

# Television as saviour for endangered languages? - A survey among Scottish-Gaelic teenagers

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The following article focuses on the use of media offers to strengthen endangered languages. A general introduction to situations of language endangerment is given and arguments for the use of minority language media offers to strengthen endangered languages are presented. An important question concerning this issue is, if media offers, due to the fact that media are to a great extent language-based, are able to directly encourage speakers of minority languages to use the language in question more often. A case study conducted among Gaelic-speaking teenagers tries to find a very general answer to this question for Scottish Gaelic. The study focuses on the attitude of the participants towards Gaelic, their use of the language and of Gaelic language television programmes. Findings regarding the use of television programmes are analysed regarding their impact on the language skills of the participants.

*Keywords: language revitalisation, media, Scottish Gaelic*

## 1 Introduction

The number of today's world languages is estimated by various scholars at 6,000 (Krauss 1992, 1998; Ethnologue; UNESCO). More than half of these languages are said to be threatened by disappearance, i.e. language death.

The reasons for language death are manifold and this paper leaves not enough room to discuss all of them. For European contexts it can generally be stated that languages disappear due to contact with other more powerful languages. In such language contact situations it is usually the case that a strong, dominant language (e.g. English, French, Spanish) threatens a smaller, often indigenous language (e.g. Scottish Gaelic, Basque, Catalan). This results in the

edging out of the indigenous language from important high prestige domains as administration, education, law and science. The use of the indigenous language is often restricted to private domains with low prestige as family and community life. Thus, members of the indigenous speech community have less and less room for the use of their ancestral language and are (slowly) abandoning their ancestral language and assimilating to the dominant speech community.

It is impossible to name a single major cause that makes people abandoning their ancestral language. But quite generally it can be stated that cultural assimilation and language shift are mainly motivated by socio-economic factors. People want to be successful in life and thus have to assimilate to the dominant culture, as this provides them with the necessary environment for their social advancement. Moreover, multilingualism is often not seen very positively in a lot of today's societies (Crystal 2000: 80, Wurm 1998: 193f.). Thus, there is hardly any motivation for speakers to maintain their personal bilingualism and to value and foster their native language.

In order to save endangered languages from extinction it is necessary to strengthen their status in comparison to the dominant language within the language contact situation. The members of the speech community must be motivated to use their indigenous language more often and to pass the language on to the next generation. To reach these aims it is important that an endangered language enhances its prestige among speech community members.

## **2 Use of media for revitalising endangered languages**

Various linguists and language activists perceived the media to be an important high prestige domain, whose power can be used to support endangered languages (Cormack 2007, Crystal 2000, Tsunoda 2005, UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages 2003). Crystal values the power of the

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media to increase the prestige of an endangered language community by increasing its visibility within the whole community (2000: 130). The *UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages*<sup>1</sup> stresses the importance of establishing “meaningful contemporary roles” for maintaining minority languages (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages 2003: 11). This means that minority languages have to adapt to modern life for being maintained by their speakers. Thus, the expansion of the languages to ‘new domains’ becomes crucial. ‘New domains’ are defined by the UNESCO paper as new areas of language use, which can be new work environments, but also new media, including broadcast media (radio, television) and the Internet (ibid.).

The media are generally seen as a high prestige domain and are usually used exclusively by the dominant languages to expand the scope and power of these languages on the cost of all other languages. Therefore the media are usually seen as a threat for endangered languages. Especially the impact of television is seen very negatively. Krauss calls TV “cultural nerve gas”, expressing so the widely spread criticism that television reinforces dominant cultures, in most cases American culture, by displacing traditional pastime activities, such as storytelling, which have long been the primary means of passing on a language (quoted after Krauss 1992: 6, in: Crystal 2000: 78 and Tsunoda 2005: 62).

But especially this power of the media could be used for the promotion of endangered languages. Cormack states in his article “The Media and Language

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<sup>1</sup> The *UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages* is a group of linguists and language advocates, who found together at the second International Conference on Endangered Languages in 2001 (held in Kyoto). From November 2001 and March 2003 they worked together to formulate ways of assessing language vitality. The collaboration resulted in the paper “Language Vitality and Endangerment”. In this paper the group will from this point on be referred to as the UNESCO expert group.

Maintenance”<sup>2</sup> several arguments that are particularly often cited for the support of the media’s role in language maintenance.<sup>3</sup>

First, the media can provide an economic boost for the minority language community in question together with the establishment of jobs in the creative and cultural industries. Especially the provision of attractive jobs, which include the use of minority language skills, outside education is highly valued. The success of the Welsh TV channel *S4C* (Sianel Pedwar Cymru “Wales’ Fourth Channel”) is often given as an example for the positive impact of the media on an endangered language.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the media, and especially television,<sup>5</sup> form the basis for a community to participate in contemporary life, politically and socially. Cormack refers for this argument to Jürgen Habermas. According to Habermas’ concept of ‘Öffentlichkeit’<sup>5</sup> the media create, “an area in which informed debate on public issues can take place” (Cormack forthcoming: 2). Thus, through the provision of news and current affairs programmes minority language media give a minority language community access to current public issues and the possibility to discuss them in their language. Otherwise the minority language community

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<sup>2</sup> Quotes used here are not taken from the article published in 2007, but from an earlier manuscript that Mike Cormack made available for the author of this article for her Master thesis. The manuscript will be quoted as follows: Cormack, Mike (forthcoming). “The media, language maintenance and Gaelic”. currently unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> Cormack discusses the influence of the media in reference to the revitalization of Scottish Gaelic. He refers to Gaelic examples exclusively, but the arguments mentioned can be applied to all minority languages with big enough media coverage.

