

‘New Speakers’ of Gaelic from Outside the UK

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A Report for Soillse

May 2017

SOILLSE

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1 Introduction

This report presents the results of a small-scale investigation into the backgrounds, experiences and views of a group of ‘new speakers’ of Gaelic currently living in Scotland who originally come from countries other than the United Kingdom. The research was funded by a small grant from Soillse, the research network to promote research to sustain Gaelic in Scotland, and is being taken forward within the research programme of COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action IS1306, ‘New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges’, which brings together researchers from 28 European countries.¹

The term ‘new speaker’ has come to the fore in sociolinguistics in recent years (see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 2013; O’Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo 2015) and there is as yet no universally applicable and agreed definition. For the purposes of this report, as with our earlier report for Soillse on new speakers of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow (McLeod, O’Rourke and Dunmore 2014), the term ‘new speaker of Gaelic’ is used to refer to people who did not acquire Gaelic in the home when growing up, but have nevertheless acquired Gaelic to a significant degree of competence and are now making active use of the language in their lives. This is itself a fairly expansive definition, and there are significant divergences in the learning trajectories and language usage patterns of the participants in this study.

Although there are no definitive data concerning the number of new speakers of Gaelic in Scotland² or the demographic composition of the new speaker group, it is evident that the overwhelming majority of new speakers of Gaelic are originally from Scotland. At the same time, the presence of non-Scots in the new speaker group is clearly not insignificant, as demonstrated by the number of such individuals holding Gaelic-related posts, most noticeably in the academic sector.

This study focuses in particular on new speakers of Gaelic who originally come from countries other than Scotland and who are currently resident in Scotland. The latter stipulation is important; even with modern communications technology, opportunities for speakers living outside Scotland to use Gaelic are significantly diminished, regardless of individual ability and motivation (cf. Klevenhaus 2011; Newton 2005). The study also excluded new speakers who are originally from other parts of the United Kingdom, even though these may well outnumber new speakers from beyond the United Kingdom. Although there are certainly some cultural differences between Scotland and the rest of the

¹See http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1306.

²The 2011 census indicates that 95.6% of the 58,652 people who said they could speak Gaelic were born in Scotland and that there were a total of 2,543 people born outside Scotland who said they could speak Gaelic (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table AT_245_2011). For several reasons, however, these figures are of limited value for this study. First, the census does not distinguish between ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ (or ‘mother tongue’) speakers. Second, the place of birth may be misleading in some cases. For example, a native Gaelic speaker might have been born in Germany but returned to the Western Isles as an infant and lived there from then on. Third, as discussed in section 3 below, it is likely that some of those reporting the ability to speak Gaelic might not be sufficiently fluent to be classified as a new speaker for purposes of this study.

UK, these are less marked than for other countries, and migration to Scotland from England, Wales and Northern Ireland tends to be conceptualised differently from migration from other countries.

In many respects, the experiences of the group of new speakers considered in this study align closely with the experience of new speakers from Scotland itself, as it has been presented in previous studies (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014). They report similar challenges in terms of the process of language acquisition and their sense of authenticity, legitimacy and connection to the Gaelic community. At the same time, there are interesting and important inflections arising from these individuals' distinct backgrounds, especially in terms of matters of identity.

There has been a very substantial body of research on the linguistic integration of immigrants into their new countries. Most of this work has focused on the acquisition and use of dominant state languages, such as English in the UK, German in Germany, Spanish in Spain and so on (e.g. Dick 2011; Kramsch and Thorne 2002). At the same time, there has been a smaller body of research on immigrants' acquisition of minority languages (e.g. Bermingham and O'Rourke (in press); Caglitutuncigil Martínez 2014; Gore 2002; Higham 2014; McCubbin 2010, 2011; O'Rourke and De Palma 2016; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). In relation to immigrants' acquisition of minority languages, there are considerable differences according to the relative density of the language in the community and its general social presence. For example, Welsh and Basque are minority languages in Wales and the Basque Autonomous Community respectively, but are spoken by 20-25% of the population, as against the 1.1% of the Scottish population which speaks Gaelic. As such, there appears to be no widespread awareness of Gaelic among Scotland's immigrant population and no general sense that acquiring Gaelic might be part of the ordinary experience of most incomers to Scotland. Although census data on professed Gaelic language ability is of distinctly limited value for this report (as explained in footnote 1 above), it is clearly very significant that only 2,543 of the 365,994 people who were living in Scotland in 2011 but were born outside the UK claimed to be able to speak Gaelic (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table AT_245_2011). This very low proportion (0.69%) demonstrates the marginality of Gaelic in the wider immigrant group.

Rather, the decision by an immigrant to Scotland to learn Gaelic and become a new speaker is highly unusual, reflecting complex individual trajectories. As discussed in section 3 below, the interviewees in this study may well constitute a large proportion of the total group of new speakers from outside the UK, rather than a very small sample of a widely attested societal phenomenon.

The structure of this report is as follows. Following a summary of previous relevant research, the design of the study is outlined, together with an overview of the backgrounds of those who took part. The report then moves on to consider the following themes:

- participants' motivations for learning Gaelic
- participants' Gaelic learning trajectories and motivations
- participants' use of Gaelic in their family, social and work lives
- participants' views on issues of identity and classification

- participants' perceptions of different varieties of Gaelic, including the Gaelic of new speakers
- participants' perceptions of the relationship between new speakers of Gaelic and traditional or native speakers
- participants' assessments of others' perceptions of them as new speakers of Gaelic

The report concludes with a summary of further work that is planned, including additional work with the data already gathered and plans for new research on this topic. This report is essentially a summary overview of key issues that arose from this research and more refined analysis will follow in subsequent publications.

2 Previous research

Research on new speakers of Gaelic is relatively new, although there has been a fairly substantial body of work on learners of Gaelic going back to the 1990s (e.g. MacCaluim 2007). In large part this is because the new speaker phenomenon itself is a recent one in the Gaelic context, having really only gathered momentum in the twenty-first century.

This study builds directly on our earlier study of new speakers in Edinburgh and Glasgow (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014), which was the first to focus specifically on new speakers. While a large majority of the 35 participants in that study were from the UK,³ there were seven participants from outside the UK (one fifth of the total) including two from the United States, two from Germany, two from the Republic of Ireland and one from another non-European country. Data from six of these seven participants⁴ are also considered in the current study. This high proportion of non-UK participants is remarkable as, in contrast to the current study, no special effort was made to locate non-UK participants; it is simply the case that new speakers from outside the UK are prominent in the contemporary Gaelic communities of Edinburgh and Glasgow (although this is likely not true of Scotland more generally and of demographically concentrated island Gaelic communities in particular).

Another relevant study, carried out by the authors with a Soillse small grant, looked at the experience of parents from Ireland who had decided to enrol their children in Gaelic-medium education in Edinburgh and Glasgow (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015). Twenty-three parents took part in this study and shared valuable information concerning their perceptions of Scottish Gaelic and the dynamics of the Gaelic community in Scotland. However, although many of these parents had taken some Gaelic classes, only one of the parents could speak Gaelic fluently⁵ and could be classified as a new speaker of Gaelic using the definition offered above. The current study does draw upon the data obtained from this one parent.

³Four participants were originally from England rather than Scotland. There were no Welsh or Northern Irish participants.

⁴One of the non-UK participants in the 2014 study did not give a full interview but only took part in a focus group alongside six other new speakers, all of whom came from Scotland.

⁵Nine of the 23 interviewees reported high competence in Irish, however.

The current study is different from earlier investigations in two respects. First, it focuses specifically on new speakers from outside the UK. Second, it is Scotland-wide in scope and not confined to new speakers in the Central Belt.

3 The research process and the research participants

This research involved semi-structured interviews with 23 individuals (50 minutes in duration on average). Of these, 16 were conducted in 2016 specifically for this project, and seven in 2013 and 2015 as part of the two previous studies (six in McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014 and one in McLeod and O'Rourke 2015).⁶ Seven interviews were conducted by telephone and the remainder were conducted in person, in a mix of locations, including interviewees' homes (4), workplaces (1), cafés (6), or the department of Celtic & Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University (5). All the interviews were conducted in Gaelic, which demonstrates that all the participants had reached a significant level of ability in Gaelic, even if two interviewees were less confident than the others. The Irish interviewees all showed some degree of interference from Irish, although this was more marked in some case than others, with one participant in particular speaking what might best be classified as a hybrid inter-Gaelic variety.

The research was conducted in accordance with Heriot-Watt University's Code of Ethical Practice for Research with Human Subjects. For ethical reasons all interviewees are anonymous and some identifying details (including some linguistic usages) have been altered or obscured.⁷ To this end all of the 23 interviewees are referred to with female pronouns although in fact there were six males. Each of the interviewees (*luchd-agallaimh*) has been assigned a code beginning with A: A1-A23. The initial R means *rannsaiche* or researcher.

Given the quite distinct nature of the group being researched here, most of the participants were already known to the researchers and were contacted directly by email. Twenty of the 23 participants fit into this category. Two others responded to a posting on a social media site concerning the 2014 study on new speakers in Edinburgh and Glasgow and one was identified by one of the 2016 interviewees.

In the absence of authoritative data (as discussed above), it is impossible to be sure how many non-UK new speakers of Gaelic there are in Scotland. However, it appears likely that the total is no more than 100-200 (assuming that a relatively tight definition of new speaker is adopted, in terms of ability and regularity of use). If this estimate is accurate, then the 23 individuals considered in this study would constitute a fairly substantial proportion of the overall group.

Unfortunately, census data in this area are difficult to interpret and to square with observable sociolinguistic reality. The 2011 census indicated that 2,543 people from outside the UK reported said that they could speak Gaelic (4.4% of the total Gaelic-speaking population) (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table AT_245_2011). This was an

⁶Two of the 2013 interviews were conducted by Dr Stuart Dunmore, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The other 21 were conducted by McLeod.

⁷Some of the Gaelic extracts quoted in this report contain grammatical errors, which are not marked or commented upon.

increase from 2,123 in 2001 (3.6% of the total) (General Register Office for Scotland 2003, Table AT_008_2001). In relation to the 2011 data, there were 394 reported speakers from the Republic of Ireland, 945 from EU countries, 51 from other European countries, 241 from Africa, 503 from the Middle East or Asia, 267 from North America, 51 from Central or South America and 91 from Oceania (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table AT_245_2011). As with the wider group of non-UK born residents of Scotland, these non-UK Gaelic speakers were principally concentrated in the main cities, with 546 (21.5% of the total of 2,543) in Glasgow, 424 (16.7%) in Edinburgh and 247 (9.7%) in Aberdeen (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table CT_0178_2011). The relative density of non-UK speakers in local Gaelic-speaking groups varied very considerably: in Aberdeen, 15.1% of the recorded Gaelic speakers in the city were born outside the UK and 13.4% in Edinburgh, as against only 0.8% in the Western Isles (130 individuals) (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table CT_0178_2011). Conversely, 15.1% of non-UK born residents of the Western Isles reported that they could speak Gaelic, as against only 0.28% in Orkney and West Dunbartonshire (National Records of Scotland 2014, Table CT_0178_2011).

Unfortunately, these data are difficult to take at face value and raise many questions about their significance. The figures in relation to people born in Ireland are problematic as the figure recorded in 2001 was 1,020 (256% higher than in 2011), even though the total number of Scottish residents born in Ireland was lower in 2001 than in 2011 (21,700 as against 22,865).⁸ More generally, in the fieldwork for this project, despite the researchers' detailed knowledge of the Gaelic-speaking community and diligent efforts to locate potential participants, it was not possible to identify *any* new speakers from the Middle East, Asia, Africa or Central/South America. It may be that some individuals from these countries asserted an ability to speak Gaelic in the census return as a statement of affinity or identification with the language (perhaps on the basis of a perceived symbolic connection to Scotland). Alternatively, some of the individuals born in these countries may be children enrolled in Gaelic-medium education who are in the process of acquiring the language. Against this background, it is noteworthy that the case of a new speaker from Singapore, Chi-Yan Lew, a visiting student at the University of Glasgow, received extensive media attention in early 2017 (e.g. BBC News 2017). The phenomenon of someone from Singapore having learned Gaelic to fluency is evidently still considered highly unusual and thus newsworthy. It is unlikely that this would be the case if there were in fact more than 500 fluent Gaelic speakers living in Scotland who were born in the Middle East or Asia.

As set out in Table 1, eleven of the 23 interviewees were from the Republic of Ireland,⁹ four from Germany, three from the USA, one from Australia, one from Canada, and three from other EU countries. (The three EU countries other than Germany are not specified for reasons of participant confidentiality; in two of these cases, neither the researchers nor the interviewees themselves were aware of other new speakers of Gaelic from the countries in

⁸It is possible that some of the Irish-born census respondents interpreted the question about 'Gaelic' as referring to Irish rather than Scottish Gaelic. The same issue would have arisen in both 2001 and 2011, however.

⁹The group did not include new speakers from Northern Ireland, and this was also true of the new speakers who took part in the two earlier studies on new speakers in Edinburgh and Glasgow and on Irish parents with children in Gaelic-medium education. The latter study did include five parents from Northern Ireland among the 23 participants, but none of them had any significant competence in Scottish Gaelic.

question who are currently resident in Scotland). The 16 interviewees from Ireland, the USA, Canada and Australia all had English as their mother tongue whereas the seven interviewees from Germany and other EU countries had initially learned English in school.

Table 1
Participants' country of origin

Ireland	11 (47.8%)
Germany	4 (17.4%)
USA	3 (13.0%)
Australia	1 (4.3%)
Canada	1 (4.3%)
EU countries	3 (13.0%)

Particular emphasis was placed on new speakers from Ireland for several reasons: first, the researchers have a particular interest in the connection between Scotland and Ireland, second, there was an intersection between this study and the previous study on Irish parents and Gaelic-medium education (McLeod & O'Rourke 2015) and third, the dynamics of Gaelic language acquisition for people from the Republic of Ireland are different than for others, as they will almost all have had significant exposure to Irish, a closely related language variety. A separate research article considering the new speakers from Ireland is planned.

In addition, it does appear to be the case that the Irish are the largest group of non-UK new speakers, with Germans and Americans also well represented. The researchers identified a further 12 new speakers from Ireland who were not interviewed in this study; no other country was as well represented in the group of potential participants.¹⁰

There was an imbalance in terms of the participants' gender, with significantly more female interviewees (17) than male (6). The gender distribution and age range of participants is set out in Table 2:

Table 2
Age and gender breakdown of participants

20-30: 7 (6F, 1M)	(25.6%)
30-40: 10 (8F, 2M)	(31.4%)
40-50: 4 (2F, 2M)	(20.0%)
50+: 2 (1F, 1M)	(22.8%)

Overall, 74% of the participants were under 40 and only 8.7% over 50. The youngest participant was 24 and the oldest 69. The female participants tended to be younger than the male ones: half the male participants were 40 and over, as against only 17.6% of the females.

¹⁰The researchers also identified a further 22 Irish people living outside Scotland (most of them in Ireland itself) who had learned Scottish Gaelic to fluency. With the exception of new speakers in Canada (principally in Nova Scotia), this figure is considerably higher than in any other country.

All the interviewees could read and write Gaelic, as demonstrated by the fact that arrangements for interviews and other practical matters were all dealt with by email using Gaelic. This pattern is quite divergent from the overall Gaelic population in Scotland: according to the 2011 census, only 67% of Gaelic speakers could read Gaelic and only 56% could write it (National Records for Scotland 2014, Table QS211SC).

As shown in Table 3, almost two thirds of the interviewees were living in Glasgow or Edinburgh, as against just under a third in the Highlands and Islands. In the absence of authoritative data concerning the wider group of non-UK new speakers, it is not possible to be certain how representative this distribution is. It was, however, extremely difficult to locate new speakers from outside the UK living in the Western Isles or other Gaelic areas (other than south Skye, in the vicinity of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig).

Table 3
Participants' place of residence

Glasgow	9 (39.1%)
Edinburgh	6 (26.1%)
Highlands	4 (17.4%)
Islands	3 (13.0%) ¹¹
Northeast Scotland	1 (4.3%)

The participants were very highly educated; all but one of the 23 interviewees had a university degree, and many had additional qualifications of different kinds.

To a remarkable degree, the interviewees were professionally involved in Gaelic. At the time of their interview, thirteen of them were working as Gaelic officers for public bodies, in Gaelic development organisations, or in the Gaelic education, media, arts, heritage and technology sectors, while two others had previously held such posts. Two others were full-time postgraduate students and two had significant unpaid roles in Gaelic organisations. Indeed, only three of the interviewees were employed full-time in jobs unrelated to Gaelic.

Sixteen of the 23 interviewees reported advanced competence in a language other than English or Gaelic: the main languages in question were French, German,¹² Irish and Spanish.

4 Motivations for learning Gaelic

The participants in this study differ from the wider group of Gaelic learners and new speakers in that, for most of them, issues of family heritage or Gàidhealtachd or Scottish identity played no role in motivating them to learn Gaelic. Previous research on new speakers of Gaelic and on learners of Gaelic more generally has identified factors relating to heritage (whether that be family heritage or Scottish heritage more generally) as an important motivating factor (e.g. MacCaluim 2007: 160; McLeod, MacCaluim and Pollock

¹¹One participant divides her time between a Scottish island and Ireland.

¹²Note that the two German participants had also learned at least one language in addition to German, Gaelic and English. In contrast, only two of the seven participants with a high competence in Irish also reported high competence in a language other than Gaelic or Irish.

2010: 25–6, 36; McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 11–14). As noted above, however, the great majority of Gaelic learners are Scottish. In this study, only two of the 23 participants reported any ancestral connection to Gaelic or the Gàidhealtachd, while a further four reported family links (sometimes quite attenuated) to Lowland Scotland. The remaining 17 had no connection to Scotland; indeed, several participants reported that they did not even know that Gaelic existed when they were growing up.

The striking exception to this pattern was one participant who grew up in a part of Canada with a strong sense of Highland Scottish heritage. Both sides of her family originally came to Canada from the Gàidhealtachd; both her parents knew a little Gaelic and one grandparent was a fluent speaker. She was able to study Gaelic while in school, reaching a good level of language competence by the time she left. In a different way, the position of the Irish interviewees was also distinct within the group. Although only two of them had any family links to Scotland,¹³ the cultural connection between Ireland and Scotland was perceived as creating a certain affiliation with Scotland and an intersection with their sense of Irish heritage.

Most interviewees identified a combination of factors as motivating them to learn Gaelic. The most important were music (whether piping, Runrig or traditional music more generally), interest spurred by holiday visits to Scotland and an interest in languages in general and minority or unusual languages in particular. For example, interviewee A11 commented as follows:

A11 *Bha ùidh agam ann an cànanan agus gu h-àraid cànanan a bha rud beag na bu inntinniche.*

I was interested in languages and especially in languages that were a bit more interesting.

Interviewee A15 belongs to a minority language community in her home country and she felt this background gave her an interest in other minority languages and solidarity with their speakers:

A15 *Tha seòrsa co-fhaireachdainn agam. Tha mi eòlach air ciamar a tha e a bhith a' faireachdainn eadar-dhealaichte bho na daoine eile . . . Tha mi a' smaointinn gur e aon de na h-adhbharan a th' ann carson a tha ùidh agam anns na mion-chànanan is rudan mar sin.*

(A15 I have a sort of empathy. I know how it is to feel different from other people . . . I think that's one of the reasons why I'm interested in minority languages and things like that).

¹³One Irish participant was born in Scotland but moved to Ireland as an infant, and her father came from central Scotland (but with no connection to Gaelic). A second came from a Protestant background and was aware of distant Scottish ancestry.

