The School of Scottish Studies and Language Policy and Planning for Gaelic

ROBERT DUNBAR

ABSTRACT

The School of Scottish Studies (the 'School') was inaugurated on 31 January 1951 as a semiautonomous institution within the University of Edinburgh, with the broad aim of studying 'Scottish traditional life in its European setting, on lines similar to those developed in several Scandinavian institutes and, more recently, in Ireland and Wales'.

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The School's holdings comprise a sound archive of over 30,000 items, including song and verse, instrumental music, oral narrative, custom and belief, traditional knowledge, material culture and contemporary ethnology in Scots, Gaelic and English, a film/video archive of about 320 items, including craft processes, customs, storytelling and song performances, a photographic archive of over 50,000 images, including those taken on fieldwork, and a manuscript collection which includes original manuscripts and copies of those held elsewhere, the Scottish Place-name Survey and the Gaelic and Scots Linguistic Surveys, project papers, and fieldwork notes (Ranft and Richmond 2012: 6). The School has benefited from the work of a number of outstanding collector-scholars, many of whom were Gaelic-speakers focusing on the Gaelic tradition, including the first collector in the school, Calum Maclean (1915–1960; see Wiseman 2010 and MacGilleathain 2011), James Ross (1923–1971), Morag MacLeod, Donald Archie MacDonald (1929–1999), Alan Bruford (1927–1995), Eric Cregeen (1921–1983), and, of course, John MacInnes (see, generally, M. Mackay 2013).

The cultural importance of the Archives is obvious, but relationships between the Archives, and in particular the activities of its staff over the years, to language planning for Gaelic are not immediately so; indeed, that there may be such a relationship might have surprised at least some of the School's collectors, who may not have considered language planning to have been part of their remit. Nevertheless, in this paper, I shall explore the ways in which not only the School and its collectors, but also their precedessors, were indeed engaged in a kind of language planning, among many other things. I shall also explore how the legacy of these efforts, in the form of the Archives, is now contributing to language planning for Gaelic, and how it may continue to do so in the future.

As Margaret Mackay has noted, 'the collecting of material relating to Scotland's oral and material culture, its songs, narratives, customs, beliefs and ways of life, has been carried out for many centuries' (M. Mackay 2013: 1), although as she also notes, it was not until the founding of the School that this activity 'became firmly fixed within an institutional framework' (ibid: 2). Thus, in some respects, the work of the School builds on the efforts of earlier collectors who relied on somewhat different media for the preservation of the traditions which they recorded. Until the twentieth century, this material was found in manuscripts, books and similar text-based media.

The older Gaelic tradition of Scotland and Ireland is preserved to some extent in a considerable number of manuscripts dating from the twelfth century onwards, most of which have an Irish provenance (McLeod and Bateman 2007: xxx–xxxi). There appears to have been only very limited collecting of material in vernacular Scottish Gaelic circulating in the oral tradition until the eighteenth century, when a number of collectors began taking down poetry and song (Thomson 1954: 5); the collection of most other genres had to wait until about the middle of the mid-

nineteenth century. For example, in the 1750s, both the Rev. Donald MacNicol (1735–1802) and Jerome Stone (1727–1756) were collecting material, including songs and poetry (Henderson 1908–11; Mackinnon 1887–88). Perhaps the two most important manuscript collections of this period were those made by the Rev. Ewen MacDiarmid (d. 1801) (Thomson 1992) and the Rev. James MacLagan (1728–1805) (Thomson 1993–94), although the manuscript collections of Dr Hector Maclean (1704–83) of Grulin, Mull (Ó Baoill 2001), and, a little later, of Rev. Dr. Alexander Irvine (1773–1824; see Hogg 2011) are also important.

The printing press allowed for the much wider circulation of the Gaelic material which was being collected, and beginning with the publication in 1751 of *Ais-eiridh na sean chánoin Albannaich; no, An nuadh oranaiche Gaidhealach* by Alexander MacDonald ('Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair', c. 1695–c. 1770), Gaels began seizing on the opportunities which print provided. *Comh-chruinneachidh Orannaigh Gaidhealach*, the 'Eigg Collection', published in 1776 by Ranald MacDonald ('Raghnall Dubh', c. 1728–c. 1808), the son of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, was the first of many important anthologies of Gaelic poetry drawn at least in part from the oral tradition. From about the middle of the nineteenth century, the range of Gaelic material which was being collected and published began to expand. Between 1859 and 1862, for example, John Francis Campbell of Islay ('Iain Òg Ìle' 1821–85) (see Thompson 1984–86; National Library of Scotland 1985; Shaw 2007), in collaboration with some exceptional fieldworkers, amassed a huge collection of Gaelic tales, some of which were published in four volumes in 1860 and 1862 as *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) collected a wide variety of material, some of which was published in five volumes of *Carmina Gadelica* (from 1900 onwards (Stiùbhart 2008). The Rev. John Gregorson Campbell (1836–91) was also an extremely important collector, not only of folktales, but also of belief legends, Fenian material, and clan lore (see Black 2005), as was Fr Allan MacDonald (1859–1905) (see Hutchison 2010).