<sup>4</sup> S4C was launched in November 1982 and is often seen as a key factor for the revival of the Welsh language. The economic success of the channel is quite impressive. S4C contributes about £33m a year to the Welsh economy, employs around 200 people as full-time staff, plus “further 1,480 people in the media and ancillary services in Wales” (Gibson & Phillips 2002: 58).

<sup>5</sup> Cormack gives Habermas, Jürgen (1989): *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press as a source. In this publication “Öffentlichkeit” is translated as “public sphere”.

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would have to rely on the media of the dominant culture which merely reinforces the latter.

The argument can also be applied to culture. The media are part of contemporary culture and thus can help to convey a picture of a modern minority language community, which is especially important for keeping younger people involved in the language. Cormack (*ibid.*) states that most minority language communities have to deal with the stereotype of old and rural based speakers and that the media are able to destroy this stereotype and to show that minority language communities can be part of a modern world. Nevertheless he points out that “it is usually the majority language culture which defines what is ‘sexy’ or ‘cool’ in contemporary culture” (Cormack adopts this argument from Dunbar 2003: 77).

Third, the media play an important role in building and maintaining a sense of group identity. Again Cormack quotes Dunbar (2003: 77): “Broadcasting can, for example, play an important ideological role, by helping to define the minority language community’s identity and by helping to define and reinforce its core values”. As stated earlier a strong sense of group identity can be very important for the maintenance of an endangered language. In consequence, this is a strong argument for providing the media with a role in language maintenance.

Fourth, the media are an important instrument for language documentation. The electronic media provide means to make the spoken word available for all. This sees Cormack (*forthcoming*: 2) as “encouraging for native-speakers and helpful for learners”. He supports thus the opinion of various other authors (Crystal 2000, Tsunoda 2005, UNESCO expert group 2003) that documentation is an important step for language maintenance efforts. The possibilities to record the spoken word provided by the media make them a useful tool in language learning and thus can support language maintenance programmes.

Cormack's final argument is that the presence of minority language media must somehow encourage the speakers actually using the language. "The mass media are, to varying degrees, language-based, and thus must be important in terms of encouraging language use, in both spoken and written forms." (Cormack forthcoming: 2) Cormack sees this last argument as the most important one, as it is about *directly* encouraging the use of an endangered language. All other arguments are more about establishing an environment which would support an endangered language. Nevertheless the assumption that more media content (such as radio and television programmes) in an endangered language does lead to more use of the language is not proven yet and needs definitely more research. Cormack states his concerns (forthcoming: 4):

This is certainly not clear in respect to television. Does it bring more people to the language? [...] Nor is it clear if it makes people talk more to each other in Gaelic or keeps children in the language, particularly the crucial teens-to-twenties category.

The case study presented in the next part tried to find at least a very general answer to this question. The study focused on the use of Gaelic language television programmes by Gaelic-speaking teenagers.

### **3 Case study: Learning Gaelic and the impact of Gaelic television**

The following data are taken from a research project conducted by the author of this article as part of her Master thesis.<sup>6</sup> Via a questionnaire the author gathered information from schools with Gaelic-medium units located in three different regions of Scotland about how teenagers from these areas differ in their Gaelic language skills, their attitude towards the Gaelic language and their use of and

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<sup>6</sup> Burmeister, Melanie (2007): „Gaelic in contemporary Scotland and the role of Gaelic television in revitalizing the language - A linguistic study”. unpublished Master Thesis, Greifswald: Ernst-Moritz-Arndt Universität.

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their opinions on Gaelic television. The data on the use of Gaelic television was analyzed regarding the impact of television on the use of Gaelic.

### **3.1 Research Method**

Due to organisational and financial reasons a questionnaire-based method was chosen for data collection. Contact to schools considered suitable for the project was established via e-mail and later on via telephone. The questionnaires were sent out by mail to the responsible Gaelic teachers, who distributed the questionnaires among their students. The response rate was quite high at 71.1%. 128 out of 180 questionnaires were sent back and could be used for the research.