Interviewee A23 expressed a somewhat similar perspective, explaining how growing up in a multicultural urban community with many immigrants fed her interest in issues of linguistic heritage and identity:

A23 So *anns an sgìre far an do t[h]ogadh mise, tric agus minig bha mi a' cluinntinn*, you know, *cànanan eile agus 's ann air an dòigh sin a thàinig mi air an tuigse dè a th' ann an dualchas cànanain* – linguistic heritage agus identity . . .

A23 So, in the area in which I grew up, I would very often hear, you know, other languages and it's in that way that I arrived at an understanding of what linguistic heritage and identity are.

Several interviewees explained that their decision to start learning Gaelic was essentially fortuitous rather than a matter of explicit articulation or careful planning. Two referred to the matter as a *tubaist* (accident) and another used the term *mearachd* (mistake). One of these, interviewee (A2), reported that she decided to learn Gaelic essentially as a hobby, thinking it would be an interesting diversion to learn a language, as her experience with languages at school had not been positive, and she had had her interest piqued by watching Gaelic television programmes. This coincided with a time of transition in her personal life that probably accounted for her seriousness of purpose once she began the learning process:

A2 *Bha tòrr atharraichean nam bheatha agam, bha mi a' gluasad taigh, bha mi a' gluasad duine, bha tòrr rudan a' tachairt. So 's dòcha thachair a' Ghàidhlig aig an àm ceart. Yeah, cha robh mi fiù 's a' smaoinichadh . . . cha robh mi airson a bhith fileanta idir, bha mi dìreach airson beagan cur-seachad, you know. Agus a-nis, bha e dìreach a' fàs.*

A2 There were lots of changes in my life, I was moving house, I was moving man [i.e. beginning a new relationship], lots of things were happening. So maybe Gaelic happened at the right time. Yeah, I wasn't even thinking . . . I wasn't wanting to be fluent at all, I just wanted a bit of a hobby, you know. And now it was just growing.

This experience can be analogised to the Catalan concept of *muda* (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015), with the Gaelic learning trajectory and the process of becoming a new speaker being connected to a particular stage in life, typically a time of transition. For informant A16, a sense of uncertainty about her life path in her mid-20s led her to come to study Gaelic at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig:

A16 *Cha robh mar gum biodh career uabhasach làidir agam agus thàinig latha air choreigin is bha mi a' smaointinn, uill, feumaidh mi rudeigin atharrachadh nam bheatha agus rinn mi co-dhùnadh . . . a dhol gu Sabhal Mòr Ostaig airson . . . uill, bha mi beachdachadh dh'fhaodte air beagan mhìosan a chur seachad an sin, ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig, rud a bha mi a-riamh airson a dhèanamh, a' smaointeachdainn aig an aon àm air an ath cheum a bha mi a' dol a ghabhail nam bheatha, mar gum biodh. Chòrd e rium cho mòr, b' e sin an toiseach mar gum biodh . . .*

A16 I didn't have a very strong career, as it were, and one day I was thinking, well, I have to change something in my life and I made the decision . . . to go to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for . . . well, I was thinking of maybe spending a few months there, learning Gaelic, something I had always wanted to do, thinking at the same time about the next step I was going to take in my life, as it were. I enjoyed it so much, that was the start [of the journey to becoming a new speaker] as it were . . .

In a slightly different way, interviewee A1 decided to learn Gaelic when she found herself living in a new city in a job that required her to travel extensively, so that the Gaelic class provided a means of meeting new people:

A1 *Mhòthaich mi gun robh clasaichean Gàidhlig faisg air an taigh agam so bha e còig mionaidean air falbh bhon taigh agus bha mi saor, cha robh caraidean agam really so bha mi a' lorg dòigh a bhith a' dol a-mach dhan a' choimhearsnachd agus a' dèanamh rudeigin còmhla ri daoine eile.*

A1 I noticed that there were Gaelic classes near my home so it was five minutes away from home and I was free, I didn't really have friends so I was looking for a way to go out into the community and to do something with other people.

Broadly speaking, the interviewees can be divided into two groups: a small group who chose to come to Scotland specifically because of their interest in Gaelic and a larger group who developed an interest in Gaelic after coming to Scotland for other reasons. These other reasons were diverse, including romantic relationships, work opportunities or education, sometimes in combination. For example, interviewee A18, who had developed an early interest in minority languages other than Gaelic, reported as follows:

A18 *Aig an àm sin, bha mi a' dèanamh cànanachas agus cruinn-eòlas aig Oilthigh [baile a breithe] agus thachair mi ri cuideigin air an eadar-lìon a bha a' fuireach ann an [baile ann an Alba] agus, cha robh Gàidhlig aige, ach co-dhiù thàinig mi an seo, thàinig mi a dh'Alba air làithean-saora, agus bha mi air mo dhòigh ann a sheo agus bha an dìthis againn air ar dòigh còmhla agus chuir mi romham gluasad a dh'Alba agus fhuair mi cothrom an uair sin sin a dhèanamh agus sin is adhbhar tighinn an seo. . . . Bhon a bha mi an seo, bha e na cheum nàdarra dhòmhsa Gàidhlig agus cànanachas a dhèanamh aig an aon àm.*

A18 At that time, I was doing a degree in linguistics and geography at the University of [home city] and I met someone on the internet who lived in [town in Scotland] who didn't speak Gaelic, but I came here anyway, I came to Scotland on holiday, and I was very happy here and we were happy together and I decided to move to Scotland and then I got the opportunity to do that and that's the reason for coming here . . . Since I was here, it was a natural step for me to do Gaelic and linguistics together.

Similarly, interviewee A14 originally came to Scotland on a student exchange but decided to stay partly because she met her partner here.

In contrast, interviewee A16 developed an early interest in Scotland and visited the country repeatedly as a teenager. This attraction also included a specific interest in Gaelic, part of her wider interest in languages:

A16 *Chan eil mi buileach cinnteach carson a thàinig mi a dh'Alba an toiseach ach feumaidh gum faca mi film air choreigin no rudeigin ach bha e a-riamh air a bhith nam smaoin a thighinn a dh'Alba agus thàinig mi airson a' chiad uair nuair a bha mi ceithir bliadhna deug. Thàinig mi cha mhòr a h-uile samhraidh às dèidh sin . . . Chòrd e rium gu sònraichte air a' Ghàidhealtachd agus anns na h-eileanan. Agus tha ùidh agam ann an cànanan co-dhiù, eil fhios agad, tha cànanan a' còrdadh rium agus mar sin, mhothaich mi gu math luath gun robh cànan eile a' dol ann an Alba agus thòisich mi air beagan fhaclan ionnsachadh aig an àm sin.*

A16 I'm not entirely sure why I came to Scotland in the first place but I must have seen a film or something but it was always in my mind to come to Scotland and I came for the first time when I was fourteen. I came almost every summer after that . . . I particularly liked it in the Highlands and Islands. And I'm interested in languages anyway, you know, I like languages and so, I noticed quite quickly that there was another language in Scotland and I began to learn a few words at that time.

It was not until some years later, however, that she decided to learn the language in earnest by coming to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, as described above.

Two of the Irish interviewees who came to Scotland specifically because of their interest in Gaelic also reported a strong attraction to the landscape and the mountains. Interviewee A3 came hill-walking every summer before deciding to study Gaelic at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, while interviewee A8 gave the following report of her first visit to the West Highlands:

Nochd mi ann an Glaschu an toiseach agus an uair sin chaidh mi air an tràna gu Mallaig agus an aiseag gu Sabhal Mòr Ostaig . . . agus o thighearna Dhia, an àrainneachd, like bheil fhios agad, nuair a bha mi air an tràna is bha mi a' sealltainn a-mach às an uinneag, bha mi air mo bheò-ghlacadh leis an dùthaich. Bha e dìreach cho àlainn 's a ghabhas. Bha buaidh mhòr, mhòr aig an sin orm agus tha mi a' smaoineachadh chan e a-mhàin a' Ghàidhlig a bha gam tharraing, 's e an àrainneachd agus an dùthaich fhèin a bha gam tharraing air ais.

I arrived in Glasgow first and then I went on the train to Mallaig and the ferry to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig . . . and oh my Lord, the environment [landscape], like you know, when I was on the train and I was looking out the window, I was overwhelmed by the land. It was just as beautiful as it could possibly be. That had a great, great effect on me and I think it wasn't just Gaelic that drew me, it was the environment and the country itself that drew me back.

Several interviewees reported having come to Scotland to study a different subject at university but then developing an interest in Gaelic after studying the language as an outside subject (elective) at university. For example, interviewee A4 reported having gained some awareness of Gaelic through a holiday visit to Scotland, and then choosing Gaelic as an outside subject, despite receiving advice to the contrary:

A4 Is tha cuimhne agam, cha robh mi a-riamh cho math sin air cànanan, rinn mi beagan Spàinntis is Laideann anns an àrd-sgoil, cha robh mi cho math sin air Spàinntis is tha cuimhne agam bha mi a' bruidhinn ris an *tutor* agam agus bha ise ag ràdh, 'Uill, mura h-eil thu math air cànanan, na dèan a' Ghàidhlig'. Ach bha mi ag ràdh, 'Uill, feuchaidh mi co-dhiù'.

(A4 *And I remember, I was never that good at languages, I did a bit of Spanish and Latin in secondary school, I wasn't that good at Spanish and I remember I was talking to my tutor and she said, 'Well, if you aren't good at languages, don't do Gaelic'. And I said, 'Well, I'll give it a try anyway'.*)

Having enjoyed learning Gaelic that year, she then changed her degree to Gaelic.

Interviewee A17, from Ireland, had quite a different reason for making a serious effort to learn Gaelic, the desire to support her children's acquisition of Gaelic as they progressed through Gaelic-medium education:

A17 *Nuair a bha [mo nighean] aig 's dòcha Clas 3 no Clas 4 bha e follaiseach dhomhsa nach robh gu leòr Gàidhlig agamsa. 'S e dìreach bha mi caran frustrated. Bha gu leòr agam airson an obair-dhachaigh is rudan mar sin a dhèanamh ach bha . . . dhomhsa bha cuimhne làidir agam mu dheidhinn na cothroman a bha agamsa [air a' Ghaeilge] nuair a bha mi òg, dìreach a thaobh mo sheanmhair is m' athair, is bha mi smaointinn tha seo caran contrived, tha iad dìreach really a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an sgoil is chan eil sin ceart agus cuideachd bha e follaiseach dhomhsa nach robh e ag obair. Tha e ag obair gu ìre ach chan eil e ag obair really mur eil an cànan aig an taigh agad cuideachd.*

(A17 When [my daughter] was maybe in Primary 3 or 4 it was obvious to me that I didn't have enough Gaelic. It was just that I was a bit frustrated. I had enough to do the homework and things like that but . . . for me I had a clear memory of the opportunities I had had [in relation to Irish] when I was young, in relation to my grandmother and my father, and I thought this is kind of contrived, they're just really speaking Gaelic at school and that isn't right and also it was obvious to me that it wasn't working. It works to an extent but it doesn't really work unless you have the language at home as well.)

Although no other interviewees in this research reported this particular motivation, it was expressed by some of the Scottish new speakers in the 2014 study (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014).

It is notable that none of the interviewees reported that they had learned Gaelic out of a desire to integrate into the local community in which they were living, that is, in order to acquire the language used in social interaction in the community. This motivation has been reported in relation to other minority languages (e.g. O'Rourke and de Palma 2016 in the context of Galician; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015 in the case of Catalan.) In the Gaelic case, it demonstrates the limited role of Gaelic even in the strongest Gaelic areas; there simply is not a general sense that it is necessary to learn and use Gaelic to function effectively while living in the Western Isles. The overwhelming majority of incomers to Gaelic communities to the Western Isles in recent years have come from Lowland Scotland,

England or eastern Europe and it appears that few of these have learned Gaelic to fluency.¹⁴

Several interviewees reported a degree of fatigue and irritation about being repeatedly asked why they had learned Gaelic. In the case of interviewee A5, her experience included receiving such questions from native Gaelic speakers, which she perceived as exclusionary:

A5 *Gu tric, gheibh mi a' cheist, 'Carson a dh'ionnsaich thu Gàidhlig?' Agus feumaidh mi aideachadh gu bheil mi a' fàs gu math sgith dhan a' cheist seo oir tha mi a' smaoinneachadh carson a dh'fheumas adhbhar a bhith agam airson rudan ionnsachadh. Ma tha cuideigin ag ionnsachadh Fraingis no Spàinntis, chan eil daoine a' faighneachd, 'Carson a tha thu ag ionnsachadh Spàinntis?' [gàireachdaich] No ma tha ùidh agad ann an sreap no kayaking, cha bhi daoine a' faighneachd, 'Carson a tha thu kayaking?' So uaireannan, tha mi a' fàs gu math sgith dhan a' cheist seo. Agus cuideachd, leis gu bheil mi air a bhith an seo fad deich bliadhna, 's e fhathast Gearmailteach a th' annam ach tha mi a' faireachdainn mar Ghàidheal cuideachd is tha mi ag iarraidh a bhith nam phàirt dhan choimhearsnachd agus tha mi a' fàs beagan searbh dhan sgaradh a tha daoine uaireannan a' cruthachadh eadar mi fhèin agus iadsan.*

A5 I often get the the question, 'Why did you learn Gaelic?' And I have to confess that I quite tired of this question because I think why do I have to have a reason to learn something. If someone learns French or Spanish, people don't ask 'Why are you learning Spanish?' [laughs] Or if you're interested in climbing or kayaking, people don't ask 'Why are you kayaking?' So sometimes I get quite tired of this question. And also, being as I have been here for ten years, I'm still a German but I feel like a Gael too and I want to be part of the community and I get a bit fed up with the separation that people sometimes create between me and them.

While some Scottish learners of Gaelic report receiving similar kinds of questions, it is likely that the issue is more prominent in relation to non-Scots for whom there is no apparent culture or heritage link to Gaelic. The related issue of others' responses to the interviewees as Gaelic speakers is considered in section 8 below.

A final point noted by several respondents was that the process of learning developed its own momentum and was not highly programmatic; as such it was not necessarily easy to give straightforward statements concerning their motivations. Interviewee A11 commented as follows:

A11 *Tha mi fhathast a' faireachdainn gur e tubaist a bha seo ach yeah, dìreach bha mi ann aig an àm ceart agus thàinig a h-uile càil còmhla mar gum biodh.*

¹⁴Here too census data may give a somewhat misleading view. In 2011, 383 Western Isles residents born in England, Wales or Northern Ireland claimed to be able to speak Gaelic, along with 7 born in the Republic of Ireland, 32 in other European countries and 81 in the rest of the world (NRS 2013: Table CT_0178_2011). All evidence other than the census belies the existence in the islands of hundreds of fluent speakers from outwith Scotland, however.

(A11 I still feel that this was an accident but yeah, just that I was there at the right time and everything came together as it were).

In a different way, interviewee A2 reported that her initial hobby interest in Gaelic just grew and grew and grew' (*'bha e dìreach a' fàs is a' fàs is a' fàs'*), without any step-by-step plan.

5 Processes and trajectories of Gaelic language acquisition

The participants in the study provided many important insights into the process of Gaelic language acquisition and their trajectory towards becoming new speakers. In many respects their experiences and perceptions overlap substantially with those previously reported by Scottish new speakers, but this particular group of interviewees were enriched by their experience of other countries and other languages.

5.1 Learning structures and pathways

The Gaelic learning trajectories of the participants in this study were broadly comparable to the larger group of new speakers (overwhelmingly Scottish in origin) who were considered in the 2014 study (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014). Almost all of them learned the language through a combination of formal study programmes, especially those offered by colleges or universities, although they had quite divergent experiences in relation to the other steps they took to advance their language skills.

Only a small proportion of the new speakers considered in the 2014 study had studied Gaelic in school (22.8%, 8 out of 35 (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 7) and that proportion was even smaller here; only one interviewee (A14, from Canada) had access to Gaelic in school. This finding is unsurprising given the unavailability of Gaelic as a subject in schools outside Scotland. The 11 Irish interviewees all studied Irish in secondary school, however, and all but one studied it in primary school as well.

As with the previous study (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 7), Sabhal Mòr Ostaig played a very important role in these new speakers' learning trajectory. Six of the 23 interviewees earned a three or four-year degree at SMO, five others had spent at least one year studying there, and one had studied for two years on the college's distance learning courses (An Cùrsa Inntigidh/An Cùrsa Adhartais). Seven interviewees had initially learned Gaelic while studying for degrees in Celtic/Gaelic at other Scottish universities.¹⁵

Interviewee A14 emphasised the special value of the immersion environment at SMO:

A14 *Bha e fìor mhath, bha coimhearsnachd mhath ann. Bha an luchd-obrach gu math taiceil ris a' Ghàidhlig is ris na h-oileanaich. 'S e, fhuair mi cothrom math a bhith a' togail na Gàidhlig, eil fhios 'ad, chan eil àite mar sin ann, eil fhios 'ad, far am faigh thu Gàidhlig mu thimcheall ort fad na h-ùine agus caraidean aig a bheil an aon ùidh ann an dòigh. Eil fhios 'ad, tha thu dìreach plonked ann an àite agus chan eil [gàireachdaich] roghainn agad ach caraidean a dhèanamh anns an àite sin agus tha thu ga dhèanamh agus tha ùidh aig a h-uile duine anns a' Ghàidhlig. Sin an rud a tha a' tarraing a h-uile duine còmhla.*

¹⁵One of these also studied at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for a year.

(A14 It was really good, there was a good community there. The staff were very supportive of Gaelic and of the students. It was, I got a good opportunity to acquire Gaelic, you know, there's no [other] place like that, you know, where you get Gaelic around you all the time and friends who have the same interest in a way. You know, you're just plonked in a place and you have no choice [laughs] other than to make friends in that place and you do it and everyone is interested in Gaelic. That's the thing that draws everyone together).

Interviewee A15 contrasted the environment at SMO with her earlier experience studying Gaelic at an urban university, finding it more welcoming and inclusive:

Uill, tha mi a' smaointinn gum b' e an àrainneachd a bha nas feumail na an cùrsa ann an dòigh airson 's gum biodh a h-uile duine a' cleachdadh a' chàin. Is cha robh mi a' faireachdainn mar . . . ged nach eil mi à Alba, cha robh mi a' faireachdainn mar outsider idir no rud sam bith. Bidh daoine dìreach bruidhinn rium anns a' Ghàidhlig dìreach mar a bha iad ga dhèanamh le daoine eile. Ann an [baile mòr], uaireannan bha mi a' faireachdainn beagan nach robh mi a' buntainn ris an àite airson bha a' mhòr-chuid air a' chùrsa às na h-eileanan no a' Ghàidhealtachd. . . agus bha tòrr dhiubh eòlach air a chèile mar-thà is bha na teaghlaichean ceangailte is rudan mar sin [gàireachdaich]. So uaireannan, cha robh mi a' faireachdainn cho welcome ann.

Well, I think that it the environment was more helpful than the course in a way because everybody used the language. And I didn't feel like . . . although I'm not from Scotland, I didn't feel like an outsider or anything like that. People just talk to me in Gaelic just like they would with other people. In [city], sometimes I felt a bit that I didn't belong in the place because most of those on the course were from the islands or the Highlands . . . and some of them already knew each other and their families were connected and things like that [laughs]. So sometimes, I didn't feel that welcome there.

Interviewee A16 also found her time at SMO extremely beneficial, but noted that some of the kitchen staff were unwilling to speak Gaelic and that she herself used a lot of English in the earlier stage of her time there.

If time spent at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is excluded, it is striking how few of the participants had ever spent time living in Gaelic-speaking areas. Only six of the 23 participants had lived for more than a month in the Western Isles or any other island Gaelic community (other than Sleat/Sabhal Mòr Ostaig). This pattern is similar to that found among the group of urban new speakers in the earlier study (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 8). Perhaps surprisingly, most of those who had spent a year or more in the Western Isles – especially those whose main experience was in Stornoway – reported that they did not find the experience particularly beneficial in linguistic terms. Interviewee A11 spent a year in a rural area in the Western Isles but did not find it helpful at all:

A11 Bha e a' còrdadh rium gu mòr ach yeah, nuair a tha mi a' coimhead air na sgilean cànan, cha robh e cuideachdail idir, idir.

