

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: 26B Modern Languages and Linguistics (Celtic and Gaelic)		
Title of case study: Transforming Gaelic language policy and resource development for the 21 st century based on the needs of Gaelic-speaking communities and professionals		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005–present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh	Professor of Gaelic	2005–present
Mark McConville	Research Associate/Project Manager	2010–present
Susan Ross	Research Assistant	2014–2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–31 st December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>UofG-led research, commissioned by Scotland’s statutory Gaelic development agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, has produced authoritative grammatical and lexicographic resources necessary for effective corpus planning. These resources underpin and facilitate the increased formal use of Gaelic in areas such as education, publishing and broadcasting. UofG research also led to the establishment of a national ‘Gaelic Language Academy’, the Comataidh Comhairleachadh Cànan (CCC), and shaped its structure, priorities and policies. As a result, Scotland’s minority Gaelic-speaking community is now supported by the linguistic framework and resources needed to maintain and encourage the growth of their language.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In line with the Gaelic Language Act (Scotland) 2005, Gaelic language policy in Scotland aims to increase both the number of Gaelic speakers and the opportunities available to them for using their Gaelic. Efforts to achieve these high-level goals are generally termed ‘status/acquisition/usage planning’; however, to be successful, they must be complemented by linguistic development activity. The latter is termed ‘corpus planning’ and includes standardising grammar and agreeing new terminology for use in official and technical domains. Since 2009, UofG Gaelic language researchers have played a leading role in a programme of research that has successfully driven forward official corpus planning for Gaelic in Scotland, in close collaboration with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the statutory Gaelic development agency.</p> <p>In 2009 a UofG research report identified the need for corpus planning to take account of the aspirational needs of the user community and to establish a formal Gaelic Academy [3.1]. In 2011, recognising his expertise and leadership in Gaelic languages and linguistics, Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s Gaelic Academy Working Group invited Professor Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh (on behalf of the Board of Celtic Studies (Scotland)) to submit a research paper on establishing a Gaelic language academy, informed by evidence from other language communities. This research [3.2], conducted by Mark McConville and Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, with contributions by Wilson McLeod of Edinburgh University, recommended that the Bòrd commission independent research into the views of Gaelic speakers about corpus planning. In response, the Bòrd commissioned (through a competitive process) a comprehensive consultation to establish the views of Gaelic speakers [3.3, 3.6]. This research project, titled <i>Diùth is Inneach [‘warp and weft’]: Linguistic and institutional foundations for Gaelic corpus planning</i>, was carried out in 2013 by Ó Maolalaigh, McConville and Susan Ross (née Bell), supported by Wilson McLeod.</p>		

Firstly, *Dlùth is Inneach* identified a dominant language ideology of ‘retrovernacularity’ among Gaelic speakers: a belief that the most ‘desirable’ form of the language (even for younger speakers) follows the usage of final generation Gaelic-dominant bilinguals (‘traditional speakers’), raised in Gaelic-speaking communities before the 1970s. The researchers recommended retrovernacularity as the linguistic foundation of Gaelic corpus planning activity, with priority given to retrovernacular usage before other variants.

Secondly, three distinct channels of social legitimacy were identified: popular, scientific and political. Gaelic speakers believed all three should be incorporated into any formal institutional foundation for Gaelic corpus planning (such as a ‘Gaelic language academy’). Based on this finding, UofG researchers recommended the Bòrd run a pilot project incorporating these principles, with ‘model’ traditional speakers working with linguistic experts and experienced Gaelic policymakers on a range of corpus planning tasks, focusing on grammar standardisation. The norms having been set by traditional speakers would establish popular legitimacy for any standardisation.

In 2016 Bòrd na Gàidhlig commissioned Ó Maolalaigh, again via a competitive process, to lead a pilot project named LEACAG, ‘Leasachadh Corpais na Gàidhlig’ (Gaelic corpus development). The project, under the auspices of [Soillse](#) (*the National Research Network for the Maintenance and Revitalisation of Gaelic Language and Culture*), included McConville, Ross, and collaborators at Edinburgh and University of Highlands and Islands’ Sabhal Mòr Ostaig [3.5], and provided expert scholarly support to the Bòrd’s Comataidh Comhairleachaidh Cànanain (CCC – Language Advisory Committee). The CCC’s establishment emerged from a recommendation of the research, and it comprises a gender and dialect-balanced group of traditional Gaelic speakers, each of whom has significant experience in practical domains of Gaelic language policy (e.g. broadcasting, publishing) with linguistic expertise input from the UofG team. In this way the project established norms for some of the most contentious issues in Gaelic grammar variation [3.5, 3.6].

