Describing proficiency in adult L2 Scottish Gaelic: Current findings and future directions

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Gaelic adult language education policy

• Issues highlighted (e.g. Comunn na Gàidhlig & Comunn Luchd Ionnsachaidh 1992; MacCaluim 2007; McLeod et al. 2010; Milligan et al. 2011):
  – Curriculum policy
  – Methods and materials policy
  – Personnel policy
Pedagogic cycles in second language learning

- Needs analysis
- Development of descriptors
- Development of learning outcomes
- Development of materials and assessments
- Application of descriptors to assessments

How is Gaelic L2 proficiency perceived?
How can it be measured?
The current study

• A data-driven approach to the measurement of proficiency in L2 Gaelic

• Design:
  – Semi-structured interview
  – Narrative task
  – 16 adult learners of Gaelic
  – 9 women, 7 men
  – Different learning backgrounds
  – Different amounts of exposure to Gaelic
Communicative adequacy

- Speaker’s ability to use formal language knowledge and language processing skills to communicate (Kuiken et al. 2010, Révész et al. 2013)

- 5 non-professional raters
  - 5 minute sample of the interview
  - Entire narrative

- Provided with a communicative adequacy scale developed for the task
  - Modelled on CEFR, Lotti (2007), Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge, WiSP (e.g. de Jong et al. (2012)), ALTE can-do statements, Munro et al. (2012), IELTS, ACTFL

- Asked to explain ratings

- Final score for communicative adequacy based on an average of raters’ scores
Results: Communicative adequacy

• High inter-rater reliability for both tasks:
  – Interview: ($\alpha = .961$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = .921 - .985)
  – Narrative: ($\alpha = .949$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = .892 - .980)

• Raters nonetheless have their own opinions...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between descriptors and comments by...</th>
<th>Jaccard’s coefficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard (interview)</td>
<td>0.343</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clem (interview)</td>
<td>0.314</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clem (narrative)</td>
<td>0.312</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew (interview)</td>
<td>0.310</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard (narrative)</td>
<td>0.306</td>
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<td>Andrew (narrative)</td>
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<td>Liam (interview)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liam (narrative)</td>
<td>0.208</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben (interview)</td>
<td>0.183</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Results: Communicative Adequacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Stronger ability to express self</th>
<th>Weaker ability to express self</th>
<th>More competent</th>
<th>More complex information</th>
<th>Simpler information</th>
<th>Less comprehensible</th>
<th>More comprehensible</th>
<th>Less confident</th>
<th>More confident</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Anne</td>
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<td>Amanda</td>
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<td>Cecily</td>
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<td>Chloe</td>
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<td>Dawn</td>
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<td>Danielle</td>
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<td>Gloria</td>
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<td>Jenny</td>
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<td>Kathy</td>
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<td>Lily</td>
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<td>Maggie</td>
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<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Richard</td>
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<td>Simone</td>
<td>Richard</td>
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<td>Tara</td>
<td>Richard</td>
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*Note: The table compares communicative adequacy across different participants, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses in self-expression, as well as their competencies in handling more, less complex, and comprehensible information.*
Linguistic proficiency

• 8 components of proficiency, in 3 dimensions:
  – Complexity
  – Accuracy
  – Fluency

• Complexity
  – Subordination ratio
  – Lexical diversity – D
  – Mean Length of Clause
Linguistic proficiency

• **Accuracy**
  – Average number of errors per AS-unit
  – Percentage of error-free AS-units

• **Fluency**
  – Phonation Time Ratio
  – Mean Length of Run
  – Pruned average number of Words per Minute
Results: Interview
Results: Narrative

Anne Tara Nikki Cecily Kathy Maggie Joyce Jenny Gloria Simone Dawn Chloe Lily Danielle Olivia Amanda

D  SR  MLC  % Accurate AS-units  Inaccuracies per AS-unit  MLR  PT  WPM
Results

• *Tendency* towards a relationship between communicative adequacy and lower CAF scores
  
  – Iwashita et al. (2008: 41)
    
    “impact [of differences in scores] on the overall level assigned to the test taker was not particularly strong”

• *Tendency* towards more balanced control over all linguistic domains at higher levels
  
  – Constraints on attentional capacity cause fewer problems (Skehan 1998)
Discussion

• The rating scale is useful, but distorts details
  – Does that matter?

  **Yes** – It can’t tell us that much about *individuals*
  **No** – Practically, mean values can be useful, so long as raters are aware that these are averages

  **Yes** – Theoretically, it doesn’t give insight into individual raters’ thought processes (Orr 2002)
  **No** – Practically, it works... (Iwashita et al. 2008)
Discussion

- Multiple-trait scale? (e.g. Hirai & Koizumi 2013: 421)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Few elaborations of the story or not sufficient opinions with no long awkward pauses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Lack of coherency or with some long awkward pauses.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Little fluency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Vocabulary</td>
<td>5. A variety of sentence patterns with almost no grammatical or lexical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. A few grammatical and lexical errors but most verbs marked for correct tense and aspect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Some verbs marked for incorrect tense and aspect, but correct use of pronouns and prepositional phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Some prominent grammatical and lexical errors, or few use of pronouns or prepositional phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Frequent grammatical and lexical errors or only a few sentences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>5. Accurate pronunciation with correct stress and natural intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Almost no prominent prosodic errors, but with some inaccurate pronunciation, incorrect stress, or unnatural intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Some prosodic errors and with no strong accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Some prosodic errors and with a strong accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Frequent prosodic errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future research

• Comasan Labhairt ann an Gàidhlig (CLAG) / Gaelic Proficiency (GAP)
  – 3 years
  – Supported by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Funding Council
  – Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen

• Framework for adult proficiency in spoken L2 Gaelic
  – 3 years
  – 120 L2 users, 20 L1 users
    • Allows for inferential stats
Future research

- Examining oral production:
  - Informal conversation
  - Narrative
  - Questions and answers
  - Elicited imitation

- Data to be coded for
  - CAF
  - Obligatory occasion analysis

- Rated by L1 users

- Scales for learners, teachers, and testers
Conclusions

• Adult Gaelic L2 proficiency is messy...

• ...but measurable
  – Multiple trait scales
  – Clear directions to raters

• Clear, data-driven needs analysis can help resolve some of the issues identified in Gaelic LEP
Conclusions

How is Gaelic L2 proficiency perceived?

How can it be measured?


