgraduate qualifications at the time of the research.

⁹Many of the participants' mothers also worked outside the home and the pattern of their employment was broadly similar to the fathers; for example, three participants' mothers were doctors.

professional occupations (including three doctors, three lawyers and three engineers) , modern professional occupations (including five teachers/lecturers) or middle or junior managerial positions (e.g. bank manager). Ten participants' fathers worked in technical or craft occupations (including two joiners and two mechanics) and only one in a routine manual or service occupation. Of participants' 70 parents, 34 had one or more university degrees, 17 had an occupational qualification (e.g. HNC, HND, teaching qualification), and 19 had no post-school qualifications. Twelve participants had two graduate parents and only four had two parents with no post-school qualifications.

One of the more surprising characteristics of the participants was the degree of their 'newness' as speakers of Gaelic in terms of their family connection to Gaelic. Almost half of the participants (48.6%, 17 individuals) had no known family connections to Gaelic at all, even going back centuries.¹⁰ Two of these reported barely knowing that the language even existed when they were growing up. No participants had two Gaelic-speaking parents, while only five (14.3%) had one Gaelic-speaking parent (three their father and two their mother).¹¹ An additional two participants (5.7%) had one or more Gaelic-speaking grandparents and a further eleven (31.4%) had Gaelic-speaking antecedents more than two generations back. Details are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Participants' family connection to Gaelic

One Gaelic-speaking parent	5	(14.3%)
One or more Gaelic-speaking grandparents	2	(5.7%)
More distant Gaelic family connections	11	(31.4%)
No known Gaelic family connections	17	(48.6%)

Of the participants with no family connections to Gaelic, almost none reported having had any significant contact with the language while they were growing up. Indeed, even one of the participants with a Gaelic-speaking parent made clear that their household was not a strongly Gaelic environment and did not have many Gaelic-speaking visitors. She did, however, have considerable contact with Gaelic on annual visits to her Gaelic parent's home village. Several of the respondents' parents had a strong interest in Scottish culture or politics, and some had a specific interest in Gaelic, as discussed below, but one (A14) described having been brought up (in Glasgow and the Highlands) more British than Scottish and having been '*car bàn*' ('a bit blank') in relation to Scottish culture.

Ten of the 23 interviewees reported advanced competence in a language other than English or Gaelic: the main languages in question were French, German,¹² Irish and

¹⁰Some of these participants had Irish antecedents, however, and assumed distant family connections to the Irish language, while three participants (two of them born in Ireland and one born in Scotland) had an Irish-speaking parent and a fourth had an Irish-speaking grandfather.

¹¹In one case the Gaelic-speaking parent died when the interviewee was still a young child, but the parent had not used Gaelic with her while she was still alive. In another case the parent was not a fluent Gaelic speaker due to a failure of transmission from the grandparental generation.

¹²Note that the two German participants had also learned at least one language in addition to German, Gaelic and English.

Spanish. In addition, three interviewees specifically referred to having acquired Scots in their homes and communities.

4 Processes and trajectories of Gaelic language acquisition

4.1 Learning structures and pathways

The participants in this study acquired Gaelic through diverse trajectories and by a variety of means. The great majority began to acquire Gaelic between the ages of 18 and 25. Three received their primary education through the medium of Gaelic¹³ and five others studied the language when they were of secondary school age,¹⁴ but the remaining 27 began to learn Gaelic as adults. Only two began to learn Gaelic when they were over the age of 30.

Given the differences in their ages, the fact that participants had generally begun to learn Gaelic in their late teens or early twenties means that some have been new speakers for many years – several decades in some cases – while others only learned Gaelic in the last few years (or, in at least two cases, were still actively learning it). Those new speakers who acquired Gaelic many years ago thus have a greater range and depth of experience in relation to Gaelic and have had a better opportunity to observe changes in its status over time.

Most participants had complex learning trajectories, mixing different kinds of courses and inputs. By far the most important inputs were university Gaelic degrees and long-term residential courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Fifteen participants (42%) had undergraduate degrees¹⁵ in Celtic/Gaelic and another four had studied Gaelic to some extent at university as an outside subject. Fourteen participants (40%) had spent at least a year at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) and another two had spent time at SMO on work placements, an input they described as being very important for the consolidation of their Gaelic skills. Others reported a learning path that involved evening classes of different kinds and short residential courses. Two who had learned Gaelic in the 1980s and 1990s reported informal conversation groups run by native speakers as playing an important role, and three who had learned Gaelic in recent years had taken Ùlpan classes. A few interviewees highlighted the importance of their informal or semi-formal social contacts with native speakers, at

¹³A fourth participant also learned some Gaelic (as a subject) while in primary school, but did not study the language in secondary school and only began in earnest after leaving university.

¹⁴Two of these participants had to attend classes organised by a local further education college or by their local authority as Gaelic was not offered at their schools.

¹⁵In addition to people who studied in the Celtic/Gaelic departments of the universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow, this figure includes five people who did degrees at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and thus overlaps with the figure given for participants who had studied at SMO. Note that three of those who completed degrees at SMO did so after they had already acquired Gaelic, e.g. one participant who had gone through Gaelic-medium education.

university and elsewhere, and several cited extensive input from Radio nan Gaidheal as playing an important role in their language learning. Two referred to the benefits of attending Gaelic church services and the related social interactions.

If time spent at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is excluded, it is striking how few of the participants had ever spent time living in Gaelic-speaking areas. Only six had spent more than a month in such an environment, though one had spent several years working in the Western Isles. A few others reported visiting Gaelic-speaking areas relatively frequently, either as children or adults, although the nature of these contacts varied considerably.

Considered as a whole, it is remarkable how minor an input the school education was in the formation of these 'new speakers'. Most obviously, the 31% who grew up outwith Scotland were not in a position to benefit from Gaelic teaching in Scottish schools, but it is striking how minor a role school education has played even for those educated in Scotland. Gaelic was simply not available to most of the participants when they were in school; this pattern reflects the very limited educational provision for Gaelic in most parts of Scotland, especially the Central Belt. In this respect the situation is very different from the position in Ireland, where almost all new speakers of Irish acquired a good competence in the language as a result of mandatory Irish lessons at school, even if they then decided to improve their ability and, in some cases, make more active use of the language at a point subsequent to their leaving school (O'Rourke and Walsh forthcoming).

More specifically, proactive steps were required to identify new speakers for this study who had gone through Gaelic-medium education (GME), and it would have been very difficult to locate more. This pattern aligns with the findings of Stuart Dunmore's current doctoral research, funded by Soillse, which suggests that few former GME pupils who did not come from Gaelic-speaking homes are now using their Gaelic frequently (Dunmore forthcoming). It is also backed up by the comment of one of the focus group participants who had gone through Gaelic-medium education, who observed that (as far as she was aware) she was the only person in her former primary school class who was now using Gaelic actively.

4.2 The experience of learning Gaelic: stages and obstacles

All the interviewees discussed in detail different aspects of their experiences learning Gaelic. These experiences varied considerably but some specific obstacles and opportunities were highlighted by several people.

It has long been recognised that learners of Gaelic do not have the immersion opportunities available to learners of other languages (see MacCaluim 2007; McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim 2010). One interviewee who had begun to learn Gaelic at university described how learning Gaelic required a real commitment and thus became a steadily more important element in her life:

A6: *Agus, tha mi a' smaointinn cuideachd, ma tha thu ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig, chan e rud as urrainn dhut a dhèanamh pàirt tìde.*

R: *No, chan e.*

B: *Nuair a bha mi san oilthigh, bha agam ri gach cothrom a ghlacadh so às dèidh greiseag dìreach mhothaich mi gun robh mi a' dèanamh a h-uile rud sa Ghàidhlig, you know? Dol dhan eaglais sa Ghàidhlig, ged nach robh mi airson dol dhan eaglais, you know? Agus dol dhan [bhuidheann] còmhraidh, ged a dh'fhaodadh e a bhith caran awkward aig amannan! Agus, a h-uile rud sin.*

R: *Dìreach airson na cothroman fhaighinn?*

B: *Yeah, dìreach airson na cothroman fhaighinn gus Gàidhlig ionnsachadh oir dh'fhàs e soilleir nach robh mi gu bhith ga dèanamh dìreach le bhith frithealadh clasaichean. Agus mar sin, yeah, às dèidh greiseag mhothaich mi gun robh i mar phàirt de mo bheatha an àite, dìreach, you know, cha b' e dìreach rud a bha mi ag ionnsachadh.*

(A6: And I also think that if you're going to learn Gaelic, it's not something you can do part-time.

R: No, it's not.

B: When I was at university, I had to take every opportunity so after a while I just noticed that I was doing everything in Gaelic. Going to church in Gaelic, even though I didn't want to go to church, you know? And going to the conversation group, though that could be a bit awkward at times And everything like that.

R: Just to have the opportunities.

B: Yeah, just to get the opportunities to learn Gaelic because it became clear that I wasn't going to do it just by attending classes. And so, yeah, after a while I noticed it was part of my life instead of, you know, it wasn't just something that I was learning.)

In a similar vein, another interviewee described how she maximised her opportunities to use the language:

A14: *Agus, a h-uile uair a bha mi ann an sin bha mi a' faotainn cothrom a bhith a' bruidhinn ri duine sam bith . . . ma chuala mi iad a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig, bhithinn a' dol a-nunn gu far an robh iad agus bhithinn dìreach a' suidh agus a' bruidhinn riutha agus 's ann mar sin a thog mi . . . mo chomas air Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn gu dearbh. A h-uile uair a chluinn[eas] mi cuideigin anns an aiseag ann an sin no ann am mòr-bhùth, no Sainsbury's no Asda no, cha robh e [gu diofar], bha mi a' bruidhinn ri duine sam bith.*

(A14: And, every time I was there [the 'Gaelic pubs' in the West End of Glasgow] I would take the opportunity to talk to anybody . . . If I heard them speaking Gaelic, I would go over to where they were and that's definitely how I developed my ability to speak Gaelic. Whenever I hear someone on the ferry or in the supermarket, Sainsbury's or Asda or whatever, I would speak to anybody.)

Some participants with experience working in the Gaelic sector reported that working in a Gaelic environment (in some cases just on work experience) had played a major role in boosting their language skills and helping them break through to confident fluency in Gaelic. One interviewee described her experience as follows:

A2: *Ach, b' e sin an dòigh as fheàrr a bh' ann airson a bhith ag ionnsachadh agus tha mise, tha mi a' smaoinichadh, air a' mhòr-chuid den ionnsachadh agam a dhèanamh tro m' obair agus dìreach tro a bhith ga cleachdadh agus ga bruidhinn. Agus, às aonais sin, chan eil fhios a'm am bithinn air tighinn air adhart cho mòr, chan eil fhios agam, ach dìreach tro obraichean Gàidhlig, tha mis' air a bhith gu math, math fortanach – gun robh agam ri Gàidhlig a chleachdadh anns gach fear dhiubh; bha sin cho feumail dhomh.*

(A2: But that was the best way to learn, and I, I think that I've done most of my learning through my work and just through using it and speaking it. And without that, I don't know if I would have progressed as far, I don't know, but just through Gaelic jobs, I've been really, really lucky – that I had to use Gaelic in all of them, that was so useful to me.)

Not surprisingly, the small group of interviewees who had spent time in Gaelic-speaking areas found that input to be very valuable. One of them summarised the benefits of her work experience (a number of years ago) while she was a university student:

R: And so you thought your Gaelic really came on from that experience?

A18: Totally. Totally. Because I was just surrounded by other people who were native speakers who were not – they weren't literate in Gaelic, most of them. They weren't, they weren't particularly confident, as usual with native speakers, but it was the habitual language and so I was introduced to something you would never have got – and I don't know if you can get it now, really.¹⁶

In contrast, another interviewee who had not had the benefit of living in a Gaelic-speaking area discussed the difficulties she had in finding suitable people to speak Gaelic with:

R: *Dè an duilgheadas as motha, nad bheachd, a bh' ann ann a bhith a' togail na Gàidhlig?*

A4: *'S e gun teagamh a' lorg daoine a tha a' dol a bhruidhinn Gàidhlig riut.*

A: *'S e sin an rud as doirbhe?*

A4: *Oh 's e, gun teagamh. Eil fhios agad – daoine nach eil a' dol a thionndadh dhan a' Bheurla ach a tha fileanta. Chan eil e cho doirbh daoine a lorg aig an aon ìre 's a tha thu; tha e doirbh daoine a lorg a tha nas fhileanta a tha thu. Sin na daoine a tha thu*

¹⁶This extract comes from the one interview that was conducted largely in English. Subsequent quotations from interviewee A18 are also in English.

dol a dh'ionnsachadh bhuapa. Chan eil thu dol a dh'ionnsachadh an uiread de chà'nain còmhla ri daoine a tha strì aig an aon ìre 's a tha thusa, agus tha e gu math duilich na daoine sin a lorg.

(R: What's the biggest difficulty, in your opinion, in learning Gaelic?

A4: It's definitely finding people who are going to speak Gaelic to you.

R: That's the most difficult thing?

A4: Oh yes, definitely. You know – people who aren't going to switch to English but are fluent. It's not hard to find people who are at the same level as you; it's hard to find people who are more fluent than you. Those are the people you're going to learn from. You're not going to learn the same amount of language from people who are struggling at the same level that you're at, and it's quite hard to find those people [i.e. those who are more fluent].)

Another interviewee also pointed to this problem and noted that her accent in Gaelic had probably suffered through lack of contact with native speakers when she was a student:

A7: *. . . a' chuid bu mhotha dhen fheadhainn a bhiodh a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig, is e luchd-ionnsachaidh e bh' annta agus, mar sin, dh'ionnsaich mi Gàidhlig gu ìre mhòr bho luchd-ionnsachaidh eile. . . . Agus, mar sin chan eil blas uabhasach Gàidhealach agam, agus tha sin mar thoradh air a sin, tha mi a' smaointinn.*

(A7: Most of those who used Gaelic were learners and so to a great extent I learned Gaelic from other learners. And so I don't have a very Gaelic accent and I think that's as a result of that.)

5 Motivations for learning Gaelic

The interviewees reported a wide range of motivations for learning Gaelic. One noted that people's motivations tend to change over time, so that their reasons for starting to learn Gaelic in the first place might not be the same as those that pushed people to keep going and reach fluency.

The main reasons that interviewees gave for learning Gaelic are broadly in line with those reported in previous studies on Gaelic learners, such as the survey in McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim (2010: 25), except that the most popular reason cited there ('I would be helping to keep Gaelic alive') was not actually cited by any of the interviewees here. However, the survey in McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim 2010 was aimed at 'learners' in the narrower sense, with only about 5% of those taking part describing themselves as fluent in Gaelic, and so were very different from the new speakers who took part in the current study.

Several interviewees identified different kinds of motivations relating to their family backgrounds and history. Those with close family connections tended to feel this motivation

more personally. For example, one of the interviewees with a Gaelic-speaking parent reported feeling an attraction to Gaelic from a young age, while another (A19) described ‘*a’ faireachdainn gun robh i annam, mar gum biodh, mar phàirt dhìom agus, aig a’ cheart àm, nach robh mi a’ dèanamh dad mu dheidhinn*’ (‘feeling that it [Gaelic] was in me, as it were, that it was part of me and at the same time, that I wasn’t doing anything about it’). One focus group participant with a Gaelic-speaking grandparent also described feeling that without Gaelic she was lacking something (‘*bha mi faireachdainn gun robh rud a dhìth orm*’ (F4)). In addition to the participants with close family connections, one interviewee with only distant family links identified family history as one of the reasons motivating her to learn Gaelic, and in a slightly different way, an interviewee with no family connections to Gaelic cited the influence of her father, who had been very interested in Gaelic and other minority languages, and in the political issues surrounding them, even though he never acquired an advanced competence in Gaelic himself.

