

6. The Fadicca and the Kenuz themselves do not trace their origin to the same geographical area. The Kenuz trace their origin to the Arabian peninsula (Badr 1955; Hamid 1973; also from personal interviews). The Kenuz claim that Matoki refers to the dialect spoken by the people who came from the east, since *mato* in their dialect means 'east'. Western Nubiologists are rather doubtful about this origin (Trigger 1976; Peter Shinnie and Robin Thelwall, pers. comm.). The Fadicca, who refer to their dialect as *Nubi*, insist that they are "the real Nubians" of African origin, who speak "real Nubian". They look on the Kenuz as originally being Arabs who were nubianized.
7. Each Nubian village in New Nubia is represented by a social club in Cairo. It is a gathering place where men socialize in the evening with members of the same village. In the morning there are special programs for women where they learn how to sew, and to read and write Arabic. Moreover, these clubs provide financial help to needy Nubian students who have left their villages to attend college in the city.

7 Sociolinguistic creativity: Cape Breton Gaelic's linguistic "tip"

ELIZABETH MERTZ

1. Introduction

Sudden shifts in a community's linguistic usage patterns afford sociolinguists interested in "explaining" linguistic changes a tempting opportunity. In cases of gradual shift, it is easier to understand change as the result of myriad social and linguistic factors and pressures, each contributing incrementally to the final result. With sudden change, on the other hand, we are more tempted to look for the one cause or factor tipping the linguistic balance. But, even in cases where rapid shift is clearly a response to a particular social change – for example, Dorian's account of shift away from Gaelic as the Scottish Highlands became less isolated (1981:51), or Tabouret-Keller's of shift in response to ongoing industrialization (1972) – there is still a complicated web of social, linguistic, and ideological factors at work. Thus Dorian notes that "English seemed to have come quickly to eastern Sutherland, but the climate which led to its rapid adoption had been centuries in the making" (1981:51). Dorian's caveat is even more clearly à propos where there is no sudden social shift corresponding with a change in language use.

The Scottish Gaelic speakers of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, experienced a rapid language shift during the 1930s and 1940s. Their case is an excellent example of linguistic "tip", as Dorian first defined it: "A language which has been demographically highly stable for several centuries may experience a sudden 'tip', after which the demographic tide flows strongly in favor of some other language" (1981:51). Unlike Dorian's Scottish case, the Cape Breton tip is not clearly traceable to any particular social change:

By the 1970s effective transmission of Gaelic had ceased . . . an interesting sociolinguistic problem, for there had evidently been little change in power relationships, cultural arrangements, values, or populations in Cape Breton.

(MacKinnon 1977:10)

This chapter examines the "tip" toward English monolingualism in two very different Cape Breton communities. Although one was an isolated Protes-

tant fishing community and the other an accessible Catholic town with a diverse economic base, both experienced the "tip" at the same time. I will argue that in order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to look not only at regional (and larger) social and economic patterns, but also at the linguistic-cultural beliefs and ideologies which filtered and translated wider social change at the local level. Using this perspective, we can appreciate the creativity of local speakers even as they apparently yield to wide-scale political or economic pressures – not only in how they continue transmission of minority languages, but also in how they cease transmission, and in how they put their minority language to powerful use even after transmission has ended. The Cape Breton case, then, demonstrates the complex inter-causality (Weber 1958) involved in language shift and maintenance. This approach takes seriously Gal's (1976) warning against simplistic external correlations of change in linguistic usage with discretely cataloged social "factors", and Romaine's (1982a) insistence on a complex socially grounded epistemology for sociolinguistic explanation.

