BILINGUALISM AND FOLK LIFE

SOME ASPECTS OF THE VERNACULAR SPEECH OF A CROFTING COMMUNITY

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The various problems arising out of the contact or conflict between two different languages have occupied the attention of linguists for generations. Much of this attention is concentrated on linguistic and cultural contacts which occurred in the past, at a time when it is no longer possible to observe them directly. To-day, the Gaelic language in the isles is experiencing intensive penetration by a foreign language. This paper is based on direct observation of the vernacular of a crofting community in actual use. No specific informants are named since the vernacular discussed here is the *lingua franca* of the community, and knowledge of it was gained simply through participation in the specific activities which it documents.

The village, or more properly speaking, the system of townships, to which this paper refers is called Glendale, and lies in a valley opening to the sea on the north-west tip of Skye. Including the contiguous townships to the east on the western shores of Loch Dunvegan, the area has a population of approximately three hundred people, among which the old and the very young predominate. Some 97 per cent of these are speakers of Gaelic. At the time of writing, the area has two elementary schools, one having been closed recently. There are four Presbyterian factions, three of which meet regularly and in which the Gaelic language predominates.

Gaelic is the language used in all normal social intercourse. At public meetings English tends to be used, normally due to the presence of a non-Gaelic speaking official. On the whole, English is used by most native speakers rather sparingly and almost always in conversation with the few resident non-Gaelic

speakers or to visitors. It may be used also in conversation with speakers of another Gaelic dialect, and, an interesting psychological fact, it tends to be used in disputations and quarrels. One or two mothers of the younger generation recently began to speak a form of English to their children and this, combined with the influence of a few children of non-Gaelic speaking parents and with the potent influence of the schoolroom itself has resulted in the appearance of English as a play language in the elementary school in the glen. It is unlikely that at this stage these children will grow up to be English speaking. There is some evidence to show that children subjected to English from their mothers and in the school playground can still become fluent in Gaelic in a very short time through contact with adults and other Gaelic speaking children outside the school playground.

The study of bilingualism in any community has many aspects—educational, sociological and linguistic, and the complete description of a bilingual situation would involve consideration of them all. Language prestige, for instance, is an important factor. The greater prestige of the secondary language will drive people sometimes to deny knowledge of their mother tongue, whether they are native Spanish speakers in Arizona or Gaelic speaking adolescents in parts of Skye. The concept of prestige, however, must be carefully used. To the Gaelic speaker English has not the prestige that, for instance, French has in the eyes of some users of English. The Gaelic speaker of this area would not think it fashionable to use English words and phrases in the context of his Gaelic speech, and it is a common type of joke to retain and repeat sections of overheard conversation heavily loaded with English words. Also, macaronic songs exploiting the mixing of the languages to achieve bathos are enjoyed.

It is unlikely, therefore, that the superior prestige of the secondary language can account for the large scale lexical penetration of English and Scots which is apparent in the local vernacular. Discussing apparently irrational borrowings in Irish, the late Madame Sjoestedt Jonval was probably mistaken in attributing the replacement of the word *crios* by the English "belt" to the superior prestige of English.[1] It is not that the study of loan words should be regarded as a purely linguistic matter and carried on without reference to sociological and cultural factors. It is, on the contrary, the main purpose of this brief paper to survey the borrowed elements

in this vernacular and relate them to widespread but definitive cultural impacts.

Before proceeding to a discussion of these borrowed elements, it should be emphasised that the local English, lexically speaking, is standard English containing no specifically dialect vocabulary. Many of the loan words, therefore, exist in Gaelic context only and do not occur in the local English. Those that do, frequently have a different pronunciation. Lubricating grease, pronounced [ɡ̊ri:s][2] in English context is [ɡ̊ri:ʃ] in Gaelic context, while "shovel" is ['ʃøfəl] and ['ʃefəl] respectively. Numerous examples could be given of different usages of this kind.

While words from English and Scots have penetrated the vernacular in all spheres of usage, they are more particularly marked in some spheres than in others. An examination of the dating and time reference vocabulary now in use is revealing in this respect. While there is, for instance, a native word for a month *mios*, points or periods within a year were never referred to by individual month names. Reference was usually made to the seasons, to seasonal limits such as *Bealltainn* and *Samhuinn*, and to certain periods within the seasons which had special names. Only one of these is now in use and this is the period of the *Iuchar*, extending from the middle of July to the middle of August.

The result of this different time division and time reference system which is now going into disuse is that the English dating system with all the month names of the English calendar are firmly established in common usage. This is in direct contrast to the names of the seasons and of the days of the week which show no English influence whatsoever.