Six interviewees reported an interest in Gaelic music as a factor drawing them to learn the language. Two of these had been involved in a Gaelic choir or in the Fèisean when they were growing up; these interviewees reported that learning to sing Gaelic songs was particularly helpful for their Gaelic pronunciation once they began to learn the language in earnest. Two others specifically cited Runrig, and two a more general interest in folk music.

Several interviewees identified factors relating to Scottish culture as reasons for learning Gaelic. Three reported an interest in place-names, two wanted to expand their knowledge of Scottish literature and culture, and one noted an interest in Scottish history and a desire to understand the Gaelic terms used in historical texts. Several interviewees explained that there were interested in languages generally.

One focus group participant expressed her thoughts as follows:

F9: *Tha ùidh agamsa ann an . . . anns an dùthaich, mar a tha i, mar a bha i – dè thachair dhan dùthaich seo gus am bi i mar a tha i an là an diugh. Agus cha bhiodh tuigse idir agamsa air sin nan robh mi aineolach air a’ Ghàidhlig. Chan eil mi a’ tuigsinn acadamaigich a tha a’ toirt a chreids’ gu bheil iad a’ teagasg eachdraidh na h-Alba agus litreachas na h-Alba agus tha iad aineolach mun Ghàidhlig idir – tha siud car cruaidh orra ach [gàireachdainn], tha cuid aca a’ dèanamh oidhirp – ach chan eil mi smaointinn gu bheil . . . ’s e beàrn mhòr, mhòr [dìth na Gàidhlig], chan urrainn dhomh smaointinn an-dràsta a bhith beò ann an dùthaich far a bheil barrachd air aon cànan agus a bhith dìreach a’ smaointinn ‘o, cumaidh mi an doras sin glaiste’.*

(F9: I’m interested in . . . in the country, how it is, how it was – what happened to this country to make it as it is today. And I wouldn’t understand that at all if I was ignorant of Gaelic. I don’t understand academics who would have you believe that they’re teaching Scottish history and Scottish literature while they’re totally ignorant of Gaelic – that’s a bit hard on them [laughs], some of them are trying – but I don’t think that . . . it’s a big, big gap [not having Gaelic], I can’t think now of living in a country that has more than one language and just thinking ‘Oh, I’ll keep that door locked’.)

Two participants had begun to learn Gaelic after deciding to enrol their children in Gaelic-medium education. One of these had a Gaelic-speaking parent but the other had no family ties to Gaelic and the decision to place her child in Gaelic-medium education was to some extent a matter of convenience.

A small number of participants suggested that their decision to begin learning Gaelic was largely fortuitous. One had simply chosen Gaelic as an outside subject at university, wishing to do a 'Scottish' subject, and one described her initial decision to take a Gaelic class as 'a passing whim' (A5).

There were interesting differences in interviewees' perspectives on the role of Scottish independence and identity as a possible motivating factor for learning Gaelic. Two interviewees cited their support for independence as a factor, but one of them explained that her perspective had changed over time:

A7: *Bha mi a' faireachdainn gur e cànan nàiseanta na h-Alba a th' innte agus gum bu chòir dhi a bhith agam, agus gun robh mi a' bruidhinn mo chànan fhèin. You know, bha mi a' faireachdainn uabhasach poilitigeach mun a' Ghàidhlig nuair a thòisich mi ga h-ionnsachadh . . . bha mi ag iarraidh rudeigin positive a dhèanamh airson Alba agus chuir mi romham Gàidhlig ionnsachadh. . . . Ach, a-nise tha mi a' faireachdainn gur i mo chànan màthaireil a chionn 's gum bi mi ga bruidhinn, is gu bheil mi uabhasach cofhurtail innte, chan eil mi a' faireachdainn poilitigeach mu dheidhinn. Agus, a-nise, an àite a bhith mar phàirt den t-strì nàiseanta, tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig nas cudromaiche. Chan eil mo chuid poilitigs air atharrachadh ach tha mi a' faireachdainn na Gàidhlig mar rud nas cudromaiche.*

(A7: I felt that it was the national language of Scotland and that I should have it, and that I was speaking my own language. You know, I felt really political about Gaelic when I started to learn it . . . I wanted to do something positive for Scotland and I decided to learn Gaelic . . . But now I feel that it's my mother tongue because I speak it, and I'm really comfortable in it, but I don't feel very political about it. And now, instead of being part of the national struggle, I think Gaelic is more important. My politics haven't changed but I feel that Gaelic is something more important.)

Conversely, another interviewee made clear that although she was a strong supporter of Scottish independence this had played no role in her decision to learn Gaelic, and another expressed her perspective on the relationship between Gaelic and Scottish identity as follows:

A9: *Tha mi a' faireachdainn gu math Albannach – tha mi gu math pròiseil às Alba agus gur ann à Alba a tha mi ach cha robh a-riamh a' buntainn no a' toirt buaidh air carson a tha mi ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig no mar a tha mi a' faireachdainn nuair a tha mi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig agus cha bhi mi a' faireachdainn nas Albannaiche nuair a tha mi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig; is e fèin-aithne eadar-dhealaichte a th' ann.*

(A9: I feel very Scottish – I'm very proud of Scotland and proud that I'm from Scotland but that's never related to or affected why I'm learning Gaelic or how I feel when I

speak Gaelic and I don't feel more Scottish when I speak Gaelic; it's a different identity.)

Another interviewee explained that although she had not begun to learn Gaelic for reasons connected to Scottish identity, she felt strongly that she had a better understanding of Scottish culture and that learning Gaelic had made a difference in terms of her Scottish identity:

R: *A bheil thu a' faireachdainn gu bheil tuigse nas motha agad a-nise air sgàth na Gàidhlig air cultar na h-Alba?*

A5: *Tha, tha. Channainnsa gun teagamh sam bith.*

*

A5: *A thaobh fèin-aithne Albannach, rinn e diofar dhòmhsa a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig.*

*

A5: *Chanainn gun do dh'atharraich e mo bheatha, a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig. Dh'fhosgail e mo shùilean gu a bhith a' faicinn rudan gu . . . mu dheidhinn na h-Alba, mu dheidhinn eachdraidh na h-Alba.*

(R: Do you feel that you have a greater understanding of Scottish culture now because of Gaelic?

A5: Yes, yes. I'd definitely say that.

*

A5: With regard to Scottish identity, learning Gaelic made a big difference to me.

*

A5: I'd say that it changed my life, learning Gaelic. It opened my eyes to see things . . . about Scotland, about Scottish history.)¹⁷

6 Gaelic use with partners and families

All the participants in this study made use of their Gaelic to some extent, but their personal circumstances varied considerably and these divergences had a major impact on the range and frequency of their Gaelic use.

¹⁷The extracts quoted here all came from the same section of the interview but in the reverse order, so that the first quoted extract came at the latest point in the interview.

6.1 Gaelic use with partners

Only three of the 15 interviewees with partners¹⁸ reported that their partner also spoke Gaelic fluently. In three other cases the partner had developed at least a reasonable passive understanding of the language, and one had taken some Gaelic courses and developed an intermediate speaking ability. Of the three partners who could speak Gaelic fluently,¹⁹ two had already learned Gaelic or were already consolidating Gaelic skills acquired in the home at the time the couple met each other; in other words, the formation of the relationship did not lead the other partner to learn Gaelic. The only example of a partner learning Gaelic after meeting the other partner involved one of the interviewees who already had a knowledge of Irish, which helped her acquire Scottish Gaelic from her partner (also a new speaker). This pattern demonstrates that although the interviewees all made significant use of Gaelic in their lives, for most of them a very important aspect of their lives – interaction with their partner – was conducted overwhelmingly or entirely through English. The three interviewees with Gaelic-speaking partners reported that Gaelic was their normal means of communication with their partner, although one indicated that their linguistics practices had varied somewhat over time, with Gaelic receiving particular emphasis when their children were young.

6.2 Gaelic use with children

Seven of the 23 interviewees were parents of children and it was striking that all but one of them reported using Gaelic with their children consistently from the time of their birth. The exception was a parent who had started to learn Gaelic after making the decision to enrol the children in Gaelic-medium education. This interviewee reported using Gaelic with the children only occasionally, due largely to their own unwillingness to speak the language with her. The others, who had used Gaelic consistently with their children from the outset, reported various difficulties. One of the focus group participants commented as follows:

F11: *Uill, tha e caran doirbh, gu h-àraid nuair a bhios iad nas sine agus nuair a tha iad nan deugairean agus gu feumar suidh sìos agus bruidhinn riutha mar inbheach no dèiligeadh ri cùisean ann an dòighean diofraichte, tha e caran doirbh! (a' gàireachdainn).*

(F11: Well, it's a bit difficult, especially when they're older and when they're teenagers and you need to sit down and talk to them like adults or dealing with things in a different way, it's a bit difficult! (laughs))

One interviewee reported that her children often replied in English when she spoke to them in Gaelic, but that they nevertheless refused to countenance the use of English in other circumstances:

¹⁸Some of these were same-sex partners, but the research did not attempt to engage with the specific issues facing LGBT new speakers, and only one interviewee discussed this issue in any detail.

¹⁹In one of these cases the other partner also participated in this study, attending one of the focus groups.

A19: *Tha cuimhne 'am, aon turas, nuair a bha [mo nighean], mu dheich 's dòcha, beagan na b' òige? Agus, 's dòcha gur e sin a' chiad turas na beatha a bhruidhinn mi rithe ann am Beurla – bha daoine eile mun cuairt, feumaidh. Agus thionndaidh i orm agus bha i cho fiadhaich – dìreach fiadhaich gun do rinn mi seo. Agus thuir i rium, “Feuch nach dèan thu seo tuilleadh!”*

R: *Ged a bhiodh i gad fhreagairt ann am Beurla!*

A19: *Sin agad e, sin agad e! Tha e [uabhasach] èibhinn. Agus bha i crosta, bha i crosta!*

(A19: I remember one time, when [my daughter] . . . was, about ten maybe, a little younger? And maybe that was the first time in her life that I had spoken to her in English – there must have been other people about. And she turned on me and she was so furious – just furious that I had done that. And she said to me, ‘Make sure you never do that again!’

R: Even though she would reply to you in English!

A19: Exactly, exactly! It's really funny. And she was angry, she was angry!

Another interviewee reported that the children did speak Gaelic to her but not among themselves.

With one exception, all the seven interviewees with children had all placed them into Gaelic-medium education. Some of them were still in primary school, some in secondary, and some were now adults. The only exception was an interviewee who was living abroad when the children were growing up but nevertheless used Gaelic with them consistently at home.

6.3 Gaelic use with other family members

As noted above, only three of the participants had a fluent Gaelic-speaking parent who was still living by the time they learned Gaelic. All of these reported that they had managed to establish Gaelic as the main language of communication with their Gaelic-speaking parent. This was not necessarily a straightforward process:

A22: *So, tilleadh gu mu mhàthair: aon uair is gun robh mi car fileanta, bha i gu math na bu dèonaiche Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn rium. Agus chanainnsa anns na [bliadhnaichean] mu dheireadh dhe beatha, gu h-àraid leis gun do dh'eug m' athair car tràth, gur e Gàidhlig a bhiodh eadar an dithis againn . . .*

E: *Agus an robh e duilich an gluasad sin a dhèanamh?*

A22: *Thàinig e, thàinig e, mean air mhean.*

R: *An do bhruidhinn sibh mu dheidhinn sin air no an e dìreach rud a thachair?*

A22: *O, tha mi cinnteach gun robh mise car a' putadh air a shon, bha mi car làidir a thaobh na Gàidhlig, bha mi airson cothroman fhaighinn a cleachdadh, so, bhithinn-sa feuchainn ri Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn rithe, 's mar a b' fheàrr, mar a b' fhasa a bha sin dhàsan, 's ann bu deònaiche a bha i.*

(A22: So, returning to my mother, once I had become pretty fluent, she was a lot more willing to speak Gaelic to me. And I'd say that in the last years of her life, especially since my father died quite young, that it was Gaelic that was used between the two of us . . .

E: And was it difficult to make that move?

A22: It came, it came, gradually.

R: Did you talk about that or is it just something that happened?

A22: Oh, I'm sure that I was kind of pushing for it, I was pretty strong about Gaelic, I wanted opportunities to use it, so I would try to speak Gaelic to her, and as she got better, as that got easier for her, she was more willing to do that.)

This interviewee also reported that her mother spoke Gaelic to the interviewee's children, although she had not transmitted it to her own children (including the interviewee).

One of the focus group participants with a Gaelic-speaking grandparent also reported that Gaelic had become the normal language of communication between them since she had become fluent in Gaelic.

Another interviewee reported that her mother had now learned Gaelic and that they had now established Gaelic as their main language of communication. In this case the mother had a Gaelic-speaking parent herself (i.e. the interviewee's grandparent). This interviewee also reported having made a similar move to establish Gaelic as the language of communication with Gaelic-speaking school friends with whom she had originally communicated in English, and claimed not to have found this transition difficult.

There were several other instances of participants influencing other relatives to learn Gaelic. One reported that she had used Gaelic consistently with her sister's son from the time of his birth and that he is now enrolled in Gaelic-medium education, and that the sister has now also begun to learn Gaelic quite seriously. Four others had inspired their parents to take Gaelic classes, and two of these had reached a good intermediate competence.²⁰

²⁰Three interviewees noted that their own parents had tried to some extent to learn Gaelic (before the interviewees themselves acquired it) but none of them had reached a high level of competence in the language, although one had a very strong interest in Gaelic and in minority languages more generally.

Finally, two of the three interviewees who were living with flatmates at the time of the interview reported that one of their flatmates spoke Gaelic and that they used Gaelic to a significant extent when interacting with this flatmate. Five interviewees were living on their own and thus did not have opportunities of this kind.

7 Other contexts for Gaelic language use

Beyond the issue of home and family environments, interviewees reported varying patterns of Gaelic language use. Several were occupied full-time on Gaelic-related work (including self-employment) and this was an important context for them to use the language. Some interviewees had numerous Gaelic-speaking friends, others considerably fewer, and some were much more involved in Gaelic activities and events than others.

Asked whether she found many opportunities to use her Gaelic, one of the Glasgow interviewees responded:

A2: *Tha, o tha. Tha mi a' smaoinneachadh thar nam bliadhnachan, eil fhios agad, gu bheil mi air eòlas a chur air tòrr dhaoine a-niste aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig. Agus, dìreach a thaobh na . . . na seòrsa rudan a bhithinn a' dèanamh na mo bheatha shòisealta, mar gum biodh, bidh mi a' coinneachadh ri tòrr dhaoine gu math tric aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig, eil fhios agad? . . . Bidh mi ga bruidhinn aig an taigh agus cuideachd gu sòisealta; bidh mi ga cleachdadh, can, air-loidhne – na meadhanan sòisealta is rudan mar sin. So, tha tòrr chothroman agam a bhith ga bruidhinn is ga cleachdadh taobh a-muigh m' obair-sa.*

(A2: Yes, oh yes. I think that over the years, you know, I've got to know lots of people now who speak Gaelic. And, just with regard to the sorts of things I would do in my social life, as it were, I meet with lots of people with Gaelic quite often, you know? . . . I speak it at home and also socially; I use it, say, on-line – the social media and things like that. So, I have lots of opportunities to speak it and use it outside my work.)