2. Language "tip" in Cape Breton

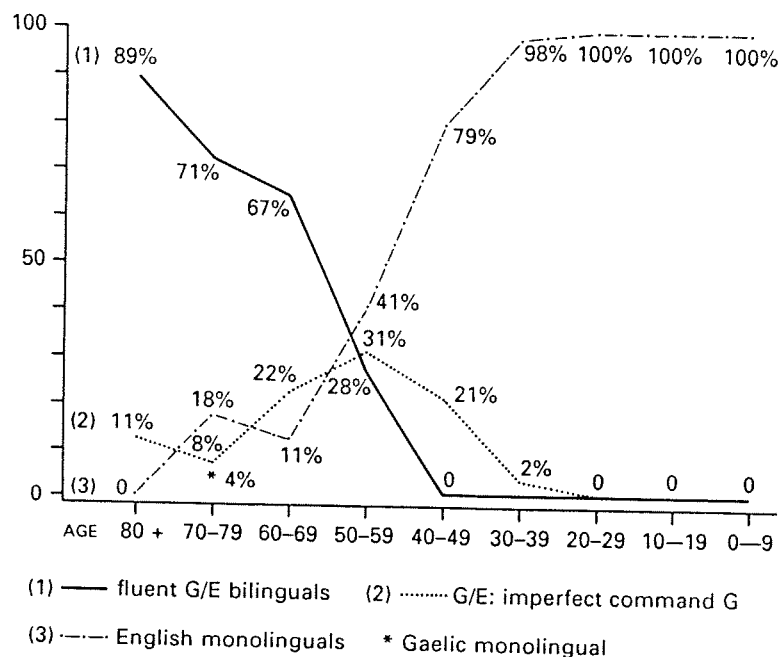
305 The island of Cape Breton, located at the northernmost tip of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, divides into two "arms". The two communities of this study are located on opposite sides of the western, more mountainous "arm", within which there is a strong religious split; Catholic communities are concentrated in the western and southern portions, while Protestant communities cluster on the eastern shoreline. Mabou, a predominantly Catholic community, is located on the western coast of Cape Breton, just 13 miles south of the coal-mining center of Inverness. The "North Shore", a Protestant community, occupies a more isolated stretch of the rough northeast coast.

The two communities present a stark contrast in many ways. Mabou, with rolling farmland and easy access to good harbors, attracted some of the earliest and better-off immigrants to Cape Breton (see MacDougall 1976:249,263,190; Mabou Pioneer Committee 1977:86). The first settlers were English-monolingual Loyalists (MacDougall 1976:290). Then, during the 1790s, Gaelic-speaking Scots, some Protestant but most Catholics, began arriving in Mabou (MacKinnon 1903:75), and soon outnumbered the Loyalist population. Throughout the early nineteenth century Mabou grew as a business center, and was among the first settlements in Cape Breton to request a school or form an Agricultural Society (Campbell and MacLean 1974:93). Its harbor made Mabou accessible to large sea-going ships, and its agricultural prosperity allowed it to export foodstuffs, including wheat. During the late nineteenth century, the town of Inverness, directly to the north of Mabou, became a coal-mining center. Mabou itself experienced a brief "boom town" era during the early twentieth century when a local coal

mine was opened. The mine attracted a flood of English monolinguals to this predominantly Gaelic-speaking community. The outsiders left when the Mabou Coal Mines closed during the second decade of the twentieth century. Lobster canneries opened, providing an outlet for local fishermen. The proximity of the railroad line also brought Mabou into increased contact with the world beyond Cape Breton.