The development in the twentieth century of sound recording technology created new possibilities for collectors, and one of the earliest to seize upon these was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857–1930) (Ahlander 2011: xvii–xviii). Perhaps the most important of these early collectors was John Lorne Campbell, 'Fear Chanaidh' (1906–1996), who by the 1930s was already compiling a large collection of sound recordings (Perman 2010). Campbell's recording activities led to a number of important publications (for example, Campbell 1939, 1961, 1962, 1972, 1973, 1990), and now some of the material he collected is being digitised and made available through the *Tobar an Dualchais* project.

A variety of motives have propelled collectors of Gaelic oral tradition – both individual and institutional – in their work; however, from the eighteenth century through to the present, there have been significant continuities, some of which are relevant to this discussion. To some extent, the work of collectors of Gaelic oral tradition mirrored contemporary initiatives – although John MacInnes has pointed out that there were other very particular agendas at work in eighteenth century Gaelic Scotland (MacInnes 1976: 244), something which is true of later periods as well. Certainly, the pioneering work of John Francis Campbell on Gaelic oral narrative owed much to George Dasent and to Norwegian and German antecedents – notably, the Grimms – (Dorson 1968:393–4); and both the establishment and early activities of the School of Scottish Studies were inspired to a considerable degree by developments in Ireland (M. Mackay 2013), and in particular the creation of the Irish Folklore Commission, the creation of which was itself informed by developments in Scandinavia (Briody 2008). Concerns about the fragility of the oral tradition – the impact of modernity on traditional, rural-based peasant folk cultures, and the necessity of recording it for posterity before it disappeared – rather than more particular concerns about the fragility of the languages themselves lay behind much of this activity. However, in the Gaelic context, those more particular concerns were frequently also deeply and intimately involved.

Linguistic concerns are evident in Alexander MacDonald's groundbreaking 1751 collection, as its very title, *Ais-eiridh na sean chánoin Albannaich*, 'The Resurrection of the the Old Scottish

Language', reveals. As Peter Mackay notes, MacDonald 'engages in celebration, advertisement and rapprochement' (P. Mackay 2013: 117). Rapprochement was certainly a priority – the book was published only five years after Culloden, and as John MacInnes has noted, MacDonald 'is obviously attempting to heal the wounds that still smarted in Scotland from the effects of the late Rising' (MacInnes 1976: 245). With regard to 'advertisement', Mackay notes that MacDonald is attempting 'in part to advertise the merits of Gaelic literature, and in part to highlight the 'Scottishness' of that literature', but that he also 'presents his collection of poems as entertainment for those who can read Gaelic, and a possible encouragement for those who cannot to learn' (P. Mackay 2013: 117). Purely linguistic concerns, and indeed an awareness of the precariousness of the Gaelic language itself, were a key part of the agenda of MacDonald's son, Ranald, in his publication in 1776 of the Eigg Collection. Indeed, Ranald MacDonald begins his preface by noting that '[t]he Gaelic language, *now struggling for existence in a narrow corner*, was once the mother tongue of the principal states of Europe' (emphasis added) (MacDhomhnuill 1776: v). He then stakes its claim as the original language of Scotland, and provides what is in essence a sociolinguistic analysis of the reasons for its decline:

> The intrinsic excellence of the language itself, added to that love of ancient customs so prevalent among mankind, and so conspicuous among the Caledonians, might seem, at first view, to give immortality to the Gaelic tongue: But many political causes, which it is not my present purpose to enumerate, concurred to introduce the English language into this country and to render it fashionable at Court.—From this date, we date the decay of the Gaelic language. The English, which paved the way to honour and preferment, was naturally cultivated with care; while the Gaelic, the knowledge or study of which could not then be attended with any emolument, and the speaking of which became even unpolite, was as naturally neglected, and often treated with contempt. The influence of these causes became the more obvious, and operated the more powerfully, the nearer they approached to our times; so that the very remembrance of a language which had once been general over almost all Europe, was in danger of being entirely obliterated. (*ibid:* v–vi)

