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Recommended Citation

Coady, Sean, "Resurrecting Gaelic: Modernity and Heritage Language Revival in Scotland in a Comparative Perspective" (2022). *Student Research Submissions*. 470.
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Resurrecting Gaelic:
Modernity and Heritage Language Revival in Scotland
in a Comparative Perspective

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Submitted in fulfillment of Honors in Anthropology (ANTH 481: Senior Thesis)

25 April 2022

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What Are We Really Saving? (An Introduction to Language, Culture, Loss, and Revitalization)

“When you lose a language and a language goes extinct, it’s like dropping a bomb on the Louvre.”

– legal scholar Michael Krauss, quoting linguist Ken Hale

The Power of Human Language

As an undergraduate student, I have been in constant search of a way to immerse myself in the anthropology of language. It has always fascinated me to think about how closely language and culture are tied together and whether the loss of a language is a catalyst for the dissolution of the culture tied to it. Despite growing up in a bilingual household, always being surrounded by cultures drastically different than my own, and having a lust and homesickness for parts of the world that I have never been to and languages that I have never spoken, it took me longer than expected to fully fathom the importance of language, linguistic preservation, and why people should care deeply about their languages being lost. Throughout my time as a student, I have always found myself coming back to the same questions concerning language, culture, how the two are intertwined, and why people should care about the loss of a language at a culture’s expense.

The importance of language to human psychology can be seen through something as simple as the way we talk about physical direction. English speakers live in a very ego-centric world. “Left” and “right” might seem like just words, but they greatly inform how we view ourselves in relation to everything else. To English speakers, the world quite literally revolves around the person speaking. Everything is left of *you*. Right of *you*. Above or below *you*. Your own right-hand side is different than the right-hand side of someone facing you. That is not something that should be taken lightly, because even something as simple as using “left” and

“right” to reference your place in the world has a major impact on your perception of it. How we speak and think in English makes us feel like we live in a world that revolves around us.

Conversely, there is an Australian Aboriginal community known as the Guugu Yimithirr, native to Far North Queensland, who use directional language much differently than English speakers do. According to linguist John B. Haviland, the heritage language of the Guugu Yimithirr does not use “left” and “right,” but rather the “four roots for geocentric direction,” meaning that these people use the equivalent of the English “north,” “south,” “east”, and “west” (Haviland 1998, 5). Unlike how left and right can change depending on which direction one is facing, the cardinal directions never change no matter where you are. The Guugu Yimithirr’s interpretation of the cardinal directions is slightly different than that of English speakers; it is possible that it is based on the position of the horizon and the “seasonal arc of the sun,” implying that the users of this heritage language do not live in an ego-centric world, but rather a nature-centric one (Haviland 1998, 5). These people are not so focused on themselves and how the world interacts with them, but rather how the world exists in its natural state. They live in a world centered on something outside of themselves which is demonstrated through linguistic choices.

Language is a necessary means of analyzing and communicating the worldview of a group or a society. Human beings are diverse creatures; we exist in every climate, every terrain, and every manner of living. Depending on where we come from, we use our actions, words, and skills differently. These differences are what make us human and are expressed through human language. Why, then, should people not care when their heritage language begins to fall out of use? People are pulled back to their roots when they begin to lose their language, and it then becomes difficult to handle cultural nostalgia in the presence of modernity.

In this thesis, I will offer reasons as to why people can and should care about language loss, why modernity has made maintaining linguistic tradition difficult in many places, and why cultural nostalgia is a valuable tool to revitalize languages. I intend to give examples from all over the world, from Hebrew in Israel to Māori in New Zealand, but I will focus mostly on the revitalization efforts of the Gaelic language in Scotland. It is my hope that the arguments and analyses that I provide will encourage new ideas about why language preservation is necessary to the survival of tradition and why the survival of tradition is important to the well-being of humanity.

Defining Language

In order to fully fathom the extent to which language is a necessary facet of culture, one must first be able to define what language is and how it is used in the human experience. Language is, in the simplest terms, a communication tool. It is the means through which humans express their lives to others. Through dialogue, song, oral tradition, or otherwise, language is how we convey our human condition. It is how we communicate who we are and what we believe. In a more complex sense, language is a communication tool that grows and evolves based on what the people who use it find important and necessary to communicate about. Not only that, but a language also changes based on environmental factors, the health and safety of its users, and how its users interact with the changing modern world. Should a language change past a certain point or disappear altogether, there is a risk of losing the ideas, beliefs, and traditions of the people who once used it.

In one of his many lectures published in *The Journal of Philosophy*, American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky attempts to tackle the definition of language and how it is tied

to Charles Darwin's theory of human evolution. While the lecture itself does not fully define language the way one would see it defined in a dictionary, Chomsky does pose an idea that did not occur to me until I read his lecture: "It is, in the first place, odd to think that language has a purpose," he states. "Languages are not tools that humans design, but biological objects, like the visual or immune or digestive systems" (Chomsky 2013, 655). In saying this, Chomsky is implying that language is an innate and pre-functional part of the human experience. While, of course, I find a great deal of merit in Chomsky's interpretation of language, I do not fully agree with this analysis. Rather than an internal, anatomical system that the human consciousness has very little control over, I like to think of language as more akin to a muscle group. That way, the biological metaphor still stands, but it becomes synonymous with a more consciously aware biological instrument. Language is a muscle that you have to exercise for it to become fully functional and sustainable. Babies are not born with the ability to speak, write, or understand language the way that they are born with the ability to digest food or fight off illness. Children do not stop reframing the way they use and understand language until after the ages of 8 and 9, and even then, there is still language development throughout adolescence as children learn more about the way words are used as they grow and move through the world (Dimroth and Narasimhan 2012, 314). Therefore, I believe that language absolutely is a tool, just as much as the muscles that move our bodies are, to help us maneuver through, interpret, and understand the world around us.

One of the arguments that Chomsky makes in this lecture that I do agree with is that "fundamental properties of language design indicate that a rich tradition is correct in regarding language as essentially an instrument of thought" (Chomsky 2013, 656). In a world where opinions are meant to be shared and explored, language is undoubtedly a means through which

thoughts and feelings can be expressed. This ties back into the idea that language is an invaluable tool used to approach the ideas of the world. With this in mind, one might argue that having a single lingua franca, or a language that is universally common across the world, would help with the comprehension of ideas and enhance the utility of language. However, this utility is not the only factor of importance; with a single lingua franca, the communication of ideas would be easier, but many ideas, varying perspectives, and the diversity of thought would be lost. Since Chomsky references languages as “instruments of thought,” I would argue that each language is a different instrument, each one playing a different part in the orchestra to create the symphony of all the world languages (Chomsky 2013, 656). Each language brings different ideas to the conversation, and with one single lingua franca, there would be a very small number of ideas to go around.

With all that said, language is exceedingly important to the human experience. In all its forms, whether that be spoken, written, or signed, language is a cornerstone of how humans are able to connect, express, and understand. Furthermore, languages are vessels for ideas and opinions, and the variance in languages used across the world support diversity of thought. Everything associated with the language you use is rooted in who you are and where you come from. In all the ways that language is described, whether that be as a tool, an instrument, an art form, or a biological system, it is no doubt the essential means of communication for humankind.