The vocabulary relating to agricultural practices also shows extensive penetration by English and Scots terms. Commercial sheep farming, stone dyking and fencing, drainage and other agricultural improvements were introduced and we can trace their effect on the language. In the case of sheep farming what was new was the scale and the methods of handling the sheep, and in this case also the introduction of new vocabulary is partial only. The technical terms for the various stages in the development of a sheep have remained Gaelic. In the female these are *uan* lamb, *othaisg* one year, *dianag* two years, and *caora* mature sheep. In the male they are respectively *uan*, *sia-reitheach*, *dò-'liadhnach* and *trì-'liadhnach*. The word seota ['ʃɔht̪ə], from the Scots "shot", a poor quality

sheep that is rejected from the flock, undoubtedly stems from the introduction of the practice of having an annual inspection to select such animals from the flock. The vocabulary of the complicated system of ear-markings remains intractably Gaelic. The Lost and Found columns of the Stornoway Gazette indicate that this is probably the only sphere in which it is still necessary to use the Gaelic language for commercial or business purposes. While the ear markings remain, the Scots word "keel" [cil] has been introduced to indicate the colouring matter that marks the fleece. There is a strong English element in dog calls, as in dog names, although sometimes a Gaelic translation is used, such as in the familiar command *fan a mach* for "wide off". No traditional accounts are available in this area of earlier methods of handling sheep with dogs, if dogs were indeed used. Traditional information about sheep milking, however, and about sheep shielings, indicate that in the earlier period sheep were more domesticated than at present and that perhaps neither specially trained sheep dogs nor colouring matter to make the sheep recognisable at a distance were necessary.

In wire fencing, the fence itself is simply ['fɛnsə], the post ['pɔs̪tə], the wire ['wɛ-ər] and the strong post that takes the strain at a corner is [s̪trɛ:nɛr], presumably from "strainer". A gate, whether on a wire fence or on a stone dyke is *geata* ['ʃɛht̪ə], but a gate-way on an old earthen dyke normally closed with a moveable hurdle is *cachalath.*

The terminology of cattle rearing and its associated activities remains entirely Gaelic. Some influence is to be seen however in words associated with land cultivation and crop winning. A farm building with its outhouses, as distinct from a croft, is called ['skwɛ-ər] from "square". There is only one such building in this area. An open drain on the land is simply called ['d̪rɛ:nə] from "drain". A closed one is *saibhear* from the Scots "siver". This is also used for a culvert under a roadway and may have been introduced with roadmaking innovations. The Gaelic word *clais* remains for the roadside ditch as for the furrow of the plough.

The croft is now firmly [l̪ɔht̪] from the English "lot", portion or share. It can be qualified by Gaelic adjectives, such as in the compound "leth-*lot*", half-croft, and in "*lot* slàn", a whole croft. So firmly established is it that the dyke separating the common grazing from the arable land is called gàradh a *lot.* No systematic rotation of crops is practised but there are

some terms, all Gaelic, which define portions of lands in relation to when they were last tilled. Haymaking has a Scots vocabulary, the haycock on the croft is *coc* while the rectangular rick in the stackyard is *dais* [d̪aʃ] from the Scots "dash" a flat portion of a stack or rick. This is cognate with English word "dais". The small semi-permanent conical cornstack in the field is *toit* [t̪ɔhtʹ] from the Scots word "hot" which has a similar usage. Assimilation to the Gaelic sound system here is complete; not only is there back mutation from *h* to *t* but the final alveolar plosive is palatalised and pre-aspirated. The imported coconut husk roping which has replaced the locally made *sùgan* has the exotic name [kaiʹja:], presumably from "coir", the name adopted in English for this rope, ultimately from the Tamil *ĸayiru*.

As might be expected, English influence is particularly marked in the sphere of personal clothing and adornments. A jacket is [ʹʃahxkɛtʹ] and a heavy woollen scarf is [karəʹvaht̪ə] from the Scots "gravat". On the other hand, for a lighter scarf the English borrowing [ʹskarfə] is used. English penetration here is very considerable and very few Gaelic terms remain. A buckle is [ʹbuxkəɬ], a brooch is [ʹbrɔtʃə] and a frock is [ʹfrɔg̊ə]. The English, or in this case the Scots, plural ending *s* is preserved in the word [ʹbaxə̤ls] an old worn out pair of shoes, from the Scots "bauchles". The plural is also preserved in the word *spreigs* from the English or Scots "sprigs" little headless nails used in shoemaking. An interesting limitation of meaning is evident in the imported word for a shoe-lace [ʹl̤isɛr] from the Scots "lacer". This generally means a fabric lace rather than a leather one which is called by the native term *barr-eille* [ʹbareʎə]. This is an instance of the name of an imported article only partially supplanting the name of a native article having the same function, and it is probable that the latter was still being made for a time while the manufactured article was also in use.