(A11 I really enjoyed it but yeah, when I look at the language skills, it wasn't helpful in any way at all).

In contrast, interviewee A4 found the time she spent in the Western Isles immensely valuable and reported that it profoundly changed her understanding of Gaelic and the Gaelic community:

A4 *Chanainn gun tug e cruth-atharrachadh air mo chuid beachdan . . . Dìreach bha a' Ghàidhlig timcheall ort agus 's e rud a bh' ann, 's e a' chiad uair, mar gum biodh, a dh'aithnich mi gun robh a' Ghàidhlig actually ann, mar gum biodh, gur e saoghal fìor a tha seo, is chan e rud a tha air a chruthachadh ann an dòigh, gu bheil dìreach daoine àbhaisteach a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig dìreach. Chan e airson rudan mar gum biodh poiliteagach no rudan mar sin, dìreach air sgàth 's gur e sin mar a bha, sin mar a tha agus cuideachd gun robh an cultar, gun robh e dìreach air a fighe a-staigh dhan a h-uile gnothach. B' urrainn dhut bruidhinn mu dheidhinn can grace notes air pìos pìobaireachd no rud mar sin ann an Gàidhlig le cailleach air choreigin no bodach air neo duine sam bith.*

(A4 I would say that it had a profound effect on my views . . . Just because Gaelic is around you and the thing was, this was the first time, as it were, that I realised that Gaelic was actually there, as it were, that this is a real world, and not something that has created somehow, that ordinary people are just speaking Gaelic. Not for any political reason or anything like that, just because that's how it was and that's how it is and also that the culture was just interwoven into everything. You could talk in Gaelic about, say, grace notes in a pipe tune or something like that with some old man or woman or with anybody).

She also reported that she developed a real sense of integration with the island community and based on the connections she made there has been able to insert herself into island-based social networks even after returning to central Scotland.

5.2 The experience of learning Gaelic: stages, obstacles and strategies

All the interviewees discussed in detail different aspects of their experiences learning Gaelic. These experiences varied considerably but some specific obstacles and opportunities were highlighted by several participants. By far the most important obstacle, cited by almost all the interviewees, was the lack of opportunities for using Gaelic, especially in immersion environments.

Some, but not all, of the interviewees from EU countries who had learned English in school reported that they found learning Gaelic easier than other languages they had studied (including English in some cases). Most of the participants said that they had been good at languages in school, but interviewee A2 had a different experience:

A2 *Cha robh mi 's dòcha math air cànanan ach air sgàth 's gu bheil Gàidhlig gu math soilleir a thaobh gràmar agus fuaimean agus stuth mar sin; bha e nas fhasa Gàidhlig ionnsachadh na Beurla no Fraingis.*

(A2 I probably wasn't that good at languages but because Gaelic is quite clear as regards grammar and sounds and things like that; it was easier to learn Gaelic than English or French).

In contrast, some other interviewees found Gaelic more difficult than other European languages they had studied. Interviewee A11 found Gaelic syntax particularly challenging and said it took her about a year to understand it. Interviewee A16 identified several stages in her Gaelic learning trajectory and explained that it took her three or four years before she felt confident with Gaelic grammar:

A11 *Nuair a thàinig mi gu Sabhal Mòr, bha mi a' faireachdainn gu robh mi comasach air còmhradh gu math simplidh a chumail ach cha bhiodh ann dh'fhaodte ach dhà no trì mhionaidean aig a' char as fhaide agus an uair sin, bhithinn stucte. Thug e dà mhios mus robh mi a' faireachdainn gu robh mi a' tighinn gu ìre far an robh e comasach dhomh còmhradh a chumail beagan nas fhaide, le mearachdan, ach bha mi a' faireachdainn gu math nas cofhurtaile às dèidh dà mhios. Chanainn an uair sin gun robh ùine mhòr, mhòr ann mus robh mise a' faireachdainn gu robh mi a' gabhail ceum eile agus chanainn ann an dòigh dh'fhaodte gun robh trì no ceithir bliadhnaichean ann. . . . Thug e greis mhòr mus robh mi cofhurtail le gnèithean agus tuisealan is mar sin air adhart.*

(A11 When I came to Sabhal Mòr, I felt that I was able to have a quite simple conversation but it would maybe only be two or three minutes at the most and then I would be stuck. It took two months before I felt that I was coming to a level where it was possible for me to have a somewhat longer conversation, with mistakes, but I felt a lot more comfortable after two months. Then I would say that it was a long, long time before I felt that I was taking another step and I would say in a way perhaps that it was three or four years . . . I took a long while before I was comfortable with genders and cases and so forth).

Several interviewees commented that the learning resources for Gaelic were inferior to those available for other, more widely spoken languages, and that this made acquisition more difficult. Interviewee A16 commented specifically on the shortcomings of Gaelic dictionaries in comparison to those available in other languages, where a single authoritative dictionary provides effective guidance on usage.

A16 *Ach chan eil a leithid ann an Gàidhlig. So bha mi an-còmhnaidh a' dol timcheall air còig faclairan agus cha robh sin leth cho math 's a tha aon fhaclair ann an cànan eile. Sin, chanainn, an rud as motha a bha mo chur drol! [gàireachdaich].*

(A16 But there isn't anything comparable in Gaelic. So I was always going around five dictionaries and that wasn't half as good as one dictionary in another language. That, I would say, is the biggest thing that annoyed me! [laughs])

For the participants from Ireland, all of whom had significant exposure to Irish (even if their competences varied considerably), the experience of learning Gaelic was quite distinct. The Irish interviewees had no difficulties with the basic structure of Gaelic; interviewee A10 reported that with the 'blueprint' of Irish grammar in his head everything 'made sense' in

Gaelic ('bha a h-uile rud a' dèanamh ciall, bha e a' dèanamh deagh chiall'). They also found much of the vocabulary familiar, but found adjusting to the different phonology of Gaelic more challenging. For interviewee A9, pronunciation and interference from Irish sometimes caused difficulties in communication:

A9 . . . *B' e an dùbhlán as motha no an duilgheadas as motha a tha aig daoine abair, can à Èirinn no Manainn ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig, na¹⁶ na fuaimean. Tha na fuaimean eadar-dhealaichte agus feumaidh tu a bhith gu math cruinn no ceart leis na fuaimean gus am bi daoine gad thuigsinn. So gu math tric, bha mise a' tuigsinn daoine a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig ach cha robh iadsan gam thuigsinn mar, cha robh Beurla a' dol a-steach dha mo Ghàidhlig mar a bhiodh le daoine eile ag ionnsachadh. Nuair a bha, nuair a bha duilgheadas agamsa le facal, 's e Gaeilge a chuirinn a-steach. So bha dà rud a' tachairt, 's dòcha nach robh na fuaimeanna Gàidhlig cruinn agam agus an sin nuair a bha an dàrna duilgheadas, 's e facal Gaeilge a bhiodh a' dol a-steach, so bha duilgheadas aig na daoine eile le sin.*

(A9) The biggest challenge or the biggest problem, for people say from Ireland or Mann who are learning Gaelic, is the sounds. The sounds are different and you have to be quite precise or correct with the sounds in order for people to understand you. So quite often, I would understand people speaking Gaelic but they didn't understand me because English wasn't coming into my Gaelic as it would with other learners. When I had a problem with a word, it was Irish that I would put in. So two things were happening, maybe I didn't have the proper Gaelic sounds and then the second thing was that an Irish word would go in, so the other people would have difficulty with that).

Interviewee A8 made similar observations about the pitfalls of lexical differences between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, but noted that this sometimes made for interesting conversational exchanges:

A8 *Tha e duilich gu leòr, tha mi a' smaoinichadh, nuair a tha Gaeilge agad is tha thu feuchainn ri còmhradh a bhith agad le cuideigin le Gàidhlig na h-Albann, tha e gu math furasta na faclan Gaeilge a' tighinn am follais an toiseach agus bidh thu a' smaoinichadh, o chan e sin a th' ann, ach 's e deagh còmhradh a bhiodh a' leantainn sin, bhiodh sinn a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn, 'O, bidh sinne ag ràdh seo is bidh sibhse ag ràdh seo', is, yeah.*

(A8) It's quite hard, I think, when you speak Irish and you try to have a conversation with someone who speaks Scottish Gaelic, it's quite easy for the Irish words to come to mind first and you'll think, oh, that's not it, but a good conversation would follow that, we would talk about it, 'Oh, we say this and you say that', and yeah).

¹⁶This use of the particle *na* here (mandatory in an Irish sentence using this clefting structure) represents interference from Irish. Irish interference was significantly more prominent in this interviewee's Gaelic than in the speech of the other Irish interviewees. Another example in this extract is the use of the Irish plural form *fuaimeanna* rather than Gaelic *fuaimean* in the last sentence quoted.

It has long been recognised that learners of Gaelic do not have the immersion opportunities available to learners of other languages (see, e.g., MacCaluim 2007; McLeod, Pollock and MacCaluim 2010). Almost all the interviewees in this study emphasised the significance of this challenge. It was particularly apparent for those interviewees who had learned English as a foreign language. Interviewee A12, from a Continental European country, contrasted the experience of the immersion environment for improving her English in Scotland and the situation in relation to Gaelic:

A12 *Tha cuimhne agam fhathast nuair a bha mi ag ionnsachadh Beurla agus nuair a thàinig mi a dh'Alba, bha Beurla agam fìor mhath co-dhiù ach bha e dìreach cho math gun robh a' chàinain ann an àite sam bith, so tha sin mòran nas fhasa nuair a tha thu ann an dùthaich far a bheil a h-uile duine a' bruidhinn Beurla co-dhiù. Is chan eil sin, you know, tha cùisean eadar-dhealaichte leis a' Ghàidhlig gu mì-fhortanach, so feumaidh tu oidhirp a dhèanamh na cothroman seo a chruthachadh dhut, mar gum biodh, no a lorg . . .*

(A12 I still remember when I was learning English and when I came to Scotland, I already had excellent English but it was just so good that the language was everywhere, so it is much easier when you are in a country where everybody is speaking English anyway. And that's not, you know, things are different with Gaelic unfortunately, so you need to make an effort to create these opportunities for yourself, as it where, or to find them . . .)

One interviewee who had begun to learn Gaelic at university described how learning Gaelic required a real commitment to seek out opportunities to use the language. This meant that Gaelic became a steadily more important element in her life:

A20 *Agus, tha mi a' smaointinn cuideachd, ma tha thu ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig, chan e rud as urrainn dhut a dhèanamh pàirt tìde.*

R *No, chan e.*

A20 *Nuair a bha mi san oilthigh, bha agam ri gach cothrom a ghlacadh so às dèidh greiseag dìreach mhothaich mi gun robh mi a' dèanamh a h-uile rud sa Ghàidhlig, you know? Dol dhan eaglais sa Ghàidhlig, ged nach robh mi airson dol dhan eaglais, you know? Agus dol dhan [bhuidheann] còmhraidh, ged a dh'fhaodadh e a bhith caran awkward aig amannan! Agus, a h-uile rud sin.*

R *Dìreach airson na cothroman fhaighinn?*

A20 *Yeah, dìreach airson na cothroman fhaighinn gus Gàidhlig ionnsachadh oir dh'fhàs e soilleir nach robh mi gu bhith ga dèanamh dìreach le bhith frithealadh clasaichean. Agus mar sin, yeah, às dèidh greiseag mhothaich mi gun robh i mar phàirt de mo bheatha an àite, dìreach, you know, cha b' e dìreach rud a bha mi ag ionnsachadh.*

(A20: And I also think that if you're going to learn Gaelic, it's not something you can do part-time.

R: No, it's not.

B: When I was at university, I had to take every opportunity so after a while I just noticed that I was doing everything in Gaelic. Going to church in Gaelic, even though I didn't want to go to church, you know? And going to the conversation group, though that could be a bit awkward at times And everything like that.

R Just to have the opportunities.

A20 Yeah, just to get the opportunities to learn Gaelic because it became clear that I wasn't going to do it just by attending classes. And so, yeah, after a while I noticed it was part of my life instead of, you know, it wasn't just something that I was learning.)

This interviewee explained that learning Gaelic required a real effort and commitment ('oidhirp mòr, mòr agus seòrsa gealltanais') and that one could not learn Gaelic in the same way as one might learn a major language such as French.

Interviewee A4 also found the structured learning environment of the university invaluable, but also underscored the importance of seeking opportunities to use the language in Gaelic communities and not only in the city:

A4 *Tha mi a' gabhail truas mòr leis na daoine a tha feuchainn ri Gàidhlig ionnsachadh taobh a-muigh na h-oilthigh dìreach air sgàth 's gu bheil e damainte doirbh, tha mi a' smaointinn. Is bha mi uabhasach fhèin fortanach sin ionnsachadh taobh a-staigh clas foirmeil agus bha sin a' freagairt ormsa ach 's e, tha mi a' smaointinn, gun do rinn diofar, bha mi a-riamh airson Gàidhlig a chleachdadh le daoine. So mar eisimpleir, a' chiad samhradh a bh' agamsa [aig an oilthigh], às dèidh a' chiad bliadhna, na truaghain anns na h-Eileanan Siar, chaidh mi bho Rubha Robhanais suas gu deas agus bha mi a' tachairt ri gach Gàidheal a b' urrainn dhomh air an t-sràid mar gum biodh, is dìreach a' bruidhinn riutha anns a' Ghàidhlig lapach agamsa.*

(A4 I really pity those people who try to learn Gaelic outwith the university just because it's damn difficult, I think. And I was extremely fortunate to learn it in a formal class and that suited me but what I think made a difference is that I always wanted to use Gaelic with people. So for example, after the first year [at university], the poor people in the Western Isles, I went south from the Butt of Lewis and I met with every Gael I could on the street as it were, just talking to them in my clumsy Gaelic).

Given the shortage of immersion opportunities, several interviewees highlighted the risk that learners could end up speaking only to each other. Although it was less beneficial than a full immersion environment, having a mentor or more advanced partner proved beneficial to some interviewees. Interviewee A19 commented on this issue as follows:

R *Dè an duilgheadas as motha, nad bheachd, a bh' ann ann a bhith a' togail na Gàidhlig?*

A19 *'S e gun teagamh a' lorg daoine a tha a' dol a bhruidhinn Gàidhlig riut.*

R 'S e sin an rud as doirbhe?

A19 *Oh 's e, gun teagamh. Eil fhios agad – daoine nach eil a' dol a thionndadh dhan a' Bheurla ach a tha fileanta. Chan eil e cho doirbh daoine a lorg aig an aon ìre 's a tha thu; tha e doirbh daoine a lorg a tha nas fhileanta a tha thu. Sin na daoine a tha thu dol a dh'ionnsachadh bhuapa. Chan eil thu dol a dh'ionnsachadh an uiread de chànan còmhla ri daoine a tha strì aig an aon ìre 's a tha thusa, agus tha e gu math duilich na daoine sin a lorg.*

(R What's the biggest difficulty, in your opinion, in learning Gaelic?

A19 It's definitely finding people who are going to speak Gaelic to you.

R That's the most difficult thing?

A19 Oh yes, definitely. You know – people who aren't going to switch to English but are fluent. It's not hard to find people who are at the same level as you; it's hard to find people who are more fluent than you. Those are the people you're going to learn from. You're not going to learn the same amount of language from people who are struggling at the same level that you're at, and it's quite hard to find those people [i.e. those who are more fluent].)

Interviewee A15 echoed this experience and reported her concern that interaction with other new speakers, even very fluent ones, meant she was not using the 'right' Gaelic:

A15 *So ann an dòigh . . . airson an àm as motha, bidh mi ga cleachdadh còmhla ri daoine eile a bha ga h-ionnsachadh cuideachd. Uill, tha cuid air ìre fìor àrd ach fhathast, uaireannan tha mi a' faireachdainn mar nach eil sinn a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig ceart really. Tha mi a' faireachdainn gur e seòrsa cànan . . . o, tha seo doirbh mìneachadh [gàireachdaich]. Chan eil fhios 'am, uaireannan chan eil really fios 'am ciamar a chleachdas tu an cànan gu ceart airson 's chan eil mi eòlach air tòrr daoine le Gàidhlig bho thùs.*

(A15 So in a way . . . most of the time, I use it with other people who are learning it as well. Well, some of them are at an extremely high level but still, sometimes I feel like we are not using Gaelic right really. I feel that it's a sort of language . . . oh, this is hard to explain [laughs]. I don't know, sometimes I don't really know how you use the language right because I don't know many native Gaelic speakers).

Interviewee A11 emphasised the value of learning from an individual expert speaker:

A11 *Agus feumaidh mi ràdh gu bheil sin a tha dhith orm, cuideigin mar tidsear 's dòcha agus gach turas nuair a tha mi a' coinneachadh ri cuideigin aig a bheil Gàidhlig fìor mhath, chì mi an diofar.*

(A11 And I have to say that I need that, someone like a teacher perhaps and each time I meet someone who has really good Gaelic, I see the difference).

In this regard she praised one native speaker colleague in particular for his helpfulness:

A11 *Bha 's dòcha facal a dhith orm agus bidh esan ag ràdh am facal seo agus bidh comas agam a chumail orm agus bha mi a' faireachdainn gu bheil mi, yeah, tha mi a' dol air adhart agus yeah, bha sin uabhasach, uabhasach cuideachail. Agus a-rithist, nuair a bha mi 's dòcha mì-chinnteach mu dheidhinn rudeigin, gu h-àraid a thaobh gràmar 's dòcha mar nuair a bha ceist sam bith agam, bha e cho math faighneachd dha agus freagairt fhaighinn bho chuideigin aig an robh Gàidhlig cho làidir.*

(A11 Maybe I needed a word and he would say that word and I would be able to keep on and I felt that I was, yeah, that I was making progress and, yeah, that was really, really helpful. And again, when I might have been uncertain about something, especially about grammar perhaps or when I had any kind of question, it was so good to ask him and to get an answer from someone who had such strong Gaelic).

In a similar fashion, interviewee A7 found support from a fellow student who had gone through Gaelic-medium education and was working to refresh his Gaelic:

A7 *Actually, tha caraid agamsa agus thòisich e aig an oilthigh aig a' cheart àm riumsa agus bha Gàidhlig aigesan nuair a bha e . . . yeah, rinn e a' bhun-sgoil tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus bha esan a' tighinn air ais, a' tilleadh dhan Ghàidhlig. So bha esan gu math cudromach dhomhsa a chionn 's gun robh e a' dèanamh oidhirp mhòr agus bha e a' bruidhinn riumsa, bha sinn còmhla co-dhiù, agus bha mise an toiseach ga fhreagairt anns a' Bheurla às dèidh ceist no dhà agus bha e doirbh a bhith a' bruidhinn anns a' Ghàidhlig fad na h-ùine ach bha e a' cumail ris fad na h-ùine so bha mise seòrsa faireachdainn nàireach nach robh mi ag ràdh anns a' Ghàidhlig. So às dèidh ùine a bhith a' bruidhinn ris, bha mi a' bruidhinn nas motha Gàidhlig is nas motha Gàidhlig . . .*

(A7 Actually, I have a friend and he started at university at the same time as me and he had Gaelic when he was . . . yeah, he went to primary school through the medium of Gaelic and he was coming back, he was returning to Gaelic. So he was quite important to me because he was making a big effort and he would speak to me, we were together anyway, and at first I was replying in English after a question or two and it was difficult to speak in Gaelic all the time but he was keeping at all the time so I was sort of feeling embarrassed that I wasn't speaking in Gaelic. So after a while talking to him, I was talking more and more Gaelic . . .)