The data collected through the questionnaire was evaluated with the statistics computer programme SPSS. This computer programme offers various statistical analysis and testing techniques, all of which can be applied to one data sample. Each question of the questionnaire was turned into a variable with a numeric value, e.g. the question “Are you male or female?” got the numeric values “1” for “male” and “2” for “female”. The data of each questionnaire was then imported by hand. So for each questionnaire one data set was built, comprising all the individual answers of the participant. All 128 data sets in sum constitute the data sample for the research. To make it easier to find the questionnaire belonging to a special set of data, the questionnaires were numbered. The order of the questionnaires is not random, but they are grouped together according to the region the participants come from.

The evaluation of the single questions is always based on the number of valid answers to this question. Participants that did not give an answer to a question were not considered in the evaluation of the respective question, i.e. if 8 out of 128 participants did not answer question x, the percentages calculated are based on a total of 120 valid answers. The results of the statistical analyses were then thoroughly evaluated in written form. Additionally, the figures are

presented in tables giving the number of participants that decided for a certain option (N) and the percentage which this number represents. For illustration answers given in the questionnaires are used. In these cases, the original statements as given in the questionnaires are quoted.

### 3.2 Participants

The research was conducted among 128 students from five Gaelic-medium secondary schools located in three different areas of Scotland. The areas were chosen according to the importance of the Gaelic language in everyday life measured by the Census 2001<sup>7</sup>, i.e. the Western Isles, the Highlands and urban areas like Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen (see Fig. 1).

Of the five participating schools one with 50 participating students was located in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, within the most strongly Gaelic-speaking area, the Western Isles. Two schools were located in the Highlands, one with 21 participating students in Inverness and one with 26 participating students in Fort William. The two remaining participating schools, one with 10 the other with 21 participating students, were located in the City of Glasgow.

Table 1: Distribution of students according to region

		Number of participants	Valid Percent
<b>Region</b>	Western Isles	N=50	39,1
	Highlands	N=47	36,7
	Glasgow	N=31	24,2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>N=128</b>	<b>100,0</b>

<sup>7</sup> A census is taken every 10 years and results are then published by the General Register Office for Scotland.



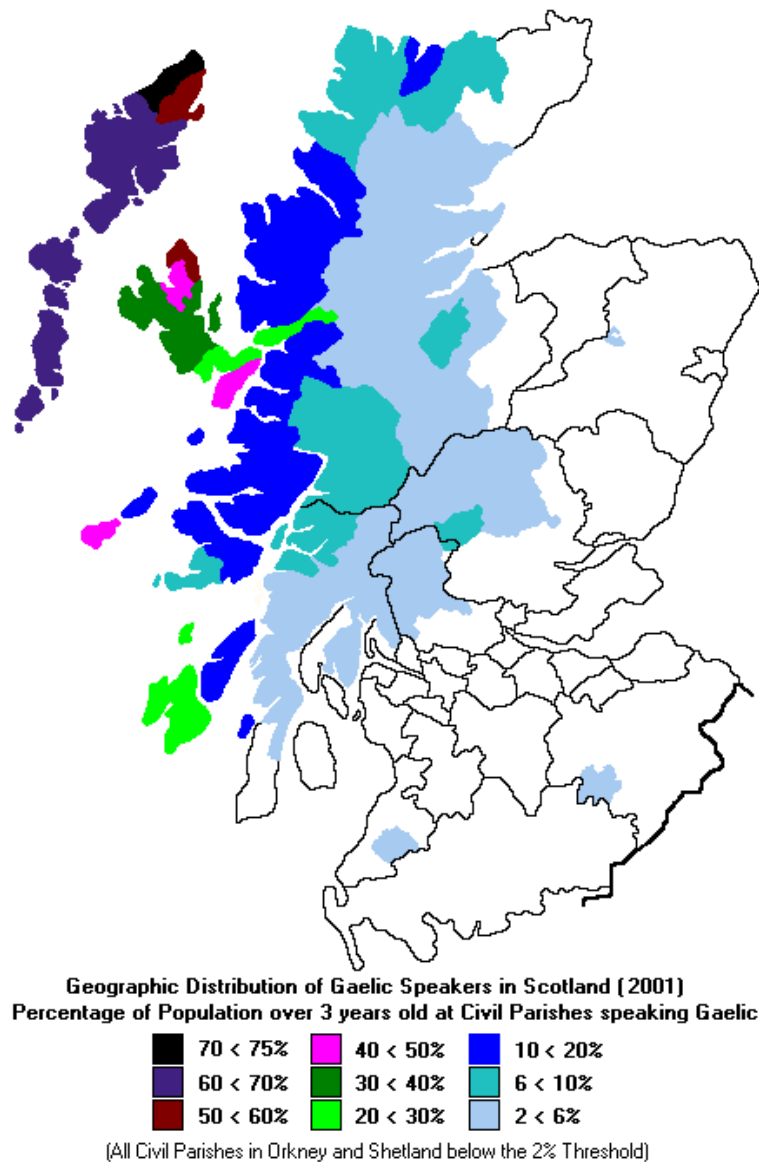


Figure 1: Distribution of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, source: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:ScotlandGaelicSpeakers2001.gif>>, adapted by Burmeister 2007

The project was restricted to secondary school students to make sure that the participants were already old enough to decide for themselves whether to continue or to stop learning Gaelic. The decision for or against the Gaelic language should be a free, self-chosen preference rather than a decision dominated by the parents. Thus, the students were between 12 and 17 years old. In general the participants from the Western Isles were a little older than the participants from the two remaining regions.

