Engagement with the Glasgow Gaelic community as a means of Gaelic learning

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The learning of Gaelic by adults

• At least 350 adult learners in Glasgow (Milligan et al. 2011), ~2000 altogether (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2012)

• Adult learners are “vital for the future of Gaelic in Scotland” (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2012: 26)
  • Strubell, Fishman
The dataset

• 16 adult learners of Gaelic, based in and around Glasgow
  – 9 women, 7 men

• Semi-structured English interview and background questionnaire
  – Different learning backgrounds
  – Different amounts of exposure to Gaelic
Research questions

- Do Gaelic learners want to be part of the Gaelic community?

- Do they make use of the community as a learning resource?

- Does desire to be part of this community have any bearing on behaviour?
  - Formal learning
  - Use of learning strategies outwith the classroom
Motivation in SLA research

• Integrative motivation (Dörnyei 2005; Ellis 2008)
  – Attitudes towards the learning situation
  – Motivation
  – Integrativeness
    • Desire to integrate with the TL community
    • Interest in foreign languages
    • Attitudes towards the TL community

• Instrumental motivation
  – Perceived concrete benefits of L2 learning
Gaelic learners’ motivation

- Adult learners tend to be integratively motivated:
  - Interested in engaging with Gaelic culture
  - Personal connection to Gaelic-speaking areas
  - A sense of Gaelic being part of national Scottish identity

- Up to 25% of participants learn primarily for instrumental reasons

MacCaluim 2006; Milligan et al. 2011
Participants’ motivation

• Instrumental:
  – Good grades
  – GM employment

• Integrative:
  – Desire to become a part of the Gaelic community
    • Passing as a learner
    • Passing as a native speaker
  – Family history of Gaelic speaking
  – Interest in Gaelic culture
  – Gaelic is a part of Scottish socio-cultural heritage

• Language revitalisation
Formal learning experience

• Different amounts of exposure
• University courses
• Evening classes
• Ùlpan
• Immersion courses at SMO
• Distance learning
• GM courses
• Highers
Learning strategies

• Skills-based deep processing strategies (Tragant et al. 2013)
  – Evaluating spoken language
  – Deduction of grammatical rules
  – Inferring meaning from context*
  – Monitoring spoken language*
Learning strategies

• Language study strategies* (Tragant et al. 2013)
  – Grammar exercises
  – Vocabulary rehearsal

• Social and interactive strategies (e.g. Oxford 1990)
  – Practise with other speakers*
  – Clarification requests
  – Seeking interlocutors’ support during interaction
Analysis

• But are these things related? Does the desire to integrate with the Gaelic-speaking community actually encourage learners to engage with the community?

• 2*2 Fisher’s exact tests of association

• $p < 0.10$
Results

• Formal learning experiences
  – Positive association:
    • Desire to integrate with Gaelic-speaking community and once weekly courses
  – Negative association:
    • Scottish socio-cultural heritage and GM course
Results

• Strategy use:
  – No association:
    • Integrative motivation and reports of practising with other speakers
  – Positive association:
    • Desire to integrate and skills-based, deep processing strategies
      – Inferring from context
      – Monitoring
      – Pattern recognition
  – Negative association:
    • Language revitalisation
      – Evaluating speech produced
      – Grammar study
    • Family history of Gaelic speaking and note taking
Discussion

• Learners do engage with the Gaelic community
  – Strategies requiring interaction more popular than others

• Participants who want to become a part of the Gaelic community:
  – Don’t necessarily report practising with others, but...
    • Use more strategies
    • Attend classes more regularly
    • Use interaction for learning purposes

• The most advanced participants all use Gaelic daily for work and/or personal relationships
Discussion

• Clear association between integration and language use/language learning

• As adult learners are “vital”, encouraging integration with the community is extremely important
  – How can we encourage more integration and/or learning
  – If they don’t wish to integrate, will they have a role to play in language revitalisation?