Other interviewees, especially those in Glasgow and those who were relatively younger, expressed a similar view of the range of opportunities to use Gaelic. As one explained:

A7: *Tha mise a' fuireach tron a' Ghàidhlig a h-uile latha agus, um, tha mi a' faireachdainn gu bheil mi ann an coimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig no ann an lìonra Ghàidhlig, eil fhios agad? Na càirdean as fheàrr leam, you know, a chì mi as trice, tha Gàidhlig aca agus, you know, nam bithinnsa airson a bhith a dhol a-mach gu rudan Gàidhlig, b' urrainn dhomh sin a dhèanamh iomadh turas san t-seachdain.*

(A7: I live through Gaelic every day and, um, I feel that I'm in a Gaelic community or in a Gaelic network, you know? My best friends, you know, that I see most often, they speak Gaelic and, you know, if I wanted to go out to Gaelic things I could do that many times in the week.)

The issue of the nature of the 'community' in Edinburgh and Glasgow is discussed further in section 10 below.

In contrast, several of the Edinburgh interviewees felt that they lacked opportunities to use the language. One of them interviewees felt she was losing her fluency in Gaelic due to lack of opportunities to use the language, which she perceived as having diminished in recent years. She reported knowing few other Gaelic speakers and seeing them only occasionally. Another interviewee who had acquired Gaelic more than 25 years ago expressed a similar view, while another who used Gaelic at home with her partner and children indicated that weeks might go by without having the opportunity to use Gaelic in a group environment, with three or four people at once.

Two of the Edinburgh focus group participants agreed that it was easier to use Gaelic in some contexts than others and that people's opportunities were determined to some extent by their interests rather than their desire to use the language:

F1: Bidh e a' crochadh air na h-ùidhean eile a th' agadsa, am bi cothrom agad do Ghàidhlig a chumail air dòigh no nach bi.

(F1: It depends on your other interests, whether you'll have an opportunity to keep up your Gaelic or not.)

For example, one of the interviewees expressed a degree of frustration that so many Gaelic events involved traditional music, in which she had only a moderate interest.

Most interviewees indicated that only a minority of their friends could speak Gaelic. One (quoted above) explained that the friends that she saw most often spoke Gaelic, however, while another noted that her Gaelic-speaking friends had variable practices in relation to terms of using the language, with some of them much more consistent in, or even insistent on, using Gaelic.

One interviewee explained that she found it more difficult to speak Gaelic with closer friends with which more intimate topics might be discussed. She described her practices with one friend, also a new speaker, as follows:

A9: A-nise, tha sinn gu math dlùth ri chèile agus bidh sinn a' bruidhinn air tòrr chuspairean air, chan eil fhios agam, chan eil an comas agamsa no aicese cho math airson a bhith a' bruidhinn air cuid de na cuspairean mar sin ann an dòigh nàdarra agus so bidh sinn a' tionndadh chun a' Bheurla ach bidh sinn an uair sin a' tionndadh air ais chun a' Gàidhlig.

(A9: Now, we're quite close to each other and we talk about a lot of subjects about, I don't know, neither she nor I really has the ability to talk about some of those subjects in a natural way and so we switch to English but then we switch back to Gaelic.)

One interviewee suggested that she had many Gaelic-speaking acquaintances and contacts she had met through her work but that her social life was in English. Another interviewee who uses Gaelic in her work reported a contrast between her language use during the day and in the evenings: very extensive use of Gaelic during the day, but relatively little in the evenings.

The great majority of the interviewees described their non-Gaelic-speaking friends and relatives as being supportive of Gaelic and they reported very little hostility from non Gaelic-speakers. A minority of interviewees had a rather more mixed experience. One said that some of her friends saw Gaelic as a 'curio' (A13), another that some perceived it as 'parochial' (A3), and a third described being regularly challenged by some of her friends about the value or importance of Gaelic. On a slightly different point, another interviewee commented that using Gaelic in public in Edinburgh did not pose problems:

R: *Am bi thu a' faireachdainn aig amannan gu bheil daoine nàimhdeil rithe, no . . . ?*

A22: *Chan eil, no – cha do dh'fhairich mi sin a-riamh ann an Dùn Èideann. Tha e cho eadar-nàiseanta, Dùn Èideann, gu bheil leithid de chànanan ann. Gu math tric, tha mi cinnteach, cha bhi fios aig daoine cò an cànan a tha mi a' bruidhinn.*

(R: Do you sometimes feel that people are hostile to it [Gaelic], or . . . ?

A22: No, no – I've never felt that in Edinburgh. It's so international, Edinburgh, there are some many languages there. Often I'm sure that people won't know what language I'm speaking.)

Significantly, though, interviewees commented that few of their non-Gaelic speaking friends expressed an active interest in Gaelic or any desire to learn the language themselves. As one interviewee explained:

A5 *Tha mi air tòrr rudan inntinneach a dhèanamh air sgàth na Gàidhlig, air sgàth is gun robh Gàidhlig agam nach robh mi air a dhèanamh mura robh Gàidhlig agam Chan eil gin dhe na càirdean agam, ge-tà, ag ràdh, 'I'd love to learn about Gàidhlig, would you teach me? You seem to get so much out of it, could I get something out of it?' Chan eil siud air tachairt idir.*

(A5: I've done lots of interesting things because of Gaelic, because I have Gaelic, that I wouldn't have done if I didn't have Gaelic . . . But none of my friends say, 'I'd love to learn about Gàidhlig, would you teach me? You seem to get so much out of it, could I get something out of it?' That hasn't happened at all.)

Similarly, one of the non-Scottish interviewees reported that her parents could not understand at all why she had become involved in Gaelic.

8 Gaelic and identity

A range of questions concerning Gaelic and participants' identities were discussed, especially different issues relating to the relationship between native speakers and new speakers, and the labels used for different kinds of speakers.

8.1 New speakers and the term 'Gael'

The meaning of the term *Gàidheal* or 'Gael' has been a matter of debate for some decades. The issue is plainly confused and there is no longer a clear and universally agreed definition. Different views have been expressed on the importance of Gaelic language ability as a criterion: whether someone with a Gaelic family background but unable to speak Gaelic can properly be considered a Gael, or conversely, whether anyone who can speak Gaelic should be considered a Gael, even if they have no family connection to the language or to the *Gàidhealtachd*. A number of scholars have written in detail on the topic, notably Konstanze Glaser (2007) and James Oliver (2005). For present purposes, the key issue is the extent to which new speakers identify themselves as Gaels.

In an influential 1994 article, Professor Donald MacAulay noted that 'Gaelic-speaking Scot[s] who ha[ve] learned Gaelic as a non-native language (and perhaps some politically correct attitudes at the same time)' will tend not describe themselves as Gaels (MacAulay 1994: 42). By the same token, quantitative research by Frank Bechhofer and David McCrone confirms that Gaelic speakers in Gaelic areas are unlikely to accept people as Gaels on the basis of language ability alone: only 27% would accept a new speaker with no Gaelic ancestry who was not born in Scotland as a Gael, and only 61% a new speaker born in Scotland but without Gaelic ancestry (Bechhofer and McCrone 2014: 126 (Table 8)).

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that most of the participants in this study did not feel themselves to be Gaels, particularly as so few of them had close family connections to Gaelic. Some were emphatic in their distancing:

A6: *Cha chanainn gur e Gàidheal a th' annam, idir.*

(A6: I wouldn't say that I'm a Gael at all.)

F6: *Cha chanainn gur e Gàidheal a th' annam, tha sin cinnteach, chan e Gàidheal a th' annam, 's e Albannach a th' annam. Ach Albannach aig a bheil Gàidhlig . . .*

(F6: I wouldn't say that I'm a Gael, that's certain, I'm not a Gael, I'm a Scot. But a Scot with Gaelic . . .)

Another interviewee expressed uncertainty as to the meaning of the term 'Gael':

A16: *Chan eil e furasta tuigsinn dè th' ann an Gàidheal agus tha beachdan eadar-dhealaichte aig a h-uile duine dè th' ann an Gàidheal, cò na Gàidheil . . .*

(A16: It's not easy to understand what a Gael is and everyone has a different opinion as to what a Gael is, who the Gaels are . . .)

One of the focus group participants felt she should make her status as an outsider explicit:

F7: Saoilidh mi gun canainn fhìn sin, gu h-àraidh am measg Gàidheil, bhithinn coma a thaobh luchd-ionnsachaidh co-dhiù, nuair a tha sinn còmhla, ach am measg Gàidheal, saoilidh mi gum bheil mi nas cofhurtail a bhith a' dèanamh soilleir – chan ann aig toiseach a' chòmhradh, chan eil e cudromach, ach ann an dòigh air choreigin gun tig e a-mach chan e Gàidheal a th' annam agus 's e ionnsachadh a rinn mi.

(F7: I think I would say that [I'm a learner], particularly among Gaels, I wouldn't bother in relation to learners anyway, when we're together, but among Gaels, I think I'm more comfortable making clear – not at the beginning of the conversation, it's not important, but somehow that it should come out that I'm not a Gael and that I learned Gaelic . . .)

In this extract (and in many other places in the data), the term 'Gael' also functions to mean 'native speaker', given the lack of more straightforward terms in Gaelic to express this concept (as discussed below). As this participant was one of the more fluent speakers in the study, this comment might be interpreted as meaning that because her speech might not immediately betray her as a learner, it was appropriate to make full disclosure, as it were.

MacAulay's point that learners of Gaelic would adopt the view that claiming to be a Gael would not be 'politically correct' would seem to hold true for most of the participants in this study, and one interviewee (A5) asserted that the term 'Gael' carried a lot of what she described as 'baggage'.

In contrast, one of the focus group participants who had begun to acquire Gaelic in nursery school expressed a very different perspective:

F8: So, chanainnsa gur e Gàidheal a th' annamsa, chan eil fhios agam carson a tha sin. Agus cha chanainn do dhaoine gur e luchd-ionnsachaidh a th' annam; chan eil cuimhn' agam air a bhith ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig, so, tha i dìreach agam; sin mar a tha e. . . . So, tha fhios 'am gu bheil daoine ag ràdh rium ann an còmhradh, 's dòcha còig mionaidean deug a-steach is tha iad ag ràdh rium, 'O, so, cò às a tha do phàrantan?' Agus tha mi ag ràdh, 'Uill, tha m' athair à [baile faisg air Glaschu] is . . . 'An e Gàidheil a th' anna?' 'Chan e.' 'Nach e?!' Agus tha e mar gu bheil iad a' coimhead orm ann an dòigh eile an dèidh sin. Agus tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil sin gu math neònach, oir chan eil cuimhn' agamsa a bhith ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig.

(F8: I would say that I'm a Gael, I don't know why that is. And I wouldn't say to people that I'm a learner; I don't remember learning Gaelic, so, I just have it; that's how it is. . . . So, I know that [native speakers] say to me in conversation, maybe fifteen minutes in, and they say to me, 'Oh, so where do your parents come from?' And I say, 'Well, my father comes from [town near Glasgow] and . . . 'Are they Gaels?' 'No.' 'No . . .?!' And it's as if they look at me in a different way after that. And I think that's really strange, because I have no memory of learning Gaelic.)

Another interviewee implied that the judgment of whether or not she was a 'Gael' was a matter for native speakers to determine:

A16: *Thuir mi gu bheil mise dhen bheachd nach e label a th' ann as urrainn dha duine togail air fhèin, ach ma tha na Gàidheil iad fhèin toilichte Gàidheal fhàgail ormsa, gum bithinnsa . . . gun gabhainn ris gu toilichte.*

(A16: I said that I'm of the view that it's not a label that a person can put on himself, but if the Gaels themselves want to call me a Gael, that I would . . . that I would happily accept it.)

As might be expected of new speakers who had worked hard to acquire Gaelic, some participants expressed a degree of impatience with the notion that people from Gaelic backgrounds who could not speak Gaelic might nevertheless be classified as 'Gaels'.

A4: *[N]uair a tha mi a' faireachdainn Bolshie, 's toil leam a bhith ag ràdh, 'Chan e Gàidheal a th' annad mur a h-eil thu bruidhinn Gàidhlig.' Agus tha mi a' creidsinn sin ann an dòigh. Uill, tha mi a' smaointinn tha thu caran gutting am facal 'Gàidheal' de chiall sam bith ma tha thu ag ràdh, 's e Gàidheal a th' annam, ach chan eil Gàidhlig agam agus chan eil mi dol ga h-ionnsachadh.' Uill, right, ann an trì fichead bliadhna cha bhi am facal 'Gàidheal' a' ciallachadh sìon an uair sin. Aig an aon àm tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil diofar ciall ann dhan fhacal. Mar eisimpleir, cha mo thogail [ann an coimhearsnachd chreidmhach]. A-nis, chan eil mi a' creidsinn ann an Dia agus chan eil mi creidmhach tuilleadh, ach tha mi fhathast a' faireachdainn [mar bhall den choimhearsnachd] ann an seagh car cultarach agus tha seagh cultarach do 'Ghàidheal' cuideachd agus chan ann às na h-Eileanan Siar a tha mi, cha robh mi ann an Uibhist no Leòdhas no Barraigh a-riamh . . . agus tha mi gu math mothachail air sin. Eil fhios agad, nuair a bha mi ag obair an uiridh aig [buidheann Ghàidhlig], tha thu a' faireachdainn an toiseach 's e coimhearsnachd cho tìgh a tha seo; tha e doirbh briseadh a-steach. Agus tha e a' toirt ùine. Tha mi a' faireachdainn gun robh daoine air . . . um . . . fàs gu math càirdeil dhomh [an dèidh greis] agus bha deagh chàraidean obrach agam an sin. Cha robh mi gam faicinn taobh a-muigh [na h-oifis] ach bha daoine gu math laghach ann an sin. Ach tha e a' ciallachadh rud dhuinn [sic] a bhith às na h-Eileanan Siar agus chan eil mi mar phàirt den choimhearsnachd sin. 'S e ciall eile cudromach airson 'Gàidheal' mar sin.*

(A4: When I'm feeling Bolshie, I like to say, 'You're not a Gael unless you speak Gaelic'. And I believe that in a way. Well, I think you're sort of gutting the word 'Gael' of any meaning if you say 'I'm a Gael but I don't have Gaelic and I'm not going to learn it'. Well, right, in sixty years the word 'Gael' won't mean anything then. But at the same time I understand that the word has different meanings. For example, I was raised [in a religious community]. Now, I don't believe in God and I'm not religious anymore, but I still feel like I'm [part of that community] in sort of a cultural way and there's a cultural meaning of 'Gael' too and I'm not from the Western Isles, I've never been to Uist or Lewis or Barra . . . and I'm quite aware of that. You know, when I was working at [Gaelic organisation] last year, you feel at first, this is such a

tight community here, it's hard to break in. And it takes time. I feel that people grew . . . quite friendly to me [after a while] and I had good work friends there. I didn't see them [outside the office] but the people were very nice there. But it means something to us [*sic*] to be from the Western Isles and I'm not part of that community. So that's another important meaning for 'Gael').

Finally, one interviewee suggested that some new speakers were keener than others to adopt a Gaelic identity, which she perceived as possibly backward-looking and constricting:

A7: *Tha cuid eile, tha iad ag iarraidh a bhith nan Gàidheil, no tha iad ag iarraidh saoghal na Gàidhlig a bhith mar a bha e bho chionn fhada an t-saoghail ach tha mise eadar-dhealaichte. Tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil an t-uabhas rudan air atharrachadh agus b' fheàrr leam gum biodh iad fhathast ag atharrachadh agus a' dol air adhart na nam biodh i fon leac.*

(A7: There are others, they want to be Gaels, or they want the Gaelic world to be like it was a long time ago but I'm different. I understand that lots of things have changed and I'd prefer that they would continue to change and progress rather than that Gaelic would be buried.)