Table 2: Distribution of age according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	all regions
Age	12 yrs	N=0	N=3	N=5	6.3 % N=8
	13 yrs	N=0	N=17	N=10	21.1 % N=27
	14 yrs	N=7	N=14	N=8	22.7 % N=29
	15 yrs	N=19	N=9	N=4	25 % N=32
	16 yrs	N=23	N=4	N=4	24.2 % N=31
	17 yrs	N=1	N=0	N=0	0.8 % N=1
Total		39.1 % N=50	36.7 % N=47	24.2 % N=31	100 % N=128

From all schools more girls than boys replied. Overall 68% of the participants were female. That is 87 out of 128 students. Just 32% of the participants were male. That is 41 out of 128 students.

### 3.3 Gaelic language skills

The results of the study showed that the distribution when children do start learning Gaelic is quite even among the regions. The big majority of the children from all three regions started to learn Gaelic during their first five years of life, i.e. before attending primary school. This means that these participants can be considered to be bilingual, as they learned Gaelic as their first language or as a second language, while their first language acquisition was not finished yet. So growing up bilingually Gaelic – English (simultaneously or progressively) is not a privilege of children from the Western Isles where the Gaelic language has its stronghold today, but it is the reality for the majority of Gaelic-speaking teenagers throughout Scotland according to these data. Surprisingly, the big majority of the participants that started learning Gaelic the latest in life came from the Highland region and not as expected from the urban area. None of the participants from Glasgow started learning Gaelic later than at the age of eight.

Table 3: Age when starting to learn Gaelic according to region

	Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	Total (all regions)
<b>Group 1 (0-3 yrs)</b>	34 % N=17	14.9 % N=7	32.3 % N=10	26.6 % N=34
<b>Group 2 (3-5 yrs)</b>	<b>38 % N=19</b>	<b>42.6 % N=20</b>	32.3 % N=10	<b>38.3 % N=49</b>
<b>Group 3 (6-8 yrs)</b>	14 % N=7	14.9 % N=7	<b>35.5 % N=11</b>	19.5 % N=25
<b>Group 4 (9-12 yrs)</b>	10 % N=5	27.7 % N=13	0 % N=0	14.1 % N=18
Total	N=48	N=47	N=31	98.5% N=126

The age at which the students have started learning Gaelic influences how good they consider their Gaelic skills to be in comparison with their English skills. Students who started to learn Gaelic before entering primary school rated their Gaelic skills as being equally good as their English language skills, although they feel more secure in English. Students who started later in life to learn Gaelic usually thought their English better than their Gaelic language skills. The region where the participants come from does not influence this result. Thus, how good the teenagers rate their language skills is dependent on how early they started to learn Gaelic.

Table 4: Considered fluency according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
<b>Fluency</b>	Equally good, more secure in Gaelic	6.1 % N=3	0	6.5 % N=2	3.9 % N=5
	Equally good, more secure in English	34.7% N=17	38.3 % N=18	58.1 % N=18	41.7 % N=53
	Better English than Gaelic	42.9 % N=21	57.5 % N=27	35.5 % N=11	46.5 % N=59
	Basic Gaelic	16.3 % N=8	4.3 % N=2	0	7.9 % N=10
Total		49	47	31	127

Table 5: Age when starting to learn Gaelic / Considered fluency crosstabulation

		Considered fluency				Total
		Equally good, more secure in Gaelic	Equally good, more secure in English	Better English than Gaelic	Basic Gaelic	All regions
<b>Age start learning Gaelic</b>	Group 1(0-3)	14.7 % N=5	55.9 % N=19	29.4 % N=10	0	34
	Group 2 (3-5)	0	54.2 % N=26	43.8 % N=21	2.1 % N=1	48
	Group 3 (5-8)	0	28 % N=7	56 % N=14	16 % N=4	25
	Group 4 (9+)	0	0	72.2 % N=13	27.8 % N=5	18
Total		5	52	58	10	125

### 3.4 Use of Gaelic and importance of the language for the students

The questionnaire asked for the participants' use of Gaelic in comparison to English in five different contexts: at home with the family, while talking to older relatives or older members of the community, during leisure time spent in sports or other clubs, church etc., at school and while being together with friends. The data show that English is the dominant language for the vast majority of participants. Gaelic is rarely used by the teenagers in everyday life. Conversations with older relatives and community members offer the most opportunities for the teenagers to use Gaelic. But also at home Gaelic is used to some extent. Proportionally, the participants from the Western Isles speak more Gaelic than the other participants; what shows that the relatively high proportion of Gaelic speakers in this area benefits the general use of Gaelic.