Aside from academic leadership of these projects, UofG’s contribution has been:

- (a) Conducting detailed investigations into identified grammatical issues and variation, using evidence from Corpas na Gàidhlig, a 30-million-word database of modern Scottish Gaelic usage, developed at UofG as part of the ongoing project, Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (DASG) [3.7].
- (b) Producing systematic usage guidance on these grammatical issues, based on both corpus evidence and input from traditional speakers living in the Western Isles. Grammar guidance was subsequently approved by CCC in 2018 and [published online](#) in 2019.
- (c) Synthetic analysis of terminology usage by bringing together multiple databases

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Bauer, Ó Maolalaigh & Wherrett 2009, Survey of Gaelic Corpus Technology.
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/54147/>
- 3.2 Mark McConville, Wilson McLeod & Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh (2011). *A Way Forward for Gaelic Corpus Planning and the Gaelic Language Academy*. Working paper submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig.[available on request from HEI]
- 3.3 Bell, S., McConville, M., McLeod, W., and Ó Maolalaigh. *Dlùth is Inneach: Linguistic and Institutional Foundations for Gaelic Corpus Planning*. Project Report
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/98132/1/98132.pdf>

- 3.4 Ó Maolalaigh, R. (2013) *Corpas na Gàidhlig and singular nouns with the numerals 'three' to 'ten' in Scottish Gaelic*. In: Anderson, W. (ed.) *Language in Scotland: Corpus-based Studies. Series: Scottish cultural review of language and literature* (19). Rodopi: Amsterdam & New York, pp.113–142. ISBN 9789042037182; E-Book ISBN: 9789401209748 [available on request from HEI]
- 3.5 Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, Mark McConville, Susan Ross, William Lamb, Wilson McLeod, Charles Wilson, Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, Richard Cox (2018). *Leasachadh Corpas na Gàidhlig (LEACAG) Final Report: Key Issues in Gaelic Grammar*. Bòrd na Gàidhlig / Soillse. [available on request from HEI]
- 3.6 Ó Maolalaigh, R. and McConville, M. (2020) 'Risk-free' corpus-planning for Scottish Gaelic? Collaborative development of basic grammatical norms for 21st century speakers.' In: Kopaczyk, J. and Millar, R. M. (eds.) *Language on the Move Across Contexts and Communities*. Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster: Aberdeen. <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/211589/>
- 3.7 Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh *Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic*. [<https://dasg.ac.uk/>]

Quality: the body of research, mostly peer-reviewed and funded by the British Academy and Bòrd na Gàidhlig through competitive processes, is expected to meet or exceed the 2* threshold.

4. Details of the impact

Gaelic used to be spoken across much of Scotland. Today there are approximately 60,000 speakers of the language in Scotland, with [decreasing use in remaining vernacular communities](#) indicating a serious existential threat to the language. Gaelic-medium education is available in most schools in the Highlands and ~30 schools in other areas, and was confirmed as an official language of Scotland in 2005. Nonetheless, the development of Gaelic was hindered by various factors, including a lack of agreement on the standardisation of variable vocabulary and grammar, and no mechanism for disseminating any agreed norms and new terminology.

The UofG-led research helped establish a common pioneering framework, based on the three identified pillars of social legitimacy, and shaped development of resources for the development of the language. The Director of Language Planning and Community Developments at Bòrd na Gàidhlig [5.1] commented that (UofG-led) '*Diùth is Inneach and the follow-on LEACAG projects have had a significant, positive impact on the development of Gaelic corpus development, providing strong linguistic and institutional foundations ...from the outset.*'

The creation of a Gaelic language academy and advances in standardisation

In 2015 the CCC, a Gaelic language academy, was established, based on the UofG-led research and recommendations, bringing together for the first time 'model' Gaelic speakers from education, broadcasting, public administration, and publishing. In doing so, the CCC combines the popular, scientific, and political legitimacy needed to guide the development of the language – a key insight of the research. The Gaelic Plan Officer for the Scottish Government's Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Learning Directorate [5.2] noted that the UofG research: *delivered the authority necessary for development of the language, with the Diùth is Inneach project (2013–14) serving as a template for subsequent corpus planning activity. Diùth is Inneach was significant in that it provided evidence of the need for such authority... [it] both recommended and showed us how this can be done, in the form of the Language Advisory Committee (CCC).*

The Chair of the CCC [5.3], commented that the CCC was established '*as a direct result of a comprehensive consultation with Gaelic speakers undertaken by ...Glasgow University in 2013*'

and that *'Dlùth is Inneach ... established the core principles that guide CCC'*. She noted that the CCC benefited from the *'well designed, thorough and effective data-based research undertaken by the team at Glasgow ... [and] from the research team's expertise'*, adding that *'corpus development is critical to the survival and revitalisation of Gaelic and... CCC and the LEACAG team achieved a large degree of consensus about the priorities and processes for future Gaelic corpus development'*. Another member of the CCC [5.4], further noted that *Dlùth is Inneach's 'detailed analysis of language usage ... enabled CCC to make recommendations and guidance as to grammar usages'*.