8.2 Perceptions of the term *neach-ionnsachaidh* (learner)

Participants expressed different views on the established term *neach-ionnsachaidh* (learner). Some accepted the label, for various reasons, including as a linguistic marker:

A4: *Chanainn gur e neach-ionnsachaidh fileanta a th' annam. . . . Och yeah, 's e neach-ionnsachaidh a th' annam gun teagamh, tha mi a' cluinntinn sin nuair a tha mi cluinntinn mo ghuth fhèin air chlàradh, 'O am blas a tha air an tè sin, obh, obh.'*

(A4: I'd say that I'm a fluent learner . . . Och yeah, I'm definitely a learner, I hear that when I hear my own voice when it's recorded . . . 'Oh, the accent that one has, oh no.')

Others felt that using the 'learner' label was more relevant or appropriate in some contexts than others. As one focus group participant put it:

F9: *Cha chleachdainn fhèin 'neach-labhairt ùr', dhomh fhèin. Tha mi a' smaointinn – tha mi nas cofhurtail le 'neach-ionnsachaidh', agus 's e siud a chleachdainnsa. . . . Ach tha mi a' smaointinn nan robh mi a' bruidhinn ri cuideigin sa Bheurla aig nach robh Gàidhlig, 's dòcha gun canadh mi, 'Yes, I'm a Gaelic speaker.' . . . Ach tha mi a' smaointinn . . . chanainnsa, agus 's e siud e – bha mi ann an Uibhist agus Barraigh o chionn mìos agus bha mi ag ràdh ri daoine ann a shin, 'Tha mi ag ionnsachadh, 's e neach-ionnsachaidh a th' annamsa'.*

(F9: I wouldn't use 'new speaker' myself, for myself. I think – I'm more comfortable with 'learner', and that's what I'd use . . . But I think that if I was talking to someone in

English who didn't speak Gaelic, that I'd say 'Yes, I'm a Gaelic speaker.' . . . But I think . . . I would say, and this is it – I was in Uist and Barra last month and I said to people there, 'I'm learning, I'm a learner'.)

A number of participants finessed the issue of being 'learners' by pointing out that everyone is a learner in some sense, that learning is a lifelong process, or that they were still learning English as well, acquiring new words or polishing their skills.

Other participants expressed a degree of frustration that the term 'learner' could be applied without regard to actual language ability. Two of the Glasgow focus group participants commented as follows:

F4: *Uill, 's dòcha gu bheil seo rudeigin connspaideach ach chan eil e . . . chan eil e gu diofar cho fileanta 's a tha thu, 's e neach-ionnsachaidh a th' annad.*

F5: *Tha sin fìor.*

(F4: Well, maybe this is a bit controversial but it . . . it doesn't matter how fluent you are, you're a learner.

F5: That's true.)

One of the interviewees gave a concrete illustration of how the term 'learner' might be applied to someone who could speak Gaelic fluently in a way that might be perceived as patronising:

A7: *Mar eisimpleir, tha deagh chuimhne agam air turas air an treana eadar Dùn Èideann is Glaschu beagan bhliadhnaichean air ais. Thachair mi ri Màiri [caraid aig a bheil Gàidhlig bho thus] air an trèana agus bha sinn a' cabadaich – sa Ghàidhlig – mu iomadh rud fad leth uair a thìde no mar sin. Nuair a bha an trèana gu bhith a' tighinn a-steach san Eaglais Bhreac, thàinig tè thugainn a bha air a bhith a' suidhe mu ar coinneamh agus a bha gu bhith a' fàgail na trèana agus thuir i ri [Màiri] ann an deagh Ghàidhlig (bho thùs) 'tha e glè mhath Gàidhlig a chluinntinn air an trèana. Feumaidh gu bheil Gàidhlig agad bho thùs, cò às a tha thu', agus an uair sin, thionndaidh i thugam is thuir i, 'you're learning Gaelic, you're doing very well!'²¹*

(A7: I remember very well a train journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow a few years ago. I ran into Màiri [native Gaelic-speaking friend] on the train and we were chatting, in Gaelic, about many things for half an hour or so. When the train was coming into Falkirk, a woman who had been sitting across from us came up to us as she was getting ready to leave the train and said to Màiri in good native Gaelic 'it's very good to hear Gaelic on the train. You must be a native speaker, where are you from?' and then she turned to me and said [in English], 'you're learning Gaelic, you're doing very well!')

²¹This incident was communicated in a follow-up email from this interviewee rather than in the interview itself.

8.3 The term 'new speaker' and related labels

In addition to 'learner', participants were also asked to evaluate alternative terms and labels that foregrounded the factor of Gaelic ability or use, such as 'speaker', 'new speaker', 'Gaelic speaker', and 'coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig' (the Gaelic community). The matter is complicated by the awkwardness of the counterpart terms in Gaelic; the basic term *neach-labhairt* for 'speaker' is not a common vernacular expression, and supplemental modifications (*neach-labhairt na Gàidhlig*, *neach-labhairt ùr*) are even more unfamiliar. Instead of *neach-labhairt dùthchasach*, various circumlocutions tend to be used for 'native speaker', such as *daoine le Gàidhlig bho thùs/bhon ghlùn* 'people with Gaelic from the beginning/from the knee'. As noted above, several participants also used the term *Gàidheal* to mean 'native speaker'.

Several participants strongly identified themselves as Gaelic speakers.

F12: *Chanainn-sa gur e neach-labhairt a th' annamsa; tha mi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig fad na h-ùine aig an taigh agus còmhla ri càraidean agus mura h-eil sin a' cunntadh, chan eil fhios agam dè eile a tha a' cunntadh.*

(F12: I would say that I'm a speaker: I speak Gaelic all the time at home and with friends and if that doesn't count, I don't know what else counts.)

F6: *Tha Gàidhlig agam, tha mi nam neach-labhairt, tha mi ga bruidhinn a h-uile latha leis an nighean agam, is ga cleachdadh le caraidean, air an tele, is an eadar-lìon.*

(F6: I have Gaelic, I'm a speaker, I speak it every day with my daughter, I use it with friends, on the telly, and the internet.

Similarly, two participants described Gaelic as their 'own language' and another felt that Gaelic had become her 'mother tongue' (A7).

One interviewee gave a particularly forceful expression of the view that the term 'Gaelic speaker' was clearer and more workable than 'Gael', and did not carry the same 'baggage':

A5: *[Nu]air a thuir mi gur e ceist phoiliteach a th' ann [cleachdadh an tiotail 'neach-labhairt'], nan canadh tu 'Gàidheal', tha tòrr baggage timcheall air an fhacal sin. Chan eil baggage sam bith timcheall air daoine a tha a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig – tha thu ga bruidhinn, tha thu comasach air a bruidhinn, no chan eil thu. Dè chanadh na passive bilinguals? Uill, 's e ceist dhaibhsan a th' ann, chan e ceist dhòmhsa a th' ann agus chan eil mise dol a . . . I'm not going to pussyfoot around and pretend I'm less good at Gaelic for the sake of some person whose parents didn't bother to speak to them, you know? Sin ceist dhan an teaghlach acasan a th' ann agus feumaidh iadsan a bhith a' gabhail dragh mu dheidhinn. Dhòmhsa dheth, you know, tha Gàidhlig agam, tha mi ga bruidhinn, tha mi ga cleachdadh, tha mi a' feuchainn ri daoine eile a bhrosnachadh a bhith ga bruidhinn, gun a bhith, mar a thuir mi, na mo shoisgeulaiche ro chruaidh . . .*

(A5: When I said that [using the term ‘speaker] is a political question, if you said ‘Gael’, there’s a lot of baggage around that word. There’s no baggage around people who speak Gaelic – you speak it, you can speak it, or you don’t. What would the passive bilinguals say? Well, that’s a question for them, it’s not a question for me and I’m not going to . . . I’m not going to pussyfoot around and pretend I’m less good at Gaelic for the sake of some person whose parents didn’t bother to speak to them, you know? That’s a question for their family and they need to be concerned about it. As for me, you know, I have Gaelic, I speak it, I use it, I try to encourage other people to use it, without being, as I said, too harsh an evangelist . . .)

Two focus group participants explained that they felt the term *coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig* (the Gaelic [language] community) might be more suitable than the term *Gàidheil* (Gaels).

F9 *Ma tha thu a-mach air coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig a tha a’ toirt a-staigh daoine le diofar fèin-aithne, eadar Gàidheil, Goill, luchd-ionnsachaidh, Canàidianaich, Ameirigeanaich, Èireannaich, a h-uile duine.*

F10 *Tha mi a’ smaoinichadh gu bheil ‘coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig’ nas inclusive agus bidh thu a’ faireachdainn – ma chanas duine ‘tha mi nam Ghàidheil’, bidh daoine eile a’ smaoinichadh, uill – tha Gàidhlig agam ach chan eil mi nam Gàidheil. So, ma bhios tu a’ cleachdadh ‘coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig’ tha sin nas inclusive; bidh a h-uile duine a’ faireachdainn mar phàirt sin, tha mi a’ smaoinichadh.*

(F9: If you talk about ‘the Gaelic community’ you take in people with different identities, including Gaels, Lowlanders, learners, Canadians, Americans, Irish people, everybody.

F10 I think ‘the Gaelic community’ is more inclusive and you feel – if someone says ‘I’m a Gael’ other people think, well, I have Gaelic but I’m not a Gael. So, if you use ‘the Gaelic community’ that’s more inclusive; everybody feels part of that, I think.)

8.4 Unease with labels and classifications

Some participants expressed a degree of impatience with the semantics of classifications or labels. One participant felt it could be a distraction from normal communication:

F8: *Tha mise a’ smaoinichadh gur e cuspair ro chudromach a th’ ann, gu ìre. Tha e cuideachail ann an rannsachadh ach a h-uile latha ann a h-uile còmhradh, tha mi dìreach a’ smaoinichadh, ‘Carson a bheil thu a’ smaoinichadh air a seo? Bha sinn a’ bruidhinn mu dheidhinn ball-coise!’, a bheil fhios agad, tha e neònach!*

(F8: I think it’s too important a topic, to an extent [i.e. it’s over-emphasised]. It’s useful in research but every day in every conversation, I just think, why are you thinking about this? We were talking about football, you know, it’s weird!)

Another expressed a lack of interest in self-classification:

A5: *‘S ann aig daoine eile a th’ ann a bhith a’ cur nan labels orm, chan eil mise dol a thogail bratach seo seach bratach eile.*

(A5: It's up to other people to put the labels on me, I'm not going to raise this flag as opposed to another one.)

8.5 Participants' personal relationship to Gaelic

Several participants expressed pride in having learned Gaelic, and many participants explained that they felt that becoming a Gaelic speaker had been a very important and positive process for them. One spoke eloquently as follows:

F12: *Thug Gàidhlig saoghal agus lèirsinn, sealladh gu tur eadar-dhealaichte, dhomh, agus fèin-aithne, agus tha i air m' atharrachadh, agus chan urrainn dol air ais air sin, tha eagal orm, sin e.*

F12: Gaelic has given me a world and a vision, a totally new perspective,²² and an identity, and it's changed me, and I can't go back on that, I'm afraid, that's it).

Another expressed thanks for all the creative and professional opportunities that Gaelic had brought her and said that learning Gaelic was the best thing that she had ever done. Another felt that she had become part of a family:

F2: *Tha e faireachdainn mar gu bheil thu pàirt de theaghlach, ann an dòigh, a bharrachd air cànan a bhith agad.*

(F2: It feels like you're part of a family, in a way, in addition to having a language.)

Some participants compared their feelings about Gaelic to their feelings about other languages they had studied. There were interesting divergences. One described learning Gaelic as a 'contribution' (A13)²³ to the future of the language and speaking it as a validation of its worth, in a way that would not be true of learning French or German or Spanish, while one of the focus group participants with family ties to the Western Isles distinguished between her feelings towards Gaelic and German as follows:

F3: *Bha mise fileanta gu leòr ann an Gearmailtis agus thog mi gu ìre gu math àrd i, agus bha mi fileanta innte ach tha e faireachdainn eadar-dhealaichte a bhith dèanamh Gàidhlig. Tha rudeigin ann a tha dìreach a' faireachdainn ceart agus chan urrainn dhomh a chur ann an dòigh sam bith eile, 's e dìreach gu bheil e faireachdainn snog.*

(F3: I was pretty fluent in German and I learned it to quite a high level, and I was fluent in it but it feels different to be doing Gaelic. There's something that just feels right and I can't put it any other way, it's just that it feels nice.)

²²Note that the Gaelic terms *saoghal*, *lèirsinn* and *sealladh*, given here as 'world', 'vision' and 'perspective', are difficult to translate directly into English.

²³The interviewee used the English term *contribution*, rather than a Gaelic word, to make this point.

But another focus group participant perceived no difference in her feelings about Gaelic and French, which she had also learned to fluency:

F9: *Dhòmhsa 's e sgil a th' agamsa, chan e pàirt de fèin-aithne a th' agamsa. Tha Fraingis agamsa cuideachd ach chan e neach-labhairt ùr na Fraingis a th' annam Tha fèin-aithne Ghallda làidir agamsa, chanainn-sa sin. So, chan eil mi a' sireadh fèin-aithne ùr.*

(F9: For me it's a skill that I have, it's not part of my identity. I speak French too but I'm not a new speaker of French. . . . I've got a strong Lowland Scottish identity, I'd say that. So, I'm not looking for a new identity.)

From a rather different perspective, one of the non-Scottish interviewees expressed the view that learning Gaelic had helped her integrate into living in Scotland:

A6: *Cha chanainn gun robh e furasta, ach nas fhasa na dòighean eile airson seòrsa ceangail a stèidheachadh ri Alba. Agus tha mi a' smaointinn gum bi Albannaich agus Breatannaich a' sealltainn orm ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte air sgàth is gu bheil mi air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, tha e a' sealltainn gu bheil mi airson fuireach an seo oir, eil fhios agad, cha bhiodh Gàidhlig gu mòran feum dhomh [anns an dùthaich anns an do rugadh mi].*

(A6: I wouldn't say that it was easy, but it's easier than other ways of establishing a connection to Scotland. And I think that Scottish and British people look at me in a different way because I've learned Gaelic, it shows that I want to stay here because, you know, Gaelic wouldn't be much use to me in [my country of origin].)

8.6 Relationships between new speakers and native speakers

8.6.1 Gaelic use with native speakers

The great majority of participants reported positive interactions with native Gaelic speakers, but a range of issues came to the fore.

The great majority of participants reported that in their experience native Gaelic speakers were willing to speak Gaelic with them but one interviewee reported that when she had visited the Western Isles local Gaelic speakers had switched to English when she attempted to speak Gaelic with them. It should be noted, however, that his interviewee was one of the less polished speakers who took part in the study, and was describing an experience at an earlier stage of her Gaelic language acquisition, when she would presumably have been even less fluent. Another interviewee, again one of the less polished speakers, reported visiting the Western Isles quite frequently but often lacking the confidence to speak with native speakers there, even though she understood the Gaelic she heard around her with little difficulty.