In the field of domestic furniture and appliances, the penetration has been almost complete. Most of the borrowings are very recent, such as [ʹpanə] for pan, [ʹpɛlə] for pail, [ʹʃe-ər] for chair, [ʹmøl̤pɔt̤] for milk-pot, [ʹkanist̪ɛr] for tea caddy, [ʹʃug̊ə] for jug, and [g̊rɛ:t̤ə] for grate. The word for frying pan is [ʹpraipan]. Back mutation from *f* to *p* has taken place in the noun, though not in the verb to fry which is [ʹfrai-iʃ] in the second person imperative. Another interesting borrowing in household vocabulary is *seaplais* [ʹsɛhplɛʃ],

soapy water in which dishes have been washed. This seems to have been derived from the Scots word "sapple", which, when used in the plural "sapples" means soap-suds. In the term for a brush we see again a substitution of English terminology in accordance with a change in material culture. The older term *sguabach* which is still used for the home-made switch of heather, has been replaced by [ˌbruʃ] for the manufactured article. Again the term [ˈbauɬə] for a bowl has replaced the familiar older term *cuach*. *Cuach* is still used to describe the bowl or cup of a song-bird's nest.

This influence has been extended to the schoolroom. The desk at which one sits is [ˌdask], and the strap one gets is [strahp] or [ˌta:s]. from "tawse". An interesting development has occurred in the words for a slate-pencil and lead pencil. If a child used the word [ˈpɛnsɛl] he is not referring to the latter but to the former. The word for a lead pencil is simply [løˌd] probably from some Scots form "leed".

There are a few words which have probably entered this vernacular through military influences. The word [ˈɛhkəˌʂɛɕ] is from "exercise" while the interesting word [ˈplaˌtu-ən] a resounding blow, or sometimes a "verbal volley" is presumably from the archaic English "platoon", a volley of musketry. The word "surtoo" for a long overcoat is ultimately from the French *surtout* but by what route it is not possible to say with certainty. The verb "to enlist" has become [ˈløstiʲ] the pretonic syllable *en-* having been dropped.

Nautical influence has yielded the interesting word [ˈbunɛlas] for windlass. Here back mutation from *w* to *b* has taken place. The change in the stressed vowel from [i] to [u] is irregular and we should assume as intermediate stage [ø]. Nautical influence has also contributed to the phenomenon of borrowing the same word from two different dialects and investing it with two different usages. While the verb "to roll" has been borrowed from English in the form [ˈɽɔliʲ], it has also been borrowed from Scots in the form [ɽaul]. The form *rowl* is attested from the North East of Scotland and from Shetland. What has happened in the case of this borrowing from two dialects is that [ˈɽɔliʲ] is limited in usage to the rolling of an object over and over, while [ɽaul] is used to describe the rolling from side to side of a ship at sea.

There are also a number of borrowings which are not confined to any particular sphere of life. These include some "particle" words. The Scots word "het", anything, is in

common use, as is also [ʰpøt̲] in the phrase "cha d' fhuair mi [ʰpøt̲]"—I did not get anything. This seems to be from the English "bit". The word is also used in the idiomatic phrase "thug e [vøt̲] dha"—he did not succeed. Occurring also in similar idiomatic context is another Scots word for a particle or little bit—"stem". The idiom "cha d'rinn e *stem* dheth", "he did not accomplish it" is in common usė.

The above discussion of loan words has been confined deliberately to their use in one community. The selection of one limited area is a matter of method, and it does not imply that similar developments are unknown or rare in other communities in the Gaelic area. Important information can be gained about linguistic interaction by a close look at the vernacular of one community actually in use. The community selected is by no means untypical of a conservative Highland crofting district and the cultural impacts discussed are widespread. The impact of sheep farming on a predominantly cattle rearing people led to changes in crofting methods generally, while modern ideas about agriculture and crop winning had some influence on the techniques used to provide winter feed. The trends of linguistic penetration along those lines will therefore be very similar in different areas with some variations in detail. The word for "turnip" in this vernacular is borrowed directly from English while the [ʃɲɛ̃hp] of certain other districts comes from the Scots "neep", with back mutation of *n* to *sn*, and palatalisation caused by the vowel. While it is not the purpose of this paper to investigate such local variations, it is interesting to point out that many Scots, as distinct from English borrowings, are felt to be Gaelic. This is simply because the average Gaelic speaker is quite unfamiliar with Scots dialect. The users of [ʃɲɛ̃hp] for "turnip", for instance, feel that it is an indigenous Gaelic word and tend to regard the users of *tuirneap* as unduly Anglicised in their speech. This is despite the known fact that turnips were not introduced into the Highland area until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.[3]