Several interviewees reported that the experience of working in a Gaelic environment played a major role in boosting their language skills and helping them break through to confident fluency in Gaelic. For interviewee A1, the work experience portion of the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig course (Greis Gnìomhachais) was extremely beneficial:

A1 *Bha coinneamh againn anns a' choimhearsnachd agus bha [ceannard na buidhne dha robh i ag obair] a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig agus mhothaich mi às dèidh làimh gun robh mo chuid Gàidhlig a' fàs nas fheàrr agus chaidh mi air ais dhan cholaiste agus bha a h-uile duine ag ràdh sin rium, 'Cò thusa? Tha Gàidhlig agad a-nis!'*

(A1 We had a meeting out in the community and [the director of the organisation for which she was working] was speaking Gaelic and I noticed afterwards that my Gaelic was improving and I went back to the college and everyone said to me, ‘Who are you? You can speak Gaelic now!’)

Similarly, interviewee A20 reported that at the end of a summer work placement she had gained real confidence and had begun to ‘think in Gaelic’:

A20 *Siud an àm nuair a thòisich mi a bhith a’ smaointinn sa Ghàidhlig; a bhith a’ faireachdainn mar gun robh mi comasach bruidhinn caran siùbhlach sa Ghàidhlig; cha robh mi frionasach gach turas a chleachd cuideigin Gàidhlig agus aig deireadh an t-samhraidh sin, yeah, chanainn gun robh mi . . . uill, dè th’ ann am fileantas?*

(A20 That was the time that I began to think in Gaelic; to feel like I was able to speak fairly fluently in Gaelic; I wasn’t nervous every time that someone used Gaelic and at the end of that summer, yeah, I would say that I was . . . well, what is fluency?)

6 Patterns of Gaelic use

All the participants in this study made use of their Gaelic to some extent, but their personal circumstances varied considerably and these divergences had a major impact on the range and frequency of their Gaelic use with partners, families, friends and colleagues. At the upper end, interviewees such as A19 reported that they used more Gaelic than English in their lives, while others were not in a position to use their Gaelic as frequently. The most extreme example was interviewee A3, who indicated that the half-hour interview for this project was the longest Gaelic conversation she had taken part in for over a year.

6.1 Gaelic use with partners

Only six of the 18 interviewees who had partners reported that their partner also spoke Gaelic fluently. Two of these Gaelic-speaking partners were native speakers and three were new speakers. In other cases interviewees’ partners had taken some steps to learn Gaelic¹⁷ but none had reached an advanced competence, and these couples did not use Gaelic to any significant degree when communicating with each other. This pattern demonstrates that although all the interviewees made use of Gaelic to a significant extent, for the great majority of them a very important aspect of their lives – interaction with their partner – was conducted overwhelmingly or entirely through English. This pattern aligns with that seen in the earlier study of new speakers in Edinburgh and Glasgow (McLeod, O’Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 15).

In the case of four of the six interviewees with Gaelic-speaking partners, all the partners had already acquired Gaelic at the time the couple met each other; in other words, the formation of the relationship did not lead the other partner to learn Gaelic. The only examples of a partner learning Gaelic after meeting the other partner involved interviewees

¹⁷Interviewee A3’s partner grew up with some knowledge of Gaelic but was not a fluent speaker, and interviewee A3 reported that her Gaelic was much better than her partner’s and that they did not use Gaelic to communicate with each other.

A6 and A22, both of whom already had a knowledge of Irish (to a higher level of competence in the case of interviewee A22).

Three of the six interviewees with Gaelic-speaking partners reported that Gaelic was their normal means of communication with their partner. For the other three, Gaelic use was less consistent. For example, interviewee A14's partner was a native Gaelic speaker but the couple did not use Gaelic consistently:

A14 *Bidh, bidh sinn ga bruidhinn, chan ann cho tric 's a bu chòir dhuinn [gàireachdaich] ach bidh, an-dràsta is a-rithist, bidh gu dearbh.*

(A14 Yes, we do speak it [Gaelic], not as often as we should [laughs], but we do, now and again, we definitely do).

The use of the phrase *an-dràsta is a-rithist* (now and again) suggests that the couple's use of Gaelic may actually be relatively limited, and the implied perception of obligation, that they *should* be using Gaelic, accords with previous research (Dunmore 2014).

In two cases, the interviewee's partner had made some efforts to learn Gaelic as a result of encouragement from the interviewee, but this did not cause them to reach fluency or lead to the establishment of Gaelic as the couple's medium of communication. Interviewee A2 reported as follows in relation to her Lowland Scottish partner:

A2 *Rinn esan an Cùrsa Inntigidh air sgàth 's gun do rinn mise e ach gus an fhìrinn innse, cha robh . . . tha e taiceil dhan a' Ghàidhlig ach cha robh ùidh aigesan anns a' Ghàidhlig idir [agus] cha robh ceanglaichean pearsanta aige leis a' Ghàidhlig.*

(A2 He did the Cùrsa Inntigidh because I did it but to tell the truth, he wasn't . . . he's supportive of Gaelic but he wasn't at all interested in Gaelic and he doesn't have any personal connections to Gaelic).

In contrast, interviewee A8 reported that her partner, also from Lowland Scotland, was frustrated with his lack of fluency in Gaelic and lost confidence as a result:

A8 *Mo bhràmair . . . bha esan ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig ach bha esan a' strì . . . 's e an rud àbhaisteach a th' ann, chan eil misneachd aige, tha e a' faireachdainn amaideach mur h-eil e comasach dha rudeigin a chur an cèill gu furasta, b' fheàrr leis a bhruidhinn ann am Beurla air sgàth 's gu bheil sin nas fhasa agus 's fheàrr leis a bhith bruidhinn mu dheidhinn rudan car domhainn mar poilitigs is rudan mar sin. Is mar sin, ged a bhiodh esan tighinn a-mach còmhla rium gu [tachartasan Gàidhlig] . . . a-nis cha bhi bhon tha e a' faireachdainn, 'Tha e cho duilich dhomh, [ainm an neach-agallaimh]. Oidhche Haoine, tha mi sgìth. Tha a h-uile duine a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig mun cuairt orm, tha mi feuchainn ri Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn, tha e duilich.' Agus a-nist, tha e air a' Ghàidhlig aige a chall agus ged a bhios mise feuchainn ri beagan Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn ris, nuair a thòisich sinn a' dol a-mach còmhla, thuirt e rium, 'Chan eil mi airson 's gum bi thu nam theagasgair'. Bheil fhios agad [gàireachdaich], sin an t-adhbhar nach do chùim sin a' dol, tha mi a' smaoineachadh.*

So 's e an co-dhùnadh aigesan a bh' ann. Tha ùidh aige fhathast, gu sònraichte 's e an dualchas a bha ga tharraing, an ceòl is rudan mar sin.

- (A8) My boyfriend . . . he was learning Gaelic but he was struggling . . . it was the usual thing, he lacked confidence, he feels stupid unless he can express something easily, he'd prefer to speak English because that's easier and he likes to talk about quite serious topics like politics and things like that. And so, even though he used to come out with me to [Gaelic events] . . . he doesn't now because he feels 'it's so hard, [name of interviewee]. Friday night, I'm tired. Everyone's talking Gaelic around me, I'm trying to speak Gaelic, it's hard'. And now, he's lost his Gaelic and although I try to speak a bit of Gaelic with him, when we started going out he said 'I don't want you to be my teacher'. You know [*laughs*], that's the reason we didn't keep going, I think. So it was his decision. He's still interested, in particular it was traditional culture that attracted him, music and things like that).

In the case of interviewee A17, interest in learning Gaelic was connected to the decision to enrol her children in Gaelic-medium education. Although she ultimately reached fluency, her partner was less successful, even though he enrolled in several classes: 'I mean *rinn e oidhirp ach 's e dìreach an department agams' a bhith bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig so sin mar a thachair*' ('I mean he made an effort but it's just my department to speak Gaelic so that's how it happened').

6.2 Gaelic use with children

Six of the 23 interviewees were parents of children, with the children ranging in age from pre-school to young adults. There was considerable variation in the interviewees' use of Gaelic with their children, variation which was partly related to the issue of the interviewees' partners' Gaelic abilities. The two parents who had Gaelic-speaking partners reported that they spoke Gaelic¹⁸ consistently to their children and that Gaelic was the normal language of the home. Other interviewees used Gaelic themselves to varying degrees when interacting with their children but were restricted by their partners' lack of Gaelic or by their children's response.

Interviewee A22 reported that the birth of their daughter cemented the decision to use Gaelic as the language of communication between herself and her partner (also a new speaker):

- A22 *Chuir sinn romhainn gur e Gàidhlig a bhiodh againn mar chànan an teaghlaich agus dh'fhàs cùisean na b' fhasa . . . cha do dh'fhàs cùisean na b' fhasa, dh'fhàs iad na bu shoilleire.*

- A22 We decided that we would use Gaelic as the language of the family and things got easier . . . things didn't get easier, they got clearer.

¹⁸In the case of interviewee A9 both Gaelic and Irish were used.

The correction from 'easier' to 'clearer' is significant and probably more realistic. Another challenge for this family's language policy was the absence of Gaelic-speaking relatives as a potential support (a likely scenario in the case of new speakers):

A22 *Cha robh . . . Granny ann le Gàidhlig, ach 's e call mòr a bha siud – nan robh Granny air a bhith againn le Gàidhlig, bhiodh e tòrr na b' fhasa.*

A22 There wasn't . . . a Gaelic-speaking granny, and that was a real disadvantage – if we had had a Gaelic-speaking granny, it would have been a lot easier.

Interviewee A10 reported that she used Gaelic with her children, but as with other respondents the fact that her partner did not speak Gaelic fluently acted as an impediment:

A10 *Bidh, yeah, bidh mi a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig ris an dithis aca, aidh. Tha mi car leisg an-dràsta is a-rithist air sgàth 's nach eil Gàidhlig aig an duine agam. Tha mi a' faireachdainn nach eil mi làidir gu leòr ach bha seòrsa siostam againne aig an taigh seo gun robh Gàidhlig anns a' chidsin, so ma tha duine sam bith anns a' chidsin, dh'fheumadh tu Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn.*

(A10 I do, yeah, I speak Gaelic to both of them, aye. I'm a bit lazy now and again because my husband doesn't have Gaelic. I feel that I'm not strong enough but we had a sort of system in this house that the kitchen was Gaelic, so if anybody is in the kitchen, they would have to speak Gaelic).

There is a sense here of speaking Gaelic being an obligation, or something that has to be proactively promoted rather than occurring naturally or easily.

Interviewee A2, from an EU country, explained that she found it difficult to speak Gaelic to her daughter as a result of her lack of appropriate linguistic repertoire.

A2 *B' àbhaist dhomh [a bhith a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig], nuair a bha i na leanabh. Ach bha e gu math duilich. Sin an rud as duilich, feumaidh mi aideachadh, o thòisich mi ach air sgàth 's gun do rinn mi ceum anns a' Ghàidhlig, tha a' Ghàidhlig agam gu math acadaimigeach. So cha robh mi fiù 's sure air rudan mar 'badan' agus . . . cuideachd, cha robh mi eòlach air rann anns a' Ghàidhlig, chan eil mi math aig ceòl idir, chan eil mi math air seinn, chan eil mi math air cuimhneachadh litreachas agus rannan chloinne. So bha sin car duilich, ma tha pàiste agad . . . tha mi comasach air seòrsa taisbeanadh a dhèanamh a thaobh ath-bheothachadh na Gàidhlig ach bha e car duilich mìneachadh dhan an nighean agam mu dheidhinn na mìrean-measgaichte a bha air an làr agus an gabh iad sgioblachadh. So ged a rinn mi oidhirp mhòr nuair a bha i na b' òige, tha e car duilich a-nis agus tha an duine agam aig an taigh an-dràsta agus chan eil mòran Gàidhlig aigesan. So tha e car duilich Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn aig an taigh a-nis. Tha an nighean ceart gu leòr leis, tha ise san bhun-sgoil Ghàidhlig agus tha i deònach gu leòr [Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn].*

(A2 I used to [speak Gaelic], when she was an infant. But it was quite difficult. That's the most difficult thing, I have to admit, since I started but because I did a degree in Gaelic my Gaelic is quite academic. So I wasn't even sure about things like 'nappy'

and . . . also, I didn't know any rhymes in Gaelic, I'm not good at music, I'm not good at singing, I'm not good at remembering literature or children's rhymes. So that was quite difficult, if you have a child . . . I can do a sort of presentation about the revitalisation of Gaelic but it was quite difficult to explain to my daughter about the jigsaw puzzle on the floor and about tidying it up. So although I made a great effort when she was younger, it's quite hard now and my husband is at home now and he doesn't speak much Gaelic. So it's quite difficult to speak Gaelic at home now. The girl is all right with it, she's in the Gaelic primary school and she's happy enough [to speak Gaelic]).

On the other hand, she had not used her native language at all with her daughter in her early years and had only recently made an attempt to introduce it. Asked why she had been able to interact with her child in one non-native language (English) rather than the other (Gaelic), she explained that she had made a very focused effort to acquire English after arriving in Scotland without a particularly good command of the language, and that by the time her child was born English was firmly established as the language of her home and interaction with her partner.

Interviewee A6, one of the least fluent Gaelic speakers among the interviewees, reported that she herself did not use much Gaelic at home, as she found it easier to speak English, especially when in a hurry, but that her partner (also a new speaker) used Gaelic consistently with the children, even if they usually replied in English. Interviewee A17, who had brought her Gaelic up to fluency in order to support her children's progress through Gaelic-medium education, also found that one of her children had stopped replying in Gaelic to her, although the other child remained willing to do so.

6.3 Other contexts for Gaelic language use

Respondents reported very diverse patterns of Gaelic usage in their work and social lives. Several were occupied full-time in Gaelic-related work (including self-employment) and this was an important context for them to use the language. Some interviewees had numerous Gaelic-speaking friends, others considerably fewer, and some were much more involved in Gaelic activities and events than others.

Interviewee A14 was among the most strongly Gaelic in terms of language use. She used Gaelic at work and her partner was a Gaelic speaker, and most of her friends were Gaelic speakers:

A14 *Agus tha Gàidhlig aig a' mhòr-chuid de na charaidean agam . . . Chan ann tric tha mi dìreach a' bruidhinn Beurla nuair a tha mi a-mach ach a rèir cò ris a tha thu, eil fhios 'ad, cò th' ann. Tha mi cuideachd a' sireadh cothroman a bhith a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig cuideachd.*

(A14 And most of my friends speak Gaelic. . . . It's not often that I will just speak English when I go out but it depends on who, you know, who's there. I also seek out opportunities to speak Gaelic).

Interviewee A19, with a Gaelic-speaking partner and several close Gaelic-speaking friends, said that she probably spoke more Gaelic than English on a day-to-day basis, although this could vary. Interviewee A8 was among those who had come to Scotland specifically because of her interest in Gaelic and she reported that as a result of the social networks she had become connected to almost all her friends were Gaelic speakers.

In contrast, interviewee A20 reported a more complex pattern. Some of her friends had no Gaelic, some were fluent new speakers, some were native speakers or early-childhood learners,¹⁹ some intermediate-level learners. Some of these were closer friends than others so that she saw them more frequently, with some she used Gaelic more consistently than others. Generally she used Gaelic most consistently with friends who had acquired Gaelic as adults. Interviewee A18 reported that most of her friends in Scotland were Gaelic speakers but that she tended not to go out very much:

A18 *Bidh mi aig an taigh cuid mhath dhen àm ach bidh mi a' dol a-mach dha na rudan a tha a' dol . . . cuid mhath dhiubh co-cheangailte ris a' Ghàidhlig. Agus, tha Gàidhlig aig cuid mhath dhe na caraidean a th' agam an seo ann an Alba.*

(A18 I'm at home a lot of the time but I go out to things that are going on . . . a lot of them are Gaelic-related. And a lot of my friends here in Scotland have Gaelic.)

Several interviewees said they had few opportunities to use Gaelic socially, however. Interviewee A1 had Gaelic-speaking friends in a neighbouring city but not where she currently lived, so was limited to using the language with acquaintances at dedicated Gaelic events. Interviewee A22 used Gaelic with her partner and children but had very little occasion to use the language outside the home, except sporadically at Gaelic events:

A22 *Ach, chan eil coimhearsnachd Gàidhlig ann a sheo, ann an [baile]. Bidh mi a' dol a-mach gu [tachartasan Gàidhlig] nuair a tha mi ann a sheo ach cha bhi sin a' tachairt ro thrìc. No, chan eil coimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig ann a sheo – chan eil mi a' faireachdainn pàirt de choimhearsnachd ann a sheo.*

(A22 But there isn't a Gaelic community here, in [town]. I will go out to [Gaelic events] when I'm here but that doesn't happen very often. No, there isn't a Gaelic community here – I don't feel I'm part of a community here).

This pattern was even more marked for interviewee A3, living in an area of the Gàidhealtachd with little or no local Gaelic activity and with no Gaelic-speaking friends or relations in the vicinity. Such cases throw up the mismatch between the motivation to use Gaelic and opportunities to do so that are characteristic of all minority languages but are considerably more marked in areas where speakers of the language are scarce.

¹⁹There is a definitional or theoretical question in relation to the applicability of the term 'new speaker' to people who began to acquire the language in early childhood via immersion education or pre-school education (which can begin in infancy). Even if they both grew up in homes where the language had no presence, there is evidently a distinction between such individuals and others who began to learn as adults and possibly (like some of the interviewees in this study) has no contact whatsoever with the language up to that point.

7 Gaelic and identity

The interviews yielded rich data about participants' personal relationship to Gaelic, the connection between learning Gaelic and their sense of belonging in Scotland, and the relationship between new speakers and native speakers.

7.1 Connection to Scotland

Participants expressed divergent views on the extent to which learning Gaelic had affected their sense of connection to Scotland. While some interviewees did feel that learning Gaelic had increased their sense of belonging in Scotland, this was not the case for others. It is important to re-emphasise here the marginality of Gaelic among immigrants to Scotland more generally – that there is very little sense in the wider population that learning Gaelic represents an important mechanism for integration.

For interviewee A20, having learned Gaelic to fluency served as a demonstration of her commitment to staying in Scotland:

A20 *Cha chanainn gun robh e furasta, ach nas fhasa na dòighean eile airson seòrsa ceangail a stèidheachadh ri Alba. Agus tha mi a' smaointinn gum bi Albannaich agus Breatannaich a' sealltainn orm ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte air sgàth is gu bheil mi air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, tha e a' sealltainn gu bheil mi airson fuireach an seo oir, eil fhios agad, cha bhiodh Gàidhlig gu mòran feum dhomh [anns an dùthaich anns an do rugadh mi].*

(A20 I wouldn't say that it was easy, but it's easier than other ways of establishing a connection to Scotland. And I think that Scottish and British people look at me in a different way because I've learned Gaelic, it shows that I want to stay here because, you know, Gaelic wouldn't be much use to me in [my country of origin].)

She also explained that learning Gaelic had increased her sense of connection to Scotland:

A20 *Tha mi air tachairt ri tòrr dhaoine ris nach robh mi air tachairt mura robh mi air Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, agus tha mi air tòrr, tòrr ionnsachadh mu dheidhinn eachdraidh agus cultar na h-Alba nach robh mi air ionnsachadh agus mar sin, chanainn gun teagamh gu bheil mi nas fhaisge air Alba air a sgàth.*

(A20 I've met many people who I wouldn't have met if I hadn't learned Gaelic, and I've learned a huge amount about the history and culture of Scotland that I wouldn't have learned [otherwise] and so I would definitely say that I am closer to Scotland because of it).

