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## Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology

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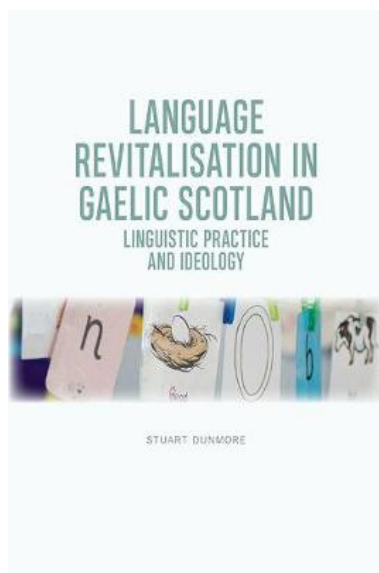
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## **Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology**

Dunmore, S., 2019. Edinburgh University Press:  
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Reviewed by Wolayat Tabasum Niroo, *Old Dominion University*

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Language is the foundation of cultural performance and a tool to claim individual and collective identity among a group of people. The connection between language and identity is critical among minoritized and indigenous people, regardless of their geographical or geopolitical space. Through their native languages, certain groups of people claim political, social, geographical, and ethnic identity and a legal base for their existence. Colonialism, however, has vanished minority spoken languages in many parts of the world. Additionally, despite claims of a “global village,” the advent of internationalization has further isolated indigenous languages in some parts of the world. Revitalizing and preventing those languages from dwindling from their spoken communities is crucial for scholars

of linguistics, sociology, cultural studies, and education. In that vein, Dunmore, in the book *Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology*, offers profound perspectives on preventing the potential loss of Gaelic language in Scotland drawing from empirical research.

In the book, Dunmore explores the experience of the first Gaelic Medium Education (GME) graduates in Scotland and their relationship and interaction

with the Gaelic language in adulthood. Specifically, the author examines Gaelic language use and attitudinal perceptions of a sample of 130 adults who received GME at a primary school—i.e., how do they use the language and how they relate themselves to it in their adult lives. The book illuminates the bilingual education system's impact on reviving a minority language. It attempts to investigate the prospects for Gaelic language maintenance, revival, and revitalization in Scotland and around the world.

Gaelic is Scotland's native language; however, it is not widely spoken even among native speakers. The prevalence of the English language over the Gaelic language dates back to Scotland's occupation by England that has diminished Gaelic's use over time. The author eloquently elaborates relevant anthropological and linguistic theories related to language and political, social, cultural, geographic identity and explores the relevance of language to nationalism and national identity. The book is organized into a comprehensive introduction, an in-depth discussion of theoretical framework, methodology and design, findings, and a coherent discussion. Employing mixed qualitative and quantitative study methods, the author examines the outcome of 130 questionnaires and in-person interviews with students of the GME school and their use of Gaelic beyond school, as well as their attitudes toward the language. Dunmore's findings indicate that the bilingual teaching method helped pupils use the Gaelic language while socializing with their peers, and also supported parents in passing on this knowledge to the next generation.

GME appeared, per Dunmore's, to be the first school to offer English and Gaelic bilingual education and was one of the critical schools in revitalizing the Gaelic language in Scotland. Although theories surrounding the revitalization of an indigenous language indicate that a school-based system in isolation may not do much in reviving a specific language, granting identity, and extending support in passing on to the next generation, Dunmore's arguments and findings are to the contrary. The author focuses on the importance of bilingualism in the school system and sheds light on bilingual school systems' positive outcomes. As the author argues, language revitalization does not occur exclusively with learning the language as a subject in a classroom. Instead, Dunmore states that the schools could be useful in their approach when adopting a bilingual system.

The author's findings indicate that the Gaelic language was spoken to some degree among the adults at school, at work, at home, and socializing. For example, Gaelic was a "secret" language in socialization at school for many participants. In other words, Gaelic was used in communications when the speakers did not want others to know about some issues, such as gossip. Moreover, the research findings elaborated on the "ideological and attitudinal stances" regarding Gaelic language use (p.109). More or less, participants showed similar stances toward the Gaelic language. For example, "regret" and "guilt" were often used by the participants in limited interaction with the Gaelic language; they expressed concerns over gradually losing the language. According to the author, all these facts will help the participants rationalize using more Gaelic language among the community in Scotland than current. In a way, Dunmore calls on policymakers' attention in the local community's interest in reviving and maintaining the Gaelic language.

Also, Gaelic was understood as Scotland's "own" language and culture. For instance, "The connection of Gaelic to Scottish national identity" (p. 133) was influential among the first-generation graduates of GME, which added to the rhetoric of claiming national identity and cultural ownership. Even though the author's findings indicate that the Gaelic language was not used optimally among the 130 GME graduates, as they used the language from "intermediate to limited" (p. 67) mostly with parents and peers, it strengthened the sense of ownership and cultural identity in relation with the Gaelic. Nevertheless, with limited use of the language, participants stated the importance of passing the language on to their future generations.

Although the book is about Gaelic speakers uncovering Celtic language revitalization through a case study of GME school graduates in Scotland, the author relates the points internationally and debates different models of language revitalization approaches, such as among America's Spanish speakers as well as Hawaiian and Alaskan native speakers; aboriginal languages in Canada, Europe, and Australia; and among native speakers of Welsh in England and Wales itself. Although Dunmore supports a bilingual-based school system in reviving indigenous languages, the author does not urge to utilize this method exclusively internationally since contexts are different in each country. Having said this, the book offers likely prospects for initiating context-based bilingual programs to keep the indigenous languages and their practices alive.

The implications of this study are multilayered. Higher education and linguists can benefit from the study and the author's research results in policy and practice. Policymakers, practitioners, indigenous language instructors, cultural perseverance program administrators, and educators can develop policies and practices based in part on the author's findings and recommendations. Also, indigenous people may find this book helpful, as it may assist them in considering constructions of indigenous identity, indigenouness, and cultural practices. Lastly, the book adds a unique yet critical contribution to the study of indigenous languages.

Dunmore's study offers a rich perspective; however, an observation-based result is what readers crave. The book leaves the readers with many intriguing questions, like how did bilingual education at GME operate in practice; how are other cohorts of GME school receiving the effort that the school and policymakers have put forth; what are the caveats moving forward about GME and its students, and so on? Even though the mentioned points are not within the author's research scope, the volume at hand indicates the need for further, relevant studies on minority language revitalization in Scotland and the region.

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