Supporting professional Gaelic speakers in education, publishing and broadcasting

The production of language resources that carry the legitimacy recommended by the research mark a significant contribution to standardisation and corpus development. A prototype system for incorporating and disseminating new terminology, led by McConville, along with production of grammar guidance, has driven the creation of a new [terminology hub](#) that allows users to query multiple databases from a single search interface, and hence find the most appropriate terminology more quickly and efficiently. [5.5, 5.1] New grammar guidance for Gaelic learners and users was informed by UofG research and in 2018 approved by the CCC. The guidance was [launched in March 2019](#), available from DASG, receiving 2,902 hits by the end of December 2020 [5.5]. For the first time, aspiring Gaelic speakers are offered solutions to 11 of the most controversial issues in modern Gaelic grammar, for example the complex areas of dative (concerning indirect objects) and genitive (concerning possession) case usage. Their authoritative status derives from the fact that they are *'based on the key requirements of the modern Gaelic-speaking community, with expert input from a group of Gaelic speakers representing dialectical variations'* [5.2]. Reflecting its success, the Bòrd has now commissioned UofG to expand the grammar guidance over the next three years.

The Scottish Government's Gaelic Plan Officer [5.2] commented that *'UofG's grammar guidance has impacted on the different parts of the Gaelic world in which I work: in translation, education, broadcasting and publishing'*, because it is *'essential in all these areas that the official agencies and speakers agree on usage matters, and the evidence provided by LEACAG and UofG's other projects have now made it possible for the first time to reach such agreement'*.

The Director of Strategy and Partnership at MG ALBA (the statutory body set up by the UK Government in 1993 to administer the Gaelic Television Fund) said of these resources during their creation in 2017, *'this work is both practical and useful, and, importantly, it also has the authority of traditional speakers and academia'* [5.6]. For Gaelic broadcasting in particular, advances in corpus planning are very important. The Director-General of the national Irish language broadcaster TG4 (formerly of BBC ALBA), explained that when BBC ALBA was developed (2008–2012), there was a striking lack of corpus development for Gaelic in Scotland compared with Irish in Ireland. In his opinion, this is crucial because minority-language broadcasters cover the same breadth of topics and therefore require equal linguistic tools to those available to majority-language broadcasters [5.7]. He further commented: *'Thanks in large part to the efforts of Professor Ó Maolalaigh and his colleagues, I believe that Scottish Gaelic now has a sustainable, authoritative, professional and democratic framework for ongoing corpus planning suitable to the needs of the language in the modern world.'*

Bòrd na Gàidhlig commissioned Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig (the national agency which produces learning materials for statutory Gaelic education) to transform the 27 pages of grammar guidance into an accessible resource for use in primary schools. Although its launch was delayed because of Covid, this will enhance its benefits in educational contexts [5.2]. The

former Head of the Glasgow Gaelic School (until 2020) said that for Gaelic teachers, '*grammar [is] the area of greatest concern ... and they will welcome this research and subsequent iteration as a resource for teachers*' [5.8]. A CCC member [5.4] who is a former Director of the Gaelic Books Council and an expert in Gaelic publishing, commented that '*standardisation supported by the new guidance will have clear commercial, efficiency and cultural benefits, giving writers and publishers confidence in the Gaelic they use.*'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial letter, Director of Language Planning and Community Developments at Bòrd na Gàidhlig [PDF], corroborating the impact of the Dlùth is Inneach and LEACAG projects on Gaelic corpus development.
- 5.2 Testimonial letter, Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government [PDF], outlining the impact of Dlùth is Inneach in establishing the principles for language development as well as the impact of the grammar guidance in a range of professional spheres.
- 5.3 Testimonial letter, Chair of the CCC [PDF], corroborating that the establishment of the CCC and its founding principles are based on evidence from the UofG research and describing the value of UofG's expertise in ongoing collaboration.
- 5.4 Testimonial letter, Director of the Gaelic Books Council 1976–2010 and member of the Executive Council of the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society and CCC [PDF], detailing how the CCC have used recommendations and guidance on grammar from the UofG research and the importance of the grammar guidance for publishing as well as other fields.
- 5.5 Website analytics for grammar resource at DASG [PDF]
- 5.6 Statement by Iseabail Mactaggart, Director of Strategy and Partnership, at MG ALBA – Quotation from [Community at the centre of Gaelic Language Development](#), Bòrd na Gàidhlig [PDF], corroborating the value of the grammar resource for Gaelic-speaking communities.
- 5.7 Testimonial letter, Director General TG4, formerly of MG ALBA [PDF], explaining the importance of grammar standardisation resulting from the research for minority language broadcasting in particular, with detailed comparison between Ireland and Scotland.
- 5.8 Testimonial letter, Headteacher, the Glasgow Gaelic School [PDF, dated February 2020, since retired], corroborating the importance of the grammar resources and Stòrlann's adaptation of them for schools having been based on academic research and invaluable for teachers' practice owing to the uncertainty around grammar issues.