The work of collecting and publishing Gaelic literature is clearly conceived by Ranald MacDonald as being part of a greater effort to defend the language. Referring implicitly to James MacPherson – and it is clear that Ranald was also, like many of his contemporary Gaels, responding to the Ossianic Controversy and engaged in a defence of MacPherson (see MacInnes 1976) – and others engaged in the publication of Gaelic literuare at about this time, he continues:

> At this critical period a fortunate event happened. Some individuals, animated with the love of their native language, regretted the danger to which they saw it exposed. Compositions of great merit in the language were known to exist. Inquiry was made after these, with a view to publish them, and this was esteemed the best method of preserving the language itself. (ibid: vi–vii).

He concludes his argument as follows: 'The Editor, moved by these considerations [i.e. the Ossianic Controversy], *and desirous to preserve his mother tongue*, has bestowed much labour and expence, during the course of two years, in collecting the poems now offered to the public.' Collecting and publishing of Gaelic oral literature is, then, to no small degree part of a language maintenance project.

The intertwined fates of Gaelic oral literature and the language itself, the importance of maintaining both, and the role that collecting such material played in both initiatives, remained a theme in subsequent periods. And while Gaelic language maintenance and revitalisation, and Gaelic language policy more generally, were not matters which were explicitly recognised as forming part of the mission or activities of the School of Scottish Studies, it is important to remember that these

matters did form part of the context which led to the establishment of the School. Gaelic language maintenance and revitalisation were of great concern to John Lorne Campbell, Derick Thomson, and the Rev. T. M. Murchison, whose Folklore Institute of Scotland, formed in 1947, played an important role in the inspiring the creation of the School (M. Mackay 2013: 5). As early as 1936, the desirability of a survey of Scottish dialects was being discussed, and shortly after his appointment in 1948 to the Chair of English Language and General Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, Angus McIntosh (1914–2005) – who enjoyed a close relationship with John Lorne Campbell – established the Linguistic Surveys of Scotland (Scots and Gaelic) (M. Mackay 2013: 3, 6–7). McIntosh also played a central role in the establishment of the School, and it is clear that the linguistic surveys and the collecting of oral traditions were conceived of as complementary initiatives, each designed to preserve a record of Scotland's linguistic diversity and cultural richness in the face of the homogenising and anglifying influences of twentieth century Britain. Clearly, linguistic considerations, and an awareness of the sociolinguistic and demographic threats which confronted the Gaelic language, continued to inform the work of collectors.

The relationship between the motives and activities of collectors of Gaelic oral tradition on the one hand and language planning become clearer, and the potential inherent in this relationship become even more evident, when the nature of language planning, and in particular language planning for minoritised languages, is considered. Language planning is a relatively young academic discipline, and in the 1960s and 1970s, it was considered to have involved two aspects: corpus planning and status planning. 'Corpus planning' involves modifying the language itself, such as 'coining new terms, reforming spelling, and adopting new script[1] . . . in short, to the creation of new forms,[2] the modification of old ones,[3] or the selection from alternative forms in spoken or written code (Cooper 1989: 31). Corpus planning also often involves the development of dictionaries and grammars, and even of a written literature.

Material collected from an oral tradition constitutes a potentially extremely rich foundation upon which corpus planning activities can be based, something which is particularly true with respect to minority languages. Joshua Fishman, still the most prominent theorist of minority language maintenance and revitalisation (or 'reversing language shift', 'RLS'), has developed a well-known eight stage model, the 'Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale', or 'GIDS', which both allows an assessment of the degree to which a minority language is threatened and provides a guide as to strategies which should be deployed to improve the situation of such languages (Fishman 1991: 81–121). Stage 8 on the GIDS, which is indicative of the stage at which the most threatened languages are situated, occurs when most remaining users of the minority language are isolated older people having few opportunities to use their language. At this stage, Fishman argues that these users are 'individuals who are well recognized as informants by folklorists and by linguists', and the priority is to save 'the last few remnants' of the language as spoken:

> Such preservative efforts are certainly extremely worthwhile because they help both professional and amateur 'collectors' to piece together and restore folksongs, proverbs and folktales, formulaic expressions (greetings, apologies, benedictions, maledictions, etc.) and, from the foregoing, subsequently, to assemble partial phonologies, grammars and lexicons, piece by piece until a reasonable whole is once more at hand....(Fishman 1991: 88)

Quite apart from the cultural and literary value of such material, it represents the foundation on which subsequent language maintenance strategies – most crucially the acquisition of the language by a broader range of people – can be built; indeed, the use of archival resources in the development

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[1] Sometimes referred to as 'graphization': Hornberger 2006: 29.
[2] Sometimes referred to as 'renovation': *ibid*.
[3] Sometimes referred to as 'modernisation': *ibid*.

of reference and learning materials has frequently been highlighted by theorists and practicitioners of minority language maintenance and revitalisation (see Hinton 2001a: 419–23). The recordings made in 1948 by the Irish Folklore Commission of some of the last remaining native speakers of Manx is an excellent example of this sort of project, and these recordings have been a very important resource in the contemporary renewal of Manx (see Manx National Heritage 2004).