One interviewee expressed the view that new speakers were more likely to use Gaelic than some native speakers:

A13: *Tha cuid de dhaoine aig . . . cuid de dhaoine òga aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs, chan eil iad cho militant 's a tha cuid dhen luchd-ionnsachaidh mar mi fhìn no [mo charaidean], mar eisimpleir. Agus . . . an-dràsta is a-rithist, tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil na daoine a dh'ionnsaich Gàidhlig – aig nach robh Gàidhlig bho thùs – tha sinn, is dòcha, a' dèanamh . . . tha sinn nas deònach Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn ri chèile na tha na daoine aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs agus tha iadsan a' bruidhinn sa Bheurla fad na tìde.*

(A13: Some people . . . some young native speakers of Gaelic, they're not as militant as some learners like myself or [my friends], for example. And . . . now and again, I think that people who learned Gaelic – who aren't native speakers – we're maybe . . . we're more willing to speak Gaelic with each other than native speakers who speak English all the time.)

This dynamic led her to express a degree of frustration:

A13 *nuair a tha daoine mar mi fhìn a tha a' cur àm don ionnsachadh Gàidhlig agus a' dèanamh oidhirp mòr air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh agus tha daoine ann aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs agus tha iad dìreach a' bruidhinn sa Bheurla, (is e), mar gu robh, och, well, tha mi a' dèanamh an oidhirp cho strìmhòr dìreach airson a ràinig an ìre a tha thu agus chan eil e a' cur dragh ort idir gu bheil an rud prìseil agadsa.*

(A13 when people like me put in the time to learn Gaelic and make a big effort to learn Gaelic and there are native speakers who just speak English, it's like, och, well, I'm making such an effort and such a struggle just to reach the level you're at and it doesn't bother you at all that you've got this precious thing.)

Native speakers cannot, of course, be treated as a simple undifferentiated group. Another interviewee observed, for example, that many native speakers working in the Gaelic sector were very willing to use Gaelic in a wide variety of situations, and that they seemed to have a different 'language ideology' (A6) from the wider group of native speakers.

8.6.2 New speakers and native speakers: linguistic issues

Although more specifically linguistic issues are discussed later in this report, some aspects of the relationship between new speakers and native speakers involve different language practices and behaviours. One interviewee gave an insightful overview of the dynamics:

A16: *Chan eil na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bhon ghluìn cleachdte gu leòr fhathast ri daoine a tha ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus thuigeadh tu carson, is e rud gu math ùr a th' ann; daoine a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig. . . . [C]ha b' fhada bhon a bha cha mhòr a h-uile duine aig an robh Gàidhlig fhileanta, na dhuine aig an robh Gàidhlig bhon ghluìn agus leis a sin bhiodh deagh Ghàidhlig agus chan eil iad*

cleachdte air an aon dòigh 's a tha daoine, can, luchd na Beurla cleachdte ri daoine a tha a' tighinn às a' Phòlainn no às a' Ruis no chan eil fhios agam dè dùthaich, agus gheibh thu dreach Bheurla. . . . Agus, sin an rud a bhiodh nam bheachdsa math, nam fàsadh na daoine le Gàidhlig bhon ghluin beagan nas eòlaiche agus nas sùbailte a thaobh luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig. Ach, air an làimh eile, mar a thuir mi, tha mì-thuigse air an dà thaobh. Chan eil luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig glic agus modhail gu leòr nuair a thig e ri daoine aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig bhon ghluin. . . . [B]idh luchd-ionnsachaidh am beachd mar as trice . . . a chionn is gu bheil ùidh acasan sa chànan agus ann an ionnsachadh a' chànan, gum bu chòir ùidh a bhith aig a h-uile duine aig a bheil an cànan, an cànan a bhruidhinn riuthasan. Agus, tha cuid mhath dhiubh am beachd gum bu chòir dhan h-uile duine a bhith comasach air ceistean a thaobh gràmair agus rudan mar sin a fhreagairt – agus, chan eil sin fìor ann an cànan sam bith. Agus, tha sin ag adhbharachadh comh-strì agus cuideachd . . . tha an luchd-ionnsachaidh gu math dèidheil air faclan ùra agus bruidhinn mu dheidhinn rudan nach biodh na seann daoine – na daoine aig a bheil an cànan bho thùs, bhon ghluin – a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn sa chànan sin gu tric. Agus, tha iad a' cleachdadh a' chainnt ùir a tha seo air beulaibh daoine aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig bhon ghluin agus chan eil sin ag obair ro mhath. Chan eil an luchd-ionnsachaidh glic gu leòr an cànan aca a chur air gleus a rèir cò ris a tha iad a' bruidhinn agus 's e sin a tha ag adhbharachadh comh-strì eadar an dà bhuidhinn agus 's e call a th' ann, nam bheachdsa. Tha feum air an dà bhuidhinn; tha feum air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig air iomadh adhbhar agus tha luchd-ionnsachaidh feumach air na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bhon ghluin – is iadsan na daoine aig a bheil deagh eisimpleir dhen chànan agus bhiodh e na bhuannachd dhan dà bhuidhinn, saoilidh mi, nam biodh nas lugha de mhi-thuigse air an dà thaobh.

- (A16: Native Gaelic speakers still aren't sufficiently accustomed to learners of Gaelic and you can understand why, as it's quite a new thing for people to be learning Gaelic . . . It's not long since almost everyone who spoke Gaelic fluently was a native speaker and thus they'd have good Gaelic and they wouldn't be accustomed in the same way, say, as English speakers are accustomed to people who come from Poland or Russia or whatever country and you'll get bad English . . . And the thing that would be good in my opinion, is if native speakers could become a bit more aware and a bit more flexible in relation to Gaelic learners. But, on the other hand, as I said, there are misunderstandings on both sides. Learners of Gaelic aren't wise and socially skilled enough when it comes to native speakers . . . Learners usually think . . . because they're interested in the language and in learning the language, that everyone who speaks the language should be interested in speaking the language with them. And, a lot of them think that everyone should be able to answer questions about grammar and things like that – and that's not true in any language. And that causes conflict and also . . . learners are quite fond of new words and talking about things that older people – native speakers – wouldn't often discuss in the language. And they use this new language in front of native speakers and that doesn't work too well. Learners aren't wise enough to attune their language to the person they're talking to and that causes conflict between the two groups and that's unfortunate, in my opinion. There's a need for both groups; there's a need for Gaelic

learners for many reasons and learners need native speakers – they're the people who have a good example of the language and it would be beneficial for both groups, I think, if there was less misunderstanding on both sides.)

Another participant argued that new speakers' confident literacy distinguished them from most native speakers:

F1: Chì mise sgaradh mòr eadar sinne a tha comasach sgrìobhadh is leughadh sa chànan agus na daoine a tha cho cudromach aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs, nach eil a' faireachdainn làidir – tha iadsan ag ràdh nach eil iad fileanta a chionn 's nach fhaod iad sgrìobhadh is leughadh agus chì mise sin mar an sgaradh as motha eadar sinne agus – an luchd a tha fileanta bho thùs.

(F1: *I see a big difference between us [new speakers] who can read and write the language and the native speakers who are so important, who don't feel strong – they say they're not fluent because they can't read and write and I see that as the biggest difference between us – and native speakers).*

8.6.3 New speaker perspectives on their role

Some participants felt that new speakers had an important role to play in revitalising Gaelic given the extent of language shift from Gaelic to English and the weakness of Gaelic in traditional Gaelic communities. One participant phrased this in terms of giving new vitality to the Gaelic community ('*spionnadh às ùr a thoirt a-steach dhan choimhearsnachd*' (F6)), and another pointed to the enthusiasm and energy of new speakers as follows:

F2 *Gu h-àraidh ann an Glaschu, tha luchd-labhairt ùra, tha iadsan cho, cho cudromach . . . an seo agus anns a h-uile àite airson buidhnean ùra a thòiseachadh agus mar is àbhaist tha iadsan na daoine a tha most enthusiastic . . .*

(F2: Especially in Glasgow, new speakers, they're so, so important here and everywhere to set up new groups and usually they're the most enthusiastic people . . .)

At the same time, several participants expressed a degree of limitation or constraint in terms of what they as new speakers could or should do in relation to Gaelic. One interviewee described her perspective as follows:

A6: *Agus, um, eil fhios agad, nan robh seòrsa deasbad ann no nan robh daoine a' bruidhinn air a' Ghàidhlig, no mu dheidhinn cultar na Gàidhlig, um, tha mi a' smaointinn gum biodh seòrsa deference an-còmhnaidh ann bhuamsa do chuideigin aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs. Direach air sgàth is gu bheil mi . . . you know, tha fios agam gur e siud an cultar aig chuideigin eile, agus 's toil leam gu mòr e agus 's toil leam gu bheil mi mar phàirt den t-saoghal sin ach chan eil mi airson an seòrsa . . . um . . . fèin-aithne sin a ghoid bho chuideigin. Tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil cunnart ann le, gu h-àraidh le mion-chànan, gu bheil daoine a' tighinn a-steach bhon taobh a-muigh agus cha bhi iad a' mothachadh gu bheil seòrsa worldview eadar-*

dhealaichte aca, agus gu bheil cultar eadar-dhealaichte aca agus . . . yeah, dìreach cha chanainn gum b' urrainn dhomh bruidhinn mar Ghàidheal, no 'on behalf of the Gaelic community' no stuth mar sin, mar a chanas daoine.

(A6: And, um, you know, if there was some kind of discussion or if people were talking about Gaelic, or about Gaelic culture, um, I think there would always be a kind of deference from me to a native speaker. Just because I am . . . you know, I know that that's someone else's culture, and I really like it and I like being part of that world but I don't want to . . . steal that kind of identity from someone. I think there's a danger with a minority language that people come in from outside and they won't realise that they have a different worldview, and they have a different culture and . . . yeah, just that I wouldn't say that I could speak as a Gael, or 'on behalf of the Gaelic community' or anything like that.)

Similarly, one of the focus group participants felt she would not have the 'authority' (*ùghdarras*) to go to a Gaelic community and tell people what to do in order to safeguard the language. Asked to clarify this, however, she indicated that she might be more comfortable undertaking this kind of role in Edinburgh or Glasgow as opposed to a traditional Gaelic-speaking area.

9 What kind of Gaelic?

Participants were asked a range of questions about Gaelic: what kind of Gaelic new speakers should aspire to, how they assessed their own Gaelic and so on. There is no question that the new speakers who took part in this study look to the traditional native speaker as the ideal model and judge their own language against that benchmark. Conversely, there seems to be no real sense of any new countervailing urban variety of Gaelic (with either overt or covert prestige) emerging at this stage.

9.1 The native speaker as model and perceptions of deficiency

Interviewees consistently presented the Gaelic of native speakers as their model, but did not always simply characterise divergences from native speakers' usage and practice as a deficiency of some kind.

One interviewee described her perception as follows:

R: So, an canadh tu, mar sin, gu bheil e cudromach a bhith a' dèanamh conaltradh leis na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bho dhùthchas agus na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bhon ghluin, mar gum biodh?

A1: Chanainn, chanainn, a chionn 's gu bheil thu, gu bheil thu gam faicinn mar mhodal, mar ummm... tha thu ag iarraidh gum bi a' Ghàidhlig agadsa coltach ris a' Ghàidhlig aca.

R: Dìreach, uh-huh.

A1: *Tha thu ag iarraidh gum bi . . . a leithid, gum bi aon là, a leithid briathrachas agus . . . umm . . . beartas cànan agad, mar sin.*

(R: So, would you say, then, that it's important to communicate with [native Gaelic speakers]?)

A1: Yes, because you see them as a model, as ummm . . . because you want your Gaelic to be like theirs.

R: Exactly, uh-huh.

A1: You want, one day, to have such a vocabulary and such richness of language, that way.)

Another interviewee who uses Gaelic in her work assessed her language against that of native speakers, but noted that her own language repertoire was in some ways broader as a result of her experience working in the Gaelic sector:

A2: *Chanainnsa gu bheil a' chànan agamsa, mar eisimpleir, gu math eadar-dhealaichte bho charaidean agamsa a tha tighinn às na h-Eileanan. A-rithist, chan eil i cho beartach 's a bhiodh a' chànan aca but aig an aon àm tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil a' chànan a th' agamsa cho freagarrach air m' obair agus cànan no briathrachas, 's dòcha, nach biodh aca.*

R: *O, gu cinnteach!*

A2: *Tha mi cinnteach gum biodh iomadach duine ag ràdh gu bheil tòrr dhen chànan a th' agamsa nach eil e ceart no fìor, mar gum biodh, you know? Agus, 's dòcha gu bheil sin fìor, chan eil fhios agam. Ach, gun teagamh sam bith, bhiodh cànan eadar-dhealaichte, gu math eadar-dhealaichte agamsa bho chuideigin an aon aois riumsa às na h-Eileanan à teaghlach le Gàidhlig aig an taigh, mar gum biodh.*

(A2: I would say that my language, for example, is very different from friends of mine from the islands. Again, it's not as rich as their language would be but but at the same time I think my language is really suitable for my work and [I have] language and terminology that they wouldn't have.

R: Oh definitely!

A2: I'm sure that many people would say that a lot of my language isn't correct or true, as it were, you know? And maybe that's true, I don't know. But without any doubt, I would have different language, very different language from someone of my age from the islands from a family with Gaelic at home, as it were.)

Another interviewee with experience of working in the Gaelic sector echoed this view, noting that her command of formal grammar and modern vocabulary distinguished her from

many native speakers, and she began to deliberately use more English loanwords when speaking with native speakers in order to seem 'more natural' (*nas nàdarraiche*) (A6).

This term *nàdarra* (natural) was used again and again by interviewees to describe the desired kind of Gaelic and they tended to mark their own Gaelic as failing to satisfy this.

F1: *Chan eil na cothroman ann, chan eil sinn a' bruidhinn gu leòr – chan eil Gàidhlig cumanta gu leòr mun cuairt oirnn gus am bi sinn a' bruidhinn, you know, gu mì-nàdarra, tha sinn cho mothachail gum bu chòir dhuinn a bhith a' bruidhinn cho ceart as urrainn is rudan mar sin, so, chan eil sinn cho nàdarra.*

(F1 The opportunities aren't there, we don't speak enough – Gaelic isn't common enough around us and we end up talking, you know, unnaturally, we're so aware that we ought to speak as correctly as possible, so we're not that natural.)

One participant flagged up the lack of opportunities to learn Gaelic 'slang' as a limiting factor for new speakers. Others explained that they found their command of Gaelic wanting in comparison to their English:

A4: *Tha fios agam gu bheil mi fhathast a' dèanamh mearachdan gràmair nuair a tha mi bruidhinn, rudan nach eil mi a' dèanamh ann am Beurla agus tha sin – chan eil na gnàthasan cainnt agam ach tha mi fhathast – tha mi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an taigh. Tha mi gu math dlùth rithe agus a' faireachdainn gu math làidir mu dheidhinn Tha fada a bharrachd Beurla agam na tha Gàidhlig agus 's dòcha tha a' dol a bhith Gàidhlig agam. A bheil fhios agad, chan eil mi dol a' sgrìobhadh nobhail a b' urrainn do Aonghas Phàdraig Caimbeul a bhith a' sgrìobhadh ann an Gàidhlig, chan eil fhios agam a bheil a' Ghàidhlig agam a' dol a bhith cho math ri sin a chaoidh, far am b' urrainn dhomh sin a sgrìobhadh an-dràsta ann am Beurla, like, a h-uile facal agam agus tha cuimhn' agam am faireachdainn sin, bhon a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus a' strì tron dorchadas, feuchainn a bhith a' cur grèim air faclan airson na smuaintean is faireachdainn agam a chur seachad agus tha – bha e cho frustrating dìreach a bhith a' faireachdainn mar, 'man, tha a h-uile facal agam ann am Beurla agus chan eil a chaoidh a h-uile facal ann an Gàidhlig a' dol a bhith agam.'*

(A4: I know that I still make grammatical mistakes when I speak, things that I don't do in English and that – I don't have the idioms but I'm still – I speak Gaelic at home. I'm very close to it and I feel very strongly about it. . . . I have a lot more English than Gaelic and maybe I always will. You know, I'm not going to write a novel like Angus Peter Campbell can write in Gaelic, I don't know if my Gaelic will ever be that good, whereas I could write that now in English, like, I have every word and I remember that feeling, from learning Gaelic and struggling in the dark, trying to get hold of words to express my thoughts and feelings and it is – it was so frustrating just to be feeling like, 'man, I have every word in English and I'm never going to have every word in Gaelic').