Defining Culture

“Culture” is a word that encompasses language, food practices, religion, healthcare, education systems, government, and so much more. That is, when culture is being discussed, it is

necessary to determine what facet of culture *specifically* is being discussed; culture requires a definition that honors all of its intricacies

In an article entitled “What is Heritage?” published by the Australian Garden History Society Inc. in 2016, author and activist Richard Offen puts it plainly: “Everywhere which displays the interaction through time between people and the environment tells the story of humankind’s endeavours: their successes and failures, their trials and tribulations, their attempts to commune with the supernatural and their forms of cultural expression through art and architecture” (Offen 2016, 13). On every corner of the globe, humans interact with their environment in meaningful ways, bringing to life what we know as “culture,” which can then be passed down through generations as “heritage” and “tradition.” There is no rulebook nor structured system for culture construction. It happens organically over time and gains importance and value through intangible things, such as repetition and reinforcement. Offen expresses that cultural environment is “more than just mere material remains” but rather “central to how we see ourselves and our identity as individuals, communities, and as a nation” (Offen 2016, 15). While Offen’s account speaks specifically of Australia and Australian heritage, this statement can undoubtedly be attributed to cultures and traditions all over the world.

In an article written by anthropologists Eric Gable and Richard Handler entitled “Anthropology and Culture,” the concept of culture is described as “a lens through which people see the world” in reference to Ruth Benedict’s interpretation of it (Gable and Handler 2008, 30). Much like the biological metaphor that is commonly used for language, the visual metaphor created by calling culture a “lens” implies that it is decisively related to human control and construction. With this in mind, culture as the metaphor of sight ties it to functionality and utility. Quoting anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, “culture is not ‘precipitated’ from ‘rational

activity.’ Rather, it is ‘culture which constitutes utility,’” meaning that the organic construction of culture is not only tied to human biological function but also that of social practicality (Gable and Handler 2008, 35). I find this metaphor to be more abstract than the one that Chomsky makes about language as a biological system, but then again, culture tends to be a much more abstract concept than language in general. For this reason, and because it gives a more tangible definition and image to an otherwise abstract idea, I am inclined to agree with the thinking behind this cultural metaphor.

Regarding the intangibility and abstraction of culture, Richard Handler wrote a book in 1988 entitled *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* which focuses on Québécois culture, identity, and policy between 1976 and 1984 and the idea of heritage and how it is a meaningful construct (Handler 1988). I find this idea to be exceedingly important because, in order to discuss what culture is, one must also discuss what different ideas about culture and culture loss demonstrate in the discourse of cultural identity. A heritage practitioner’s view of culture is much different than an anthropologist’s view and, as Handler discusses in his book, the “emptiness” of culture can be interpreted as the absence of something sacred and intangible, and efforts to retain or reclaim authenticity of culture can ultimately “never succeed” because it “succumbs to nationalist culture theory” (Handler 1988, 129-30). In short, Handler argues that considering culture and heritage to be tangible and solely attached to observable and material things perpetuates the need to “protect and demonstrate the collective individual’s existence by protecting what it possesses from the claims of other collective individuals,” as if to imply that the standing and vitality of a culture is made only by what one can observe of it (Handler 1988, 156). Many anthropologists tend to argue that culture and heritage exist through meaningful thought, moral codes, rituals, etc. That is, culture exists through the intangible and therefore

cannot be taken away. However, people who live within a cultural bubble and exist within their heritage find a great deal of importance in the tangible parts of culture as well, such as architecture, geographical location, traditional dress, or language, which I will discuss further in my analysis of David Berliner's book. These things, to a cultural native, can absolutely be taken away. Culture is complicated and difficult to define, but I would argue that focusing entirely on the intangible and ignoring the tangible, or vice versa, is an erasure of different perspectives and experiences and therefore creates an imbalanced definition of what culture is.

One of the most necessary features of a culture is its practitioners' ability to share it, both generationally and in out-group settings. Without this, cultures cannot be passed down, and losing the traditions, beliefs, and values of a group will cause it to be completely lost with its last practitioner. In *Losing Culture: Nostalgia, Heritage, and Our Accelerated Times*, Belgian anthropologist David Berliner provides an analysis of why the passing down of culture is important to its existence. He introduces the term "exonostalgia", which is the "nostalgia for a past not experienced personally" to outline why the loss of culture is detrimental to future generations (Berliner 2020, 9). The children of these cultures who find it to be forgotten tend to feel like they are missing a huge part of their identity. Berliner makes the point that culture is innately tied to one's "individual identity and that of their group," and that "humans create stories and practices that serve to stabilize" these connections between culture and identity (Berliner 2020, 10). He says that it is due to "the fear of disappearance, for the children of the future, that we seek to preserve, to 'museumify' ways of life, values, traditions, traumatic memories, identities, roots, languages, rites, skills, and so on" to slow the threat of culture loss (Berliner 2020, 8).

This is where language comes back into the picture. Since culture and language are so tied together and culture loss creates a sense of lost identity and social nostalgia, language loss is a means through which this circumstance occurs. In a way, culture can be referenced as a social language in and of itself. Much like a language is a means of expressing one's perception of the world, culture is another form of human expression that is shaped around groupthink, ritualistic practices, and belief systems. Culture is the observable interpretation of the human experience and language is the tool through which this observable interpretation can be communicated to others. However, these two very real and very necessary means of global communication are not invulnerable in any way. Just as a culture can be lost with its last practitioner if it is not passed down, a language can easily suffer the same fate. As seen in both Chomsky's interpretation of language as he relates it to Darwin's Theory of Evolution and the quote from Marshall Sahlins used in Gable and Handler's article, language and culture are often both referenced in biological metaphors, and the loss of both is often referenced as forms of extinction, just like a species of animal or an ecosystem at large (Chomsky 2013, Gable and Handler 2008). As I will discuss further in my critique of the phrase "language death," this anthropomorphizing of language and culture is somewhat unfair. However, the fact that this metaphor exists for both language loss and culture loss implies that the two are intricately connected, and that one may substantially impact the other.

Language Loss and Revival

In his book entitled *Language Death*, linguist and author David Crystal writes that "a language is said to be dead when no one speaks it any more" (Crystal 2000, 11). I would like to amend this statement to say that, for the purposes of this thesis, a language is said to be dead not

only when no one speaks it, but also when no one signs, writes, reads, or understands it fluently anymore. It is important to me that languages that are not spoken orally are included. Otherwise, several languages used by millions of people, such as ASL, BSL, and other signed languages used by members of differently-abled communities, are pushed out of the conversation.

It is also important to me that the term “language death” is fairly critiqued. I want to acknowledge that “death” is becoming more harmful than helpful in the conversation about language loss. Many scholars, including David Crystal, compare languages to “ecosystems” and language users to “living entities” that exist within them (Crystal 2000, 32). While this is an interesting and thought-provoking metaphor that comes up a lot in linguistic discourse, calling it language “death” implies that someone, or something, may be doing the killing. In his book, Crystal critiques authors who refer to it as “language murder” or “linguicide” because these terms are inherently antagonistic, unfairly anthropomorphized, and should not be thrown around, especially in cases where languages are lost due to a need for survival, assimilation, or evolution (Crystal 2000, 86). He poses the alternative term “language suicide,” which takes the burden of language loss off of the people who speak it and puts it fairly on external circumstances (Crystal 2000, 86). As to whether or not a language has the agency to decide its own fate, the implication of “language suicide” is not that a language is a sentient being and is the one at fault, but rather that language loss is something that happens often and that trying to find blame is more harmful when it is targeted on the people involved. It does not remove the tragic implications of language loss, nor does it make the problem any less serious, but it does allow for a mentality that is less antagonistic and blame-heavy when talking about language loss.