Alexander MacDonald, 'Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair', was certainly consciously engaged in corpus planning in his 1751 collection. For example, he provided in his preface a summary of the orthographic conventions he uses 'for the more easy perusal of this work to those who are not expert in reading the language, though perhaps their mother tongue'. He also provided details on his editorial principles, noting that 'no pains have been spared to render the language as plain and intelligible as reasonably can be expected' (Mac-Dhonuill 1751: ix–x). His son Ranald followed his preface with a page-and-a-half section entitled 'Instructions for reading the Gaelic Language', which focused mostly on orthographic matters; thus, he, too, was engaged in corpus planning. Both the Linguistic Survey of Scotland and the School of Scottish Studies Archives provide a huge source of material of relevance to future corpus planning activities in support of Gaelic. Contained within the archives is a wealth of terminology, idioms, placenames and so forth that could be used to enrich contemporary Gaelic language use and inform the development of appropriate terminology and styles for a range of domains. Indeed, Dr Gary West of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh has recently noted that the Scottish Government is committed to increased promotion of both the Gaelic and Scots languages, and that the Archives 'are a rich and unique source for both' (Ranft and Richmond 2012: 34).

The second aspect of language planning,'Status planning', deals with the modification of the functions which a particular language is meant to serve (or, to put it another way, modifications in the domains[4] in which a language is used). It therefore relates to the social and political position of the language (Cooper 1989, 32–3). Status planning has often played a significant part in the decline in minority languages: the designation of a particular language as the 'official' one usually meant the exclusion of other languages from those domains, so-called 'high' domains, which are perceived as socially important and most closely associated with institutions of power and influence. Status planning for minority languages such as Gaelic often involves initiatives aimed at introducing or reintroducing their use in such domains. As the name implies, status planning also relates more generally to enhancing the prestige of a language. It is in respect of this aspect of status planning that the collection of oral traditions is of most relevance and importance: the act of collecting, and of preserving, and then of disseminating such traditions can send an important signal about the value which is attached to the language and its related culture. This was well understood by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. As noted earlier, his 1751 collection was meant as a possible encouragement for those who could not speak Gaelic to learn it – essentially, he had in mind a form of status planning that would lead to an increase in the prestige of the language, resulting in increased acquisition which, as we shall see, is a further area of language planning activity. His more general goals of 'celebration, advertisement and rapprochement', and in particular his desire to demonstrate that Gaelic and its literature were 'cultivated' and 'refined' (P. Mackay 2013: 117) – a desire which was shared by many later editors of Gaelic material, particularly those of the latter part of the nineteenth century (see, for example, Linkletter 2011) – had as their purpose the enhancement of the reputation of the language and its speakers in the wider Scottish context, and this clearly was an exercise in status planning.

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[4] Domains are the contexts in which language is used, and they are defined by three dimensions: the location in which discourse is taking place, the participants in the discourse, and the topic of the discourse. Examples would include the home, the church, the school and the workplace. See Fishman, Cooper, and Ma 1971; Spolsky 2004: 39-56.

In recent years, reference has sometimes been made, in the context of language planning for minority languages, to an additional type of language planning, 'use (or usage) planning' (see, for example, Welsh Language Board, n.d.). In fact, use planning subsumes many aspects of what status planning is concerned with: the encouragement of the practical use of the language in a greater number of domains. However, it is not only concerned with the introduction or reintroduction of the language in so-called 'higher' domains, but also with the protection of the language, and even its reintroduction, in more intimate, informal domains such as the home, the community, and in a variety of local institutions which, though less prestigious and powerful in a broad societal sense, are nonetheless important in terms of actual patterns of daily language use. The contribution which collections such as the Archives make to this aspect of language planning is not as obvious, but there are nonetheless potential indirect links. As noted in the discussion of corpus planning, such collections provide terminology, idioms and styles which may be used to support the introduction or reintroduction of a minority language into a wide variety of domains. As one of many examples, the alleged lack of relevant material for use in early years child-care and pre-school education has been highlighted by researchers (Stephen *et al.* 2010: 31–2). The Gaelic oral tradition has a wealth of such material, much of which is contained in collections such as those of the Archives, which could be deployed by parents and other caregivers, including those working in the pre-school and primary school sectors, through, for example, the development of teaching materials and aides, supported where necessary by training.