Interviewee A12 also felt that learning Gaelic had increased her sense of connection to Scotland, particularly as she was learning Gaelic at the same time as the debate on Scottish independence – with much discussion of the nature of Scottishness and the concept of 'civic nationalism' – was at its height:

R *Agus a bheil e a' dèanamh diofar sam bith a thaobh sin gu bheil thu a' tighinn air adhart ann an Gàidhlig na h-Alba, a bheil thu a' faireachdainn nas Albannaiche air sgàth sin?*

A12 *Tha, tha, yeah.*

R *Carson?*

A12 *Tha mi a' faireachdainn gu bheil e a' toirt tuigse agam mun cultar na h-àite agus gu bheil mi a' dèanamh beagan obair airson a bhith . . . um . . . fitting in, you know. Tha mi a' dèanamh rud, you know, chan eil mi just an seo agus ag ràdh, uill seo mise. So you know, tha mi a' dèanamh . . . tha mi ag ionnsachadh gu leòr rudan mun thir seo agus mi ag ionnsachadh a' chànain. Agus of course, bha mi, tha mi agus bha mi ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig dìreach nuair a bha sinne gu lèir a' smaoinneachadh mun Scottishness agus mun poilitigs . . .*

R *Tha thu a' bruidhinn mun referendum?*

A12 *Sin e, sin e. So bha sinn gu lèir a' bruidhinn mun concept sin, you know, civic, civic nationality agus civic identity ann an Alba agus bha sin glè inntinneach dhomhsa mar immigrant agus just, chan eil sin really cho logical ach bu toil leam gun robh mi ag ionnsachadh a' chànain nuair a bha sinne gu lèir a' smaoinneachadh mu na rudan sin.*

(R And does it make a difference in that regard that you are making progress with Scottish Gaelic, do you feel more Scottish because of that?)

A12 It does, it does, yeah.

R Why?

A12 I feel it gives me an understanding of the culture of the place and that I'm doing some work in order to . . . um . . . fit in, you know. I'm doing something, you know, I'm not just here and saying, well here I am. So you know, I'm doing . . . I'm learning lots of things about this country and I'm learning the language. And of course I was, I am, I was learning the language just as we were all thinking about Scottishness and about politics . . .

R You're talking about the referendum?

A12 That's it, that's it. So we were all talking about that concept, you know, civic, civic nationality and civic identity in Scotland and that was very interesting to me as an immigrant and, just, that's not really so logical but I liked it that I was learning the language when we were all thinking about those things).

Interviewee A7, originally from Ireland but based in Central Scotland, commented that learning Gaelic had helped develop her knowledge of and sense of connection to Gaelic Scotland rather than to Scotland more generally and Central Scotland in particular. The specific experiences of the Irish interviewees are discussed on pp. 49-50 below.

In contrast, for some other interviewees learning Gaelic had not really increased their sense of connection to Scotland. Interview A2 commented that she already felt sufficiently Scottish before she learned Gaelic:

A2 *Chan eil mi a' faireachdainn nas Albannaiche air sgàth 's gu bheil Gàidhlig agam; tha Gàidhlig cudromach dhomh ach bha mi a' faireachdainn Albannach gu leòr gun*

a' Ghàidhlig.

(A2 I don't feel more Scottish because I have Gaelic; Gaelic is important to me but I felt Scottish enough without Gaelic).

This was partly because by the time she learned Gaelic she already felt rooted in her local community in a part of Scotland with little Gaelic tradition, and connected to her partner and his family, who also had no Gaelic connections.

7.2 Participants' personal relationship to Gaelic

Several participants expressed pride in having learned Gaelic, or explained that they felt that becoming a Gaelic speaker had been a very important and positive process for them in personal terms. This sense of personal commitment was clearly related to the process of learning itself and the perceived need to be proactive in seeking opportunities to use the language in group and community settings.

Interviewee A11 expressed a strong sense of personal commitment to Gaelic, indeed a sense of obligation, and asserted that other new speakers felt similarly. She suggested that Gaelic learners who did not feel this way did not continue with their learning of the language – so that those who reached sufficient competence to become new speakers necessarily had this kind of commitment.

A11 *Tha fios agad gu bheil thu a' dèanamh diofar, you know, gu bheil 's dòcha duine eile a tha a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig. Agus uaireannan, tha e uabhasach eagalach agus tha thu a' faireachdainn gu bheil thu fo chuideam ann an dòigh, you know, gum bu chòir dhut a bhith nas fheàrr, gum bu chòir dhut a bhith a' feuchainn nas cruaidhe [gàireachdaich]. Agus tha mi a' smaoinneachadh gu bheil . . . tha mòran daoine air a bheil mi eòlach faireachdainn mar seo cuideachd. Yeah, tha mi a' smaoinneachadh gach duine nach eil a' faireachdainn mar seo, chan eil iad a' cumail orra agus bidh iad a' stad . . .*

A11 You know that you're making a difference, you know, that maybe another person is speaking Gaelic. And sometimes, it's really frightening and you feel that you are under pressure in a way, you know, that you should be better, that you should be trying harder [laughs]. And I think that . . . lots of people who I know feel this way as well. Yeah, I think that anybody who doesn't feel this way, they don't keep going and they stop . . .

A similar perspective was expressed by interviewee A15, who spoke of a perceived sense of 'mission' in relation to Gaelic. In contrast to other non-British students who had studied at the university with her, she strongly wanted to remain in Scotland after graduation and keep on with Gaelic:

A15 *Mar eisimpleir, nuair a bha mi [aig an oilthigh], às dèidh na ceithir bliadhna sin, bhiodh cha mhòr a h-uile duine à dùthchannan eile a' dol air ais dha na dùthchannan aca fhèin. Ach bha mi dìreach a' faireachdainn gun robh seòrsa ceangal agamsa, nach b' urrainn dhomh dìreach falbh às dèidh sin. Bha mi a'*

faireachdainn gum bu chòir dhomh fuireach an seo is cumail orm leis a' Ghàidhlig. Bha mi a' faireachdainn gun robh seòrsa mission agam ri sin [gàireachdaich].

- A15 For example, when I was [at university], after those four years, almost everyone else from other countries would go back to their own country. But I just felt that I had a kind of connection, that I couldn't just leave after that. I felt that I should stay here and keep on with Gaelic. I felt that I had kind of a mission to do that [laughs].

Asked to explain what she meant by 'mission', she elaborated as follows, explaining that her knowledge of Gaelic increased her knowledge and understanding of Scotland:

- A15 *Uill, air sgàth 's nach eil mòran daoine le Gàidhlig, tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil dìreach aon neach a' dèanamh diofar nuair a tha mise ann. So, yeah [gàireachdaich]. . . . So yeah, agus tha mi a' smaointinn cuideachd gu bheil mi nas eòlaiche air an dùthaich agus air an eachdraidh is rudan mar sin air sgàth 's gu bheil Gàidhlig agam na na daoine eile bho thall thairis a tha dìreach tighinn an seo is a' dèanamh ceum ann an economics no rudeigin is a' dol air ais [gàireachdaich].*

- (A15 Well, because not many people speak Gaelic, I think that just one person can make a difference when I am here. So, yeah [laughs] So yeah, and I also think that I am more knowledgeable about the country and the history and things like that because I have Gaelic than those other people from abroad who just come here and do a degree in economics or something and then go back [laughs]).

For interviewee A2, her transition to becoming a new speaker of Gaelic was connected to major changes in her professional and personal life, as she left a job she found somewhat unsatisfying and also became a mother. She described the experience as an 'epiphany':

- A2 *Agus a-nis, tha epiphany agam a thaobh na Gàidhlig agus 's dòcha gun a' Ghàidhlig, bha mi fhathast [anns an t-seann dreuchd agam], a bhith car mì-thoilichte a thaobh an siostam agus ann an dòigh, bha e ag atharrachadh a h-uile rud oir bha mi trom, so bha seo na deagh chothrom stad le obair agus a' Ghàidhlig a dhèanamh agus 's dòcha gun a' Ghàidhlig, chan eil fhios 'am . . . Ach air sgàth 's a' Ghàidhlig, cha robh mi airson a dhol air ais dhan [t-seann dreuchd] . . . So bha e car mar a' gabhail thairis mo bheatha oir a-nis, tha mi seòrsa an sàs ann an Gàidhlig, tha mi ag obair ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig . . .*

- (A2 And now, I've had an epiphany in relation to Gaelic and maybe without Gaelic, I would still be [in my old job], somewhat unhappy about the system and in a way, it has changed everything because I was pregnant, so it was a good opportunity to stop working and do Gaelic and maybe without Gaelic, I don't know . . . but because of Gaelic, I didn't want to go back to [the former job] . . . So it was sort of taking over my life because now, I am sort of involved in Gaelic, I work in the Gaelic sector . . .).

7.3 Connection to the Gaelic community

The relationship between new speakers and traditional speakers of Gaelic has been a complex issue, as is often the case in minority language situations as new speakers become increasingly prominent (O'Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo 2013). Matters are further

complicated by the underlying dynamics of Gaelic-English language shift, through which language transmission in Gaelic communities has become much less common.

One prominent question is the extent to which new speakers associate themselves with, or feel that they can associate themselves with the label *Gàidheal* or 'Gael'. The significance of this term has been a matter of debate for some decades. As issues of language ability and use have become entangled with issues of cultural identity and affinity in the context of weakening language transmission, confusion has developed and there is no longer a clear and universally agreed definition. Different views have been expressed on the importance of Gaelic language ability as a criterion: whether someone with a Gaelic family background but unable to speak Gaelic can properly be considered a Gael, for example, or conversely, whether anyone who can speak Gaelic should be considered a Gael, even if they have no family connection to the language or to the *Gàidhealtachd*. A number of scholars have written in detail on the topic, notably Konstanze Glaser (2007) and James Oliver (2005), and Michael Klevenhaus has written a perceptive essay from the standpoint of a new speaker living in Germany (Klevenhaus 2011).

In an influential 1994 article, Professor Donald MacAulay noted that 'Gaelic-speaking Scot[s] who ha[ve] learned Gaelic as a non-native language (and perhaps some politically correct attitudes at the same time)' will tend not describe themselves as Gaels (MacAulay 1994: 42). By the same token, quantitative research by Frank Bechhofer and David McCrone confirms that Gaelic speakers in Gaelic areas are unlikely to accept people as Gaels on the basis of language ability alone: only 27% would accept as a Gael a new speaker with no Gaelic ancestry who was not born in Scotland, and only 61% a new speaker born in Scotland but without Gaelic ancestry (Bechhofer and McCrone 2014: 126 (Table 8)).

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that most of the participants in this study did not feel themselves to be Gaels, particularly as so few of them had close family connections to Gaelic. For example, interviewee A4 explained that for her the term 'Gael' was 'extremely political' and she preferred to avoid using it:

A4 *Chan eil mise, chan eil mise gu bhith bothered leis an fhirinn [innse] le am facal sin. Ma tha luchd-ionnsachaidh a' smaointinn gu bheil e dùbhlach, uill, nach cleachd e. Ma tha Gàidheil às na h-Eileanan Siar ga chleachdadh fhathast, cleachd e. Chan eil mise gu bhith cur air duine sam bith, gu bhith toirt air duine sam bith mar gum biodh am facal [a chleachdadh] . . . tha e uabhasach fhèin poiliteach is tuigidh mi sin ach [cha bu chòir dhaibh] a bhith a' cleachdadh am facal mur a h-eil iad ag iarraidh sin a dhèanamh. Mi-fhìn, cha chanainn-s' gur e Gàidheal a th' annamsa a chionn 's gu bheil car riaghailtean ann a thaobh, chanainn-sa, riaghailtean sòisealta ann an dòigh, tighinn bho shealladh [nan eilean]. Cha chanadh 'adsan . . . Chanadh feadhainn, tha mi a' smaoinichadh, gur Gàidheal mi ach chan eil mi a' smaoinichadh gun canadh feadhainn eile. Chan eil mi idir, idir, dol a bhith a' dol sìos agus ag ràdh, 'O, 's e Gàidheal a th' annamsa'. Idir. Chan eil mi a' smaoinichadh gur e sin m' àite idir. Tha mi a' smaointinn gur e m' àite dìreach ma tha daoine a bhith ag ràdh, 'O, tha thu gu math Gàidhealach', air neo rud mar sin, gur e sin, gur e moladh a tha sin agus dìreach fàgaidh mi aig an sin e.*

(A4 I'm not going to get bothered by that word, to [tell] the truth. If learners think that it's challenging, well, don't use it. If Gaels from the Western Isles use it, then use it. I'm not going to make anybody use the word, as it were . . . it's extremely political and I understand that but [they shouldn't use] the word if they don't want to do that. Myself, I wouldn't say that I'm a Gael because there are rules, I would say, social rules of a kind, considered from the standpoint of the islands. They wouldn't say . . . Some would say, I think, that I'm a Gael but I don't think that others would. I'm definitely, definitely not going to go around saying 'Oh, I'm a Gael'. Definitely not. I don't think that's my place at all. I think it's just my place, if people say 'O, you're pretty Gaelic' or something like that, that that's praise and I will just leave it at that).

Similarly, interviewee A16 took the view that the judgment of whether or not she was a 'Gael' was a matter for native speakers to determine:

A16 *Thuir mi gu bheil mise dhen bheachd nach e label a th' ann as urrainn dha duine togail air fhèin, ach ma tha na Gàidheil iad fhèin toilichte Gàidheal fhàgail ormsa, gum bithinnsa . . . gun gabhainn ris gu toilichte.*

(A16: I said that I'm of the view that it's not a label that a person can put on himself, but if the Gaels themselves want to call me a Gael, that I would . . . that I would happily accept it.)

The most strikingly distinct perspective on the issue of Gaelic identity was expressed by interviewee A14, who in contrast to the other participants had strong family ties to Gaelic:

R *Dè tha a' Ghàidhlig a' ciallachadh dhut gu pearsanta mar gum biodh?*

A16 *Tha i na pàirt dhìom, mura biodh Gàidhlig agam, eil fhios 'ad, chan eil fhios 'am. Aidh, tha i dìreach na pàirt dhìom is sin e. Bhithinn air chall às a h-aonais [gàireachdaich].*

R *Agus an robh thu a-riamh a' faireachdainn mar sin, no an robh na faireachdainnean air atharrachadh le ùine?*

A16 *Tha mi air a bhith faireachdainn mar sin fad mo bheatha. Nuair a bha mi a' fàs suas . . . fiù 's, bha mi cinnteach gur e Gàidheal a bh' annam agus gun robh càirdeas ann an Gàidhlig agus gun robh coimhearsnachd ann an Gàidhlig agus gun robh buannachdan ann agus . . . aidh. Agus tha i na pàirt dhìomsa cuideachd, eil fhios 'ad. Aidh. . . . Tha, tha mi nam Ghàidheal ged nach ann à Alba a tha mi bho thùs. Tha mi fhathast nam Ghàidheal gu dearbh. Chaidh mo thogail ann an àite Gàidhealach. Chan eil fhios 'am dè th' ann a bhith nad Ghàidheal ann an dòigh, eil fhios 'ad, tha tòrr dìofar mhìneachaidhean ann bho dhìofar dhaoine ach dhomhsa, tha e a' ciallachadh a bhith an sàs ann an cultar na Gàidhlig agus an sàs ann a bhith a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig agus . . . an ceòl cuideachd agus a h-uile rud sin.*

(R What does Gaelic mean to you personally as it were?

A16 It's part of me, if I didn't have Gaelic, you know, I don't know. Aye, it's just part of me and that's it. I'd be lost without it [laughs].

R And have you always felt like that, or have your feelings changed over time?

A16 I've felt like that all my life. Even when I was growing up . . . I was certain that I was a Gael and that there was kindred in Gaelic and there was community in Gaelic and that there were benefits to it and . . . aye. And it's part of me too, you now. Aye . . . yes, I'm a Gael even though I'm not from Scotland originally. I'm definitely still a Gael. I grew up in a Gaelic area. In a way I don't know what it is to be a Gael, you know, there are lots of different definitions from different people but for me, it means to be involved in Gaelic culture and to be involved in speaking Gaelic and the music too and everything like that).

As might be expected of new speakers who had worked hard to acquire Gaelic, some participants expressed a degree of impatience with the notion that people from Gaelic backgrounds who could not speak Gaelic might nevertheless be classified as 'Gael'. Interviewee A19 explained her perspective as follows:

A19 *[N]juair a tha mi a' faireachdainn Bolshie, 's toil leam a bhith ag ràdh, 'Chan e Gàidheal a th' annad mur a h-eil thu bruidhinn Gàidhlig.' Agus tha mi a' creidsinn sin ann an dòigh. Uill, tha mi a' smaointinn tha thu caran gutting am facal 'Gàidheal' de chiall sam bith ma tha thu ag ràdh, 's e Gàidheal a th' annam, ach chan eil Gàidhlig agam agus chan eil mi dol ga h-ionnsachadh.' Uill, right, ann an trì fichead bliadhna cha bhi am facal 'Gàidheal' a' ciallachadh sìon an uair sin. Aig an aon àm tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil diofar ciall ann dhan fhacal. Mar eisimpleir, cha mo thogail [ann an coimhearsnachd chreidmheach]. A-nis, chan eil mi a' creidsinn ann an Dia agus chan eil mi creidmhach tuilleadh, ach tha mi fhathast a' faireachdainn [mar bhall den choimhearsnachd] ann an seagh car cultarach agus tha seagh cultarach do 'Ghàidheal' cuideachd agus chan ann às na h-Eileanan Siar a tha mi, cha robh mi ann an Uibhist no Leòdhas no Barraigh a-riamh . . . agus tha mi gu math mothachail air sin. Eil fhios agad, nuair a bha mi ag obair an uiridh aig [buidheann Ghàidhlig], tha thu a' faireachdainn an toiseach 's e coimhearsnachd cho tìght a tha seo; tha e doirbh briseadh a-steach. Agus tha e a' toirt ùine. Tha mi a' faireachdainn gun robh daoine air . . . um . . . fàs gu math càirdeil dhomh [an dèidh greis] agus bha deagh chàraidean obrach agam an sin. Cha robh mi gam faicinn taobh a-muigh [na h-oifis] ach bha daoine gu math laghach ann an sin. Ach tha e a' ciallachadh rud dhuinn [sic] a bhith às na h-Eileanan Siar agus chan eil mi mar phàirt den choimhearsnachd sin. 'S e ciall eile cudromach airson 'Gàidheal' mar sin.*

(A19) When I'm feeling Bolshie, I like to say, 'You're not a Gael unless you speak Gaelic'. And I believe that in a way. Well, I think you're sort of gutting the word 'Gael' of any meaning if you say 'I'm a Gael but I don't have Gaelic and I'm not going to learn it'. Well, right, in sixty years the word 'Gael' won't mean anything then. But at the same time I understand that the word has different meanings. For example, I was raised [in a religious community]. Now, I don't believe in God and I'm not religious anymore, but I still feel like I'm [part of that community] in sort of a cultural way and there's a cultural meaning of 'Gael' too and I'm not from the Western Isles, I've never been to Uist or Lewis or Barra . . . and I'm quite aware of that. You know, when I was working at [Gaelic organisation] last year, you feel at first, this is such a

tight community here, it's hard to break in. And it takes time. I feel that people grew . . . quite friendly to me [after a while] and I had good work friends there. I didn't see them [outside the office] but the people were very nice there. But it means something to us [*sic*] to be from the Western Isles and I'm not part of that community. So that's another important meaning for 'Gael').