Table 6: Use of Gaelic in various contexts

	At home	Conversations with older people	Leisure time	In school	With friends
<b>Always G</b>	0	11.7 % N=15	0	0	0
<b>More G than E</b>	6.3 % N=8	21.1 % N=27	0	6.3 % N=8	0
<b>Same G and E</b>	14.1 % N=18	14.8 % N=19	3.1 % N=4	7.8 % N=10	5.5 % N=7
<b>More E than G</b>	<b>43 % N=55</b>	<b>29.7 % N=38</b>	30.5 % N=39	<b>75.8 % N=97</b>	32.8 % N=42
<b>Always E</b>	36.7 % N=47	22.7 % N=29	<b>66.4 % N=85</b>	10.2 % N=13	<b>61.7 % N=79</b>
Total	128	128	128	128	128

Nevertheless Gaelic is considered to be an important factor in the teenagers' lives. A comparison of the results of each region reveals that the student's responses are fairly alike. A very big majority of the participants from each region consider Gaelic to be important for their lives. Participants from Glasgow consider Gaelic to be slightly more important for their lives than the participants from the other regions.

Table 7: Importance of Gaelic according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
<b>Importance of Gaelic</b>	Yes, important	81.4 % N=35	78.6 % N=33	88.9 % N=24	82.1 % N=92
	No, not important	18.6 % N=8	21.4 % N=9	11.1% N=3	17.9 % N=20
Total		43	42	27	112

The most common reason given why Gaelic is important in the teenagers' lives is that Gaelic is the language used by their family and within their community. 37.7% of all participants gave this as the only or one of the reasons why Gaelic is important for them. And even if the vast majority of the students do not speak Gaelic as the only language at home, they see the importance of Gaelic when communicating with older people in particular. A lot of students pointed out that there are people within their community who just speak Gaelic or who like the younger people to use Gaelic when talking to them.

Table 8: Reasons for considering Gaelic as important / as not important factor in life

Reason given	Communicative value	Cultural value	Part of heritage	Gaelic is useful in life	No need for Gaelic	Other reasons
<b>Yes</b>	37.7 % N=46	19.7 % N=24	16.4 % N=20	16.4 % N=20	12.3 % N=15	22.1 % N=27
<b>No</b>	62.3 % N=76	80.3 % N=98	83.6 % N=120	83.6 % N=120	87.7 % N=107	77.9 % N=95
Total	122	122	122	122	122	122

That Gaelic is considered to be an important factor in the teenagers' lives, because it enables them to communicate with their family and people in their community, makes Gaelic a living language for these teenagers. Although the overall use of Gaelic is very small. Nevertheless, the fact that over 80% of the

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participants think that the Gaelic language is an important part of their lives, shows that Gaelic is part of their identity. Nearly a fifth of the participants stressed that Gaelic is part of their culture and heritage. These teenagers are aware that the Gaelic language is threatened and try to improve the situation of the language by using and promoting it. This is quite impressive considering the age of the participants. But seeing the Gaelic language as part of one's identity and being aware of the endangered status of Gaelic are the very preconditions for preventing it from dying out. Hence, this generation seems able and willing to pass Gaelic on to the next generation.

### 3.5 Gaelic TV

In general the provision of Gaelic language television programmes is very small. Currently there is no all-Gaelic television channel and programmes in Gaelic are shown on BBC Alba and two commercial channels (STV and GrampianTV) intermingled with the regular English programmes. Additionally, there is the free digital channel TeleG which broadcasts Gaelic programmes during one hour each evening. For years there has been an ongoing debate on the establishment of an all-Gaelic television channel. But the launching of the channel has been postponed several times mainly due to unclear financing.

Much of Gaelic television is funded by “Seirbhis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig”, the Gaelic Media Service (GMS). The Gaelic Media Service funds Gaelic broadcasting with money allotted by the Scottish government.<sup>8</sup> According to the Service's annual report (2006: 15) the GMS provided funding for 91 hours of television programming in 2005/06.<sup>9</sup> The funding provided

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<sup>8</sup> According to GMS' annual report the Scottish Executive provided £8.5m. (12.75m. €) in 2005/06. (Gaelic Media Service 2006: 8)

<sup>9</sup> This is not the total amount of Gaelic broadcasting, as there are also programmes which are not funded by GMS. However, it was not possible to find out how many hours of Gaelic programming were shown in total in 2005/06 or how many hours are shown on average

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supported programmes from five different genres: factual, arts & entertainment; youth & children; current affairs; educational programmes; comedy; religion; sport and drama.

