An Overview of the Soillese Research Agenda in the Isles

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin

Soillese Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean
Realising the opportunity

- Developing a world class research initiative to address the chief challenge of socio-cultural viability of Gàidhlig
  - Viability of Gàidhlig as a socio-cultural identity: one location in a broader debate of sustainable diversity
  - Soillse: a dedicated research agency with multi-institutional links and ambitious backers
  - Fluid lines of communication between the research community > public bodies > minority language community

- Realising the challenge: the most intractable cultural issue of the 21st Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% Cumulat.</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% Cumulat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100,000,000 to 999,999,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2,308,548,848</td>
<td>38.73721%</td>
<td>38.73721%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10,000,000 to 99,999,999</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2,346,900,757</td>
<td>39.38076%</td>
<td>78.11797%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,000,000 to 9,999,999</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>951,916,458</td>
<td>15.97306%</td>
<td>94.09103%</td>
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<tr>
<td>100,000 to 999,999</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>283,116,716</td>
<td>4.75067%</td>
<td>98.84170%</td>
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<td>10,000 to 99,999</td>
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<td>60,780,797</td>
<td>1.01990</td>
<td>99.86160%</td>
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<td>1,000 to 9,999</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>7,773,810</td>
<td>0.13044</td>
<td>99.99204%</td>
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<td>100 to 999</td>
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<td>89.2%</td>
<td>461,250</td>
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<td>99.99978%</td>
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<td>10 to 99</td>
<td>339</td>
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<td>94.1%</td>
<td>12,560</td>
<td>0.00021</td>
<td>99.99999%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 to 9</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
<td>100.00000%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>277</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>6,909</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,959,511,717</td>
<td>100.00000%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic and Language Relations

- 94% of the world’s population speaks 6% of the world’s languages (c. 300)

- 1% of the world’s population accounts for 80% of the language diversity (c. 5600)
Aspirations for minority cultural diversity but ...

- Fragmented traditional communities
- Weak cohesion in other networks
- Gàidhlig scenario: Colliding with societal realities of 58,000 speaker base
Engaging with a productive process

- Depicting reality – gathering information
- Developing a diagnosis
- Indicating a prognosis of the condition
- Suggesting a prescription – language planning
- Encouraging institutional and communal buy-in – participation in productive outcomes
Central issues: Spheres of Research

- **Demography** – contraction of speaker community and the concomitant loss of social density in traditional geographic realms (*Societal prevalence*)
- **Non-optimal levels of acquisition** to sustain the language as a functional identity (*L1 and L2 Linguistics*)
- **Ambiguity** in language identity (*Anthropology*):
  - (a) a national minority language but a wide gap between passive interest in language identity and actual levels of affiliation
  - (b) a highly circumscribed minoritised language: contending with majority language functional primacy and an increasingly passive identity in the minority culture
- **Institutional support** (*Language planning and policy*): creative tension between
  - (a) corpus planning/language resource planning (*planning for language*: language-centred expertise) and
  - (b) planning interventions on behalf of speakers (*societal planning*: the language group in various social realms: socially rooted speakers and neo-adherents)
Building on previous research

- Wells, G. (2013) Perceptions of Gaelic Learning and Use in a Bilingual Island Community
The condition of the Irish Gaeltacht
Status bearing but fragile and endangered
Language planning: more aspirational than societal
Minority speaker groups need to be able to protect the social density of active speakers

Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015

(New CLS 2015)
New CLS 2015: 2011 Census Language Data: Vitality Index

- % Ir. Sp.s in EDs
- >18yr. Ir. Sp.s
- <18yr. Ir. Sp.s (outside educational system)

Distribution of daily Irish speakers’ data across 155 Gaeltacht EDs.

[The minority language condition in bilingualism]
Non-optimal attainment in minority language under the prevailing conditions of minority bilingual acquisition, i.e. unbalanced minority and uni-directional bilingualism.

ICD/ABC 2014
Score: Irish – English → Score Index
Developing research agenda to address these research spheres

- Streamline Soillse structures to facilitate development of projects
- Encourage projects dealing with interrelated themes across spheres of research – complexity of the minority language condition
- Engaging in a progressive manner with the minority language community in a dynamic exchange of insights arising from research outputs and community activities
Priorities

1. **Baseline data** of speaker typologies in native speaking communities (Project in the Isles)

2. Research into developing a **language planning model** which has the capacity to integrate the L1 and L2 experience of Gàidhlig (Research Strategy for Gàidhlig)

3. **Develop strategic ambition** for the revitalisation of Gàidhlig: strategic analysis regarding the coordination of efforts of the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Scottish Funding Council, Universities, development agencies and other public bodies to support a research agenda for Gàidhlig in tandem with development agenda for a community of speakers throughout Scotland (Research Strategy for Gàidhlig)
Project in the Isles

- **Module 1**: Preparatory Module – Planning and Review phase and Establishing Statistical Base
- **Module 2**: Questionnaire-based survey administered in pre-schools to assess family language practice of infant age cohort
- **Module 3**: Demographic survey of the sociolinguistic dynamic in 4 indicative Gàidhlig-speaking communities
- **Module 4**: Questionnaire-based quantitative survey of the language attitudes, reported abilities and practices and family sociolinguistic background of teenagers in the 4 secondary schools in the Isles
- **Module 5**: Public and official consultation on language aspiration and policy concerns for the Isles
- **Module 6**: Integration of L1 and L2 language planning practices as a model for language initiatives in the Isles
- **Module 7**: The write-up, reporting phase
Mòran taing!
Go raibh maith agaibh!