Interview A1 reported a very distinctive sense of Gaelic identity arising out of her background as a Protestant in the Republic of Ireland. She perceived herself as something of a 'pretender' in Ireland and found it easier to affiliate with Gaelic identity in Scotland:

A1 *Math dh'fhaodte gun robh trioblaid agam leis a bhith nam Phròstanach agus Gàidheal ann an Èirinn ach an seo, tha e ceart gu leòr a bhith nad Phròstanach agus Gàidheal an seo ach feumaidh mi aideachadh, chan eil creideamh agam idir. Cha bhi mi a' dol dhan eaglais [gàireachdaich]. . . . Bha e fada nas fhasa dhomhsa an seo, a bhith nam Ghàidheal an seo, ach ann an Èirinn, bhithinn a' faireachdainn caran . . . chan eil fhios 'am ach just a pretender no rudeigin mar sin. Chan eil fhios 'am carson. A-nist, cha chreid mi gum biodh sin a' tachairt ach cha do dh'fheuch mi fhathast ri Gàidhlig na h-Èireann ionnsachadh gu ceart.*

(A1 Maybe I had a problem with being a Protestant and a Gael in Ireland but here, it is all right to be a Protestant and a Gael here but I have to admit, I don't have any religion at all. I don't go to church [laughs] . . . It was much easier for me here, to be a Gael here, but in Ireland, I would feel a bit . . . I don't know but just a pretender or something like that. I don't know why. I don't think that would happen now but I still haven't tried to learn Irish properly).

Interviewee A15 expressed the view that new speakers who were native speakers of English found it easier to gain acceptance by native Gaelic speakers. This perspective did not come through in the interviews with other participants from continental European countries, however.

A15 *Tha mi a' smaointinn tha e coltach gu bheil e nas fhasa airson daoine le Beurla bho thùs a' faighinn a-steach dhan choimhearsnachd Gàidhlig is rudan mar sin. Chan eil fhios 'am, tha mi eòlach air tòrr daoine . . . uill, chan eil tòrr ach beagan daoine, daoine a tha à Ameireaga is Sasainn is àitean mar sin a tha gu math . . . 'Gàidhealach' ann an dòigh . . . Tha e coltach gu bheil iad mar phàirt dhan choimhearsnachd Gàidhlig ann an ìrean nas motha na tha mise is 's dòcha daoine eile bho dùthchannan eile. Chan eil fhios 'am.*

R *Agus an e ceist cànan a tha sin no dè?*

A15 *Cànan agus cuideachd, chan eil fhios 'am, cleachdaidhean agus rudan mar sin. Is chan eil fhios 'am really carson ach sin dìreach aon rud, tha mi a' smaoineachadh. Agus 's dòcha gu bheil iad air an accepted ann an ìre bu mhotha cuideachd le daoine le Gàidhlig . . .*

(A15 I think that it seems that's easier for native English speakers to get into the Gaelic community and things like that. I don't know, I know a lot of people . . . well, not a lot but a few people, people who are from America and England and places like that

who are quite . . . ‘Gaelic’ in a way . . . it seems that they are part of the Gaelic community to a greater extent than I am and maybe other people from other countries. I don’t know.

R And is that an issue with language or what?

A15 Language and also, I don’t know, behaviour and things like that. And I don’t really know why but that’s just one thing, I think. And maybe they are also accepted to a greater extent by Gaelic speakers . . .)

8 Relationships between new speakers and native speakers

The great majority of participants reported positive interactions with native Gaelic speakers, explaining that in their experience native Gaelic speakers were generally willing to speak Gaelic with them. Native speakers cannot, of course, be treated as a simple undifferentiated group. Interviewee A20, for example, commented that native speakers working in the professional Gaelic world were very willing to use Gaelic with her and that they had a different ‘language ideology’ (her phrase) from native speakers more generally.

Although more specifically linguistic issues are discussed later in this report, some aspects of the relationship between new speakers and native speakers involve different language practices and behaviours. One interviewee gave an insightful overview of the dynamics:

A18 *Chan eil na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bhon ghluin cleachdte gu leòr fhathast ri daoine a tha ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus thuigeadh tu carson, is e rud gu math ùr a th’ ann; daoine a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig. . . . [C]ha b’ fhada bhon a bha cha mhòr a h-uile duine aig an robh Gàidhlig fhileanta, na dhuine aig an robh Gàidhlig bhon ghluin agus leis a sin bhiodh deagh Ghàidhlig agus chan eil iad cleachdte air an aon dòigh ’s a tha daoine, can, luchd na Beurla cleachdte ri daoine a tha a’ tighinn às a; Phòlainn no às an Ruis no chan eil fhios agam dè dùthaich, agus gheibh thu dreach Bheurla. . . . Agus, sin an rud a bhiodh nam bheachdsa math, nam fàsadh na daoine le Gàidhlig bhon ghluin beagan nas eòlaiche agus nas sùbailte a thaobh luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig. Ach, air an làimh eile, mar a thuit mi, tha mì-thuigse air an dà thaobh. Chan eil luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig glic agus modhail gu leòr nuair a thig e ri daoine aig a bheil a’ Ghàidhlig bhon ghluin. . . . [B]idh luchd-ionnsachaidh am beachd mar as trice . . . a chionn is gu bheil ùidh acasan sa chànan agus ann an ionnsachadh a’ chànain, gum bu chòir ùidh a bhith aig a h-uile duine aig a bheil an cànan, an cànan a bhruidhinn riuthasan. Agus, tha cuid mhath dhiubh am beachd gum bu chòir dhan h-uile duine a bhith comasach air ceistean a thaobh gràmair agus rudan mar sin a fhreagairt – agus, chan eil sin fìor ann an cànan sam bith. Agus, tha sin ag adhbharachadh comh-strì agus cuideachd . . . tha an luchd-ionnsachaidh gu math dèidheil air faclan ùra agus bruidhinn mu dheidhinn rudan nach biodh na seann daoine – na daoine aig a bheil an cànan bho thùs, bhon ghluin – a’ bruidhinn mu dheidhinn sa chànan sin gu tric. Agus, tha iad a’ cleachdadh a’ chainnt ùir a tha seo air beulaibh daoine aig a bheil a’ Ghàidhlig bhon ghluin agus chan eil sin ag obair ro mhath. Chan eil an luchd-ionnsachaidh glic gu leòr an cànan aca a chur air gleus a rèir cò ris a tha iad a’ bruidhinn agus ’s e sin a tha ag adhbharachadh comh-strì eadar an dà bhuidhinn agus ’s e call a th’ ann,*

nam bheachdsa. Tha feum air an dà bhuidhinn; tha feum air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig air iomadh adhbhar agus tha luchd-ionnsachaidh feumach air na daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bhon ghlùin – is iadsan na daoine aig a bheil deagh eisimpleir dhen chànan agus bhiodh e na bhuannachd dhan dà bhuidhinn, saoilidh mi, nam biodh nas lugha de mhi-thuigse air an dà thaobh.

- (A18 Native Gaelic speakers still aren't sufficiently accustomed to learners of Gaelic and you can understand why, as it's quite a new thing for people to be learning Gaelic . . . It's not long since almost everyone who spoke Gaelic fluently was a native speaker and thus they'd have good Gaelic and they wouldn't be accustomed in the same way, say, as English speakers are accustomed to people who come from Poland or Russia or whatever country and you'll get bad English . . . And the thing that would be good in my opinion, is if native speakers could become a bit more aware and a bit more flexible in relation to Gaelic learners. But, on the other hand, as I said, there are misunderstandings on both sides. Learners of Gaelic aren't wise and socially skilled enough when it comes to native speakers . . . Learners usually think . . . because they're interested in the language and in learning the language, that everyone who speaks the language should be interested in speaking the language with them. And, a lot of them think that everyone should be able to answer questions about grammar and things like that – and that's not true in any language. And that causes conflict and also . . . learners are quite fond of new words and talking about things that older people – native speakers – wouldn't often discuss in the language. And they use this new language in front of native speakers and that doesn't work too well. Learners aren't wise enough to attune their language to the person they're talking to and that causes conflict between the two groups and that's unfortunate, in my opinion. There's a need for both groups; there's a need for Gaelic learners for many reasons and learners need native speakers – they're the people who have a good example of the language and it would be beneficial for both groups, I think, if there was less misunderstanding on both sides.)

Some interviewees expressed a degree of frustration with some native speakers' tendency to devalue Gaelic in certain ways, either by not using it or by questioning its value. Interviewee A8 contrasted her experiences in Ireland and Scotland, expressing disappointment that native Gaelic speakers in Scotland often used English in a way she had not encountered in Ireland:

- A8 *Corra uair, bidh cianalas orm, gu sònraichte nuair a tha mi a' faireachdainn am measg muinntir na Gaeilge ann an Èirinn, tha iad . . . làidir, tha iad làn mhisneachd agus corra uair an seo, uill, a' chuid as motha don ùine, feumaidh mi aideachadh [gàireachdaich], chan eil am faireachdainn sin am measg nan Gàidheal an seo. 'S e an luchd-ionnsachaidh a bhios a' bruidhinn a' Ghàidhlig fad na h-ùine, mo charaidean, bidh sinne daonnan a' bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig ach an fheadhainn aig a bheil a' chànan, tha iadsan buailteach tionndadh don Bheurla agus mar Gaeilgeoir, chan eil mi a' tuigsinn sin. Bhon ma tha fhios agadsa gu bheil Gaeilge aig cuideigin, bidh sibh ag atharrachadh gu Gaeilge sa bhad. Bhiodh e mar maslach a bhith a' bruidhinn na Beurla riutha is mar sin, chan eil mi buileach – fhathast, tha mi a' stri le sin an seo.*

(A8 Sometimes, I feel homesick, especially for how I feel among Irish speakers in Ireland, they're strong, they're full of confidence, and sometimes here, well, most of the time I have to say [laughs], there isn't the same feeling among native Gaelic speakers here. It's the learners who speak Gaelic all the time, my friends, we always speak in Gaelic but native speakers, they are prone to switch to English and as a committed Irish speaker, I don't understand that. Because if you know that someone speaks Irish, you switch to Irish immediately. It would be sort of shameful to speak English to them and so I'm not totally – I still struggle with that here).

Interviewee A14 regularly visits an island Gaelic community and related negative attitudes among some older native speakers there:

A14 *Tha Gàidhlig aig na seann daoine ach chan eil iad uamhraidh fhèin deònach a bruidhinn ris na daoine òga.*

R *Nach eil?*

A14 *Chan eil, bidh iad a' bruidhinn riutha fhèin ach chan eil iad a' smaointinn – chan eil fhios agam a bheil fhathast na feallsanachd aca nach e rud feumail a th' anns a' Ghàidhlig. Tha iad ga bruidhinn riutha fhèin ach chan eil iad a' smaointinn gum bu chòir dha a bhith aig na feadhainn òga. Cuid dhiubh, chan eil mi ag ràdhainn gur ann mar seo a tha e dhan a h-uile duine. Tha sin ann fhathast, eil fhios 'ad, gu bheil i gad chumail air ais agus nach fhaigh thu air adhart ann am beatha ged a tha mi fhèin ann agus an duine agam nar suidhe ann agus tha sinn ann an dreuchdan far a bheil sinn a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig.*

(A14 The old people have Gaelic but they're not very willing to speak it to younger people.

R Are they not?

A14 No, they speak it to each other but they don't think – I suspect they may still have the view that Gaelic isn't useful. They speak it to each other but they don't think the young people should have it. Some of them, I'm not saying that it's like that for all of them. It's still out there, you know, that it keeps you back and you won't get ahead in the world even though my partner and I are there in front of them and we work in jobs where we use Gaelic).

Some participants felt that new speakers had an important role to play in revitalising Gaelic given the extent of language shift from Gaelic to English and the weakness of Gaelic in traditional Gaelic communities. At the same time, several participants expressed a degree of limitation or constraint in terms of what they as new speakers could or should do in relation to Gaelic. Interviewee A20 described her perspective as follows:

A20 *Agus, um, eil fhios agad, nan robh seòrsa deasbad ann no nan robh daoine a' bruidhinn air a' Ghàidhlig, no mu dheidhinn cultar na Gàidhlig, um, tha mi a' smaointinn gum biodh seòrsa deference an-còmhnaidh ann bhuamsa do chuideigin aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs. Dìreach air sgàth 's gu bheil mi . . . you know, tha fios agam gur e siud an cultar aig cuideigin eile, agus 's toil leam gu mòr e*

agus 's toil leam gu bheil mi mar phàirt den t-saoghal sin ach chan eil mi airson an seòrsa . . . um . . . fèin-aithne sin a ghoid bho chuideigin. Tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil cunnart ann le, gu h-àraidh le mion-chànan, gu bheil daoine a' tighinn a-steach bhon taobh a-muigh agus cha bhi iad a' mothachadh gu bheil seòrsa worldview eadar-dhealaichte aca, agus gu bheil cultar eadar-dhealaichte aca agus . . . yeah, dìreach cha chanainn gum b' urrainn dhomh bruidhinn mar Ghàidheal, no 'on behalf of the Gaelic community' no stuth mar sin, mar a chanas daoine.

- (A20 And, um, you know, if there was some kind of discussion or if people were talking about Gaelic, or about Gaelic culture, um, I think there would always be a kind of deference from me to a native speaker. Just because I am . . . you know, I know that that's someone else's culture, and I really like it and I like being part of that world but I don't want to . . . steal that kind of identity from someone. I think there's a danger with a minority language that people come in from outside and they won't realise that they have a different worldview, and they have a different culture and . . . yeah, just that I wouldn't say that I could speak as a Gael, or 'on behalf of the Gaelic community' or anything like that.)

Interviewee A4, who had spent extensive periods in the Western Isles, expressed strong views on the importance of traditional Gaelic communities and distanced herself from other new speakers she knew who were not particularly interested in Gaelic culture.

- R *Am biodh e comasach a bhith beò ann an Gàidhlig ach gun a bhith a' buntainn ris a' chultar, cultar [eilein anns am b' àbhaist dhi fuireach]?*
- A4 *Tha mi a' smaointeachadh gum b' urrainn – chan eil mi dol ag ràdh nach b' urrainn. 'S e na tha mise ag ràdh, thàinig mi dhan Ghàidhlig air sgàth gun robh ùidh agam anns a' chultar agus anns an eachdraidh agus anns an dualchas. Agus nuair a bha mi ag ionnsachadh Spàinntis anns an àrd-sgoil, cha robh cultar air a theagasg, 's e dìreach a' chànain agus cha robh ùidh a' choinnne agam ann an dìreach a bhith, mar gum biodh, ag ionnsachadh fhaclan is rudan mar sin. Um . . . 's e cultar a bha mi a' sireadh, so mar sin, 's e an ùidh a th' agamsa anns a' chultar . . . chan eil mi ag ràdh nach b' urrainn do luchd-labhairt ùra a bhith beò mar gum biodh gun chultar na Gàidhlig . . . Leis an fhìrinn 's e . . . agus tha mi air a' bheachd seo a chluinntinn am measg Gàidheil eile – chan eil mi airson Gàidhlig a bhith agamsa mura h-eil an cultar ann, mura h-eil, mura h-eil, mar eisimpleir coimhearsnachdan mar [eilean anns am b' àbhaist dhi fuireach] ann, like what's the point ann an dòigh. Tha e faireachdainn nas fuadaine ann an dòigh. Às dèidh na dh'aithnich mi ann an [eilean], tha mi a' smaointinn mura h-eil sin ann, mura h-eil na Gàidheil ann a bhruidhneas a' Ghàidhlig, tha sinne air cridhe na Gàidhlig a chall. So chan eil mi ag ràdh, is chan eil mi a' dol a chàineadh na daoine, an luchd-labhairt ùra a tha ag iarraidh a bhith beò ann an cultar eile is tha mi a' tuigsinn na h-argamaidean a th' aca, gum bi . . . cleachdadh na Gàidhlig ann an raointean ùra is rudan mar sin. . . . Tuigidh mi sin ach 's e dìreach, um, chanainn-sa gur e call uabhasach fhèin mòr a bhiodh ann nan cailleamaid, can, na coimhearsnachdan a tha sin, is na daoine a tha sin a tha cho fialaidh is rudan mar sin is cho Gàidhealach.*

(R) Would it be possible to live [one's life] through Gaelic but not to be connected to the culture, the culture of [island where the interviewee used to live]?

A4 I think you could – I'm not going to say that you couldn't. What I'm saying is, I came to Gaelic because I'm interested in the culture and the history and the tradition. And when I was learning Spanish in secondary school, culture wasn't taught, it was just the language, and I didn't have the slightest interest in just, as it were, learning words and things like that. Um . . . it was culture I was seeking, and so, my interest is in the culture . . . To tell the truth – and I've heard this view from other Gaels – I don't want to have Gaelic unless the culture is there, unless, unless, for example communities like [island where the interviewee used to live] are there, like what's the point in a way. It seems more artificial in a way. After what I learned on [island], I think that unless that is there, unless there are Gaels [i.e. traditional speakers] speaking Gaelic, we will have lost the heart of Gaelic. So I'm not saying, and I'm not criticising those new speakers who want to live in a different culture and I understand their arguments, about using Gaelic in new fields and things like that . . . I understand that but it's just, um, I would say that it would be a tremendous loss if we were to lose, say, those communities, and those people who are so hospitable and so on and so Gaelic).

9 Linguistic issues

Participants were asked a range of questions about Gaelic: what kind of Gaelic new speakers should aspire to, how they assessed their own Gaelic and so on. There is no question that the new speakers who took part in this study look to the traditional native speaker as the ideal model and judge their own language against that benchmark.

9.1 Interviewees' assessments of their own Gaelic

Although the participants had all reached considerable, and usually very high, levels of fluency in Gaelic, many of them spoke negatively about their Gaelic and compared it unfavourably to that of native speakers.

Asked what she thought was the best kind of Gaelic in the twenty-first century, interviewee A15's first answer was simply 'not the kind of Gaelic that I speak' (*chan eil [sic] an seòrsa Gàidhlig a tha mi fhìn a' bruidhinn*). Interviewee A5 reported that she sometimes found conversation with highly fluent native speakers somewhat demoralising:

A5 *Feumaidh mi ràdh gu bheil mise uaireannan a' call misneachd a' bruidhinn ri daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig bho thùs, dìreach air sgàth 's gu bheil Gàidhlig cho brèagha aca is chan eil mi a' faireachdainn gu bheil mi math gu leòr. Bidh mi fhathast ga bruidhinn riutha ach chan eil mi an-còmhnaidh cofhurtail ach chan eil sin a' ciallachadh gun tèid mi dhan a' Bheurla . . . 'S e dìreach gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig cho beartach aca agus blas cho brèagha agus an uair sin, bidh mi a' faireachdainn beagan self-conscious is a' smaoinichadh, o mo chreach, tha do bhlàs uabhasach.*

(A5 I have to say that I sometimes lose confidence talking to native speakers, just because they have such beautiful Gaelic and I don't feel that I am good enough. I still talk to them but I'm not always comfortable but that doesn't mean I switch to English . . . It's just that their Gaelic is so rich and their *blas*²⁰ so beautiful and then I feel a little self-conscious and I think, o my, your *blas* is terrible).

In contrast, interviewee A8 expressed greater confidence in her abilities, which she attributed to her commitment to using the language:

A8 *Ach ann an coimeas ri feadhainn eile, fiù 's daoine a tha a' teagasg na Gàidhlig, tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil Gàidhlig mhath agam is tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil sin a' tighinn bhon neart agus an creideamh ann an dòigh a th' ann a th' agamsa airson Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn.*

(A8 But compared to some others, even people who teach Gaelic, I think that I have good Gaelic and I think that comes in a way from the strength and belief that I have to speak Gaelic).

One important element in the negative perceptions most interviewees reported in relation to their Gaelic was their lack of a distinct dialect, which was directly connected to their difficulties in accessing immersion opportunities discussed in section 5.2 above. This issue was particularly striking for those interviewees who had learned English as a foreign language. Here, the additional issue arose of the extent to which an accent from their native language was present in their Gaelic. Some interviewees found this to be more of an issue than others.