Thus, the offer of Gaelic programmes seems quite varied but it has to be noted that there is no Gaelic news programme and just one weekly current affairs programme (“Eòrpa”, Europe). Moreover, audience researches for GMS<sup>10</sup> showed that viewers are not satisfied with the range of programmes and that they criticize the lack of creativity in programme development. The annual report states: “The range of programmes is considered insufficient to appeal to the overall demographic spectrum of Gaelic viewers and programme planning has not been deemed to be audience-centered.” Further on the report states: “Innovation and fresh talent, new and engaging approaches and formats, are felt to be important features of the required diversification and extension of the programme range.” (Gaelic Media Service 2006: 12) Criticism is also directed at the “dispersed and confusing scheduling” of programmes (Cormack 2005: 116). Spoken in general terms, the viewers do not know when certain programmes are shown. There is no general schedule available. The most reliable way to get information on current programming is via the Internet on the websites of the respective channels.

### **3.6 Use of Gaelic programmes**

Gaelic language programmes on television are watched by about 50% of the participants of the study; the number of teenagers from Glasgow watching

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during a week. Cormack states that there were three hours each week in 2004. (Cormack 2005: 116) Additionally, the GMS’ annual report states the key slots for Gaelic programmes are Thursday evening on BBC2 and Sunday evening, late Tuesday night and some Sunday mornings on GTV/STV. (Gaelic Media Service 2006: 11)

<sup>10</sup> Audience researches for GMS are conducted by the “Lèirsinn Research Centre” based at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye.

Gaelic TV being significantly smaller than the number of viewers from the two other regions.

Table 9: Watching Gaelic TV according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
Watching Gaelic TV	Yes	66 % N=33	55.3 % N=26	12.9 % N=4	<b>49.2 % N=63</b>
	No	34 % N=17	44.7 % N=21	87.1 % N=27	<b>50.8 % N=65</b>
Total		50	47	31	128

If the teenagers watch or do not watch Gaelic television programmes is not dependent on the teenagers' self-assessed fluency in Gaelic. This is a very balanced result, showing that about half of the participants in each "fluency-group" watch Gaelic TV and the other half does not watch Gaelic TV. An exception is the group that claims to be "equally good in Gaelic and English, but feel more secure in Gaelic" where 4 participants do watch Gaelic TV compared to one who does not watch Gaelic programmes. But this does not influence the overall result, as this group constitutes just 3.9% of the sample.

Table 10: Watching Gaelic TV / fluency in Gaelic crosstabulation

		Fluency in Gaelic in comparison to English					Total
		Better in Gaelic than in English	Equally good, but feel more secure in Gaelic	Equally good, but feel more secure in English	Better in English than in Gaelic	Basic Gaelic	
Watching Gaelic TV	Yes	0	4	25	28	5	<b>62</b>
	No	0	1	28	31	5	<b>65</b>
Total		0	5	53	59	10	127

The most popular programme, i.e. the programme most often mentioned in the research, is the Gaelic language-learning programme *Dè a-nis?* ("What now?"). 32 of the participants stated that they watch this programme. 19 of them stated that they watch *Dè a-nis?* on a regular basis. All other programmes mentioned can not compete with the popularity of *Dè a-nis?*. Other programmes watched are Gaelic culture and music programmes, the current affairs programme *Eòrpa*



(“Europe”), Gaelic translations of various cartoon series, comedy programmes and the sports programme *Spòrs* (“Sports”).

The reasons why teenagers watch Gaelic television programmes are mainly entertainment and the use of the programmes for active language learning. Entertainment was given as a reason by 38.7% of all participants. These students stated that they like the programmes or that they think the programmes are “entertaining”, “good” or “funny”. 32% of all participants stated that they watch Gaelic TV to improve their Gaelic skills. Most of these students just stated: “to learn more”, “to improve my Gaelic” etc. But some students were slightly more specific and stated that the programmes help them to learn new words, that they give them the opportunity to listen to different dialects of Gaelic or that Gaelic TV helps them to improve their pronunciation.

The most common reason for not watching Gaelic programmes is that the participants think the programmes are not suited for their age group. Participants who gave this as a reason stated they think the programmes are “boring”, “childish”, “cheesy” or “just for younger children”. Especially participants from Glasgow are critical of Gaelic programmes. But surprisingly not the older participants were the ones who consider the Gaelic programmes not suitable for their age group, but the 13- and 14-year olds.

Table 11: Reasons for watching/not watching Gaelic programmes

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
<b>Reasons for watching or not watching Gaelic TV</b>	Entertainment	45.2 % N=14	38.2 % N=13	20 % N=2	38.7 % N=29
	Language learning	41.9 % N=13	29.4 % N=10	10 % N=1	32 % N=24
	Information	16.1 % N=5	17.7 % N=6	.0 % N=0	14.7 % N=11
	Programmes not suited for teens	3.2 % N=1	11.8 % N=4	40 % N=4	12 % N=9
	Other reasons	29 % N=9	41.2 % N=14	40 % N=4	36 % N=27

### **3.7 Gaelic TV and language**

An important aspect of the research was to find out if Gaelic language programmes increase Gaelic language use. The most important question is if the watching of Gaelic language programmes motivates speakers to use more Gaelic. Another possibility would be to actively strengthen one's language skills by writing down words, phrases etc. when watching Gaelic programmes.