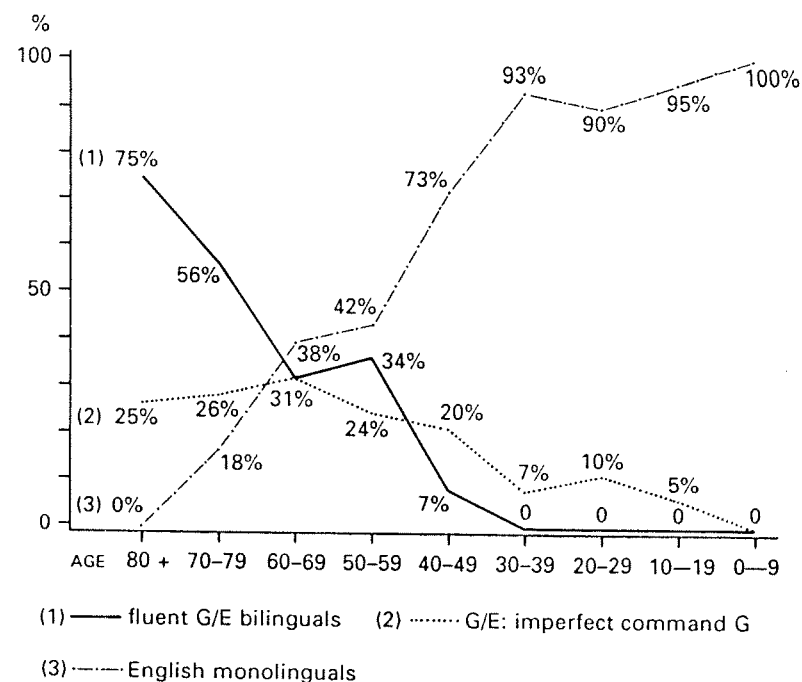
By contrast, the North Shore was always a more isolated, homogeneous community. It was settled entirely by Presbyterian Gaels during one of the last waves of emigration from the Scottish Islands, a time characterized by government-supported emigration from the most poverty-stricken areas of Scotland.¹ The first immigrant group of which there is certain evidence arrived on the "Shore" from the Isle of Harris in 1843, although there may have been settlers from Harris during the 1830s (see Mertz 1982a:60). Stretched along twenty miles of the mountainous, rocky northeastern coast, the Shore was among the last areas of Cape Breton to receive settlers, probably because its infertile rocky land made farming difficult. Although the settlers made their living by fishing, the Shore also lacked natural harbors; the northernmost end of the area is entitled "Wreck Cove" because of the frequent shipwrecks on the rocky shore there. The community remained relatively isolated throughout the nineteenth century, with no railroad line and no good harbors for sea-going ships. Indeed, until the river at the southern end of the Shore was bridged, the only contact with the outside was provided by a boat, the *Aspy*, which made a regular run between remote areas on the northeastern coast and the nearest large town of Sydney. Regular schools came late; by the end of the nineteenth century the Shore was still serviced by traveling school teachers holding school at homes in the community on an irregular basis.

The North Shore, then, affords a sharp contrast with Mabou. Where Mabou was settled early, by relatively affluent settlers, the North Shore was settled late. Mabou was always diverse in terms of language and religion, with the English-monolingual Loyalists holding many of the higher-status positions in town during the early period of settlement by Catholic Gaels. The Shore was composed entirely of Presbyterian Gaelic speakers. Mabou was also diverse in economic terms, drawing upon farming and fishing for export, coal-mining, and many businesses which served the surrounding communities. The North Shore residents were fisherfolk, eventually becoming almost completely economically dependent upon the export of lobsters and fish. Where Mabou was in constant contact with the outside English-monolingual world, the North Shore was sheltered and isolated. English-language schooling came early to Mabou, but late to the Shore. In spite of all of these differences, residents of both areas remained bilingual in Gaelic and English until the 1930s and 1940s, when transmission of Gaelic ceased in both communities. Today there are no fluent Gaelic speakers in either community under the age of 40.

Figure 1. *The North Shore*

Evidence of this linguistic “tip” emerges from contemporaneous reports by social scientists, from informants’ recollections, and from age breakdowns of current proficiency data. The use of current proficiency data alone, of course, provides only a rough guideline, but linguists and sociolinguists have used this method in assessing historical change in language (Labov 1965; Gal 1976). We can see the clear, patterned change in Cape Breton by comparing age breakdowns from Mabou and the North Shore (see Figures 1 and 2). Fluent ability in Gaelic is limited to informants aged 40+ in both communities.² Further, the distribution of Gaelic-speaking abilities among people in their 40s shows only a small number of fluent, or even halting, speakers, and a larger number of non-speakers, in that age category. There is no large group of younger semi-speakers such as might emerge from a process whereby Gaelic gradually disappeared from general use. It would seem, then, that during the 1930s and 1940s very few children were learning to speak Gaelic at home.³

This is borne out by the reports of social scientists who studied Gaelic in Cape Breton. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, we know that children were socialized in Gaelic by their parents at home (Campbell 1948). After that time, there was a shift in socialization practices, and a concurrent “tip” in

Figure 2. *Mabou*

patterns of language use. Children did not learn Gaelic, as it ceased to be used between parents and children at home (Dunn 1953; Campbell and MacLean 1974; MacKinnon 1977). The shift in the home was accompanied by a reluctance to use Gaelic in public as well (see Dunn 1953:149).

We can supplement this broad picture of a “tip” in Gaelic usage and transmission by using informants’ recollections. Because it is obviously problematic to rely heavily on present reports of past usage (we know that even present reports of *present* usage can be dubious sources), I draw upon these data with caution, relying only on reports which have been extensively cross-checked and which are consistent with contemporaneous social science reports. As regards the timing of the “tip”, informants from both communities were unanimous:

... and then, I don't know, it [Gaelic] kind of died out there ... by forty years ago ... and nobody was speaking Gaelic hardly.