In *Language Death*, Crystal cites the estimation that there are somewhere between 3,000 and 10,000 languages used by humans today (Crystal 2000, 3). He discusses how this is a *huge*

variation. There is a reason for this: there are just simply too many languages on earth to put a figure on. Databases like Ethnologue, sources such as the *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, as well as countless surveys and studies have not been able to conclude exactly how many languages are used around the world because the true number of languages, language variations, and dialects is just too vast (Crystal 2000, 3). Crystal also speaks to the idea that all of the languages that are used today are “only a fraction of all the languages there have ever been” and claims that “there may have been as many as 600,000 languages spoken on Earth, or as few as 31,000” throughout human history (Crystal 2000, 11). It is clear that, as Crystal puts it, “far more languages have died, in the history of humankind, than now remain” (Crystal 2000, 11). It is common for linguistic scholars to compare the loss of languages to the extinction of animal species, but referring back to the issue of calling language loss “language death,” this metaphor is becoming outdated. As I noted previously, it is unfair to refer to languages as species because it invokes a notion of murder and death when a language is lost and the subsequent implications of this idea are harmful to the analysis of what the true causes of losing languages are.

Truthfully, there are a plethora of different reasons why languages are lost, but Crystal and many other scholars agree that languages are most prone to loss when a new, more “modern,” and more “useful” language comes to take its place and parents opt to use the new language at home with their children. In his book, Crystal focuses primarily on the English language, how it has spread across the globe through colonialization and conquest, and how it has cut down a large number of minority languages. “No language has ever exercised so much international influence as English,” he says, and he breaks down the dissolution of minority languages into three stages (Crystal 2000, 70). The first stage is when “immense pressure on the people to speak the dominant language” causes cultural natives to reassess what language would

be most beneficial to use (Crystal 2000, 78). Language is profoundly related to power; when a group of people with a different language asserts more dominance over a minority group and language, it creates a power struggle where the dominant language usually prevails. This is why reclaiming a lost language can be used as a way to reclaim power over oneself and one's culture, and I will speak more in-depth about this idea later.

The second stage of language loss that Crystal outlines is one of “emerging bilingualism,” where people are proficient in both their heritage language and the prevailing, dominant one (Crystal 2000, 79). Over time, however, this bilingualism begins to turn disproportionately in favor of the dominant language, and this leads to the third stage where the younger generations stop using their heritage language completely. Crystal mentions the “feeling of shame about using the old language” that causes young people to let go of their linguistic heritage in favor of the language that took it over (Crystal 2000, 79). This “shame” is key to understanding why languages are lost in the first place. If you were taught that your heritage language does not belong in the modern world and that people would shun you for using it, your social survival instinct would tell you to give it up to fit in and survive. This is an idea that is widely accepted in linguistic scholarship, as countless languages have been lost this way throughout history. David Harrison, a professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College, writes that “all linguistically encoded knowledge is always only one generation away from extinction” in his book *When Languages Die*, which puts the responsibility of choice for retaining or abandoning a heritage language on the shoulders of parents, teachers, and mentors (Harrison 2007, 147). Harrison also poses the thought that languages are meant to change and evolve, and that this should not be seen as a tragic loss but rather an organic one, but when actors other than the

heritage users of the language come into play, such as users of a majority language, the language change becomes more morally complicated (Harrison 2007, 207-8).

It is clear from Crystal's and Harrison's perspectives that language loss is caused in one part by power struggle, and in another part by the attitudes of the cultural natives. This dual causation brings into question why anyone would want to revive a language that has been lost. For many people, especially those who did not participate in generational language transmission for whatever reason and those who grew up without their heritage language, language loss is an organic part of human progress, and forcibly trying to stop it from happening is not the right or moral thing to do. However, as I will discuss more with the case studies outlined in this paper, if people decide that language is a cornerstone of cultural and social identity, then revitalizing a language provokes a conversation about the use of nostalgic tactics; is revitalization a method of reinstating cultural identity, or does it simply halt the natural progression of human evolution? As Crystal puts it, "language is the primary index, or symbol, or register of identity" (Crystal 2000, 40). The feeling of cultural nostalgia that Berliner also talks about in his book is a longing that can be seemingly remedied by connecting people back to their heritage languages. However, there is a difference between living culture and nostalgic culture, with the former being an actual, truthful reinterpretation of a language or culture that once existed, and the latter being a conceptualized reinterpretation that may not be as authentic but rather has the purpose of making the people feel *emotionally* connected to their pasts. While neither living culture nor nostalgic culture is deficient in linguistic revitalization efforts in general, it is important to distinguish between the two by establishing what authenticity is, what makes something authentic, and by looking at how cultural natives react to both living and nostalgic culture. Depending on the

circumstance, the culture, and the language in question, one might be more effective than the other. With this in mind, what are we really saving when we save a language, and why?

Dissecting Linguistic Modernity (Scottish Gaelic in a Historical Context)

“God help England if she had no Scots to think for her.”
 – George Bernard Shaw, *The Apple Cart*

A Brief Background of Gaelic

One of the more widely discussed and analyzed cases of language loss and revitalization in the modern era is that of Scottish Gaelic, pronounced [galɪk]. While now spoken only primarily in the Scottish Highlands and Nova Scotia, Scottish Gaelic was once the primary language spoken in Scotland before the 13th century (Nance 2021, 617). The language developed from Old Irish and has Indo-European roots. It is related to the other Celtic languages that have been spoken in and around the British Isles, such as Irish Gaelic (pronounced [gæɪlɪk]), Welsh, Breton, and Cornish (Ó Baoill 2010, 1). According to research done by Claire Nance, a professor at Lancaster University, an early version of the Gaelic language spread to Scotland in the 4th and 5th centuries due to the immigration of Old Irish speakers (Nance 2021, 617). Slowly, as the language began to spread, it evolved into several dialectical variations, and by the 6th century, there were likely countless different variations of the language (Ó Baoill 2010, 4-7). Like many languages, Gaelic went from an “old” period into a “middle” period, where it had linguistic influence from Viking raiders, Saxon alliances, and the occasional interaction with the French (Ó Baoill 2010, 7-13). By the 11th and 12th centuries, in the high medieval era, it was the heritage language for the people of Scotland, and it became a cornerstone of Scottish cultural identity that would greatly influence the sentiment surrounding its dissolution and eventual attempts at revitalization in the coming centuries (Nance 2021, 617).

Over time, Scottish Gaelic began to fall victim to the emergence of English through cultural conflict and northward English expansion. Most of Anglo-Scottish international history

before the 18th century is full of political and national tribulation. King James IV received the Scottish crown after his mother's forced abdication in 1567, and he held a claim to the English throne through family ties. When Queen Elizabeth I of England died without children in 1603, King James secured the English throne and used the following year to craft a union between the two nations under one crown (Croft 2003, 84). This unification made many Scots feel like they were losing their independence, and the next century saw many Scottish rebellions that concluded with the Jacobite Revolution, which ended in defeat in 1746 with the Battle of Culloden (Dumville 2016, 104). This was a time when what made a person Scottish became increasingly important, and holding on to one's cultural identity despite the turmoil that Scotland was engrossed in was necessary for maintaining a sense of nationalism and longing for an independent nation. After the failed revolutions of the 18th century, English speakers continued migrating northward into Scottish lands, bringing their language with them. Gaelic began to fall out of use in the Scottish Lowlands in favor of English as generations of Scottish natives stopped reaching fluency in Gaelic because parents chose English instead, and when English landowners in Scotland waged the Highland Clearances in the 18th and 19th centuries, Gaelic-speaking Scots were forcibly removed from their homes and stripped of their culture, including their heritage language (Ostdiek 2018). Using "brutal methods of eviction," such as English landlords burning their tenants' homes and forcing them out, Scottish crofters and farmers living in the Scottish Highlands came into cultural contact with (and, therefore, linguistically integrated with) more English speakers in Scotland as they moved closer to the Anglo-Scottish border (Ostdiek 2018, 138). Furthermore, with the rise of media consumption and intentional narrative manipulation in the country's formative and post-formative years, anti-Gaelic sentiment was prone to be more widespread because it became clear that anyone could "join a conversation and affect mass

opinion” (Koh 2016, 20). Gaelic had become a socially barbaric language in the eyes of the English, and the Scottish people living near the border started to believe that it was unfit for civilized life. Just like countless other languages through history, Scottish Gaelic became at risk of loss due to the onslaught of pro-English mentality.