Another interviewee expressed the limitations of her Gaelic in terms of emotional range:

F5: *Dè an cànan a chleachdas tu ma tha thu brònach, no feargach, no emotional? Eil fhios agad? Nuair a tha mise brònach bidh mise ga ràdh ann [am Beurla]. An àite Gàidhlig.*

(F5: What language do you use when you're sad, or angry, or emotional? You know? When I'm sad I say it in [English].²⁴ Not Gaelic.)

Participants thus measured their Gaelic against their own English as well as the Gaelic of native speakers, usually judging it deficient or limited compared to both.

9.2 Perceptions of good Gaelic and model speakers

Asked to describe what they considered to be 'good' Gaelic, participants generally explained that it should be clear and natural. One explained that a good speaker should not have an accent that impeded understanding.

Two interviewees named specific individuals with a public profile in the Gaelic world – including broadcasters and officials in Gaelic organisations – as examples of model speakers. These included new speakers as well as native speakers. Another suggested looking to the most native of native speakers:

A18 Do I think there are people who are good Gaelic speakers? Yes, definitely. And the big marker with them was that they were probably monoglots at an early age and were only really properly exposed to English for the first time at school at the age of five or six. They are the people that speak the kind of Gaelic I sometimes don't understand. And it's completely unconscious – why they are doing certain things.

A number of participants expressed relatively puristic attitudes in relation to Gaelic, rejecting the excessive use of loanwords and loan translations (calques). One interviewee expressed her view as follows:

A20 *Theirinn gur e Gàidhlig mhath, Gàidhlig nach eil a' cur tuilleadh iasad air a' Bheurla agus a tha cleachdadh gnàthas càinnt agus facail Gàidhlig agus air an taobh eile, gur e droch Gàidhlig a tha cur iasad – tuilleadh iasad air a' Bheurla, a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig – facail Bheurla nuair a bhios facail Ghàidhlig ann cheana.*

R: *Agus a bheil mòran den Gàidhlig sin ri chluinntinn?*

A20: *O, tha, tha, a h-uile là; air Radio nan Gàidheal agus gu h-àraidh – dè am facal? Calques, verbal calques. Chan eil mi [dèidheil] air sin idir.*

²⁴The participant actually specified a particular variety of English here but this reference has been removed for ethical reasons.

(A20: I would say that good Gaelic is Gaelic that doesn't use too many loans from English and that uses Gaelic idioms and Gaelic words and on the other hand, that bad Gaelic takes too many loans from English and uses Gaelic – English words when there are already Gaelic words there.

R: And is there a lot of that [bad] Gaelic to be heard?

A20: Oh yes, yes, every day; on Radio nan Gàidheal and especially – what's the word? Calques, verbal calques. I don't like that at all.)

Another interviewee shared this concern about loanwords but expressed a somewhat more pragmatic view:

A23: *Tha mise nas cleachdte a bhith a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig mas urrainn dhomh seach a bhith tilgeil Beurla a-steach. . . . Tha mise a' feuchainn a bhith ga sheachnadh leis gu bheil mi a' smaointinn, ma tha abairt no gnìomhair ceart gu leòr sa Ghàidhlig, carson nach b' urrainn dhomh a chleachdadh. Ach tha sin ann agus bidh facail iasaid a' tighinn a-steach gu cànan sam bith, ach tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil cunnart ann a shin cuideachd. Ach, air an ìre eile, a' coimhead ann an dòigh eile, tha e math a bhith a' cruthachadh facail ùr airson a' chànain, agus feumaidh sinn sin a dhèanamh ma tha e dol a dhèanamh ciall san t-saoghal a th' againne. . . . Tha mi a' smaointinn aig amannan tha daoine, aig an robh a' Ghàidhlig bho thùs, daoine 's dòcha a' streap ann an aois, gu bheil iad a' smaointinn gu bheil cus a bharrachd facail ùra [ann] is chan eil iad a' tuigsinn agus bidh iad a' gearan mu dheidhinn sin.*

(A23: I'm more accustomed to use Gaelic if I can than to throw English in . . . I try to avoid it since I think, if there's already a phrase or a verb in Gaelic, why can't I use it. But there's that and loan words will come into any language, but I think there's a danger there too. But, on another level, looking in another way, it's good to create new words for the language, and we need to do that if it's going to make sense in the world that we have . . . I think that sometimes native speakers, people who are older, that they think there are too many new words that they don't understand and they complain about that.)

Participants' willingness to use new terms in Gaelic did not appear to be a matter of attempting to align Gaelic more closely with English, or to create some kind of hybrid variety; rather the preference was to develop a wide range of Gaelic vocabulary so that the language could be used in any situation.

Puristic views were also evident in the negative comments that several participants made in relation to the Gaelic produced by pupils in Gaelic-immersion education. These observations were mostly based on direct personal contacts and experiences: several spoke as parents of children in the system, or as professionals (both inside and outside the education system) who had worked with schoolchildren in different ways.

Several speakers also expressed the view that the Gaelic of younger native speakers was not as rich ('beartach' (A2)) as that of previous generations, citing the increased use of code-switching and loan words in particular.

Despite the puristic views expressed by some participants, it is noteworthy that several interviewees made extensive use of code-switching, sometimes mainly for discourse markers (*but, yeah, you know* etc) while one expressed substantial ideas in English and another used profane language in English on numerous occasions.

9.3 Perceptions of new speakers' Gaelic

Although we are not closely examining linguistic production in this study,²⁵ there was considerable variation among the participants in terms of their language, with a few of them particularly native-like in their speech, a few with perceptible non-Gaelic accents (Glasgow, English, Irish, German, American), and most of them mixed or 'mid-Minch'. One interviewee described her perception of her own language and that of other new speakers as follows:

A3: *Tha mise a' smaointinn gu bheil mise fortanach ann an dòigh; tha am blas agam caran, tha am blas agam ann am Beurla fiù 's caran freagarrach dhan Ghàidhlig, ann an dòigh. Is mar sin tha e furasta gu leòr dhomh bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig agus cha bhi daoine eile no daoine eile aig a bheil Gàidhlig, cha bhi iad a' smaointinn 'O! Tha thu air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh', dìreach sa bhad.*

R: *A bheil thu mothachail air sin nuair a tha thu am measg luchd-ionnsachaidh eile, can daoine à Galldachd Alba, le blas Ghlaschu, no blas Amerigeachach?*

A3: *Aidh . . .*

R: *A bheil sin soilleir?*

A3: *O, tha e gu math soilleir, tha e gu math soilleir.*

R: *Agus a bheil e a' toirt buaidh air mar a tha luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig a' faireachdainn mun deidhinn?*

A3: *Tha mi a' smaoinneachdainn gu bheil, aidh. Aidh.*

(R: Do you notice that when you're with other learners, say people from Lowland Scotland, with a Glasgow accent, an American accent?

A3: Aye.

R: Is that obvious?

²⁵Note, therefore, that some of the extracts quoted in this report contain grammatical errors, which are not marked or commented on. Where dialect features have been altered, however, square brackets are used.

A3: O, it's quite obvious, it's quite obvious.

R: And does that affect how Gaelic speakers feel about them?

A3: I think it does, aye. Aye.)

As described above, most of the participants had complex learning histories involving several different kinds of input. The linguistic result was summarised by one participant as follows. Although this participant learned Gaelic in school rather than as an adult, like most of those involved in the study, the general pattern is similar.

F2: *Dh'ionnsaich mise Gàidhlig tron bhun-sgoil agus chan eil fhios agam cia mheud tidsear a bh' againn agus 's ann à diofar àiteachan a bha iad – 's ann à Uibhist a Deas no Leòdhais no na Hearadh no gu bith de àite, Barraigh . . . so mar sin, chuala mise diofar dualchainnt agus tha mi fhèin a' cleachdadh diofar briathrachas.*

(F2: I learned Gaelic in primary school and I don't know how many teachers were had and they were from different places – from South Uist and Lewis or Harris and whatever place, Barra . . . so I heard different dialects and I myself use varied vocabulary.)

She went on to explain that this could lead to uncertainty, not knowing which word to use when talking to speakers of particular dialects.

One of the interviewees who began to learn Gaelic in her twenties described her linguistic production as follows:

A21: *Uill, tha an Gàidhlig agamsa gu math . . . measgaichte. Tha . . . tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil mi a' dol bho bhlàs gu blàs. . . . Tha mi dìreach a' cleachdadh an rud, a' chiad rud a tha tighinn chun a' cheann. So, chan eil mi nam oileanach math airson . . . Tha, tha am prìomh rud . . . um . . . nam bheachd, gum bi daoine gam thuigsinn.*

(A21: Well, my Gaelic is pretty . . . mixed. I . . . I think I go from accent to accent. . . . I just use the first, the first thing that comes to mind. So, I'm not a good student for . . . The main thing . . . um . . . in my opinion is that people understand me.)

9.4 The issue of *blàs*

Many participants identified *blàs* as a key marker distinguishing native speakers and new speakers. Most used the term *blàs* simply to mean accent, but its full meaning may well be a good deal richer; Vanessa Will suggests that *blàs* 'may be described as a set of linguistic and paralinguistic elements, including dialectal and register variants, prosody, and the use of idiomatic expressions, which combine to bestow an almost palpable aesthetic quality to one's speech' (Will 2012: 37).

One of the Glasgow focus group participants commented as follows:

F4: *Chan eil fhios agam cia mheud turas gun cuala mi daoine ag ràdh, ‘Chan eil blas agad.’ Agus, uill, dè blas a tha iad a’ ciallachadh?*

(F4: I don’t know how many times I’ve heard people say ‘You don’t have blas’. And, well, what *blas* do they mean?)

This remark provoked laughter from the rest of the group, probably because the speaker had a fairly marked Glasgow accent in her speech. This suggestion that some accents were more acceptable than others was echoed by a second Glasgow focus group participant.

F2: *Ma tha blas gu math Leòdhasach agad no rudeigin mar sin, chan eil iad a’ smaointinn dad mu dheidhinn agus tha e ceart gu leòr, ach ma tha thu à [Baile Gallda] le [Baile Gallda] accent’, you know, . . . chan eil iad a’ gabhail ri sin, you know.*

(F2: If you have a strong Lewis accent or something like that, they [native speakers] won’t think anything of it and that’s all right, but if you’re from [Lowland town] with an [Lowland town] accent’, you know . . . they won’t accept that, you know.)

A third participant in the Glasgow focus group, who had family ties to the Hebrides, moved beyond the issue of accent to take in other linguistic markers of authenticity:

F3: *Tha iad uaireannan a’ magadh orm air sgàth ’s gu bheil facail neònach agam a chleachd mi. Dà bhliadhna air ais bha mi bruidhinn ris an nàbaidh agam ann an [eilean far a bheil a seanmhair a’ fuireach] agus bha mi dìreach ag ràdh rudeigin mar na . . . dè bh’ann? Thuir mi ‘aimsir’, agus bha ise ag ràdh, ‘och, chan eil “aimsir” a th’ againne, ’s e “side” a th’ againn air’. Bha mi, ‘yeah, ok, yeah.’ ’S e air sgàth ’s nach robh mise air mo bhogadh am measg daoine bho thùs [às an eilean], ’s ann – chan eil uileach na gnàthasan cainnte agadsa, an aon rud ris na h-acasan. Ach, aig an aon àm chan eil sin gu diofar really, ’s e cuideigin a dh’ionnsaich Gàidhlig a th’ annamsa ach aig an aon àm feumaidh gu bheil rudan ann, chànan fhèin, a tha fhathast buntainn ris an sgìre sin.*

(F3: Sometimes they [native speakers] make fun of me because of a funny word I used . . . Two years ago I was talking to my neighbour in [island where her grandmother lives] and I was just saying something like . . . what was it? I said *aimsir* [for ‘weather’], and she said, ‘och, we don’t say *aimsir*, we call it *side*.’ I said, ‘yeah, ok, yeah’. And because I wasn’t immersed from the start among people from [that island] – you don’t have all the idioms, the same thing they do. But at the same time it doesn’t matter, I’m someone who learned Gaelic, but at the same time there must be things, I’d say, that still belong to that area.)

The link between language and place seems important in this regard, reflecting what Katherine Woolard (2008) says about the need amongst many minority language speakers to show that the language they have adopted is from ‘somewhere’.

9.5 The role of dialects

A small minority of participants had deliberately endeavoured to acquire a particular dialect. Three of the participants with a Gaelic-speaking parent focused on the dialect of their parent's area of origin, although one of these also received significant input from her partner's relatives on a neighbouring island. Two participants with no close family links to Gaelic also focused on one specific dialect. In one case this was the dialect of a mainland district where she had lived as a child, although she did not actually have any ancestral connections to the area in question, and one concentrated on another mainland dialect principally because she had found it convenient to attend residential Gaelic classes that were offered there.

These participants reported different methods of working to acquire the dialect in question. One described making recordings of her Gaelic-speaking parent and two others had used field recordings in the School of Scottish Studies Archives. One worked closely with her parent to help her acquire Gaelic:

A19 *'S e an rud a bh' agamsa 's e nach robh aig a h-uile duine idir [luchd-ionnsachaidh eile], idir gun robh m' athair ann agus, aon uair is gun do chuir mise romham gun robh mi a' dol a dhèanamh oidhirp cheart air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, bha esan [uabhasach] cuideachail. Tha mi a' ciallachadh leis a sin . . . chan e a-mhàin gun robh e deònach bruidhinn rium anns a' Ghàidhlig ach gun robh e a' feuchainn ri dhèanamh cinnteach gur e Gàidhlig cheart, mar gum biodh, a bha mi a' togail. Bha e fhèin dìreach ceart cho mionaideach ri [neach-teagaisg aig an oilthigh], tha mi a' smaoinneachadh, na dhòighean. 'S dòcha gun robh e beagan nas tlachdmhoire san dòigh a dheigheadh e timcheall air a' ghnòthach, ceart gu leòr. Ach, a thaobh, gu h-àraid a thaobh fuaimneachadh, tha mi a' smaoinneachadh, an toiseach, bha e mionaideach mu dheidhinn sin agus 's iomadh turas a chaidh sinn a-mach air chèile, leis an fhirinn innse. Eil fhios agad? Bhiodh e a' toirt orm, eil fhios agad, canail an aon fhacal, eil fhios agad, uair is uair gus am biodh e ceart. . . . Mar sin, bha mi uabhasach fortanach, ged a bha e car doirbh aig an àm, rinn e diofar.*

(A19: The thing I had that by no means everyone [every learner] has, is that my father was there and once I had decided to make a real effort to learn Gaelic, he was really helpful. By that I mean . . . not just that he was willing to talk to me in Gaelic but that he tried to make sure that it was correct Gaelic, as it were, that I was acquiring. He was just as particular as [teacher at the university], I think, in his methods. Maybe a bit more pleasant in the way he went about it, right enough. But with regard to, with regard to pronunciation, in the beginning he was particular about that and there were many times we fell out with each other, to tell the truth. You know? He would make me, you know, say the same word, you know, again and again until it was right . . . So I was extremely fortunate, although it was a bit tough at the time, it made a difference.)