[M-5]⁴

... like I would say nineteen – at least 1935 – from there on it started slipping, and once it got to five or ten years later, well it [Gaelic] was just about finished.

[NS-12]

Informants also noted the rapidity of the change, saying that "it [Gaelic] died out so fast", or that it "went quickly here".

In Mabou, descriptions of usage patterns in the community prior to the 1930s paint a picture of Gaelic as a private language used more in homes and private conversations than in public places (see Mertz 1982a: 101–18). Many of the shopkeepers and business people of Mabou were English-monolingual Loyalists; the schools were always conducted in English, including those run by the church (MacDonald n.d.: 50). Thus the Scots in Mabou maintained Gaelic–English bilingualism for more than 130 years primarily by virtue of Gaelic socialization "in the home". Children in small schools within the Gaelic-speaking sub-areas of Mabou also spoke Gaelic in the school yards; if adults working on farms, boats, or at the mines and canneries found themselves in groups composed of bilinguals they would feel free to codeswitch. But English predominated in the public life of the town of Mabou.

This was less the case in the more homogeneous North Shore, where Gaelic was more widely used in public. Informants agreed, however, that codeswitching to English was more common while shopping in the small stores:

I probably would speak a bit of Gaelic with him [the shopkeeper]. But when I went going to buy, I'd always speak English.

[NS-6]

When we were buying, there's things we can't say in Gaelic, we'd have to say that in English.

[NS-23]

Conversely, the prevailing ethic dictated exclusive use of Gaelic at home with one's grandparents: "If you didn't speak Gaelic to them, they'd say 'He's too stuck up to speak Gaelic'" [NS-23]. Although members of the grandparents' generation were bilingual, they felt that a proper feeling of community solidarity dictated use of Gaelic at home. Similarly, many North Shore residents became literate in Gaelic because home worship, involving the reading of Gaelic Bibles and religious materials, was almost exclusively in Gaelic.

Informants from both communities who were born during the 1930s recall a change in their parents' linguistic behavior: "Well, I guess when I got near school age they started talking English" [NS-18]. Gaelic became a language for adult and/or secret conversations: "[My mother and father] was always speaking Gaelic to each other and when people was coming to visit and that, it was all Gaelic they spoke. But they never spoke Gaelic to me – English, that's all" [NS-4]. Another informant similarly notes: "We didn't speak that much [Gaelic] at home, you know, to our parents – my parents spoke it to one another" [M-14]. On the North Shore this change in home usage was

accompanied by a change in public arenas. Gaelic was now used for quick greetings and comments, but not for extensive conversations. This change was noted by many informants, who variously attributed it to the growing numbers of non-Gaelic-speaking young, negative attitudes on the part of Gaelic speakers themselves, and a general view that "it [Gaelic] wasn't just the thing" [NS-23].

Data from current proficiency curves, scholars accounts, and retrospective accounts by informants, then, converge upon the 1930s and 1940s as the time when both Mabou and the North Shore experienced a rapid linguistic tip toward English monolingualism. We have seen that the two communities differ in many ways; yet despite differences in degree of isolation, length of settlement, religion, cultural/linguistic homogeneity, economic structure, the presence of a local English-monolingual elite, and contact with English-language schools, the two areas maintained Gaelic–English bilingualism until the same point in time, and then tipped toward English monolingualism. How can we account for this?

3. Understanding the Cape Breton "tip"

A straightforward acculturative model linking language shift with pressure from a dominant English-monolingual society clearly would not suffice to explain the Cape Breton tip. There was no sudden intrusion upon either community at the time of the shift. Furthermore, if contact with the outside English-monolingual world were key, Mabou would have experienced a shift long before the North Shore. Not only did local "Mabouites" have ample opportunity during the nineteenth century to witness at close hand the superior status which English enjoyed in Nova Scotian schools and commerce, they also had a local English-monolingual elite in the United Empire Loyalists.

