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Review of *Language, Education and Social Processes in a Gaelic Community*, by Kenneth MacKinnon

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In short, the author seems to have good intentions toward sociolinguistics, but his book is too vague to be useful in this regard.

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KENNETH MACKINNON, *Language, education and social processes in a Gaelic community*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977. Pp. xi+222.

Sociolinguistic studies of Europe's Celtic margins have been scarce, and sociolinguistic studies in any depth even more so. Kenneth MacKinnon's contribution is a major effort to fill a part of this gap, and it is for the most part a successful and provocative effort. The Scottish Gaels exist on the periphery of a highly urbanized and industrialized nation, and yet, as MacKinnon notes, the Gaelic speech community may have more features in common with parts of the so-called 'third world' than with most of the rest of Britain. MacKinnon's chief thrust is to explore the respective roles of Gaelic and English in Harris, an island community in the Outer Hebrides, where virtually all community members are bilingual. He focusses especially on the schools as an agency of social control: the schools in Harris are the foremost instrument of the larger British society impinging on the Hebridean child's world (although in recent years children have been coming to school as bilinguals, thanks to television), and the educational selection process ultimately removes many promising young people from the island community for good. In successive chapters MacKinnon deals with (1) ethnic language in education, (2) Gaelic in Harris primary schools, and (3) Gaelic in secondary and further education. The findings reported in these three chapters are placed, in additional chapters, within the larger picture of Gaelic–English bilingual usage in the community.

MacKinnon departs from the customary treatment of societal bilingualism in which one language represents a technological sophisticated urbanized culture and the other a rural folk culture. One way he does this is to refuse to accept a simple model of competition for dominance between the two languages. He argues convincingly that in such a society each language may have a well-established and reasonably secure place. We are accustomed to this idea, perhaps, if the two languages fit neatly into a stratified pattern of bilingualism with diglossia (Fishman 1971), but it is an interesting feature of Harris bilingualism that a very rich, formal variety (a highly elaborated code in fact), of what would have to be the low (L) variety, Gaelic, is widely used in the active religious life

of the island, both in church services and in family worship. In recognition of the islanders' own seeming acceptance of diversified legitimate roles for each of their languages, MacKinnon discards the concept of dominance configuration in bilingualism (Weinreich 1964) in favor of what he calls 'demesne-extension': the 'concept of language "occupying" or "owning" particular "hereditaments" within social life and extending its ownership to link these together into an integrated "estate" ' (148). Thus he finds that the Gaelic 'estate' encompasses family relationships and extends as far as discussing a child with a teacher at school, but not as far as letter-writing, a non-face-to-face relationship, even when the recipient is a family member.

This is not to say that MacKinnon finds the bilingual scene in Harris a static one. Besides reporting on the situation synchronically, he provides a valuable diachronic perspective, albeit unavoidably a shallow one, by means of two approaches. He investigates language use across all of the age groups currently available on the island, and he reproduces a questionnaire used by the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1958–9 (SCRE 1961) for re-use in 1972–4, so that change in language attitudes and use taking shape in the intervening years appears in the later responses as compared with the earlier. The overall picture which emerges from this diachronic approach is much as one would expect: Gaelic has lost ground to English in many respects. For example, 91.8% of all primary school children used Gaelic, or else both Gaelic and English, at home in 1957–8. In 1972–3 the percentage had dropped to 68.6. Similarly, the youngest age group (ages 18–39) in MacKinnon's 1973 sample population show an 11.6% lesser use of Gaelic for family prayers and worship as compared with the oldest group (60 and over). Furthermore, MacKinnon found that language maintenance and language loyalty are not the focus of overt, activist attitudes in Harris as they are in Wales. While his sample population had generally favorable attitudes toward Gaelic and desired its perpetuation in the coming generation (75% thought it 'important' that their children keep their Gaelic), only 20% of the sample preferred that the island population remain small rather than grow via incomers without Gaelic, and only 2% objected to the idea of a daughter of their own marrying a boy who could not speak Gaelic. (However, 41% *preferred* that a daughter marry a Gaelic speaker.)