'Acquisition planning' is another important area of language planning, added to corpus and status planning by Robert Cooper (Cooper 1989: 33–4). It concerns planning for the increase in the number of users – speakers, writers, listeners or readers – of the language. Obviously, schools and other formal educational institutions are important settings for acquisition planning, but a language is first acquired in the home and local community, and language skills are enhanced by other institutions than educational ones, particularly the media. Acquisition planning, therefore, also involves planning activities outside of the educational system. Acquisition planning is of particular importance to minority languages, as they tend to suffer ongoing losses in numbers of users, often due in part to their exclusion from the education system.

Collections of oral tradition such as those of the School Archives are important in acquisition planning for a variety of reasons. As we have already seen, they are a valuable source of terminology, idioms, placenames and of registers, as well as of dialects, all of which can be extremely useful in the development of language acquisition programmes. As a source of literature, history and cultural information, they also have a huge potential in broader educational programming, something to which we shall return momentarily. Gaelic revitalisation efforts in Nova Scotia provide a good example of how archival material, and in particular digitised sound archives made available through the world wide web, are being deployed in other, non-school based language acquisition initiatives. Modelled on the 'master-apprentice' programmes developed by Leanne Hinton and others (see, for example, Hinton 2001b), 'Bun is Bàrr' is an initiative in which a younger Gaelic learner who has reached a reasonable level of fluency works intensively on a one-to-one basis with a native speaker in order to develop high levels of proficiency in spoken Gaelic. Web-based resources, all drawing on sound recordings made by field workers, are used regularly in these sessions, with the tutor explaining and contextualising the material, and drawing on it as a means of enriching language skills and cultural knowledge. Also notable is the 'Stòras a' Bhaile' programme, held annually at the Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum, which uses a variety of sound recordings in intensive instructional programmes designed to further develop the language skills of participants, and also to impart cultural skills associated with traditional Gaelic culture as it is found in Nova Scotia (Watson 2010). The potential for the use of the School Archives in a variety of language acquisition initiatives, both school-based and community- and locally-based, is very considerable.

One final aspect of the contribution which collections such as the School Archives can make to language planning for Gaelic relates to the cultural value of the contents of the recorded material. Joshua Fishman has emphasised the importance to any language maintenance initiative of supporting a cultural identity associated with and based in the language (Fishman 1991: 5–6, 28), and he argues that traditional forms of cultural expression and traditional aspects of the culture associated with the language are crucial in such identity maintenance efforts. Mark Fettes also emphasises the importance of broader cultural considerations in language maintenance efforts, arguing that 'confronting, marginalizing, and dismantling' dominant discourses transmitted through the majority language and culture which tend to contribute to the linguistic and cultural dislocation of minority language communities is an essential step in any language maintenance effort, but is not by itself sufficient. Communities commited to language renewal must also develop and transmit 'a web of stories attuned to local experience':

> The local language has to be used to meet its speakers' need for concepts and stories that make sense of the world *in their terms*. So storytelling is crucial, in the broad sense used here. Traditional myths and historical accounts; stories about people's relationship with the land and with nature; contemporary tales of despair and hope, love and death; poetry, songs, poems, and so on. Every good story is another reason to cherish the language, another branch on the fire to keep it burning (Fettes 1997: online).

John Shaw has made much the same point. His argument is not that material based in the traditional oral culture of the Gaels is the only cultural content that should be deployed in a language maintenance effort – far from it, as he welcomes and stresses the importance of the language and culture expanding 'into new forms, institutions and sectors' – but that the fostering of a distinctive cultural identity that is based in the language is crucial, and that 'the traditional content which has been maintained in Gaelic communities over generations' (the sort of material which exists in abundance in the School Archives) is also an important component in the mix, and also needs to be nurtured and developed. Thus, apart from any 'instrumental' value that the wealth of material in the School Archives may have in Gaelic language maintenance – for example, as a source for corpus planning and as a tool in language acquisition planning – it clearly has an intrinsic value, not only in a broader sense but in terms of Gaelic language maintenance. As a result, the current generation of Gaelic language planners should be grateful for the efforts of the collectors and preservers of the School of Scottish Studies Archives.

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