However, although we cannot make a simple correlation between external pressure or prestige values and language shift, there is no doubt that the difference in status between Gaelic and English played a role in shaping the interpretive filter through which Cape Breton Gaels understood their linguistic situation. As Dorian noted in the East Sutherland case, understanding the sociocultural background of language prestige and loyalty against which a sudden tip occurred is as critical to explaining the shift as is isolating one, or several, more immediate precipitating events. Rubin (1968), for example, looked at the official status and symbolic value accorded Spanish and Guarani in assessing the relationship between Paraguayan political structure and language maintenance.

Nova Scotia gave Gaelic official status in the schools with an 1841 bill which provided that: "[A]ny school wherein the ordinary instruction may be in the French, Gaelic, or German languages in any School District in this

Province shall be entitled to the like portion of the public money as any school wherein the ordinary instruction may be in the English language" (PANS Duplicate Bill and Amendments 1841 cap. 43). This provision was dropped in 1864 (Revised Statutes 1864 Title XVII Public Instruction). In the 1920s, in response to a petition drive in Cape Breton, Gaelic was again officially included on the Nova Scotian curriculum (see 1920 Petition, PANS). The Nova Scotian government at no time actively promoted Gaelic; there is no evidence of any systematic attempts to foster Gaelic-language schools or instruction. But at the same time, the government certainly did not openly discourage it. Gaelic was not legislated against; the official policy left open the possibility of Gaelic schools and media. This policy did not change during the 1930s.

On the other hand, it was clear that English was the language of the Nova Scotian government, from the laws printed by the Nova Scotian Assembly on through the tax, land petition, and census forms which the government used. Indeed, the first contact which many Scots immigrants had with Nova Scotian society was their meeting with an English-monolingual immigration officer, for whom they had to manufacture a patronymic consistent with the English system of naming (MacDonald 1959:3; Price and Price 1972, describe a similar situation in Saramaka). Schools were conducted in English. Men who served in World War I returned still more aware that outside of Cape Breton, English was Canada's dominant language.

308 Cape Breton Gaelic speakers, then, had long been conscious of the superior position which English held in official Nova Scotian life. This perception was reinforced by tourists and by native sons and daughters who returned to visit after emigrating to the United States or to central or western Canada. We can find negative assessments of Gaelic in the accounts of early tourists:

I have a reasonable amount of respect for a Highlandman in full costume; but for a sandy-haired, freckled, high-cheeked animal, in a round hat and breeches, that cannot utter a word of English, I have no sympathy. One fellow of this complexion, without a hat, trotted beside our coach for several miles, grunting forth his infernal Gaelic to John Ormond, with a hah! to every answer of the driver, that was really painful. . . . Now I have heard many languages in my time, and know how to appreciate the luxurious Greek, the stately Latin, the mellifluous Chinese, the epithetical Slavic, the soft Italian, the rich Castilian, the sprightly French, the sonorous German, and good old English, but candor compels me to say, that I do not think much of the Gaelic. It is not pleasing to the ear.

(Cozzens 1877, reprinted in Elliott 1956:70)

Other tourists were quite positive in their reactions to hearing Gaelic spoken, but the condescension inherent in their view of Gaelic as quaint or charming could hardly have escaped local residents (see Elliott 1971).⁵

Furthermore, Cape Breton residents began to develop, from an early time, a very specific theory about the relation between Gaelic and English.

From an early report of the Nova Scotian Superintendent of Education comes evidence of this folk theory – and possibly its origin:

It may be proper to remark that in many sections the teacher has to labour under many disadvantages, . . . , and that circumstance is the perpetual contest which the teacher has to wage in combating [sic] the peculiarities of idiom and pronunciation consequent on the prevalence of the Gaelic language . . . perhaps but few realize fully how great an obstacle it is to progress in the acquisition of a thorough English education in the county. The Gaelic-speaking population predominates.

(Cited in Campbell and MacLean 1974:149)

This metalinguistic belief, that Gaelic speaking is an obstacle to learning correct English (and to the opportunity for advancement through education in general), is still prevalent today. During the critical period for language shift, Gaelic revivalists from nearby urban centers struggled in vain to combat the "one language theory", arguing for the "value" of speaking two languages (*Casket*, December 8, 1938; Gaelic College Special Publication 1943; *Cape Breton Post-Record*, March 15, 1939).