The Idea of Modernity

As I expressed previously, language loss cannot be solely attributed to conquest, and users of the dominant language are not always to blame for it. Despite how it may seem at first glance, language loss is not always about oppression. In the case of Scottish Gaelic, oppression did play a large role in the trajectory of its decline, but the factor that truly did the most damage was the changing attitudes of the Scottish natives themselves.

As David Berliner expresses in his book, “the experience of loss, whether real or vicarious, is complemented by an imperative to transmit a culture made valuable by the fact of having been the object of destruction” (Berliner 2020, 7). Just like cultural tradition, languages are passed down to younger generations through language transmission from parent to child. When parents choose not to pass a language down, it is usually due to circumstances outside of their control. Translator and historian Andrew Dalby writes that “languages of government and culture are often introduced by conquest, and they do sometimes continue to be used even if the conquerors go away,” meaning that when enough language is transmitted from the majority group to the minority group and when the majority group is no longer pushing for conquest, it is still not socially or culturally practical for anyone to use the minority language anymore (Dalby 2003, 176). This occurs not just in the context of conquest, but in the context of migration as well. For example, immigrants to America during the early-to-mid 1900s (specifically Italians

who immigrated to New York City) “recontextualized traditions to fit their unique status and social situation” in that specific circumstance (Jacobson 2008, 75). This idea can be extended to the case of Scottish Gaelic. Once the English came in and formed a new established government, society, and way of life, Gaelic speakers were better off speaking English to be a part of their new Anglicized world. This happened primarily in the Scottish Lowlands, where the English and the Scottish had always been geographically close, and switching to English was seemingly the right choice at the time for many Scottish families. Contrarily, some families in the Highlands continued to try and retain their heritage culture and language despite the rule of the English. It was common to think that users of minority languages “were simply unlucky, or backward, or (as we would say now) under-developed,” which caused people to “abandon their language and their old-fashioned ways as soon as possible” (Dalby 2003, 84). The mentality that is shaped by this kind of discourse drastically alters one’s perception of their own language and dehumanizes people on the basis of their pre-colonized or pre-migratory identity, therefore initiating the post-colonized or post-migratory abandonment of the seemingly “under-developed” factors.

This argument as to whether or not Gaelic was modern, civilized, or even useful at all forced Scots to consider their place in their own culture and the modern linguistic world at large. The idea of modernity, and more specifically the idea that modernity is something to strive for, is a massive question for advocates against language loss. Especially when cultural nostalgia and emotional ties to traditions of the past emerge, it gets harder and harder to determine whether or not modernity should be the end goal. Does returning to the language and tradition of your ancestors mean that you are regressing into primitive times? For many Scots living in the post-English assimilation era, the answer was yes. Today, however, that idea has begun to shift as many Scots seek to reclaim a cultural spirit that they feel was taken from them.

Gaelic Today

Today, there are fewer than 60,000 speakers of Scottish Gaelic across the globe, with around 58,000 speakers in Scotland and 1,500 in Nova Scotia (Nance 2021, 617). In Scotland, fluent Gaelic speakers mostly live in the Highlands and the Outer Hebrides, and the speakers in Nova Scotia can be traced back to Scottish immigrants to Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries (Nance 2021, 617). The notion of a Scotland with Gaelic as its primary language is a memory now, though many Scots still feel cultural ties to their Gaelic roots. In an article written on modern Gaelic usage in Scotland entitled “Gaelic Scotland and Ireland: Issues of class and diglossia in an evolving social landscape,” researchers Cassie Smith-Christmas and Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin cite that “today, all Gaelic speakers are bilingual,” and that “it is not uncommon for younger speakers... to have decreased proficiency in the language due to the adoption of English as their peer group language” (Smith-Christmas and Ó hIfearnáin 2015, 257).

I had the amazing opportunity to interview Dr. Smith-Christmas on March 18th, 2022, about her work with Gaelic-speaking communities in Scotland. She has a Ph.D. in Scottish Gaelic and focused her Ph.D. research on the complexity of the code-switching patterns of a Scottish family in the West Highlands with three generations of Gaelic speakers. In her research on generational language socialization, Dr. Smith-Christmas has also worked with families on the Isle of Lewis and in the Outer Hebrides. Her current focus is on language revitalization in Ireland, and she has been writing a book that analyzes all six families that she has worked with for her research. After hearing about her work with the first family in the West Highlands, I asked Dr. Smith-Christmas if she found families using Gaelic with their children to be commonplace. In her response, she referenced a researcher of language education named Elana Shohamy who coined the term “post-vernacular,” which is “when the language is no longer used

as a language of... normal communication” but having this be a deliberate choice (interview with Smith-Christmas, 2022). Dr. Smith-Christmas connected this idea to the generational transmission of Gaelic, where parents are often choosing to use Gaelic with their children in “very specific ways that are [tied] in with emotion,” such as in situations of reprimand or affection (2022). This way, Gaelic is still used by many Scottish families without it being a conversational language in the home. That being said, families that make a conscious effort to teach Gaelic in the home, such as the family that Dr. Smith-Christmas worked with, are unfortunately not very common anymore. She commented on how it took a great deal of effort to track down Scottish Gaelic-speaking families for her research, whereas it was much easier to find families who spoke Irish Gaelic when she began her work in Ireland. Most families in Scotland, even the ones who use Gaelic sparingly, tend to default to English, thus halting the generational transmission of Gaelic.

Because all current Gaelic speakers also speak English and because many Scots do not speak Gaelic at all, there has been an increase in pro-Gaelic movements in recent decades, both by the Scottish government and the Scottish people, in order to provide a semblance of national identity that many have not had since Scotland assimilated with England. Partially due to the current events involving England and Scotland on the global stage, as well as the increase in cultural nostalgia felt by Scots all over the world, the Scottish government has put a plethora of Gaelic revitalization efforts into place, wherein the hope is that revitalizing Gaelic will give the Scottish people a way to reclaim their cultural identity. These efforts, however, have been faced with complicated challenges and have not always been met with welcome.

Patriotic Because It's Necessary (Scottish Gaelic in a Nationalistic and Nostalgic Context)

“You don't stumble upon your heritage. It's there, just waiting to be explored and shared.”
– Canadian musician Robbie Robertson

Hiraeth

Before delving into the specifics of Gaelic revitalization efforts in Scotland, I would like to take a brief detour to Wales. Just as Scotland suffered great cultural loss in the time of English assimilation, the Welsh endured a very similar circumstance that led to both linguistic and cultural revitalization efforts that ultimately became a blueprint for revitalizing traditional cultures and languages across the world. When remembering the English colonization that attempted to strip them of their language and cultural heritage, the Welsh have a word that encapsulates their feeling of longing for the Wales that their ancestors grew up in: *hiraeth*.

The word *hiraeth* has no direct translation into English, though many English speakers have sought to appropriate the word to fit their own feelings of homesickness or longing for places that they have never been. It is a word that is specific to Wales and the feeling of homesickness, grief, and nostalgia for Welsh culture before English colonization. It is derived from the Welsh word *hir*, meaning “long,” and the Welsh suffix *-aeth*, which makes the root adjective a noun. According to the University of Wales Dictionary, the word is akin to the English word “longing,” though it carries a connotation that connects it more to grief, sadness, and sorrow. It is an “all encompassing homesickness for the old country” of Wales (Roberts 1995, 57). A large part of reclaiming Welsh cultural identity has been harnessing this feeling of *hiraeth* and using it to rekindle the Welsh language and traditions that were lost many centuries ago.