The participants were asked if they talk about programmes after watching Gaelic TV. The results show that Gaelic television programmes get just some people talking. Just 9.5% of the participants stated that they "always" or "very often" talk about Gaelic programmes. The big majority of the participants talk "seldom" or "never" about a programme, even if most participants chose the option "sometimes". 34.5% of the participants ticked "sometimes", 25% "seldom" and 31% "never".

A comparison of the results from each region suggests that the students from the Highlands talk more about Gaelic programmes than students from the other regions. Students from Glasgow talk the least about these programmes. The majority of 53.8% stated that they "never" talk about these programmes. But the Glasgow group also has the highest percentage of students who stated not to watch Gaelic TV programmes at all, whereas the majority of the students from the Western Isles and the Highlands stated that they do watch Gaelic programmes.

Table 12: Talking about programmes according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
Talking about programmes	Yes, always	.0 % N=0	2.2 % N=1	3.8 % N=1	1.7 % N=2
	Yes, very often	11.4 % N=5	6.5 % N=3	3.8 % N=1	7.8 % N=9
	Yes, sometimes	38.6 % N=17	43.5 % N=20	11.5 % N=3	34.5 % N=40
	Very seldom	22.7 % N=10	26.1 % N=12	26.9 % N=7	25 % N=29
	No, never	27.3 % N=12	21.7 % N=10	53.8 % N=14	31 % N=36
Total		44	46	26	116

When asked about the language they use, when talking about Gaelic programmes, 32.7% of the participants stated that they always use English in this situation. 34.7% said that they use more English than Gaelic when talking about programmes and 22.8% stated that they use both Gaelic and English. Just 9.9% stated that they always talk about Gaelic programmes in Gaelic or more often in Gaelic than in English.

Students who declared to use always Gaelic or more Gaelic than English when talking about Gaelic television came mostly from the Western Isles. Surprisingly, in comparison to the groups from the Western Isles and the Highlands, quite a lot of the students from Glasgow said that they talk about Gaelic programmes in Gaelic and in English. Nevertheless, it became quite clear in this research that Gaelic television programmes do not encourage participants to talk more Gaelic.

Table 13: Which language is used when talking about Gaelic programmes according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
Language use	Always in Gaelic	2.7 % N=1	.0 % N=0	.0 % N=0	1 % N=1
	More in Gaelic than in English	16.2 % N=6	5 % N=2	4.2 % N=1	8.9 % N=9
	In Gaelic and English	18.9 % N=7	17.5 % N=7	37.5 % N=9	22.8 % N=23
	More in English than in Gaelic	32.4 % N=12	42.5 % N=17	25 % N=6	34.7 % N=35
	Always in English	29.7 % N=11	35 % N=14	33.3 % N=8	32.7 % N=33
Total		37	40	24	101

Another way to actively use television programmes for the benefit of one's language skills is to write things down. That could be new words, unknown words, tips for pronunciation or grammatical forms which are new or unclear. When asked about this kind of use of Gaelic programmes the participants' answers are very clear. Nearly no one of the students does write down information concerning the Gaelic language while watching a Gaelic programme. 88% of all participants declared that they never write things down. Just one participant from the Western Isles group and one participant from the Highland group said that they write down information "very often".

Table 14: Writing things down / region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
<b>Writing things down</b>	Yes, very often	2.3 % N=1	2.2 % N=1	.0 % N=0	<b>1.7 % N=2</b>
	Yes, sometimes	2.3 % N=1	4.4 % N=2	.0 % N=0	<b>2.6 % N=3</b>
	Very seldom	9.3 % N=4	8.9 % N=4	3.5 % N=1	<b>7.7 % N=9</b>
	No, never	86.1 % N=37	84.4 % N=38	96.5 % N=28	<b>88 % N=103</b>
Total		43	45	29	117

The participants were also asked to state in general how they think Gaelic television affects their Gaelic language skills. 71.6% of the 102 participants that answered the question think that Gaelic television helps them in their language learning.<sup>11</sup> Most of these participants' statements are very general: "It improves them", "It helps them" or similar statements. Other participants were slightly more specific and reflected on the way in which television influences their language skills. Mostly it was stated that television programmes help with building up vocabulary. Other participants stated that Gaelic programmes help them with their own pronunciation of Gaelic words or that television helps them

<sup>11</sup> As just about 50% of the 128 participants stated that they regularly watch Gaelic programmes, this result indicates that even participants who do not watch Gaelic programmes on a regular basis have an opinion on how useful these programmes can be for language learning.

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to speak more fluently. Some participants stated that Gaelic TV helps them to differentiate between the different regional dialects of Gaelic. Three statements that were very positive about Gaelic TV but not that easy to classify were: “It gives me people to look up to. it makes me realise how limited my vocabulary skills are”, “It’s important, because TV is more influential than books” and “It shows how many different things Gaelic is involved in “.