Informants today recall the influence of this "bilingual deficit" folk theory: "Parents thought teaching Gaelic would – 'twould sort of confuse the two languages in their minds" [M-14]. If the goal was to learn perfect, unmarked English with the accompanying cognitive benefits and increased possibilities for assimilation, parents must limit their children's exposure to Gaelic from the very beginning, "because when you start out and use Gaelic . . . [learning English is] really hard" [M-6].

A dramatic statement of the extent to which this belief was carried emerges from the following discussion with a man who never learned Gaelic, but who heard Gaelic at home because both of his parents were fluent Gaelic speakers:

Investigator: "Was it the Reverend Fraser that said that – that it would interfere with their English?"

NS-2: "Yea, he thought they should be speaking more English to the children in the homes, I was told that . . ."

Investigator: "Do you think that's true?"

NS-21: "It is, I know – one time, well when I went into the army . . . when he [the officer] was pretty near through [asking entrance questions], he said, 'What second language is bothering you?'"

NS-2: "He did? He knew darn well [everyone laughs]. Oh, you bet you can tell, that's the truth. A lot of people that I would talk English – speak English with, they'd say, 'Tell me, you can speak Gaelic, can you?' They could tell, yes, sure they could . . . that I was speaking – that I spoke Gaelic."

Investigator [to NS-21]: "Would you call Gaelic a second language of yours? I mean – that you spoke it that much that it would interfere with your English?"

NS-2: "No, he didn't speak to – you wouldn't say you did? [to NS-21] But like us, now, it does interfere."

NS-21: "I wasn't thinking it would but –"

NS-18: "No, but Gaelic is in your background, though, and –"

NS-21: "He noticed there was something there."

NS-2: "You bet he did."

NS-19: "Although . . . you didn't make a habit of speaking it, you – you know it in your mind."

NS-2: "It's there – up there, just the same, yes, listening to your parents talking and you had it up there, yea, that's true, I believe."

This is an extraordinary statement if we consider that NS-21's parents, like the parents of many in his generation, used Gaelic in the home only sparingly, for private communication and secrets. In an almost supernatural fashion, the background "noise" of a language he never spoke or understood entered his mind and affected his ability to speak English.⁶ Just this slight degree of exposure was enough to leave his English permanently "marked".

Learning "unmarked" English did become the goal for many Cape Bretoners during the difficult Depression years, when ability to assimilate easily to the Canadian and US mainstream became increasingly important in local eyes.

Where before, the value of local in-group solidarity had counterbalanced the higher prestige of English monolingualism, now rural identity became a serious economic liability. Cape Breton had already been a depressed area; the 1930s brought severe economic hardship to the island. A fisherman recalls efforts by a Catholic priest to rescue Cape Bretoners: "He was after the bishop. 'Fellows down there are all going Communist, they're starving – why don't we do something for them?'" [Laben, in *Cape Breton's Magazine* 1977, 16:8]. The association of Gaelic with rural, "backward" areas took on a sharp economic focus. Attempts by young people to deny any knowledge of Gaelic were now also attempts to deny an image of themselves as poor or lower-class: "[If you spoke Gaelic] you were considered like . . . what they call today 'second-class' citizens" [M-7].

Along with the fact that local group identity, as a balance in favor of Gaelic use, was disappearing, came a change in attitude toward the possibility of upward mobility as the distance between economic core and peripheral areas was decreased by improved communications and transportation. Parents who wished to prepare their children for a modern world saw a necessary link between dropping Gaelic and upward mobility. And that link was provided by local beliefs about language, cognition, and social identity. Only through this interpretive filter did the events of the 1930s have any connection whatever with language. Language tip in Cape Breton resulted from an active decision on the part of rural Cape Bretoners, given their cultural-linguistic schema and reigning economic-political conditions, that they wished to "join the modern world" of mainstream Canada. The decision was a powerful rejection of any permanent identification of com-

munity children as members of a depressed economic periphery (Wallerstein 1976); in a sense, it was an effort to contest peripheralization.

4. Creativity after the "tip"

The preceding section stressed that linguistic "tip" was not a mere reflex of external pressures, but rather reflected Cape Bretoners' active interpretation of, and struggle with, changing circumstances. This section continues that theme, noting that even after transmission of Gaelic ceased in Cape Breton, Gaelic speakers continued to use their language in creative ways. Indeed, the communicative force of a codeswitch to Gaelic today is all the more potent because it is a marked rather than unmarked usage.