Yet for learners of Gaelic with no ties to any particular area, the prospect of acquiring a particular dialect can be problematic, as one interviewee explained:

A4: . . . *tha mi cinnteach agus tha mi an dùil gum biodh barrachd daoine cofhurtail bruidhinn rium nam biodh blas . . . umm . . . Leòdhasach neo blas Uibhisteach no fiù 's blas Sgitheanach . . .*

R: *Ionadail . . .*

A4: *Yeah, blas ionadail orm an àite meadhan a' Chuain Siar no rudeigin mar sin. Ach chan eil mi cinnteach gum feum thu sin . . . Bha mi riamh a' faireachdainn gun robh rudeigin math dh'fhaodte rud beag inauthentic nam bithinn ag ionnsachadh [dualchainnt] . . . b' urrainn dhomh a bhith air blas Leòdhasach ionnsachadh 's dòcha. Ach cha robh mi . . . 's e rud a bha mi faireachdainn, uill, cha robh mi ann an Leòdhas riamh, carson a bhiodh blas Leòdhasach orm, bhiodh sin gu math annasach. Carson a bhiodh blas Uibhist a Tuath orm? Cha robh mi ann riamh. Ach . . . bhiodh e math a bhith cunbhalach, tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil e duilich do luchd-ionnsachaidh nuair nach eil blas cunbhalach aca. Mar sin tha mi a' feuchainn a bhith a' dèanamh am blas as fheàrr Uibhisteach agam airson [Gàidhlig] a theagasg. Tha mi a' feuchainn a bhith cunbhalach mu dheidhinn sin gus am bi m' oileanaich ag ionnsachadh blas reusanta cunbhalach agus cha bhi iad cho, fhios agad, nuair a tha thu a' cluinntinn cuideigin a tha air Beurla ionnsachadh agus chan eil iad air blas sònraichte ionnsachadh, uaireannan tha iad caran disembodied sounding.*

(A4: . . . I'm certain and I expect that more people would be comfortable talking to me if I had a . . . Lewis accent or a Uist accent or even a Skye accent . . .

R: Local. . .

A4: Yeah, a local accent instead of mid-Minch or something like that. But I'm not sure you need that . . . I've always felt it would maybe something inauthentic if I was to learn [a dialect] . . . I could have learned a Lewis accent maybe . . . But I wasn't . . . the thing I felt was, well, I've never been to Lewis, why would I have a Lewis accent, that would be really strange. Why would I have a North Uist accent? I've never been there. But . . . it would be good to be consistent, I think it's difficult for learners when they don't have a consistent accent. So I try to do my best Uist accent in order to teach [Gaelic]. I try to be consistent about that so that my students learn a reasonably consistent accent and they won't be, you know, when you hear someone who's learned English and hasn't learned a particular accent, sometimes they're a bit disembodied sounding.)

One interviewee who had spent time working in a particular island community described her experience as follows:

A18 Some people, sometimes, think I'm from [island], I think I'm getting nearer. You know, people from [that island] wouldn't think that but some people . . . 'An ann à [eilean] a tha thu?' ['Are you from [island]?] 'No, no, I'm from [town outside the Gàidhealtachd]' And then, and then you get moved to the other box.

R: I see, right.

A18: And there's a totally different . . .

R: . . . Ideological thing, yeah. Isn't that strange?

A18: People like to know which box you're in and if you are in the in-group or you are not in the in-group. And Gaelic speakers – 'Cò às a tha thu?' ['Where do you come from?'] There you go, straight in there. So what do you say? You know, do you lie? Sometimes I lie just for fun.

R: Yeah, well, why not?

A18: To see what happens. If someone doesn't know me, it's not of any great consequence. You know, just to see what happens.

Another interviewee expressed her perceptions of this issue of authenticity slightly differently, and compared the dynamics in relation to Gaelic learning in Scotland to those she had encountered in Wales:

A5: *Chan eil mi a' faicinn gu bheil càil ceàrr a bhith ag ràdh gun do dh'ionnsaich thu Gàidhlig. Agus ma tha thu air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh chun h-ìre a tha mise air ionnsachadh . . . air a h-ionnsachadh, bu chòir dhut a bhith pròiseil às. . . . So chan eil mi a' faicinn adhbhar sam bith a bhith ag ràdh, 'You know, actually I really come from such and such an island.' You know? Bha mi a' bruidhinn ri cuid de dhaoine anns a' Chuimrigh, nuair a bha mi sa Chuimrigh bho chionn beagan bhliadhnachan agus bha iadsan ag ràdh, 'You know, 's urrainn dhut Cuimris ionnsachadh, ach cha bhi daoine a' gabhail riut mura h-eil blas ceart agad. Tha rudeigin ceàrr', bha iad ag ràdh, 'mu dheidhinn blas an neach-ionnsachaidh, agus mar sin, aon uair is gu bheil thu fileanta bu chòir dhut fìor bhlas ionadail de sgìre air choreigin a thogail air do chuid Cuimris'. Agus bha mise a' smaoinneachadh, 'Uill, tha siud inntinneach oir chan eil an aon seòrsa social pressure air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig'. Agus, tha cuid de dhaoine, tha e gu math follaiseach gur e luchd-ionnsachaidh . . . bidh blas Shasainn, no blas Ghlaschu . . .*

R: *Blas Ameireaganach.*

A5: *No blas Ameireaganach fhathast air a' chainnt aca, agus chan eil càil ceàrr air sin.*

(A5: I don't see anything wrong with saying that you learned Gaelic. And if you've learned Gaelic to the level that I've learned it you should be proud of it.

R: Definitely, yes, you must be proud of it.

A5: So, I don't see any reason to say, 'You know, actually I come from such and such an island.' You know? I was talking to some people in Wales, when I was in Wales

a few years ago and they said 'You can learn Welsh, but people won't accept you unless you have the right accent. There's something wrong,' they said, 'with the learner's accent, and so, once you become fluent you should learn the real local accent of some particular area for your Welsh'. And I thought, 'That's interesting because there isn't the same sort of social pressure on learners of Gaelic'. And with some people it's pretty obvious that they're learners . . . they'll have an English accent, or a Glasgow accent . . .

R: An American accent.

A5: Or an American accent on their speech still, and there's nothing wrong with that.)

9.6. The rejection of urban Gaelic

Given their apparent perception of the native speaker as the ideal model, there was no sense from the participants that 'new speakers' in the cities were developing any new variety of Gaelic that represented an acceptable alternative to the 'traditional' Gaelic of the native speaker. When asked whether there was such a thing as 'Edinburgh Gaelic' or 'Glasgow Gaelic', participants tended to point to the Gaelic produced by school pupils in immersion education rather than the language of adult 'new speakers'. In doing so, they tended to be negatively judgmental, highlighting examples of glaring English interference, in terms of lexis, grammar or phonology.

One participant in the Glasgow focus group commented as follows:

R: *A bheil blas ionadail a' fàs an seo idir, a bheil a leithid de rud ri Gàidhlig Ghlaschu ag èirigh?*

F5: *Tha mise smaoinichadh gu bheil.*

R: *Uh-huh – ciamar?*

F5: *Seòrsa blas sgìre Ghlaschu, nuair a tha daoine bruidhinn Gàidhlig.*

R: *Blas ionadail na Beurla tighinn a-steach, no dè tha thu ciallachadh? No dè seòrsa Gàidhlig a th' ann?*

F5: *'S dòcha, seadh. Agus gu sònraichte aig na sgoiltean, gu dearbh. Bidh iad a' cleachdadh abairtean agus cleachdaidhean a tha gu sònraichte ceangailte ri foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, tha mise smaoinichadh. "Na bi gòrach gu mise!" Sin fear. Agus "tha thu hurtaigeadh mo feelings!"*

(R: Is a local accent developing here at all, is such a thing as Glasgow Gaelic emerging?

F5: I think so.

R: Uh-huh – how?

F5: A sort of Glasgow accent, when people speak Gaelic.

R: The local accent in English coming in, or what do you mean? Or what kind of Gaelic is it?

F5: Maybe, yes. And especially at the schools, definitely, They [school pupils] use phrases and usages that are particularly linked to Gaelic-medium education. ‘Don’t be stupid to me’ and ‘You’re hurting my feelings’.)²⁶

One of the Edinburgh focus group participants also responded to a question about the possible emergence of an urban variety of Gaelic by flagging up the strong Glasgow accent of pupils in the Gaelic school there:

F6 *Ach tha clann a’ tighinn bho Condorrat agus tha mi a’ smaoinichadh Drochaid an Easbaig, Bishopbriggs [chun a’ Mhòid Ionadail] agus tha blas Ghlaschu cho làidir aca, ‘Tha mi an seo’ [blas Ghlaschu] . . . Is bidh na tidsearan [à aitean eile], ‘s e Gàidheil a th’ annta – à Uibhist agus Leòdhas ach tha iad a-mach air ‘tha na blasan ud cho sgriosail’, tha iad ag ràdh – ‘s e dìreach blas Ghlaschu is a’ Ghàidhlig sgriosail – ‘s e sin a bha iad ag ràdh.*

(F6 But children come [to the local Mòd] from Condorrat and I think and they have *such a strong* Glasgow accent, ‘I am here’ [*in Glasgow accent*] . . . And the teachers [from other places], they’re Gaels – from Uist and Lewis and they talk about how those accents are just awful, they say – it’s just the Glasgow accent and the terrible Gaelic – that’s what they say.)

10 Perceptions of Gaelic in the urban context

In addition to their linguistic perceptions of the kind of Gaelic spoken in the cities, participants also commented on the nature of the Gaelic communities in Edinburgh and Glasgow more generally. There were evident differences of perspective, partly to do with different understandings of the term ‘community’ (*coimhearsnachd*) and what it could mean in this context.

To illustrate the limited nature of the urban Gaelic community, one interviewee contrasted the situation in Edinburgh with the Gàidhealtachd area in which she had grown up:

A3: *Nuair a bhios mi air ais [ann an sgìre m’ àraich] bidh mi a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig gu tric oir bidh mi a’ tachairt ri daoine dìreach air an t-sràid no sa Cho-op, aig a bheil Gàidhlig is tha mi eòlach orra, is bidh sinn a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig. Ann an Dùn Èideann, chan eil sin a’ tachairt; feumaidh tu dol gu tachartas Gàidhlig no dol gu*

²⁶The Gaelic phrase cited here for ‘to me’ is incorrect; *riumsa* should be used in place of **gu mise*. The English word hurt is Gaelicised (in place of a native word like *goirteachadh* or *gonadh*) and the English word ‘feelings’ is used in Gaelic.

buidhnean sònraichte Gàidhlig no coinneamh a chur air dòigh le do charaid aig a bheil Gàidhlig no rudeigin mar sin, cha bhi e tachairt dìreach gu nàdarra.

(A3: When I'm back [in the area I grew up] I'll speak Gaelic often because I'll just meet people on the street or in the Co-op, people I know who speak Gaelic, and we'll talk in Gaelic. In Edinburgh, that doesn't happen, you have to go to a Gaelic event or particular groups or arrange to meet your Gaelic-speaking friend or something like that, it doesn't just happen naturally).

The participants in the Glasgow focus group expressed the view that Gaelic had a higher profile in Glasgow and there was a stronger Gaelic community there than in Edinburgh. On the other hand, one of the Glasgow interviewees gave a rather more negative view of the situation in Glasgow, commenting '*tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil e doirbh a ràdh gu bheil coimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig ann an Glaschu*' ('I think it's difficult to say that there's a Gaelic community in Glasgow') (A17). With regard to organised Gaelic events in Glasgow, she said '*tha e dha-rìribh follaiseach dhòmhsa gur e luchd-ionnsachaidh agus daoine mar sin a tha a' tighinn a-mach airson nan tachartasan sin; chan ann tric a chì thu Gàidheil aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs a' nochdadh ann*' ('It's really obvious to me that it's learners and people like that who come out for those events; you rarely see native speakers²⁷ showing up there').

Another Glasgow interviewee commented as follows:

A2: *A thaobh a' choimhearsnachd ann an Glaschu, uill, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil e ann, but chan eil fhios a'm a bheil mi a' faireachdainn sin air sgàth is gu bheil mi cho an sàs ann nam obair. Chan eil fhios agam, eil fhios agad, nam bithinn nam Ghàidheil, mar gum biodh, agus a' fuireach ann an Glaschu à . . . chan eil fhios agam, à Beinn a Bhadhla no rudeigin agus an seo ann an Glaschu a' dèanamh obair sam bith, chan eil fhios agam, ag obair ann am pub no whatever, chan eil fhios a'm am bithinnsa a' faireachdainn, you know, a bheil coimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig ann. Tha mi a' smaoinichadh gum feum thu a bhith mar phàirt dheth ann an dòigh, eil fhios agad?*

(A2: With regard to the community in Glasgow, well, I think that it's there, but I don't know if I feel that because I'm so involved in it through my work. I don't know, you know, if I was a Gael living in Glasgow from . . . I don't know where, from Benbecula or somewhere and here in Glasgow and doing some kind of work, I don't know, working in a pub or whatever, I don't know if I would feel, you know, that there's a Gaelic community. I think you need be part of it in a way, you know?)

One interviewee who had lived in both Glasgow and Edinburgh reported encountering more hostility to Gaelic in Glasgow, but suggested this might be attributable to the relatively higher profile of Gaelic in Glasgow. In contrast, a Glasgow interviewee who had previously

²⁷Note that the phrase translated as 'native speakers' is literally 'Gaels who have Gaelic from the beginning'.

lived in Edinburgh detected a difference in the nature of the Gaelic communities in the two cities, partly as a result of the role of the island Gaelic associations in Glasgow:

A7: *Ach chanainn gu bheil barrachd de choimhearsnachd ann an Dùn Èideann na tha ann an Glaschu.*

R: *Seadh. Carson?*

A7: *Ann an Dùn Èideann, tha i stèidhte air a' chànan seach air cò às a tha thu, is cò leis thu. Ann an Glaschu tha barrachd ann co-cheangailte ri, ris an eilean às a bheil thu air neo . . . rudan mar sin, eil fhios agad? Ann an Dùn Èideann tha e nas lugha ach tha daoine eòlach air a chèile agus chan eil e gu diofar cò às a tha thu. Chan eil mi ag ràdh gu bheil, chan eil mi ag ràdh ann an Glaschu, eil fhios agad, nach eil iad càirdeach, 's e dìreach a thaobh infrastructure agus cuideachd . . . tha Gàidhlig nas cudromaiche ann an Dùn Èideann, ann an Glaschu, eil fhios agad, 's e daoine às na h-àiteachan aig a bheil Gàidhlig a' tighinn còmhla agus tha sin nas cudromaiche na an cànan uaireannan, eil fhios agad, tha mi a' smaoinichadh.*

(A7: I would say that there's more of a community in Edinburgh than in Glasgow.

R: Yes. Why?

R: In Edinburgh, it's based on the language rather than where you're from, and who you belong to. In Glasgow it's more connected to the island you come from or . . . things like that, you know? In Edinburgh it's smaller and people know each other and it doesn't matter where you come from. I'm not saying, I'm not saying that they're not friendly in Glasgow, it's just about infrastructure and also . . . Gaelic is more important in Edinburgh, in Glasgow, you know, it's people from the Gaelic areas coming together and that's more important than the language sometimes, you know, I think.)