But there were also participants who could not see any effect of Gaelic TV on their language skills. Some of the participants also gave reasons why they do not think that television affects their Gaelic. Mostly it was the lack of subtitles that was criticised: “It doesn’t help me learn because there is no English translation. So I do not understand a bit of it.”, “Not a bit cause they speak too fast and it doesn’t tell you what they said.”

Also participants that could see an effect of Gaelic programmes on their language skills wished for subtitles: “Quite often it gives me more vocabulary when the programs have subtitles.”, I think it improves a little bit but it would make it easier if some subtitles were added.”

Other participants stated that they think Gaelic TV has very little effect on the viewers language skills, but mostly these participants spoke in general terms and not out of their own experience: “I would think it would if it was watched a lot, and used some challenging Gaelic”, “I think it helps other people”, “It could help people out of school.”

Table 15: Effect of Gaelic TV on language skills according to region

		Region			Total
		Western Isles	Highlands	Glasgow	All regions
<b>Learning effect</b>	Yes	74.4 % N=32	71.1 % N=27	66.7 % N=14	<b>71.6 % N=73</b>
	No	25.6 % N=11	28.9 % N=11	33.3 % N=7	28.4 % N=29
<b>No effect</b>	Yes	14 % N=6	23.7 % N=9	23.8 % N=5	<b>19.6 % N=20</b>
	No	86 % N=37	76.3 % N=29	76.2 % N=16	80.4 % N=82
<b>Little effect</b>	Yes	7 % N=3	5.3 % N=2	9.5 % N=2	<b>6.9 % N=7</b>
	No	93 % N=40	94.7 % N=36	90.5 % N=19	93.1 % N=95
<b>Total</b>		43	38	21	102

As a summary it can be stated that the already scarce provision of Gaelic programmes is used by just half of the participants in this study. Reasons for not watching Gaelic television programmes are mainly that the programmes do not appeal to the teenagers and thus mirror general findings of audience researches conducted for the Gaelic Media Service (c.f. 3.5).

The research could not support the hypothesis that Gaelic television programmes motivate the viewers to talk more Gaelic. Mostly, participants talk about Gaelic programmes just sometimes or seldom. And the majority uses more English than Gaelic or just English when talking about programmes. However, about a third of the participants use some Gaelic when talking about Gaelic programmes, including some people that predominantly use Gaelic.

Nevertheless it is interesting to see that reasons to watch Gaelic are to a great extent related to language learning. Notwithstanding the fact that just a small percentage of the participants actively use Gaelic programmes for their personal language learning by explicitly writing down information concerning the use of Gaelic during watching Gaelic programmes, most of the teenagers think that Gaelic television can be used as a tool for language learning. Thus, television is generally perceived to help with language learning - even by participants who do not watch Gaelic programmes on a regular basis. Mostly, television programmes are perceived to provide help with pronunciation, as they

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provide examples of natural and fluent speech from different Gaelic speakers. To hear spoken Gaelic helps to improve one's own pronunciation and it provides help for recognizing and distinguishing various Gaelic dialects. Moreover, the participants use the programmes to extend their vocabulary.

#### **4 Conclusion**

The case study presented here has shown that the use of Gaelic is mainly restricted to the private domain and thus can not compete with English in most communicative contexts. Nevertheless it has become quite clear that Gaelic-speaking teenagers value Gaelic as an essential marker of their identity and culture and thus consider it to be an important factor in their lives, which will not be abandoned that easily.

In regard to the use of television programmes for encouraging the use of the language, results of the study were quite negative. Gaelic television programmes are generally perceived to support the language learning process, but they do not directly encourage viewers to speak more Gaelic. As a guideline for further research it can be stated that the questions of the research were quite general. More information is needed to interpret the figures better. The context in which Gaelic programmes are watched has not been considered in this study. But it is definitely an important factor that influences language choice. Mike Cormack proposes a new research agenda for analysing media impact on endangered languages with the aim "to discover what kinds of media, what kinds of media content and what kinds of media contexts are most likely to encourage use of [an endangered language]" (Cormack 2007: 65f.).<sup>12</sup> Some of the questions he thinks

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<sup>12</sup> Cormack established his research agenda focusing on Gaelic media. But the questions can be used to study media impact on each minority language with sufficient media provision.

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important for discovering how people use minority language media are the following:

- How do people use the media to interact with each other?
- In what context do people talk about minority language media?
- What attitudes do minority language speakers have towards the use of their language in the media?
- How do people participate in media (through phone-ins, letters to the editor, studio audiences)?
- How do minority language speakers interact with non-minority language media?
- How do minority language media make people feel about themselves as minority language speakers?

Cormack's research questions focus not alone on the use of the minority language within the media context, but could give help to describe and analyse the complicated interaction processes between the speech communities and the languages in question more thoroughly. Besides the use of questionnaires he stresses the importance of interviews and discussion groups to get more detailed information.

As was stated in the beginning there are various arguments how the media can be used to strengthen minority languages by strengthening the prestige of the minority language in question. Nevertheless, the essential question, if minority language media offers directly encourage speakers to use the language more often, needs more thorough research.

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