One could look at the reduced frequency of Gaelic use in Cape Breton today as evidence of its unimportant and "vestigial" character. But this view would not do justice to the critical pragmatic⁷ functions which Gaelic use fulfills today, nor would it take account of the continued importance of Gaelic use within the community's linguistic ideology. The importance of a language in the community's repertoire cannot be assessed by mere mathematical frequency of use; it is the entire cultural-linguistic framework through which speakers actively interpret their linguistic experience which gives relative weight and meaning to particular linguistic usages.

In public arenas in the two communities today, Gaelic is used sparingly. The most common use is as a boundary marker. Conversations often begin and end with a routine exchange of Gaelic greetings. Here use of the marked code creatively indexes – indeed, creates – the edges of discourse.

Another boundary marked by Gaelic use is that between community insiders and outsiders.⁸ Thus, older community members switch to Gaelic in order to convey secret or private information. For example, one woman turned to her widowed sister while they were standing among a group of friends in a public place, and asked her quietly "*Bheil airgead agad?*" ('Is money at-you?/Do you have money?'). Her sister assured her quickly that she was okay ("Tha"/'Is'), and then they both rejoined the general English conversation. The choice of Gaelic may also simply indicate a feeling of closeness toward the person addressed, signaling as it does a shared history as members of the community. Gaelic pet names or expressions are often employed in addressing family members. In all of these cases, Gaelic speech functions as an index of intimacy, creating an almost palpable boundary as it closes strangers out of conversations. Perhaps the most intimate use of Gaelic possible is in speech to oneself. A wonderful example of this was provided by a woman who was in charge of a large church gathering. As she walked among the people gathered there, I heard her say in a loud tone, "Time to start". Then, turning quickly, she muttered "*Cait a' bheil a' pheansail?*" ('Where's the pencil?'). After a brief look around, she turned

back to address the assembled women in English. Here the switch to Gaelic signaled a shift between addressing others and talking to herself.

At times the two boundary-marking functions of Gaelic coincide, as when the Gaelic greeting ritual is used as a test of Gaelic-speaking ability. I had an opportunity to observe this at close hand, because during my initial months in the community, informants would use the ritual exchange of greetings as an opportunity to test my mastery of Gaelic. When I could move beyond "*Ciamar a tha thu?*" ('How are you?') and standard phrases to unrehearsed and more complex sentences, it was generally agreed by those testing me that I now "had Gaelic". Nonverbal cues added to the sense that this was a test; as I replied to each question or remark, eyebrows would lift and nods of approval or murmurs would follow. A similar testing process is used with visiting relatives, visitors from Scotland, and children taking Gaelic classes. The assessment of ability through Gaelic greetings is a sensitive linguistic means of according insider status, at the same time as it establishes the boundary of the speech exchange itself.

Gaelic speakers also often codeswitch in order to convey strong emotion or humor. Thus informants will often respond to a shocking piece of news, or to the high point of a story with an exclaimed "*Dhia!*" or "*Thigherna!*" ('God!' or 'Lord!'). Strong agreement or assent is similarly often signaled in Gaelic (as, for example, when a woman nodded vigorously and said "*Mise cuideachd*" ('Me, too') in response to a comment in English).

In all of these cases community members use Gaelic creatively to highlight, emphasize, end, and begin speech. Simply by virtue of its reduced range, Gaelic packs a stronger sociolinguistic punch. And, by virtue of the history of association between community identity and minority language, speakers attach a strong affectual value to Gaelic which gives it emotional power. Finally, because only some community members now understand Gaelic, a codeswitch can function as a powerful rebuke, actually closing the conversation to some while including others. As Gaelic use ceases to serve as a regular medium for conveying semantico-referential information (see Silverstein 1976), it gains pragmatic force for expressing affect and creatively molding the speech situation.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has emphasized the crucial role of a group's linguistic-cultural folk theories in filtering wide-scale social change. It is through this interpretive filter that speakers give local meaning to global economic and social changes, meaning which forms the critical background for language shift. I have also stressed that there is enormous creativity in this process. Speakers are actively struggling to create and control their social world through their act of interpretation; they are not merely yielding passively to wider social

forces. This approach takes seriously the "active aspect of knowledge" discussed by Bourdieu:

Those who suppose they are producing a materialist theory of knowledge when they make knowledge a passive recording and abandon the 'active aspect' of knowledge to idealism, as Marx complains in the Theses on Feuerbach, forget that all knowledge, and in particular all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, and that between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped to produce.