I reached out to a friend of mine who is a native Welsh speaker and asked her if she had any thoughts on what *hiraeth*, being from Wales, and speaking Welsh means to her. In her response to me, she referenced the FIFA World Cup qualifier game between Wales and Austria that took place on Thursday, March 24th, 2022. Before the game, Welsh singer Dafydd Iwan sang a Welsh nationalist song that he wrote called “Yma o hyd” (“Still Here” in English) which tells of the oppression suffered by the Welsh throughout history and how they overcame it. My friend told me that the entire stadium sang along with him and even though many of them were probably not fluent Welsh speakers, they all knew the words and the sentiment that the song carried. Something as small as an opening soccer game performance was enough to bring thousands of Welsh people together to stand in solidarity about how hard they have had to fight to keep their culture and language standing. My friend expressed to me, “Welsh speakers tend to be passionate and patriotic because we have had to. Without people constantly fighting, and [continuing] to do so, we would have lost/will lose our language.”

Research professor and Welsh sociolinguist Colin H. Williams writes that “initiatives in support of the promotion and recognition of the Welsh language have been achieved as a result of direct action and stealth politics, often in the face of considerable opposition and hostility,” meaning that the Welsh have had to work hard to get their language back (Williams 2014, 243). Williams references the time before *hiraeth* really took hold when speaking Welsh was made illegal and persecuted by the English, who had it “eradicated from public life” (Williams 2014, 242). He then goes on to describe the period between 1912 and 1962 when a “designated Welsh education system” was put into place to combat the linguistic and cultural oppression, and also the period of pro-Welsh protests and mobilization between 1962 and the 1980s, all of which were attempts to “[embed] the current opportunities to use Welsh more deeply within the fabric

of society” (Williams 2014, 243). Today, though it has been a difficult road, Wales is a model for bilingual education in Europe, with 19% of its population speaking fluent Welsh because of revitalization efforts that include “language policy and sociolegal developments, formal education, the family, and community life” (Williams 2014, 244). Despite the odds, the people of Wales have spent the last hundred years working together to harness their feeling of *hiraeth* and reclaim the language of their ancestors and subsequently reclaim autonomy and power from their oppressors.

The Components of Gaelic Revitalization

While the word *hiraeth* cannot be used to describe a longing for anything other than Welsh culture, the will to regain a heritage that was lost can absolutely extend from Wales to Scotland. Much like Welsh, the revitalization of Scottish Gaelic “requires urgent action” to be successful according to human rights legal academic Rhona K.M. Smith, but to the rest of the world, “linguistic rights are not afforded a high priority” (Smith 2000, 173). When international issues are presented on the global stage, linguistic and heritage revival do not find themselves on the docket very often. However, revitalizing Scottish Gaelic has become a valiant endeavor. The risk of losing Gaelic more has grown considerably over the past few decades, and the subsequent cultural ramifications would be detrimental to the future of Scottish heritage transmission.

Smith writes that, despite Gaelic being fairly acknowledged by the global community as a heavily at-risk minority language, there is a considerable amount of work that still needs to be done to rekindle its usage in Scotland. She references that Gaelic itself is in somewhat of a “renaissance,” where the drive to revitalize it has grown over recent years, and efforts to do so have come in slow waves that are caused by shifts in political ideology, international affairs, and

increases in national and cultural advocacy (Smith 2000, 175). This case of increased advocacy and shifting political ideology can be attributed to the rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP), which won control of the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and subsequently claimed an “overall majority” in 2011 (Mullen 2014, 631). The goal of the SNP was, and continues to be, advocacy and implementation of tactics that encourage Scottish national independence, identity, and autonomy (Mullen 2014, 630). As such, during the rise of the SNP, many organizations that promote the revitalization of Gaelic took the stage such as the Gaelic Society in 1871 and An Comunn Gaidhealach in 1891 (Smith 2000, 175). In more recent years, the Scottish government has worked together with an organization called Comunn na Gaidhlig to support efforts to revitalize the language (Smith 2000, 175). The Scottish government has also taken several administrative measures to make Gaelic more accessible to the Scottish population, including displaying road signs written in Gaelic and giving the language a place within the Scottish education system, both of which have their own issues and variables that I intend to analyze in a later section (Smith 2000, 177). However, the groups and governmental actors who are trying to revitalize Gaelic are fighting an uphill battle. The reason why Gaelic began to disappear in the first place was because it stopped being socially useful to its speakers after the idea emerged that it might be unfit for the civilized world. In another article written by Cassie Smith-Christmas and lecturer Sileas L. NicLeòid, the authors discuss how “language ideologies are mediated by broad social and historical forces” and how these ideologies, that either support minority language use or dissuade it, “often are in competition with each other” (Smith-Christmas and NicLeòid 2020, 576). They write that “the decline of Gaelic can be attributed to sociohistorical and political realities that led to the disenfranchisement of its speakers and to their language becoming associated with backwardness and poverty” that now has left only 1.1% of the Scottish

population with the ability to speak Gaelic (Smith-Christmas and NicLeòid 2020, 578). In order to revitalize it, Gaelic has to reclaim a useful, pertinent, and respectable place in society.

Otherwise, the attitude of the Scottish people who believe that Gaelic is unfit for the world will not change, and as much as they might feel that they have lost an integral part of their identity with the loss of their heritage language, the revitalization efforts will not succeed if heritage speakers continue to feel that their language is not useful.

Revitalizing the Gaelic language has come down to three dominant factors: educational endeavors, cultural nostalgia, and national identity. Learning and becoming fluent in a language with so few speakers and no obvious real-world usefulness that cannot also be claimed by English is very difficult, but when it is a heritage language, there is an understanding that it has a tie to a culture that cannot be replaced. In the case of education, Gaelic is slowly being taught in Scottish schools again, and anyone can learn Gaelic through language-learning tools, such as Duolingo, whether they are culturally native or not. In another one of her research articles, Cassie Smith-Christmas analyzes how learning Gaelic in a school setting gives children a space to speak Gaelic and an understanding of what is being asked of them from an educational standpoint, but that it also “[frames] Gaelic as an *object* to be *performed*” rather than “an everyday normative mode of communication” (Smith-Christmas 2016, 5). She writes that the classroom has become one of the few places where Scottish children will actually speak Gaelic (Smith-Christmas 2016, 10). In this regard, providing Gaelic education is a good first step in the revitalization process, but it is not enough to bring the language back into everyday use.

This is where “exonostalgia” comes in. Cultural nostalgia has been a huge component of Gaelic revitalization efforts and a strong augmentation of educational endeavors. Even though the people living in Scotland now were not alive to experience the traditional Scottish culture in

the high medieval era, the desire to honor and participate in these traditions and cultural practices in the modern world is still somewhat widespread, and one of the ways that this desire can come to fruition is through learning and speaking Gaelic. In a study done by New Zealand-based lecturer Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire, it is shown that the drive to learn one's heritage language can come from trying to reclaim one's cultural roots, connecting with one's ancestors, or even maintaining contact with the living older or younger generations who use the language (Berardi-Wiltshire 2012). In the Gaelic-speaking communities of Scottish immigrant families in Nova Scotia, Gaelic has been kept in use through song and dance. These Celtic musical traditions "have remained remarkably healthy" despite Gaelic's decline in use (MacIntyre and Baker 2017, 504). Furthermore, generations of families from all over the world have been experiencing "a global phenomenon" known as the "Celtic boom," where many people with Celtic heritage are inspired by Riverdance performances, Celtic Woman concerts, and other groups that have made Celtic performance art accessible to the world (MacIntyre and Baker 2017, 504). This phenomenon helps create a motivation to protect and savor cultural connection because belonging to something bigger than oneself is crucial to the human experience. It is a motivation that has helped Gaelic revitalization efforts stay relevant and optimistic through the decades. That being said, it is true that "the desire to use [Gaelic] outside of the confines of the educational context" is somewhat "absent" in the younger Scottish population and, as I will discuss further, this lack of desire is a big part of what separates Gaelic from other more successful linguistic revitalization efforts worldwide (Smith-Christmas 2016, 12).