Asked whether she had ever tried to acquire a particular dialect in Gaelic, interviewee A5 said that she had not and that there was a risk of making a fool of oneself:

A5 *Cha robh, oir bhiodh e a' còrdadh rium a bhith a' fuireach ann an àite far a bheil Gàidhlig dha-riribh anns a' choimhearsnachd is a' faighinn am blas sin ach mar a tha fhios againn uile, chan eil mòran dhiubh ann [gàireachdaich]. Is cha robh an cothrom ann a thaobh obair. . . . Mar sin, cha robh mi a-riamh airson blas a chur orm a dh'aona-ghnothach oir tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil cunnart ann a bhith a' dèanamh amadan dhiot fhèin.*

(A5 No, because I would have liked to live in a place when Gaelic is really [used] in the community and to get that accent but as we all know, they aren't many of them [such places] [laughs]. And there weren't any work opportunities . . . So I never wanted to deliberately put on a particular accent because I think there's a danger of making a fool of yourself).

²⁰The Gaelic term *blas*, literally 'taste', is most straightforwardly translated as 'accent', but its full meaning may well be a good deal richer. Vanessa Will suggests that *blas* 'may be described as a set of linguistic and paralinguistic elements, including dialectal and register variants, prosody, and the use of idiomatic expressions, which combine to bestow an almost palpable aesthetic quality to one's speech' (Will 2012: 37).

Interviewee A15 also felt it was ‘unnatural’ to attempt to acquire a particular dialect in Gaelic. Instead she felt she had a mixed kind of Gaelic, with an accent reflecting her native language:

A15 *Chan eil e a’ faireachdainn nàdarra dhomh a bhith a’ feuchainn ri dualchainnt a chleachdadh nuair nach eil mi a’ buntainn ri àite sam bith le Gàidhlig. . . . ‘S e dìreach seòrsa measgachadh a th’ ann agus ’s dòcha gu bheil am blas [Frangach] agam a’ tighinn air adhart cuideachd.*

(A15 It doesn’t feel natural for me to try to use a dialect when I don’t belong to any particular place with Gaelic . . . It [her Gaelic] is just a kind of mix and perhaps my [French]²¹ accent comes through too).

Interviewee A2, from an EU country, was quite critical of her Gaelic but says she is comfortable being identifiable as someone from another country:

R *Dè an seòrsa Gàidhlig a th’ agad fhèin? Dè chanadh tu?*

A2 *Gàidhlig gu math acadaimigeach. Chan eil mi math air dualchainntean no dad sam bith, so le cinnt, you know, ma bhios daoine sam bith ag èisteachd rium, bidh iad a’ cluinntinn blas [a ciad cànan].*

R *Agus am biodh sin fìor anns a’ Bheurla cuideachd?*

A2 *Seadh, oh seadh. . . . Tha mi car toilichte a bhith cuideigin bho thall thairis a tha ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig agus chan eil mi airson a bhith, you know, samhachadh gu bheil mi à Lewis no àite sam bith, tha mi car toilichte le ‘SMOG’. Agus cho fad ’s a tha daoine gam thuigsinn, tha mi ceart gu leòr leis. So chan eil e gu diofar. . . Yeah, ach tha mi car mothachail gu bheil Gàidhlig luchd-ionnsachaidh a th’ agam ged a tha e seòrsa ’s dòcha gu ìre àrd, chan eil mi fileanta, fileanta. Chan eil mi cho fileanta sa Ghàidhlig ’s a tha mi anns a’ Bheurla.*

(R What kind of Gaelic do you speak? What would you say?)

A2 Quite academic Gaelic. I’m not good at dialects or anything, so definitely, you know, if people listen to me, they will hear an accent [from her first language].

R And would that be true in English too?

A2 Yes, oh yes. I’m quite happy to be someone from abroad who is learning Gaelic and I don’t want to be, you know, pretending that I’m from Lewis or somewhere, I’m quite happy with ‘SMOG’.²² And so long as people understand me, I’m all right with it. So it

²¹This interviewee actually referred to her own first language and not to French.

²²‘SMOG’ is a common acronym meaning ‘Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Gaelic’, referring to the variety associated with the college (sometimes perceived as artificial). Usually this relates specifically to lexical items and in particular new conceptual terminology associated with register expansion, rather than to phonology or morphology. In contrast to interviewee A2’s embrace of ‘SMOG’, interviewee

doesn't matter . . . Yeah, but I'm quite aware that I have learner's Gaelic and although it's at kind of a high level I'm not really fluent. I'm not as fluent in Gaelic as I am in English).

In contrast, interviewee A11, from a different EU country, thought that she did not have an accent from her native language in her English, and that in both English and Gaelic she tended to pick up different accents depending on who she was speaking to. At the same time, she questioned whether recognisable 'foreign accents' exist in Gaelic, given the novelty of the 'foreign new speaker' phenomenon:

A11 *So a-rithist, tha sin eadar-dhealaichte nuair a tha thu ag ionnsachadh Beurla, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil dùil aig a h-uile duine gum bi blas an àite agad agus mar as àbhaist, you know, ma tha thu às [an Eadailt], bidh blas [Eadailteach] agad. Ach chan eil e ag obair leis a' Ghàidhlig really, you know [gàireachdaich] . . .*

R: *Agus cha chuala mi thu a' bruidhinn Beurla, an canadh tu gu bheil blas mar sin agad anns a' Bheurla?*

A11 *Chan eil. Chan eil idir, idir. A-rithist, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil 's dòcha seo a bhios a' tachairt leis a' Ghàidhlig agam cuideachd, gu math tric tha mi ag ràdh gu bheil kind of pick and mix accent agam oir tha . . . agus gu math tric, nuair a tha mi a' bruidhinn ri cuideigin à Astràilia no nuair a tha mi a' fuireach ri cuideigin à Manchester, tha e cho furasta dhaibh buaidh a thoirt orm. . . Tha dùil agam gum bi an [aon] rud a' tachairt dhomhsa leis a' Ghàidhlig cuideachd. So nam biodh mi a' fuireach ann an Uibhist a Deas, 's dòcha an dèidh mìos no dhà, bidh mi a' cleachdadh faclan no bidh 's dòcha blas nas Uibhistiche orm. . . Ach yeah, chan eil blas [Eadailteach] air a' Bheurla agam agus yeah, chan eil fhios 'am an e rud mar blas [Eadailteach] nuair a tha thu a' bruidhinn [gàireachdaich] Gàidhlig 's dòcha.*

(A11) So again, that's different when you're learning English, I think that everyone expects that you will have an accent from the place [you came from] and usually, you know, if you're from Italy²³ you will have an Italian accent. But that doesn't really work with Gaelic, you know [laughs].

R And I haven't heard you speaking English, would you say that you have an accent like that in English?

A11 No. Not at all, at all. Again, I think that this is maybe what happens with my Gaelic too, I quite often say that I have a kind of pick and mix accent because . . . and quite often, when I talk to someone from Australia or stay with someone from Manchester, it's so easy for them to have an effect on me . . . I expect that the [same] thing is happening with Gaelic too. So if I were living in South Uist, maybe after a month or two, I would be using words or maybe I would have more of a Uist accent . . .

A5 said that she did not like the term 'SMOG' although she had spent some time studying at SMO in the past.

²³This interviewee actually referred to her country of origin and not to Italy.

But yeah, I don't have an Italian accent in my English and yeah, I don't know if there's such a thing as an Italian accent when you're speaking Gaelic maybe . . .)

Interviewee A19 also drew a comparison between Gaelic and English in considering the issue of dialect acquisition, commenting that it would be 'inauthentic' to adopt a dialect in the absence of a real connection to the area where it was used, but that at the same time the absence of any distinguishing local features could leave her 'disembodied sounding':

A19 *Bha mi riamh a' faireachdainn gun robh rudeigin math dh'fhaodte rud beag inauthentic nam bithinn ag ionnsachadh [dualchainnt] . . . b' urrainn dhomh a bhith air blas Leòdhasach ionnsachadh 's dòcha. Ach . . . 's e an rud a bha mi faireachdainn, uill, cha robh mi ann an Leòdhas riamh, carson a bhiodh blas Leòdhasach orm, bhiodh sin gu math annasach. Carson a bhiodh blas Uibhist a Tuath orm? Cha robh mi ann riamh. Ach . . . nuair a tha thu a' cluinntinn cuideigin a tha air Beurla ionnsachadh agus chan eil iad air blas sònraichte ionnsachadh, uaireannan tha iad caran disembodied sounding.*

(A19 I've always felt it would maybe something inauthentic if I was to learn [a dialect] . . . I could have learned a Lewis accent maybe . . . But . . . the thing I felt was, well, I've never been to Lewis, why would I have a Lewis accent, that would be really strange. Why would I have a North Uist accent? I've never been there. But . . . when you hear someone who's learned English and hasn't learned a particular accent, sometimes they're a bit disembodied sounding).

Interviewee A10, a native speaker of English, commented that she perceived her native Dublin accent in her Gaelic, but that this was not always apparent to other Gaelic speakers due to their limited familiarity with other Gaelic dialects:

A10 *Nuair a tha mise a' cluinntinn a' ghuth agam fhèin, tha mi a' smaoinneachadh, you know, sin cuideigin à Baile Àtha Cliath a rinn Gàidhlig na h-Alba ach an-dràsta is a-rithist, chan aithnicheadh duine sam bith gur ann às Èirinn a tha mi . . . uaireannan bhiodh iad a' faighneachd, you know, cò às a tha thu, ach a bheil sin ann air sgàth 's nach eil daoine eòlach air dualchainnt diofraichte?*

(A10 When I hear my own voice, I think, you know, that's someone from Dublin who's done Scottish Gaelic but now and again, no one would realise that I'm from Ireland . . . sometimes they ask, you know, where are you from, but does that happen because people aren't familiar with a different dialect?)

In contrast, interviewee A1, also from Ireland, said that she did not think she had a detectable Irish accent in her Gaelic, although she thought this was apparent in her English.

A small minority of participants had deliberately endeavoured to acquire a particular dialect. Interviewee A16, who lives in a residually Gaelic area, believes that dialectal diversity is a healthy thing and has endeavoured to adopt the dialect of that area:

A16 *Tha mi smaointinn gu bheil e glè mhath gu bheil dualchainntean fhathast a' dol agus cànan sam bith a tha fallain, tha dualchainntean aice. Bidh mise a' feuchainn gu ìre air choreigin . . . tha mi mothachail nach eil mi buileach ann fhathast ach tha mi*

feuchainn ri dualchainnt [na sgìre anns a bheil i a' fuireach] a leantainn mas urrainn dhomh a chionn 's gu bheil mi a' faireachdainn gu bheil sin freagarrach, eil fhios agad. 'S ann an seo a tha mi air a bhith a' fuireach o chionn seachd no ochd bliadhnaichean is chan eil e a' dèanamh ciall nam bithinn a' bruidhinn mar Niseach.

(A16) I think that it's very good that dialects are still going and that any language that's healthy has dialects. I try to some extent . . . I'm aware that I'm not quite there yet but I try to follow the dialect of [the area in which she lives] if I can because I feel that that's appropriate, you know. This is where I have been living for seven or eight years and it wouldn't make sense if I spoke like someone from Ness (Lewis)).

A final point in relation to dialects that was made by several interviewees was the declining salience of dialectal diversity in Gaelic, particularly among younger speakers. This process of homogenisation was been noted for some time (McLeod 2017). As such, the Gaelic spoken by new speakers is likely to become less distinguishable from that of 'native speakers'.

A15 *Nuair nach robh mi cho fileanta, bhithinn a' smaointinn gum biodh na daoine le Gàidhlig aig an oilthigh cho fileanta, oh wow, agus cho làidir anns a' chànan agus tha coimhearsnachd cho mòr ann. Ach a-nis, nuair a tha mi fhìn beagan nas fheàrr air a' chànan, tha mi cluinntinn nach eil iad cho fileanta ri sin agus nach bi iad ga cleachdadh. 'S ann dìreach ann an suidheachaidhean sònraichte a bhiodh iad a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig. So yeah, tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil staid na Gàidhlig gu math lag really.*

(A15) When I wasn't that fluent, I used to think that the Gaelic speakers at the university were so fluent, oh wow, and so strong in the language and that there's such a big community. But now, when I myself am a bit stronger in the language, I can hear that they're not that fluent and that they don't use it. It's only in particular situations that they use Gaelic. So yeah, I understand that the situation of Gaelic is pretty weak really).

Interviewee A11 commented specifically on the weakening of dialect features among younger speakers:

A11 *A-rithist, nuair a tha mi a' tachairt ris na h-oileanaich eile neo daoine a tha ag obair còmhla rium, fiù 's nuair a tha ceangal aca ri àite sònraichte air a' Ghàidhealtachd no anns na h-eileanan, cho tric, chan eil dualchainnt aca idir.*

(A11) Again, when I meet other students or people who work with me, even when they have a connection with a particular place in the Highlands and Islands, very often they don't have any dialect at all).

9.2 Perceptions of good Gaelic and model speakers

Asked to describe what they considered to be ‘good’ Gaelic, participants generally explained that it should be clear and natural. Several of them also expressed relatively puristic attitudes in relation to Gaelic, rejecting the excessive use of loanwords and loan translations (calques). Interviewee A15 commented as follows:

R *Dè an seòrsa Gàidhlig as fheàrr anns an aonamh linn fichead?*

A15 *. . . Uill, dìreach Gàidhlig far nach eil thu a’ cleachdadh faclan Beurla agus a bheil a’ cleachdadh . . . gnàthasan-cainnt . . . a tha a’ tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig gun a bhith a’ cleachdadh mar calques agus rudan mar sin. Agus yeah, bidh mi fhìn a’ smaointinn ma tha blas gu math ionadail aig cuideigin, bidh mi a’ smaointinn gur e Gàidhlig math a th’ ann.*

(R What’s the best kind of Gaelic in the twenty-first century?)

A15 . . . Well, just Gaelic where you don’t use English words and you use . . . idioms . . . that come from Gaelic without using calques and things like that. And yeah, I think that if someone has a really local accent, I think that that is good Gaelic).

Interviewee A8 expressed a similar view, criticising what she saw as the excessive use of English words even when Gaelic words are available:

A8 *Tha mise fhathast don bheachd gun e fìor Ghàidhlig nàdarra Gàidhealach, sin an rud as fheàrr an àite a bhith a’ cur faclan Beurla a-staigh fad na h-ùine no ag ùisneachadh na faclan Gàidhlig ach ’s e Beurla a th’ annta le litreachadh Gàidhlig agus a’ chuid as motha don ùine, tha deagh fhacal ann an Gàidhlig ach cha bhi daoine ga ùisneachadh.*

(A8 I still think that real natural Gaelic is the best thing, instead of putting in English words all the time or using Gaelic words that are just English words with Gaelic spelling when most of the time, there’s a good word in Gaelic but people don’t use it).

Interviewee A20 also noted the importance of speaking ‘naturally’, with a good use of idiom, but placed a strong emphasis on the functional, pragmatic aspect of Gaelic language use – that good Gaelic must be an effective means of communicating with native speakers:

A20 *’S e tha mi fhìn ag iarraidh bhon Ghàidhlig, ideally bu toil leam Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn gu nàdarra le blas cho faisg air blas fileanta ’s a ghabhas agus tòrr ghnathasan cainnt a bhith agam agus Gàidhlig a b’ urra dhomh a chleachdadh airson ’s gum bi cuideigin aig an robh Gàidhlig bho thùs cofhurtail bruidhinn rium. Chan eil mi ag ràdh nach eil mi ag iarraidh deagh ghràmar, tha mi ag iarraidh sin, ach tha mi dìreach a’ smaointinn gu bheil deagh Ghàidhlig a’ ciallachadh rud eadar-dhealaichte.*

(A20 What I want from Gaelic, ideally I would like to speak Gaelic naturally with a *blas* as close to that of a native speaker as possible and to have lots of idioms and Gaelic

that I could use in a way that a native speaker would be comfortable talking to me. I'm not saying that I don't want good grammar, I do want it, but I just think that good Gaelic means something different).

Interviewee A21 expressed a more modernising perspective, emphasising the importance of developing new terminology alongside the maintenance of traditional usage:

A21 *Agus mhothaich mi gu bheil dìreach dà sheòrsa de Ghàidhlig ann; na daoine a tha a' cantainn, 'uill, seo a' Ghàidhlig, agus seo a' Ghàidhlig againne mar fileantaich', an uair sin tha iad a' beachdachadh air SMOG agus [ag ràdh] dè an rud grod a tha seo? Ach, dhòmhsa dheth, chan e – tha feum againn air an dà rud, dìreach na seann abairtean is seann dòighean ach cuideachd na dòighean ùra – bidh gach cànan a bhios beò ag atharrachadh agus a' togail faclan ùra. Uill, tha mi-fhìn an sàs ann an coimpiùtaireachd agus, mar sin, feumaidh sinn faclan ùra a chruthachadh gus na rudan a ràdh, air sgàth 's nach robh na faclan bho shean ann. Is mar sin feumaidh sinn gabhail ris an dà rud agus ag obair còmhla.*

(A21 And I've noticed that there are two kinds of Gaelic: people who say, 'well, this is Gaelic, this is the Gaelic that we have as native speakers', and then they look at SMOG and say what is this nasty thing? But for me, it isn't – we need both things, the old phrases and the old ways but also the new ways – every living language changes and develops new words, Well, I'm involved in computing and we need to create new words to express things, because the words weren't there historically. And so we have to accept both things and work together).

10 New speakers from outside the UK: reactions from others

Interviewees reported a wide range of reactions to their decision to learn Gaelic to an advanced level. These are considered in relation to three distinct groups: (1) native Gaelic speakers, (2) non-Gaelic speakers in Scotland and (3) people in their home countries (including their own families).

10.1 Reactions from native Gaelic speakers

Interviewee A11 spent an extended period in the Western Isles several years ago and reported that some there found it extremely curious that someone from her country could speak Gaelic:

A11 *Uill, gu h-àraid nuair a bha mi ann an [eilean], bha sin uabhasach èibhinn nuair a fhuair iad a-mach gun robh mi ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig, bha sin uabhasach iongantach agus bha iad gu math tric ag ràdh, 'Thig an seo, tha Gàidhlig aice is tha i às [dùthaich chèin].' Bha sin like, tourist attraction or something, you know rudeigin cho mì-àbhaisteach.*

(A11 Well, especially when I was in [island], it was really funny when they found out that I was learning Gaelic, that was really surprising and they would often say, 'Come here, she speaks Gaelic and she's from [interviewee's home country]'. It was like a tourist attraction or something, you know something so unusual).

Interviewee A16 expressed a slightly different view, asserting that even though some Gaelic speakers found it strange, most were encouraged that someone from a foreign country would learn Gaelic and take an interest in Gaelic culture:

A16 *Uill, tha e na annas do chuid. A' chuid as motha, tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil iad a' cur fàilte air. Tha cuid aca, yeah, tha iad a' smaointinn gu bheil e annasach ach . . . gu leòr dhiubh, tha iad fiù 's a' cur fàilte air gu bheil cuideigin bho thall thairis mar gum biodh a' tighinn a-steach is a' dèanamh oidhirp gus taic a chur ris a' chultar aca.*

(A16 Well, I think it's surprising for some. The majority, I think that they welcome it. Some of them, yeah, they think it's strange but . . . many of them, they even welcome [the fact] that someone from abroad, as it were, comes in and makes an effort to support their culture).

Interviewee A2 echoed this view, stated that native Gaelic speakers were very pleased that non-Scots were learning Gaelic:

A2 *Bha iadsan gu math toilichte gun tàinig cuideigin bho thall thairis a bha airson Gàidhlig ionnsachadh agus a rinn oidhirp mhòr an cànan ionnsachadh.*

(A2 They were very pleased that someone from abroad wanted to learn Gaelic and had made a great effort to learn the language).

The situation of the Irish participants was distinct from those from other countries, given the long-established affinity between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland, which appears to have made it less remarkable that they would be able to communicate in Gaelic. Nevertheless, the Irish interviewees reported some divergences in terms of the reactions they received from Gaelic speakers and other Scots.