Apparently also to be correlated with the spread of the "agricultural revolution" are the movements of rabbits and their multiplication in different areas.[4] Their introduction at different periods has resulted in different terms being used. In this vernacular the word is [ˈʈɛʰpɜtˈ] from English "rabbit", while the "proper Gaelic" of a number of other areas is *coineineach*, corresponding to the *coney*, *coning*, *kunnin*, *cuning* of various Scots dialects.

Surveying the whole field of borrowings, it is obvious that the large scale penetration of the language by English and Scots terms is neither haphazard nor difficult to rationalise. The native culture of the crofter was a very specialised one, the practice of agriculture was rudimentary and the implements associated with it were few in number. Housing, again, was of the simplest kind as were the furnishings. The elaboration of equipment and possessions due to the gradual introduction of manufactured goods necessitated new terms. Even where these goods had precisely the same function as the traditional articles, they brought their own names with them—"belt" to displace the familiar and widely used *crios*, "bowl" to displace *cuach*, "brush" for *sguabach*—examples could be multiplied. New techniques also brought their own vocabulary while a native technique such as peat cutting remains untouched.

One is faced with the question of the extent to which it is possible to date such borrowings by phonetic analysis. A general statement such as "the earlier the borrowing the greater will be the adaptation to the native sound system" is not properly applicable to this case. It is clear that considerable adaptation can take place in a very short time, while, on the other hand, foreign features can be retained in early borrowings. We can assume that in a predominantly monoglot population adaptation would be swift although not necessarily complete. Alveolar articulations are revealing in this context. The alveolar plosives *t*, *d* have been in the vernacular for a considerable time and seem to have survived a predominantly monoglot phase. The voiced plosive has, of course, been devoiced and the voiceless one aspirated. Examples of the retention of these consonants (they are underlined in the phonetic representations given above) are numerous. They occur frequently with the native feature of pre-aspiration in words such as [l̥ɔht̲] a croft, [n̥ɔht̲] a pound sterling, and [t̲aoit̲] bold or hardy, a word of uncertain origin. Alveolar *-t-* is found also in an interesting borrowing which is probably early ['taulɛr, -ɔxk] a lazy or useless dog, or the act, on the part of a dog, of lying or standing around always in the way. The word appears to be English "toller" or "tauler", a kind of dog used as a decoy in hunting. The word passed into North American and although it is not attested as yet in Scots in this sense, it possibly existed in dialects from which it passed into Gaelic. Alveolar *-d-* survives in the word [skø̤d] in the phrase "dh'fhalbh e le [skø̤d]" he went at a great

speed. This is derived from the Scots verb "to scud"—to skim a flat stone over water.

It is not easy, therefore, to use the concept of degree of adaptation in estimating the age of loan words. We must assume that a number of the words containing alveolar articulations survived for part of the time through the speech of monoglot speakers. Imperfect adaptation to the native sound system is also seen in features which contradict the system of initial mutations, such as in the words [l̪ɔht̪] and [n̪ɔht̪] already quoted. Indeed, with few exceptions all alveolar consonants have been easily accepted even when, as in this case, they contradict the morphological system of the mother tongue. A scientific description of the *vernacular*, therefore, would probably reveal a more elaborate sound system than a description of that portion of it only which is historically Gaelic.

Generally speaking, there are two main classes of borrowings, the first group largely oral and from Scots and belonging to a predominantly monoglot period, and the second largely from the English of the schoolroom and from the printed page. To the first group belong, among others, the words which show back mutation such as *w* to *s* in *siosacot* from "waistcoat" and *w* to *b* in *bunalas* from windlass, *h* to *t* in *toit* from "hot" and the other examples already quoted. A further one is the *v* to *m* in the verb ['mɛn̪tər] —a sense of daring, probably from "venture". Such fundamental changes could not occur in a predominantly bilingual phase.

We must regard the members of the second group as being in a state of process phonetically, because the continuous reinforcement of their English forms by education and the printed page will probably drive their specifically Gaelic forms out of use. There are still, however, a large number of these English words in Gaelic form in the vernacular.