In the same vein as cultural identity, it is impossible to talk about linguistic revitalization in Scotland without acknowledging how large of a role nationalism and national identity have had on its varying degrees of success. Because the Anglo-Scottish relationship has been filled

with “historical tensions,” and because Scotland is a member of the United Kingdom and is still beholden to an English-dominant world, there have been several modern attempts to break from this tie and make Scotland a truly autonomous state (Mason 2013, 139). The Scottish National Party was formed in 1934 as a progressive political party and appeals to a majority of the constituents in the Highlands and the Midlands of Scotland, whereas the Lowlands tend to be more Conservative (Sim 2021, see Figure 1). They operate with the agenda to reclaim and maintain Scottish national integrity, and the party put forth a referendum plan in 2014 that was ultimately unsuccessful (Mullen 2014). However, the vote was excruciatingly close, and the minority group of the Scottish population that voted in favor of independence were very vocal in their beliefs that Scotland should be fighting to take back its cultural and national identity from England (Mullen 2014, 632). This argument has resurfaced with the situation surrounding Brexit and the UK’s decision to leave the European Union in 2020. The polls show that the Scottish people voted strongly against Brexit. In fact, every council in Scotland voted to remain in the Union (BBC News, “EU

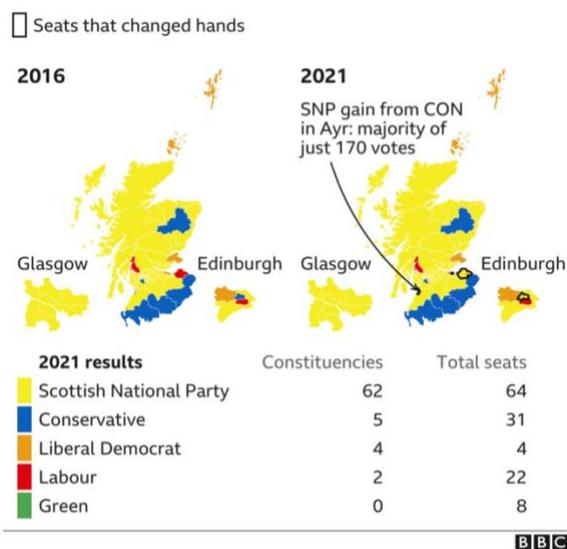


Figure 1: Scottish constituency vote distribution in 2016 vs. 2021 (BBC News)

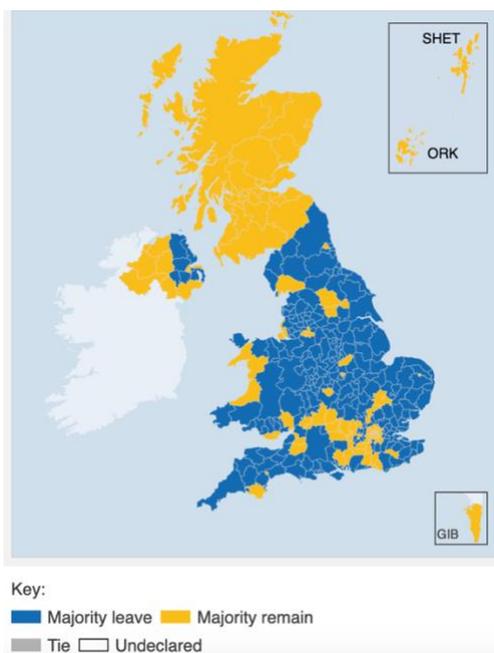


Figure 2: 2020 UK Brexit vote distribution (BBC News)

Referendum,” see Figure 2). However, the population of Scotland is so small compared to the rest of the UK that the votes had very little impact on the outcome. Many Scottish people once again felt as though they have been forced into a national identity that they did not consent to, and reclaiming their heritage, language, and culture is a way to take back the power that has been exercised over them for centuries.

It is under these three components that Gaelic revitalization efforts have been able to resurface, albeit slowly, after centuries of the language being in crisis. However, whether or not Gaelic will prove to be useful and desirable in the modern world will ultimately dictate how successful the revitalization is. Having the people of Scotland reclaim Gaelic is not just a political and cultural endeavor, but also one that challenges and reshapes the ideas of linguistic modernity.

The Modernization of Gaelic

While the efforts to revitalize Scottish Gaelic are becoming more widespread across the world, there are some unforeseen consequences to this endeavor that many scholars believe halt its cultural effectiveness. Most notably, traditional languages that are being revitalized are subject to linguistic modernization as new learners begin to make them their own. Because Scotland exists in different social, political, and cultural circumstances than it did when Gaelic was widely spoken, and in the endeavor to revitalize Gaelic as a useful language that is fit to exist in the modern world, new Gaelic speakers have begun to subconsciously use Gaelic with different and non-traditional linguistic features.

In her article “‘New’ Scottish Gaelic Speakers in Glasgow: A Phonetic Study of Language Revitalisation,” Claire Nance analyzes the phonetic differences between the Gaelic of

native speakers who grew up with it and the Gaelic that young people are speaking in the Glasgow school system. For clarification purposes, I will be referencing those who use Gaelic fluently as their first language as “L1 speakers” and those who are learning Gaelic as a second language alongside their pre-acquired fluency of another language as “L2 speakers.” Nance notes that “even in heartland communities, immersion schooling has become the normal method of Gaelic acquisition” in place of growing up with it in the home (Nance 2015, 556). This implies that the ratio of L1 speakers to L2 speakers of Gaelic is becoming more disproportionate as the number of L2 speakers grows within these immersion programs. With more people learning Gaelic as an L2, especially in urban education hubs like Glasgow, the way that young people speak Gaelic has changed a great deal from how it is spoken in the “heartlands” by L1 speakers (Nance 2015, 557). The differences are mostly phonetic, ranging from new uses of vowel sounds (especially that of [ʰ] and [i]) to variations in laterals (specifically alveolar and palatalized laterals versus velarized laterals), but there are also differences in intonation, meaning that there is variation in cadence and prosody between L1 and L2 speakers (Nance 2015, 562-7). Nance theorizes that this is in part due to this new form of Gaelic being spoken mostly in urbanized areas like Glasgow, where the social environment is drastically different from that of the rural Highlands where many L1 speakers live (Nance 2015, 560). However, the idea that revitalization efforts are most effective when they are “reconstructing the social conditions of when the language in question is widely spoken and transmitted” is not realistic (Nance 2015, 555). Because many people associate their heritage language with their traditional cultural heritage, they usually do not want their heritage language to change or modernize, and many L1 speakers fight against modernity to keep their language as traditional and as “pure” as possible.

