Language ideologies and code-switching in Scottish Gaelic discourse: Affective stance and voicing the 'other'

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Scottish Gaelic is a minority language traditionally associated with the mountainous Highlands and Hebridean islands in the northwest of Scotland. The availability of the language in education, however, especially since the introduction of Gaelic-medium education ('GME') in 1985, has meant that there are an increased number of second-language learners who do not necessarily live in these traditional 'heartland' areas. This paper will examine the ways in which both native speakers and learners make use of code-switching – which in this case is the term used to refer to speakers' alternation between Gaelic and English – as a potent means by which to convey particular language ideologies (cf. Kroskrity, 1999). Our analysis draws on corpora from these two different groups of speakers: ten hours of recordings of an extended family located on the Isles of Skye and Harris ('The Campbell Family Corpus') and the 'GME-Inbhich Corpus', based on twenty hours of interviews with adults who received Gaelic-medium education. Observations of the corpora show that both groups occasionally code-switch to English when reflecting on wider discourses about the state of Gaelic, especially those pertaining to language planning initiatives. Using a microinteractional approach (cf. Auer, 1984; 1988) further analysis reveals that code-switching to English provides a valuable tool in effectively 'double-voicing' such discourses (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). We discuss how by using English in such instances, speakers are able to give an 'other' voice to critics of language planning efforts and to people who fault learners in their acquisition/use of the language. This allows speakers to communicate negative affective stance towards their subjects, while at the same time distancing themselves from the direct stance acts indexed in conversation. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of this use of code-switching and the differences between natives' and learners' language use.

References

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