The receptiveness of Gaelic to penetration of a lexical kind is unusually great in view of its almost complete resistance to interference of a phonetic or phonemic kind. The latter phenomenon is explicable by the curious relationship which exists between the two languages. The people's knowledge of English is almost entirely from the schoolroom and from the printed page. Practically the only non-Gaelic sound taught by generations of Gaelic teachers is the English *-th-* [ϴ]. Even this tends to be improperly learnt or forgotten and *-s-* is quite frequently substituted for it. The result is that the local English

[o]	>[ɔ]
drove	>d̪rɔ:v
notion	>ˈnɔ:ʃɛn
soda	>ˈsɔ:da
note	>n̪ɔht̪
most	>mɔst̪
moleskin	>ˈmɔ:lʃʲin
loaf	>ˈl̪ɔfə
pole	>ˈpʾɔ:lə
stove	>ˈst̪ɔ:fə
stroke	>ˈst̪rɔ:xk

[ɔ]	>[a]
saucer	>ˈsa:sar
call	>ˈka:liʲ
lorry	>ˈl̪a:ri
hall	>ha:ɬ̪
ball	>b̪a:ɬ̪
pawn	>pʾa:n

[ʌ]	>[u]
monkey	>mũŋg̪i
brush	>b̪ruʃ
turnip	>ˈtʿuŋahp
jug	>ˈʃud̪e
onion	>ˈũɲɛn
puddler	>ˈbud̪l̪ɛraxk

[e]	>[ɛ]
train	>t̪rɛ̃:n
drain	>ˈd̪rɛ:nə
rail	>ˈɾɛ:lɛ
game	>gʲɛ̃:m
plaguing	>ˈplɛ-igʲəɣ
paint	>pʾɛnt̪
trade	>t̪ʾrɛd̪
baker	>ˈb̪ɛ:gʲɛr
"the Rainies"	>na ˈɾɛ̃:nis
square	>ˈskwɛ-ər
grate	>ˈg̊rɛ:d̪ə

[i]	>[ø]
trim	>t̪røm
bit	>b̪ød̪
clipper	>ˈkløb̪ɛr
prig	>pʾrøʲ
milk-pot	>ˈmølpɔd̪
pit	>pʿøt̪
print	>pʿrønt̪
clip	>kløp

REFERENCES

[1] *Étrennes de linguistique Offertes . . . à Emile Benveniste* (Paris 1928), 81-122.

[2] The symbols are those of the International Phonetic Alphabet, with a few modifications for the particular requirements of this paper. Certain consonants are underlined to emphasise alveolar articulation, e.g. *n*, *t*, *l*, and to indicate lack of assimilation to the Gaelic sound system. [ø] is a mid back, half open vowel, not rounded.

[3] J. MacDonald, *The Agriculture of the Hebrides* (Edinburgh 1811) 217.

[4] James Ritchie, *Influence of Man on Animal Life in Scotland* (Cambridge 1920) 252.

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has an almost completely Gaelic sound system. There is no contact with an English or Scots dialect substantial enough to influence their English articulations and to impose changes which could find their way back into the native speech.

By referring to extensive material culture contacts we can account for the vast majority of recent loan words. We are at the same time, however, faced with the utter *designative inadequacy* of the native language. This is probably a heritage of the rigidly monolingual educational policy followed since compulsory education was first introduced. The language seems unable to extend itself beyond the sphere of immediate experience, beyond the frequently seen or heard. Noticeable in this category are the names of migrant or rare birds and the names of fish and plants. It is not so much a question of inability to recognise but inability to name except with an English term. Place-names also fall into this category. All names of places in the locality or in the neighbourhood are invariably in Gaelic. There is no English influence whatsoever discernible in any of these place-names used in the context of Gaelic, although if uttered in English context to a visitor they will have Anglicised forms. Yet, place-names not in constant use are increasingly developing English forms. The Gaelic names for the counties of Caithness, Sutherland and Argyll are going quite out of use, as are those of Highland towns, such as Fort William, Fort Augustus, and Campbeltown. Since education other than that from traditional knowledge or visual experience has always been through the medium of English, it is obvious that the bounds of a Gaelic speaker's knowledge will be wider than the scope of his language. There are thus a great number of English words entering the language which are not discussed in this paper, and are not due to cultural penetration but to the designative incapacity of the mother tongue in relation to the secondary language.

NOTES

The following word list, which is given without detailed comment, shows a few of the regular sound changes found in borrowings in this vernacular. Among members of the older generation, changes of this kind tend to occur even in extempore borrowings. Scots dialectal influences, in words such as "paint" and "trade" in the [ɛ] group, may have been instrumental in setting the pattern for some of the shifts.