This linguistic change is seen as a consequence in language revitalization discourse because it is thought that modernizing a traditional language almost defeats the purpose of revitalizing the language at all. However, linguistic purism is ultimately a huge reason why languages are unnecessarily lost. Nancy Dorian, an American linguist who specializes in the East Sutherland dialect of Gaelic, wrote an article entitled “Purism vs. Compromise in Language Revitalization and Language Revival” that focuses on this idea. In Dorian’s analysis, she equates purism to conservatism in cases of linguistic anti-modernity all over the world (Dorian 1994, 480). This fight against linguistic change has impacted minority languages not just in Europe, but also in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. It has become a widespread ideology, full of seemingly good intentions but met with detrimental consequences. “Whether or not puristic attitudes are universal,” Dorian says, “they are widespread enough to create problems for efforts to support minority languages with a small native-speaker base” (Dorian 1994, 480). Revitalization efforts met with the idea of purism are often faced with the added challenge of a civil war between L1 speakers who want to keep the language “pure” and L2 speakers who are working towards reframing the language to fit in with the modern world. With this dichotomy, as one that creates “teams” and sides to “support,” the focus is taken away from the actual detrimental issue of language loss and puts it on the distractive argument of whether or not saving some of the language is better than saving none of it at all (Dorian 1994, 487).

Despite this argument, it is actually quite common for languages on the brink of disappearance to change during and due to their revitalization efforts. In another older article written by Nancy Dorian, she states that “language simplification” is common, though different, in both “language death” and “language pidginization” (Dorian 1978, 607). Though this article is several decades old, I believe that many of the ideas that Dorian poses in it still hold; in order to

bring a language back to the world, it needs to evolve with the changing times. Through linguistic simplification, phonetic reframing, or even new vocabulary and prosodic features, languages grow and change to fit into the societies that we live in today. Striving to maintain linguistic tradition, purism, and “complexity” brings the morality of modernism to the table and challenges the way people think about traditional language revitalization.

It is not a rare thought that languages should remain pure despite the efforts to recover them. This is more often than not the reason why people argue against language revitalization at large; the goal to keep a language “pure” ultimately overtakes the goal of keeping it in use. This mentality creates an interesting imbalance in a culture’s view of modernity. When a language is lost, it is usually because people moved towards a more useful and modern language, but then when a language revitalization process begins, people actively fight against modernity to keep the language traditional and “pure.” This is why there is no easy answer to the question of whether or not modernity should be sought after. Modernity both causes and reverses language loss, and this is a difficult truth to be met with as a heritage speaker or as a revitalization advocate. However, languages are not saved by close-minded thinking, and with whole cultures and identities at stake, it is exceedingly important to question whether or not the goal is to save the language in some form, even in a more modern form, or to see it lost for the sake of purity. This choice is not an easy one, but it is a necessary one. In order to save a language, cultural nostalgia and modernity cannot be at war; they have to work together to create a version of a traditional language that can fit and be useful in the modern world.

External Effectiveness and Internal Hatred (The Successes and Failures of Language Revitalization)

*“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be reborn.”
– Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, ‘Prison Notebooks’*

Push-Back on Gaelic Revitalization

In my interview with Dr. Smith-Christmas, I asked her about how she has observed language loss impacting cultural identity in Scotland while living in the UK and working with Gaelic language transmission. In her response, she talked about how the “lack of acknowledgment of Gaelic into Scottish national identity” has led some people to develop a “visceral hatred” of the language (interview with Smith-Christmas, 2022). She mentions how even seeing an English-Gaelic road sign, which are common in Scotland and a big part of how the Scottish government has supported the revitalization of the language, causes some people to experience extreme anger. “Every few months usually... at least twice a year,” she says, “you normally see something pop up that is somebody railing against [them]... ‘Oh my God, they put the sign in Gaelic!’...People get really, really angry about these things” (2022). She theorizes that this is due to a lack of confidence of the Scottish people in the efforts to revitalize their language. “When people lose their language,” she says, “I think somehow [this] hatred is internalized and it *does* something, and there’s something very sad about that” (2022). The harder it is to see the hope in restoring national and cultural identity through language revitalization and the less that people are actively exposed to their heritage language, the more people project hatred onto the notion of reclaiming their language, which causes intense push-back. In Ireland, following independence, the Irish language became much more widely used and many places are becoming more monolingual in it. In Scotland, this is not the case, as language revitalization is still an ongoing endeavor that still has yet to see significant widespread success.

There is no universal opinion on what the correct way to revitalize Gaelic is or whether or not it should happen at all. Scotland is quite diverse in the ideas and ideologies of its people, and in our interview, Dr. Smith-Christmas mentioned the “traditional divide between the [Scottish] Lowlands and Highlands” (interview with Smith-Christmas, 2022). People in the Lowlands have been told for centuries that Gaelic is inferior, and this idea has only been perpetrated by the rise of English across the country. As Claire Nance theorizes, “Scottish Gaelic revitalisation is taking place both in the language’s traditional heartlands and in Scotland’s urban centres,” but there is a complicated difference in local culture that causes an ideology dichotomy between the two (Nance 2015, 554). While both Highlanders and Lowlanders are participating in Gaelic revitalization efforts, Lowlanders who live in more urbanized environments are more likely to not advocate for Gaelic usage because there is a “long history of migration to urban areas [to look] for work,” meaning that the switch from Gaelic to English in the urban Lowlands was predominantly utilitarian (Nance 2015, 555). Another layer of the push-back against Gaelic that Dr. Smith-Christmas brought up in our interview is when people feel a sense of ownership of the language, and then realize that it does not belong just to them but also to non-heritage speakers, so they “react against [revitalization] in terms of hatred” (2022). This gate-keeping of the Gaelic language from non-heritage speakers who are trying to do their part in revitalization efforts connects back to the idea of linguistic purity that I discussed earlier. If it is not the language that their ancestors spoke and if it is not being spoken by Scottish people alone, many people believe that it is not worth revitalizing. It is because of this lack of community cooperation, emphasis on linguistic purity, and the ineffective efforts made by the Scottish government to give the Scottish people hope for the future of their heritage language that efforts to revitalize Gaelic have remained slow and difficult.

Global Models for Language Revitalization

Scottish Gaelic is not the first language to be met with the challenge of revitalization, and as time goes on it becomes increasingly evident that other cultures and languages can be used as good examples for Gaelic. Language revitalization is not a straightforward task, and analyzing circumstances where language revitalization efforts have been successful helps the languages that are still in the early stages stay on the right path. It is important to ask *why* certain revitalization efforts have been successful, and why others may not have been.

As I have previously mentioned, the Welsh language is not only a beacon of success in global language revitalization, but it is also culturally and geographically close to Gaelic. It presents itself as an excellent model of a traditional language and culture within the UK that has reclaimed cultural autonomy over English oppressors, which is exactly what Scottish Gaelic revitalization advocates are striving to do. The revitalization of Welsh was made possible by strong governmental involvement, which put in place “critical reforms” both in and out of the Welsh education system to help establish the most cohesive and successful language revitalization possible (Williams 2014, 244). The Welsh government has played a crucial role in getting the Welsh language back on its feet: the Welsh Language Act of 1993 “provided a statutory framework for the treatment of English and Welsh on the basis of equality,” meaning that the two languages became legally and socially equal and Welsh was given a more recognized place in society (Williams 2014, 245). Furthermore, the establishment of the Welsh Language Board (WLB) in 1993 helped facilitate the promotion, construction, and overseeing of Welsh revitalization efforts (Williams 2014, 245-7). In the Welsh education system during the mid-to-late 1900s, the language was offered as an “opt-in choice” at many schools, and the 1988 establishment of the Education Act made the Welsh language “one of four Core Subjects in the

National Curriculum” in a majority of Welsh schools (Williams 2014, 249-50). Because of this strong and consistent governmental support, new generations of Welsh speakers are increasing, the connection between the Welsh language and Welsh national identity is stronger than ever, and Welsh will most likely be used in Wales for decades to come. Furthermore, the revitalization of Welsh has been made possible through “community language development,” based around a communal longing for cultural reclamation (and in this case, the feeling of *hiraeth*), that has brought Welsh back into consistent use in both older and younger generations (Williams 2014, 258). The connection between national identity and the Welsh language is much stronger than what the same connection looks like with Gaelic in Scotland today because Welsh revitalization efforts have been more poignant, more reinforced, and more thorough in their implementations than that of those in Scotland so far. The case of Welsh proves that successful language revitalization is achieved through positive reinforcement of strong national identity, as well as consistently putting helpful and successful measures in place that people can actively see the positive effects of. Strong, deliberate, and actively successful efforts made by a nation to revitalize its heritage language keep the process alive and thriving.