(1984:467)

Thus while one must certainly give weight to the "symbolic dominance" of English-monolingual core areas in analyzing Cape Bretons' language tip, the analysis would be completely inadequate if it did not also include the crucial role of local ideologies and interpretive struggles. Woolard (1985b) has similarly argued that although the notion of "cultural hegemony" may fruitfully be applied to sociolinguistic work on "status and solidarity", local community solidary linguistic values operate as a powerful counterweight to dominant ideologies. The Cape Breton case demonstrates that even where there is an apparent yielding to hegemonic values, there may also be resistance and creativity. Small-scale local creative acts of interpretation and of language choice are a form of cultural praxis through which local speakers respond to, but also effect, social change.

Notes

1. As W. Ross explains, "broadly speaking, in the eighteenth century people go from the Highlands; in the nineteenth they are sent" (1934:1). Whereas early emigrants took capital with them, later emigrants actually removed an economic liability from the area when they left. Predictably, the British at first attempted to discourage Scottish migration but then encouraged it, whereas the reverse was true of the Nova Scotian government (see MacDonald 1937:142, 144; Martell 1942:24, 26; Graham 1956:35; Cowan 1967:22, 27).
2. The only exceptions to this are young Gaelic teachers who either emigrated recently from Scotland, or went to Scotland to receive intensive training.
3. An alternative hypothesis might be that parents continued to socialize children in Gaelic, but that the children soon forgot it after participating in the primarily monolingual public life of their communities. This is not, however, supported by contemporaneous reports of social scientists or retrospective reports of informants.

For the statistically minded, it may be convincing to see the results of a multiple regression, contrasting the effects of residence (Mabou or the North Shore) and age on Gaelic-speaking ability: the F-value for place of residence was 0.24, whereas for age it was 620.68, allowing us to conclude what is obvious without statistical support – that age is a good predictor of Gaelic-speaking ability.

- whereas place of residence (with all the accompanying social and economic differences) is not (Mertz 1982b:90).
4. My coding uses M to signify informants from Mabou, and NS for informants from the North Shore.
 5. Certainly it did not escape my informants, several of whom commented to me wryly that American tourists often found "the Gaelic" quaint.
 6. For a discussion of a similar (though less dramatic) US version of this crude "Whorfian" theory regarding the impact of language on mind, see Mertz (1982a).
 7. By "pragmatic" function, I mean the way in which codeswitches to Gaelic index and create linguistic/social context (see Silverstein 1976).
 8. See Mertz (1983) for a discussion of the different way in which Gaelic personal naming conventions perform dual boundary-marking functions.

8 Skewed performance and full performance in language obsolescence: The case of an Albanian variety

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1. Introduction

Studies in language obsolescence have broached significant directions of inquiry in the dynamics of language change. In scholars' efforts to circumscribe the field of language death research, the following major areas of findings seem to be the most conspicuous. (1) It is probable that language death does not differ in kind from other types of linguistic change, but in the speed with which structural changes occur and in the number of phenomena covered by the process (Dorian 1981; Schmidt 1985c). (2) In cases of contracting languages it is possible to end up with communities characterized by marked asymmetries in the development of pairs of skills such as phonology vs. grammar, passive vs. active competence, high vs. low or colloquial stylistic level, written vs. spoken discourse, which normally co-occur in a more balanced way in "healthy" mother-tongue situations (Dorian n.d.). (3) Language death studies raise crucial questions concerning the concept of the speech community, since the frequently appearing sociological category of imperfect speakers involves problems of successful participation in the various communicative events of the community (Dorian 1982a). (4) There is evidence to suggest that, despite certain similarities between language death and pidgins and creoles, the two processes differ crucially (Dorian 1981; Schmidt 1985a). (5) Significant structural restrictions in grammar have been convincingly correlated with reduction in speech genres which were once highly valued specimens of verbal art and competence (Hill 1978; Tsitsipis 1984). (6) Linguistic competence exists among fluent speakers in the ordinary sense of productivity, but the language has stopped being a source of continuous invention (Hymes 1984). (7) A very broad perspective encompassing other speech contexts in