Nonetheless it is not the case that Gaelic is simply retreating before the pressure of English on all fronts. MacKinnen found that a considerably higher percentage of the English mother-tongue pupils in Harris schools had acquired some degree of ability in Gaelic in the 1970s than had done so in the 1950s, despite the fact that the English mother-tongue group is larger now than it was then. He also found the youngest members of his 1973 sample population more inclined than the oldest members to use Gaelic in a number of essentially 'modern' situations, e.g. in conversation at public entertainment, in the bank, to a policeman, to a telephone operator.

Since the special focus in this study is the schools, it will be well to look closely at MacKinnon's findings in this area. Despite the fact that the chapter on 'Ethnic language in education' establishes the failure of the Harris schools to implement successive recommendations made by various layers of government for an increased role for Gaelic, in MacKinnon's surveys the schools do not appear unambiguously as a force favoring English. In some respects (e.g., the official inclusion of Gaelic as a subject of study) the schools have markedly improved their record over the period during which MacKinnon's study shows a general weakening of the position of Gaelic, and MacKinnon also encountered teachers who actively promote Gaelic in all spheres of school life. One of his surprising findings is an *increased* use of Gaelic and English jointly in students' interactions with teachers, so that while the percentage of primary school children who used only Gaelic to teachers dropped, so did the percentage who used only English. At the conclusion of an extensive survey of Harris secondary pupils' experiences and attitudes, MacKinnon pronounces the position of the secondary school 'neutral . . . regarding Gaelic'.

Percentages and figures tell only a small part of the story, however. In his quest for quantifiable or tabulable data, I think the author rather underplays the untabulable yet inordinately powerful *symbolic* role of the schools in reinforcing the respective positions of Gaelic and English. Perhaps the most significant facts MacKinnon presents about Gaelic in the schools are these: the Gaelic language is largely a subject of study rather than a medium of study after the very earliest grades (and even there in some schools); Gaelic has often been taught in the fashion of a foreign, not a native, language; folkloristic projects are undertaken in Gaelic classes but 'modern' topics are rarely discussed in Gaelic, even in Gaelic classes; supplementary visual teaching materials in Gaelic, in so far as they appear at all, are homemade and limited in comparison with those in English. All of this is duly noted by MacKinnon; it deserves, however, a prominence which it fails to find in a study somewhat overblessed with tables and figures. I am the more persuaded of the value of these untabulable findings because of my own experiences in administering questionnaires in rural Highland areas, where it is a rare respondent who is comfortable with even a very simple instrument. Indeed, MacKinnon himself comments on heavy failure of response to sections on two of his questionnaires.

MacKinnon is at pains in his study to refute the 'culture-lag hypothesis of language-conservation . . . whereby cultural innovation and higher levels of relative economic development are to be associated with the early shift to English of areas open to such influences (such as eastern areas of the Scottish Highlands)' (180). All the same, his own data indicate an extremely high correlation between residing and attending school in the most rural Harris districts and the speaking of Gaelic as a first language. Urbanization may thus be an independent variable not adequately dealt with here. On the whole, however, this study is admirably

broad-meshed. I have concentrated here on the findings related to the schools but MacKinnon frames that aspect of his work in a much broader consideration of the language use of the total community, and he is concerned generally with patterns of language shift, of language and power (especially social solidarity of the mechanical and organic varieties), and of linguistic socialization. Throughout the volume comparisons with the language situation in Wales are provided which throw the Gaelic language situation into excellent relief; and in the final chapter MacKinnon attempts to relate the language contact pattern in Harris, and in Gaeldom generally, to that in other parts of the world via a four-celled typological matrix invoking bilingualism and diglossia. (However valid the matrix, though, the diglossic model is not persuasive for Harris because of the extensive 'high' use of an elaborated-code Gaelic in religious life.)

MacKinnon regards his book, and offers it, as only a first approach to the thorough sociolinguistic study of Gaelic Scotland. It is one of the virtues of his study that it offers so many *Anknüpfungspunkte* for subsequent studies. It is a pity, however, that the author, while using unpublished British sources, did not draw on two exceedingly pertinent unpublished American dissertations (Parman 1972 and Walker 1974). Still more to be regretted is his failure to take Michael Hechter's 1975 study, *Internal colonialism: the Celtic fringe in British national development, 1536–1966*, into account when revising his dissertation for publication in book form. MacKinnon invokes the concept of 'internal colonialism' in the final pages of his study, and surely he would have found in Hechter's work some compensation for the neglect of Scotland among British sociologists which so draws his fire at the beginning of his own volume.

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