Another example of international language revitalization success is the recovery and consistent use of Hawaiian, Māori, and other languages native to the Pacific Islands and Polynesia. Much like that of Welsh, the revitalization of these heritage languages is centered mostly around anti-British colonization. In both the cases of Hawaiian and Māori, there were strong efforts to quell the learning and use of these languages by British colonial idealists in the late 1800s and early-to-mid 1900s. In an article authored by anthropologist and researcher Judith A. Simon, she writes that “in seeking to assimilate Māori to English cultural values, customs and language, the schools [in New Zealand] were simultaneously aiming to destroy the values,

customs and language of the Māori” (Simon 1998, 67). English values were being forced on the Māori people at the expense of their own culture, and since taking back one’s heritage language is symbolic of taking back one’s national and cultural autonomy, the effort to halt this colonial oppression in New Zealand has turned into Māori revitalization efforts and has resulted in what the Māori language looks like today. The Hawaiian language revitalization process is closely related to that of Māori. Laiana Wong, a professor at Hawai’i inuiākea (a school that focuses on Hawaiian knowledge and culture) analyzes the successful education methods of the Hawaiian language in schools in his article “Authenticity and the Revitalization of Hawaiian.” The “growth and spread of Hawaiian” has been made possible by making it “available to potential users” of the language, he writes, but that it has also been challenged by the idea of linguistic purity in its linguistic communities much like Scottish Gaelic has (Wong 1999, 94). Wong claims that “authenticity, however, is not a reliable determinant of superiority” because “authenticity” is simply a constructed and abstract idea that only seeks to provide and redact “political and economic leverage” in language learning communities (Wong 1999, 97). By appropriately navigating the harmful ideas of linguistic purism, Hawaiian has had a significant increase in new speakers and learners who value Hawaiian in all its forms and want to be a part of Hawaiian culture. Both Māori and Hawaiian have seen linguistic revitalization success because people have connected the languages back to the reclamation of their cultural autonomy and the revoking of the colonial immersion enforced by the English. To them, the motivation to speak their heritage languages is not just about bringing the languages back, but also protecting their land, culture, and livelihood, which is a very powerful thing.

Lastly, it is necessary to analyze the revitalization of Modern Hebrew in Israel when participating in revitalization discourse, as it is one of the most striking success stories of

language revitalization to date. In Israel, Modern Hebrew is not just tied to national and cultural identity, but a religious identity as well. Over time, there were immense efforts to “revernacularize” Biblical Hebrew and give the modern version of it a place in Israeli society because people thought that it was “crucial to their Jewish identity” to do so (Walsh 2005, 306). In this case, the modernization of Hebrew was necessary because doing so “freed the language from old restrictive forms” and “allowed the language to adapt to and better express modern life experiences,” allowing the language to be more usable while still maintaining its cultural importance (Nahir 1998, 344). Hebrew went from being a purely faith-based traditional language to defining an entire modern ethnoreligious national identity within a century. Furthermore, Modern Hebrew was given a place both in public and in the education system, and this two-fold method of supporting Modern Hebrew usage was crucial to its revitalization (Walsh 2005, 306). Moshe Nahir, a professor of linguistics at the University of Manitoba, describes the revitalization of Hebrew as “miraculous” and credits the work of the Israeli Hebrew speakers as a community, because “linguistic revival, particularly of the magnitude of the Hebrew Revival, could not possible be carried out by a single individual... [It] was a collective effort” (Nahir 1998, 335-6). Nahir lays out several factors that were the cause of the success of the revitalization of Modern Hebrew. First, the “communicative factor,” where unlike in the cases of Irish, Welsh, Māori, etc., Hebrew was being revitalized to be an L1 for its speakers rather than an L2. Second, the “political factor,” where Modern Hebrew became the preferred primary language of government and community dealings over Yiddish. Third, the “religious factor,” where Modern Hebrew was being utilized in “universal religious education” and became a cornerstone for Jewish identity. Finally, the “literary factor,” where Modern Hebrew was being used as the authorial language for periodicals, novels, and religious works (Nahir 1998, 340-4). All of these factors combined

create a perfect linguistic ecosystem for Modern Hebrew to become the primary language in Israel, and this case is a strong example of the successful revitalization of a language in the endeavor to establish a national, cultural, and religious identity.

In all three of these cases, it is clear that a consistent and attainable motivation on the part of both governmental actors and community members is what revitalizes a language. It is important to have a plan and a way to make language learning accessible, as well as a way to have people care about learning their heritage language. If the Scottish government made an even stronger effort to advocate for national and cultural identity in Scotland, not just from where they are currently but from an even stronger base, Gaelic might have a stronger case for revitalization. Rather than simply telling the Scottish people that they should care, it may be more beneficial if they were told *why* they should care, and the Scottish government has the power to shape this thought for the national community. Furthermore, in order for Gaelic revitalization to be successful, the idea of linguistic purism needs to be addressed. Scottish Gaelic is struggling with these crucial factors and still has a long way to go, but if Scotland can use what other nations have learned and go the extra mile, it might be enough to bring Gaelic back into more consistent use and give the Scottish people a new and necessary layer of cultural identity.

Does Something to My Blood (A Brief Conclusion)

“You get to choose who you are. Legacy, memories of the past, can serve us well. But we cannot let them define us. When heritage becomes a box instead of an inspiration, it has gone too far.”
 – Brandon Sanderson, ‘Skyward’

Why Should We Care?

The connection between one’s identity and the culture of one’s ancestors is something that countless people experience across the world every day. My father and I both grew up with Irish folk music, and he once told me something that I thought was quite profound: “I can’t handle American folk and country music,” he said, “but Irish music? This does something to my blood.” This spoke to me because it stands as proof that identity, heritage, and belonging are just as real and tangible as they are conceptual. Music that “does something to your blood” creates a feeling that can be taken away just as easily as it is given, and humans find this sense of belonging important enough to pursue through things like music, art, and language.

Throughout my research, I have found that there are a variety of opinions about whether or not language revitalization is culturally ethical, whether some revitalization is better than none, and why languages should or should not be revitalized in general. Why should people care about this at all? No answer will appeal to everyone, and there will never be a dearth of discourse on this, but language is connected to power loss, and revitalizing a culture’s heritage language is a way of helping people take their national power back from whichever culture overtook it in the first place. This act, by definition, fosters a cultural and national identity and pride that can come from very little else. Dr. Smith-Christmas mentioned in our interview that a community’s language is a “fundamental part of their being” (interview with Smith-Christmas, 2022). Language revitalization should not only be about bringing a language back into use but also “supporting marginalized groups,” as Dr. Smith-Christmas puts it (2022). Language

revitalization “matters to the people that speak [the languages],” she says, “or to the people who should have spoken them, but don’t” (2022). She also mentions that heritage languages provide an intimate understanding of the land itself, as was made evident by the vignette that I posed in my introduction. If heritage languages are lost, and “north,” “south,” “east,” and “west” become “left” and “right,” so much of the respect and understanding of the natural world and what the users of these languages find important are lost forever.

Truthfully, many people do not and will never care about languages being saved. It is the work and persistence of the many who do care that will foster communities, write policies, teach heritage languages in schools, and keep the discourse going about why language revitalization is exceptionally important to humankind.

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