Interviewee A1 reported that Scottish Gaels had always been warm and encouraging to her as an Irish person learning Gaelic:

A1 *Tha iad gu math blàth riumsa, yeah, tha iad an-còmhnaidh a' cur fàilte orm is you know, gu math toilichte gu bheil Èireannaich an seo ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig.*

(A1 They are very warm to me, yeah, they're always welcoming to me and you know, very happy that Irish people are here learning Gaelic).

Interviewee A13 reinforced this view, recalling that many native speakers in the Western Isles expressed a strong sense of affinity:

A13 *Bha gu leòr daoine ag ràdh, oh you know, 'Tha sinn a' smaoinichadh gu bheil dìreach an aon àite a th' ann, Èirinn agus Alba'.*

(A13 Lots of people would say, oh you know, 'We think it's just one place, Ireland and Scotland').

Interviewee A9 also explained that he had been warmly welcomed in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd from the outset, and that perceived confessional differences were never a problem:

- R *Ciamar a tha e mar Èireannach a bhith a' cur seachad mòran ùine ann an Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba agus dè an seòrsa fàilte a fhuair thu . . . ciamar a tha na Gàidheil ann an Alba a' coimhead air na Gàidheil ann an Èirinn?*
- A9 *Uill, eil fhios agad, fàilte mòr is bha e soilleir dhomh bhon chiad latha gun robh iad a' coimhead orm mar bhràthair, eil fhios agad. You know, so cha robh . . . bha e cho làidir sin agus nuair a bha mi a' fuireach ann [an coimhearsnachd Ghàidhealach] . . . cha robh iad a' smaointinn fiù 's air creideamh, you know just, seo Gàidheal, eil fhios agad. So tha e coltach leinn fhèin, tha e a' bruidhinn an aon teanga, tha an aon cultar aige. Agus just rud inntinneach mu dheidhinn sin, nuair a bha mi a' falbh . . . thuirt duine a-mhàin, 'Cha do smaoinich mi a-riamh gur e Caitligeach a bh' annad', eil fhios agad.*
- (R How is it as an Irish person to spend a lot of time in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd and what kind of welcome did you receive . . . how do the Scottish Gaels look on the Irish Gaels?
- A9 Well, you know, a warm welcome and it was clear to me from the first day that they looked on my like a brother, you know. You know, so it wasn't . . . it was that strong and when I was living in [Gaelic community] . . . they didn't even think about religion, you know just, this is a Gael, you know. So he is like us, he speaks the same language, he has the same culture. And just one interesting thing about that, when I was leaving . . . one person said to me, 'I never thought of you being a Catholic', you know).

At the same time, the fact that the matter of religion was flagged up in this manner suggests that it does remain an important issue, and not all interviewees presented such a positive picture in this connection. Interviewee A6, who had spent several years living in the Western Isles, reported that people in Lewis were somewhat 'suspicious' towards him because they associated Ireland with Catholicism, but that people in Benbecula, South Uist and Barra were much more 'welcoming'.²⁴

²⁴The interviewee used the English words 'suspicious' and 'welcoming' here.

A rather different form of negativity was reported by interviewee A12, who described an incident in a café in Glasgow when another customer who heard her speaking English with her Irish accent approached her and told her she disliked hearing her speaking. There was no connection to Gaelic in this exchange, however, and no indication that this hostile customer was a Gaelic speaker.

10.2 Reactions from non-Gaelic speaking Scots

For non-Gaelic speaking Scots, the idea that a foreigner could learn Gaelic was often remarkable. Interviewee A20 reported as follows:

A20 *Bidh mi a' faighinn a' bheachd tric bho Albannaich, you know ma thachras mi ri cab driver no rudeigin, tha iad ag ràdh, 'Oh, you're putting us all to shame! I'm Scottish and I don't speak Gaelic!' Tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil am beachd sin ann.*

(A20 I often get the view from Scottish people, you know if I meet a cab driver or something, they say 'Oh, you're putting us all to shame! I'm Scottish and I don't speak Gaelic!' I think that view is [common]).

Interviewee A16 reported a 'broad spectrum' of views from non-Gaelic speaking Scots, including reactions similar to that presented by interviewee A20:

A16 *Uill, gheibh thu a h-uile càil ann an sin. Broad spectrum. Tha daoine gu leòr ann a chanas, 'Uill, carson a dh'ionnsaich thu a' Ghàidhlig? Dè am feum a tha sin? Cànan a tha bàsachadh, cànan . . . tinkers' language' . . . Ach air an làimh eile, tha mi a smaointeachdainn gu bheil gu leòr ann aig a bheil spèis dhi agus a tha an uair sin a' smaointinn, 'O uill, 's math gu bheil thusa a' dèanamh oidhirp. Oidhirp a bu chòir sinne a bhith dèanamh'. Gheibh thu sin cuideachd.*

(A16 Well, you get everything there. A broad spectrum. There are plenty of people who say 'Well, why did you learn Gaelic? What use is that? A dying language, a tinkers' language' . . . But on the other hand, I think there are plenty who have respect for [Gaelic] and then think 'O well, it's good that you are making an effort. An effort that we should be making'. You get that too).

Interviewee A15 agreed that non-Gaelic speaking Scots were 'gu math measgaichte' (quite mixed) in their reactions, with some being positive and others negative.

10.3 Reactions from fellow nationals

Given the lack of connection between their home countries and Gaelic, several interviewees reported varying reactions among their relatives and fellow nationals. For example, interviewee A18 commented that '*chan eil mo phàrantan a' tuigsinn dè tha mi a' dèanamh agus carson a tha mi ga dhèanamh ach chan eil iad gam chàineadh, co-dhiù*' ('my parents don't understand what I'm doing or why I'm doing it but they don't criticise me at any rate'). Interviewee A2 also reported that her own parents were unsupportive but noted that one of their neighbours chose to do a short course at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, while others had a low level of awareness of Gaelic:

A2 *Agus daoine anns [an dùthaich aice], bha cuid nach eil a' tuigsinn. Chan eil mo phàrantan a' tuigsinn carson. Tha iad car a' smaoinichadh gu bheil seòrsa de you know, 'Honestly, why doesn't she get a real job?' Agus carson nach eil i a' dèanamh rud like, you know, tha mo phiuthar na neach-lagha, a' phiuthar eile na accountant. Agus bha obair cheart aice aig aon àm is a-nis, tha ise a' dèanamh [obair] ann an*

cànan nach eil beò. Ach tha ùidh aig cuid eile anns a' Ghàidhlig. So aig aon de na cùrsaichean aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, thachair mi ri cuideigin às [an dùthaich aice] a tha a' fuireach dà shràid air falbh bho mo phàrantan, a tha ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig cuideachd. Is bha sin uabhasach neònach. Ach bha tòrr daoine anns [an dùthaich aice] nach eil buileach – you know, eòlach air Gàidhlig. Uill, tha iad car eòlach air Gàidhlig ann an dòigh 's a tha iad eòlach air Alba. You know, tha line anns na leabhraichean turasachd ag ràdh, 'Tha cànan Ceiltis ann ach na gabh dragh, tha Beurla aig a h-uile duine.'

- (A2) And people in [interviewee's home country], there were some that didn't understand. My parents don't understand why. They sort of think that there's a, you know, 'Honestly, why doesn't she get a real job?' And why doesn't she do something like, you know, my sister is a lawyer, the other sister is an accountant. And she [the interviewee] used to have a proper job at one time and now she is working in a dead language. But others are interested in Gaelic. So at one of the courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig I met someone from [interviewee's home country] who lives two streets away from my parents who is also learning Gaelic. And that was really strange. But there are lots of people in [interviewee's home country], who aren't really – you know, familiar with Gaelic. Well, they are a little familiar with Gaelic in the way that they are familiar with Scotland. You know, there's a line in the tourist books that says 'There is also a Celtic language but don't worry, everyone speaks English').

Interviewee A5 reported generally supportive reactions from her family and friends in her home country:

- A5 *Anns an fharsaingeachd, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil iad gu math moiteil asam gu bheil mi a' dèanamh na tha mi ag iarraidh dèanamh is gu bheil beatha toilichte agam leis na tha mi a' dèanamh. Chuala mi turas no dhà, 'Carson nach eil thu ag ionnsachadh cànan feumail?' [gàireachdaich] Ach tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil iad a' tuigsinn a-nis gu bheil i gu math feumail dhomhsa nam bheatha agus anns an fharsaingeachd, tha iad toilichte ach cha bhiodh gin aca airson mo leantainn [gàireachdaich].*

- (A5) In general, I think that they are quite proud of me, that I'm doing what I want to do and that I have a happy life with what I'm doing. Once or twice I've heard, 'Why aren't you learning a useful language?' [laughs] But I think that they understand now that it [Gaelic] is quite useful to me in my life and in general, they're happy but none of them would want to follow me [laughs]).

Interviewee A4 reported that her father was supportive of her involvement in Gaelic but that her other family members saw it as 'foolishness' and urged her to return to her home country:

- A4 *A h-uile triop 's a tha mi a' fònadh dhachaigh, bidh iad ag ràdh, '[Heather],²⁵ cuin a tha an gòralas seo gu bhith seachad, cuin a tha thu tilleadh?'*

²⁵The name of this interviewee has been changed.

(A4 Every time I phone home, they say, '[Heather], when is this foolishness going to be over, when are you coming back?')

Interviewee A11, from a different EU country, reported minimal awareness of Gaelic in her home country but a positive sense of curiosity:

A11 So *uaireannan, bidh daoine eòlach air . . . bidh fios aca co-dhiù gu bheil Gaeilge ann ach Gàidhlig na h-Alba, mar as àbhaist, seo a' chiad turas a chuala iad a-riamh mu dheidhinn. Ach mar as àbhaist, bidh iad, tha sin, you know, uabhasach inntinneach agus tha iad a' smaoinneachadh dìreach tha rudeigin cho neo-àbhaisteach. Agus yeah, mar as àbhaist, feumaidh mi ràdh, tha ùidh aca agus gu math tric, tha iad ag iarraidh barrachd fhiosrachaidh fhaighinn, so tha sin math.*

(A11 So sometimes, people will know about . . . at least they will know that Irish exists but Scottish Gaelic, usually it's the first time they have ever heard about it. But usually they will [find it] extremely interesting and they think that's something that's just so unusual. And yeah, usually, I have to say, they're interested and quite often they want get more information [about it], so that's good).

11 Synthesis of key findings

The participants in this study differ from the wider group of Gaelic learners and new speakers of Gaelic in that, for most of them, issues of family heritage and Gàidhealtachd or Scottish identity played no role in motivating them to learn Gaelic. Previous research on new speakers of Gaelic and on learners of Gaelic more generally has identified factors relating to family heritage or Scottish heritage as an important motivating factor. In this study the majority of participants had no connection to Scotland and several participants reported that they did not even know that Gaelic existed when they were growing up.

Most interviewees identified a combination of factors as motivating them to learn Gaelic. The most important were music, interest spurred by holiday visits to Scotland, an interest in languages in general and minority or unusual languages in particular. Several interviewees observed that their decision to start learning Gaelic essentially had not been a matter of any careful planning. For some it started out as nothing more than a hobby or as a means of meeting new people via Gaelic classes. A minority of the group had come to Scotland specifically because of their interest in Gaelic while in the majority of cases an interest in Gaelic developed after coming to Scotland. The reasons linked to interest in the language varied considerably and included romantic relationships, work opportunities or education.

None of the interviewees reported that they had learned Gaelic out of a desire to integrate into the local community in which they were living. This is perhaps unsurprising and demonstrates the limited social role of Gaelic even in the strongest Gaelic areas. Several interviewees reported growing irritated about being asked why it was that they had learned Gaelic, with some of them perceiving such questions as an implicit challenge to the value of Gaelic.

The participants in the study gave important insights into the process of Gaelic language acquisition as well as their trajectories in becoming new speakers. Their experiences and

perceptions show substantial overlap with those reported by Scottish new speakers more broadly. However, the accounts of this group of interviewees were greatly enriched by their experience of learning and speaking other languages and living in other countries.

Almost all the interviewees had learned the language through formal study programmes (usually at colleges or universities, especially Sabhal Mòr Ostaig) but often drew on other resources and informal methods and experience to develop their language skills. The fact that only one interviewee (from Canada) had access to Gaelic in school is not surprising given the unavailability of Gaelic as a subject in schools outside Scotland. All the Irish interviewees had studied Irish in school, however.

All the interviewees discussed different aspects of their learning experience in Gaelic. These accounts varied but a number of specific challenges and opportunities were identified. The greatest challenge mentioned by interviewees was the lack of opportunities to use Gaelic, particularly in immersion environments. This finding accords with previous research in this area, which has drawn attention to the lack of immersion opportunities available to learners of Gaelic compared with other more widely used languages.

Some of the interviewees from other EU countries who had learned English in school found learning Gaelic easier than other languages, while for others Gaelic was more difficult than other languages they had studied. A challenge to learning Gaelic for many interviewees was that lack of learning resources in Gaelic compared with other languages.

For the participants from Ireland, all of whom had significant exposure to Irish, the experience of learning Gaelic was very different. They reported little or no difficulties in acquiring the basic structure of Gaelic and found much of the vocabulary familiar. However, they also reported that a key challenge was adjusting to the different phonology of Gaelic.

Because of the shortage of immersion opportunities, many interviewees pointed to the limited pool of speakers available to them. While not perceived as having the same value as a full immersion, having a linguistic mentor was seen as beneficial to some interviewees. Working in a Gaelic environment played a significant role in improving their language skills and helped them advance their level to higher levels of fluency. The participants in this study reported varying levels of language use dependent on personal circumstances. Some reported making regular use of Gaelic, in some cases more than English. Others reported fewer opportunities to speak the language.

Less than half of the interviewees who had partners reported that their partner also spoke Gaelic fluently. In other cases partners had taken steps to learn Gaelic but had not reached advanced competence and therefore the couple did not use Gaelic to any significant degree with each other. Although all the interviewees made significant use of Gaelic in their lives, in general interaction with their partner was almost entirely through English. This is not dissimilar to the findings of the earlier study of new speakers in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

A quarter of interviewees were parents of children, with the children ranging in age from pre-school to young adults. Amongst this sub-group there was considerable variation in the degree to which interviewees use Gaelic with their children. This was affected by their partners' level of fluency in Gaelic. Those who had Gaelic-speaking partners tended to

report speaking Gaelic to their children and establishing Gaelic as the normal language of the home. Others used Gaelic to varying degrees when interacting with their children but felt restricted because of their partner's lack of Gaelic or by their children's response. An additional challenge in consolidating Gaelic as part of a family language policy was the absence of Gaelic-speaking relatives.

A very diverse pattern of Gaelic usage was reported in interviewees' work and social lives. Several had full-time occupations linked to Gaelic and this provided an important context in which to use the language. While some interviewees had many Gaelic-speaking friends, this was less the case than for others. The level of involvement in Gaelic activities also varied across the group.

The interviews provided rich data about participants' personal relationship to Gaelic, the connection between learning Gaelic and their sense of belonging in Scotland. Most of the participants in this study did not feel themselves to be Gaels, particularly as so few of them had close family connections to Gaelic. Some interviewees felt that learning Gaelic had increased this sense of belonging while others did not. This is perhaps unsurprising given the marginal role of Gaelic among immigrants to Scotland more broadly. Many interviewees said they were proud to have learned Gaelic and that becoming a Gaelic speaker was positive in terms of their own personal experience. This sense of personal commitment to learning Gaelic was clearly related to the process of learning itself and the perceived need to be proactive in seeking opportunities to use the language.

The majority of participants reported that they had had positive interactions with native Gaelic speakers and that native speakers were willing to speak Gaelic with them. Some participants were of the view that new speakers had a significant role to play in revitalising Gaelic given the extent of language shift to English and the decline in the use of Gaelic in traditional Gaelic-speaking communities. However, many participants also felt constrained in terms of what they as new speakers could or should do in relation to Gaelic.

Although the participants had all reached high levels of fluency in Gaelic, many of them downgraded their linguistic abilities compared to that of native speakers. Few of them had acquired (or endeavoured to acquire) a particular dialect. This issue was particularly striking for those interviewees who had learned English as a second language. For them, an additional issue related to the extent to which an accent from their native language was present in their Gaelic. However, several interviewees also highlighted the declining salience of dialectal diversity in Gaelic, particularly among younger speakers. This is linked to the process of homogenisation in Gaelic dialects more broadly; the Gaelic spoken by new speakers is therefore likely to become less distinguishable from that of 'native speakers'.

When asked what they considered to be 'good' Gaelic, most interviewees said that it should be clear and natural. Several also expressed puristic attitudes to Gaelic, rejecting the use of loanwords and loan translations/calques.

Interviewees reported a wide range of reactions from people to their decision to learn Gaelic to an advanced level. Some speakers who had spent extended periods of time in the Western Isles reported positive reactions to their learning and interest in Gaelic. The

situation of the Irish participants was different because of the long-established affinity between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. This made it less remarkable that they would be able to communicate in Gaelic. For non-Gaelic speaking Scots, the idea that a foreigner could learn Gaelic was often seen as remarkable. Given the lack of connection between their home countries and Gaelic, several interviewees reported mixed reactions among their relatives and fellow nationals. Some reported minimal awareness of Gaelic in their home country but a positive sense of curiosity.

12 Conclusion

The focus of our study has been on new speakers of Gaelic who originally come from countries other than Scotland and who are currently resident here. In this report we have attempted to bring together the results of this study which collected information on the backgrounds, experiences and views of this group. While there is little or no data about the number of new speakers of Gaelic in Scotland or their demographic composition, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of new speakers of Gaelic are originally from Scotland. However, the existence of non-Scots in this new speaker group is clearly not negligible. Finding out about how this group learn and become speakers of Gaelic provides us with some important insights into a small but important group of new speakers.

Our research shows that the experiences of this group of new speakers appears to be closely aligned with the experience of new speakers from Scotland more generally. New speakers of immigrant background report many of the same types of challenges when it comes to acquiring the language and their perceived legitimacy as speakers and their connection to the Gaelic community. However, we also found important differences, especially in terms of matters of identity.

In relation to immigrants' acquisition of minority languages, there are considerable differences according to the relative density of the language in the community and its general social presence. The decision by an immigrant to Scotland to learn Gaelic and become a new speaker is highly unusual and reflects complex individual trajectories.

Our ongoing research in this area benefit considerably from the intellectual and logistical support that is provided by participation in the COST Action on New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe. This will allow for further intellectual exchange as we learn about ongoing research in other language communities and present our findings to a community of specialist researchers. The issue of new speakers has emerged as an important field in minority language sociolinguistics and language planning and it is important that Gaelic be included in this process of intellectual exchange. The number of studies on immigrant new speakers of minority languages is as yet limited. As such the current study provides new insights into the particularities of this understudied group.

This study looked specifically at new speaker of immigrant background who had made a successful transition to becoming active new speakers of Gaelic. The findings of the current study and our previous work on new speakers of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow provide important insights into the complex mechanisms involved in acquiring a language that is not learned in the home or widely spoken in the community. Our 2015 study of Irish parents and Gaelic medium education provides some insights into the challenges faced by parents

who often engage in the process of learning Gaelic to support their children's learning or out of a personal commitment to the language or a combination of both. It would be beneficial to extend this study to include parents of other immigrant backgrounds to better understand the specific challenges that they face and how they as potential new speakers can be supported. It is evident that clearer insights into the pathways that lead to successful outcomes in this area can be of considerable importance for Gaelic language revitalisation in Scotland.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their thanks to all the interviewees who gave of their time in connection with this research. We would also like to thank Fiona O'Hanlon and Gordon Wells for their advice on demographic issues, Fiona MacDougall for transcribing the interviews, Charles Wilson for advice on layout and Stuart Dunmore for conducting two of the 2013 interviews. The writing of this chapter has also benefitted from discussions with members of the EU-funded COST network IS1306 *New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges*. Of course, we also thank Soillse for the awarding of the small grant that funded this research.

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