One of the Edinburgh interviewees was much more negative about the nature of the Gaelic community there, however:

A8: *Chan eil coimhearsnachd Gàidhlig ann a sheo, ann an Dùn Èideann. Bidh mi a' dol a-mach gu na h-oidhcheannan Bothain²⁸ nuair a tha mi ann a sheo ach cha bhi sin a' tachairt ro thrìc. No, chan eil coimhearsnachd Gàidhlig ann a sheo – chan eil mi a' faireachdainn pàirt de choimhearsnachd ann a sheo.*

(A8: There isn't a Gaelic community here in Edinburgh. I go out to the Bothan nights when I'm here but that doesn't happen very often. No, there isn't a Gaelic community here – I don't feel part of a community here.)

²⁸Bothan is a Gaelic social evening that takes place in Edinburgh once a month.

11 Views on Gaelic policy, the politics of Gaelic and the prospects for the language

The participants in this study were generally very well informed about current policy for Gaelic and made a number of observations about present development strategies and their predictions about the future of the language.

Many participants expressed the view that stronger and more effective promotion was needed. As one interviewee argued:

A23: *Feumaidh na rudan sin a bhith a' tachairt a thaobh foghlaim ach feumaidh e a bhith a' leudachadh ann an diofar àiteachan, tro na h-oilthighean, tron Phàrlamaid, tro na meadhanan agus tha sin a' tachairt agus aig amannan tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil e a' tachairt gu math slaodach – ro shlaodach.*

(A23: Those things need to happen in relation to education but it needs to be expanded in different places, through the universities, through the Parliament, through the media and that's happening but sometimes I think it's happening very slowly – too slowly.)

Asked whether they felt positive or negative about the future of Gaelic, there were marked differences in opinion. A few were strongly positive:

F9: *Bidh mi tric a' smaointinn, can an diofar eadar an t-suidheachadh a th' againn an-dràsta agus an t-suidheachadh a bh' ann o chionn deich air fhichead bliadhna, tha an adhartas cho mòr, tha mi a' smaointinn, tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil an t-suidheachadh air atharrachadh cho mòr gum b' urrainn do dad sam bith a' tachairt bho seo a-mach.*

(F9: I often think, say with the difference between the situation we have now and the situation thirty years ago, the progress is so great, I think, I think that the situation has changed so much that anything could happen from now on.)

Another interviewee pointed to the role of new speakers in bringing new energy to Gaelic:

A7 *Tha i fàs is crìonadh aig an aon àm. Tha i air a dhol bho a bhith na cànan le coimhearsnachd is gun infra, gun bhun-structar gu cànan le bun-structar gun choimhearsnachd, mar gum biodh. Tha mi uabhasach misneachail mu dheidhinn staid na Gàidhlig agus tha tuigse gu math eadar-dhealaichte agam bho tha aig a' mhòr-chuid de na daoine an sàs anns a' Ghàidhlig. Tha mise a' faicinn na Gàidhlig mar rudeigin a tha fàs . . . an àite a bhith a' smaoinneachadh, 'O, am mair a' Ghàidhlig?' . . . So, tha, tha luchd-ionnsachadh ann a tha a' fàs fileanta, rud nach robh a' tachairt bho chionn fichead bliadhna gu ìre mhòr sam bith. Nuair a thòisich mi air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, bha daoine mar mi fhìn ann, agus bu mhise an duine a b' òige a bh' ann an sàs ann an tòrr rudan Gàidhlig agus bho chionn deich bliadhna an dèidh sin bha mi fhathast tòrr na b' òige na a' mhòr-chuid agus, a-nise, gu h-obann tha daoine ann a tha òg is a tha brosnachail . .*

(A7 It's growing and declining at the same time. It's gone from being a language with a community but no infrastructure to a language with an infrastructure but without a community, as it were. I'm really optimistic about the situation of Gaelic and I've got a very different understanding from most people who are involved in Gaelic. I see Gaelic as something that's growing instead of thinking, 'Oh, will Gaelic survive?' . . . So, learners are becoming fluent, something that didn't happen twenty years ago, to any great extent. When I started to learn Gaelic, there were people like me there, and I was the youngest person who was involved in lots of Gaelic things and ten years ago I was still much younger than most of them but now, suddenly, there are young people about who are enthusiastic)

Another interviewee also pointed to the energy that people were bringing to Gaelic:

R: *Agus uile-gu-lèir, an canadh sibh gu bheil sibh dòchasach no eu-dòchasach a thaobh na tha an dàn dhan Ghàidhlig san àm ri teachd?*

A3: *Tha mi dòchasach. Chan eil fhios a'm dè tha sin a' ciallachadh ach tha mise dòchasach.*

R: *Carson? Dè na h-adhbharan dòchais?*

A3 *Uill, tha mi, dìreach tha mi eòlach air daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig, cuid dhiubh aig a bheil Gàidhlig bho thùs, cuid dhiubh a tha air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh a tha gu math beòthail mun chànan agus gu math . . . a' deànamh rudan math, rudan inntinneach agus tha sin fìor mhath.*

(R: And in general, would you say that you are optimistic or pessimistic about what's in store for Gaelic in the future?)

A3: I'm optimistic. I don't know what that means but I'm optimistic.

R: Why? What are the reasons for optimism?

A3: Well, just that I know people with Gaelic, some of them native speakers, some of them who have learned Gaelic who are really energetic about the language and very . . . are doing good things, interesting things and that's really good.)

In a similar vein, another interviewee expressed the view that the only people who could sustain the language in the future were those she called '*luchd na misneachd*' (literally 'the confident people') (A14), those who were committed to speaking Gaelic as often as possible.

One of the focus group participants suggested that there might be more reasons for optimism from the perspective of the cities as opposed to the traditional Gaelic areas:

F7: *Saoilidh mi . . . gu bheil e nas fhasa a bhith dòchasach mar neach-ionnsachaidh, agus neach-ionnsachaidh air a' Ghalldachd, tha fhios agad, gu bheil uiread de chothroman ann, chan eil gu leòr ann, ach tha cothroman air a bhith fàs. Agus chan eil fhios 'am buileach, nam b' ann sna h-eileanan a bha mi fuireach, am bithinn cho dòchasach? Chan eil fhios agam, dìreach amharasach nach biodh – ach tha e a rèir dè thachras – mas e 's gun tig barrachd crionaidh sna h-eileanan – cha ghabh smaoineachadh air– ach ann an dòigh tha barrachd, tha rudan a' tachairt gu follaiseach air a' Ghalldachd agus am measg daoine dìoghrasach . . . luchd-ionnsachaidh, agus tha cothroman air a bhith air an togail, so tha . . . adhbharan ann a bhith dòchasach.*

(F7: I think . . . that it's easier to be optimistic as a learner, and a learner in the Lowlands, you know, there's so many opportunities, there aren't enough, but opportunities have been growing. And I don't really know, if I were living in the islands, would I be so optimistic? I don't know, I just suspect that I wouldn't – but it depends on what happens – if there's more decline in the islands – it doesn't bear thinking about – but in a way there's more, things are happening publicly in the Lowlands among enthusiastic people . . . learners, and opportunities have been developed, so . . . there are reasons to be optimistic.)

A few participants expressed a more straightforwardly negative view. One interviewee said as follows:

A20 *Chan eil mi cinnteach gu bheil e dol a mairsinn.*

R: *Carson?*

A20: *Tha na h-àireamhan a' dol sìos fhathast agus chan eil mi cinnteach gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig aig a' chloinn math gu leòr airson mairsinn.*

(A20: I'm not sure that it's going to survive.)

R: *Why?*

A20: *The numbers [of speakers] are still going down and I'm not sure that the children's Gaelic is good enough for it to survive.)*

Another was blunter, predicting that the current development infrastructure for Gaelic would not be maintained and that Gaelic was destined to become a a 'relic, you know, increasingly – the Latin of Scotland' (A18).

Several participants expressed the view that there had been positive changes in the status of Gaelic in recent years and decades. One commented on the increased public visibility of the language, on signage and elsewhere, another noted an apparent increase in public support for the language and a third perceived 'seòrsa de step-change, co-dhiù san roinn

phoblach ('a sort of step-change, at least in the public sector') as the Gaelic Language Act was implemented. One commented specifically in relation to the status of Gaelic in Glasgow that there had been a real transformation in relation to education and other fields ('*abair dà là ann an Glaschu a thaobh foghlaim is eile*') (A19).

A number of points of concern were flagged up, including the failure of intergenerational transmission:

A8: *An rud as mò tha mi a' faicinn nach toil leam, 's e daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig ach chan eil Gàidhlig aig a' chlann aca. Tha mi a' gabhail iongnadh na th' ann de thidsearan Gàidhlig aig nach eil ... nach eil, nach bi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig ris a' chloinn aca. Daoine eile a tha fìor chomasach ann an Gàidhlig a phòs cuideigin aig nach robh i agus tha a' chlann a' togail na Beurla . . . tha e, tha e tàmailteach. Feumaidh mi ràdh, . . . ['s e] an cunnart as motha a tha mise a' faicinn, nach bi an òigridh a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig eatorra fhèin; oir 's e an transmission sin as treasa. Tha thu a' faighinn Gàidhlig bho do phàrantan aig an toiseach, ach caillidh tu e mura cumar sin a' dol eadar peathraichean is bràithrean; am broinn an teaghlach anns a' chiad dol a-mach, ach cuideachd eadar caraidean – you know? Chan eil e gu lèor a bhith ga faighinn sa sgoil, feumaidh clann a bhith ga bruidhinn eatorra fhèin.*

(A8: The biggest thing that I see that I don't like is people who speak Gaelic but whose children don't have Gaelic. I'm amazed by the number of Gaelic teachers . . . who don't speak Gaelic to their children. People who are really capable in Gaelic who married someone who doesn't speak it and then the children take up English . . . it's, it's disgraceful. I have to say that the biggest danger I see is that young people don't speak Gaelic among themselves, because that's the most powerful kind of transmission. You get Gaelic from your parents at first, but you'll lose it unless it's kept going between brothers and sisters; within the family at first but also among friends – you know? It's not enough to get it in school, children have to speak it among themselves.)

In relation to their views on Gaelic development strategy, the most common concern expressed by participants felt that too much emphasis was placed on Gaelic-medium education in the schools, that the approach of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other policymakers was a matter of putting 'all the eggs in one basket' (A14), particularly in light of their observations about the quality of the Gaelic produced by children in Gaelic-medium education (discussed in section 9.6 above). Several participants also expressed the view that the learning of Gaelic by adults did not receive sufficient attention from policymakers. One interviewee expressed the view that too much attention (and funding) was given to one-off projects rather than ongoing initiatives that could have a greater long-term impact, while others argued that Bòrd na Gàidhlig allocated too much money to ineffective initiatives or did not put in place proper mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of particular strategies or policies.

The research did not systematically investigate participants' views on the issue of Scottish independence and the possible role of Gaelic in an independent Scotland, but a number of

participants commented on these issues. Several participants expressed strong support for independence, but others were undecided or doubtful about the matter. One expressed concerns about the consequences of the break-up of Britain and a distaste for nationalism in general, while another felt that the independence debate was a distraction from more pressing social and political problems.

Participants had different views on the extent to which Scottish independence might bring positive changes for the situation of Gaelic. Some felt it would, some were much less confident.

R: An dèanadh neo-eisimeileachd do dh'Alba diofar dhan Ghàidhlig nan tigeadh i?

A19: Tha mi a' smaoinneachadh. Tha mise a' creidsinn gu mòr gun dèanadh, gun dèanadh seo diofar – chan eil mi a' faicinn ciamar nach dèanadh. Agus, tha mi a' smaoinneachadh . . . chan e gu bheil mi a' faireachdainn idir, idir gun tig a h-uile rud ceart air an là, air a' chiad là a thigeadh neo-eisimeileachd, ach bha mi riamh a' coimhead air mar toiseach-tòiseachaidh . . . mar an là air am b' urrainn dhuinn tòiseachadh dòigheil air rudan a chur ceart taobh a-staigh na dùthcha agus a bhith a' coimhead oirnn fhèin ann an . . . bho gach taobh, mar gu biodh – air na tha math mar deidhinn agus na rudan a dh'fhaodadh a bhith air an ruith nas fheàrr na tha iad. Agus dualchas na h-Alba, cha chreid mi gum gu bheil sinn a' dèanamh math air a sin fhathast, a bhith a' toirt deagh àite is inbhe dhan eachdraidh againn, dhan chànan – dha na cànan againn is mar sin air adhart. Is mar sin, tha mise a' creidsinn gu mòr gu bheil an ceangal ann eadar fallaineachd cultar na h-Alba agus neo-eisimeileachd.

(R: Would Scottish independence make a difference for Gaelic if it were to happen?

A19: I think so. I believe strongly that it would, that it would make a difference – I don't see how it wouldn't. And I think – not that I remotely think that everything will be made right on the day, on the first day that independence came, but I've always looked on as making a start . . . as the day on which we could make a proper start at putting things right within the country and to look at ourselves in . . . from every perspective, as it were – what's good about us and what things could run better than they are. And Scottish cultural tradition, I don't think we're doing well at that yet, giving a proper place and status to our history, to our language – to our languages and so on. And so I believe strongly that there's a connection between the health of Scottish culture and independence.)

Conversely, another interviewee was much more doubtful that independence would bring a positive change in provision for Gaelic:

R: Am biodh e gu diofar dhan Ghàidhlig nan robh Alba neo-eisimeileach, a bheil thu creidsinn?

A4: *Gu bhith onarach, cha chreid mi gum biodh, air sgàth is gu bheil beachdan cho eadar-dhealaichte aig daoine, chan eil mi a' smaointinn gu bheil na pàrtaidhean air a bhith cunbhalach ann an dòigh sam bith mu dheidhinn an taic a tha iad a' cur iad ris a' Ghàidhlig. 'S e an tuigse a th' agamsa gu bheil daoine à pàrtaidhean eadar-dhealaichte air a bhith a' cur taic ris a' Ghàidhlig aig amannan eadar-dhealaichte ann an eachdraidh na Gàidhlig agus nach eil aon phàrtaidh gu sònraichte math agus mar sin, chan eil fhios agam am biodh. . . . Chan eil duine sam bith ag ràdh, chan eil fiù 's na Nàiseantaich, chan eil iad ag ràdh ' Yeah! Gàidhlig ri fhaotainn anns a h-uile sgoil.' Ach chan eil duine sam bith ag ràdh sin.*

(R: Would it make a difference for Gaelic if Scotland were to be independent, do you think?

A4: To be honest, I don't think it would, because people have such different views, I don't think the parties have been at all consistent concerning their support for Gaelic. My understanding is that people from different parties have been supportive of Gaelic at different times in the history of Gaelic and no party is particularly good and so I don't know if it would . . . Nobody, not even the Nationalists, says 'Yeah! Gaelic to be available in every school'. But nobody is saying that.)

One interviewee (A6) explained that although she herself supported independence, her position was not related to Gaelic and that she felt that Gaelic speakers had diverse views on the independence issue.

12 Conclusion

This report has given an overview of the rich data gathered through this project but further, in-depth analysis is now planned, with a view to producing two or more academic articles dealing with some of the specific issues that have arisen. These articles will contextualise the Gaelic research in the wider international context.

We also intend to gather additional data among new speakers of Gaelic, both in the urban Central Belt and in other areas of Scotland, including Gaelic-speaking areas. This initial study has served an exploratory function and will allow us to refine our approach for an ongoing investigation. We expect to focus in particular on family language use by new speakers and the connection between Gaelic and Gaelic-medium education.

Our ongoing research will benefit considerably from the intellectual and logistical support that is provided by participation in the COST action on new speakers. This allows for intellectual exchange as we learn about ongoing research in other language communities and present our findings to a community of specialist researchers. The issue of new speakers is emerging as an important issue in minority language sociolinguistics and language planning and it is important that Gaelic be included in this process of intellectual exchange.

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