



## **SCOTLAND'S LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: THE LACK OF POLICY AND PLANNING WITH SCOTLAND'S PLACE-NAMES AND SIGNAGE.**

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### **Overview**

This paper discusses theoretical, practical and comparative aspects of factors affecting Scottish place-names and signage. It deals mainly with the usage of Scottish Gaelic signage. Scottish Gaelic language activists have reached a point where, after campaigning for bilingual signage, there is no clear coherent policy as to where they should go and a lack of correct Gaelic forms, so lending some urgency to this issue.

This paper highlights the lack of policy and planning over the linguistic landscape and draws comparisons with signage policies established by other bilingual communities. In so doing it illustrates how far behind Scottish Gaelic is in legislative terms with basic human linguistic rights compared to those achieved by other communities, even ones such as Welsh which fall under the remit of the same state (UK). It draws together the various forms of evidence in order to conclude with recommendations and to initiate debate on the Gaelic signage issue in Scotland.

The following topics will be discussed with detailed examples in order to raise questions and to examine the lack of policy:

- theoretical aspects of the linguistic landscape;
- signage issues;
- legislation for signage;
- Scottish signage; the linguistic inheritance, issues, practice.
- Recommendations.

### **Theoretical**

It has to be considered before commencing this discussion just how much signage has spread over the last 100 years with the advent of the mass use of cars and use of commercial signage. A century ago there would have been a landscape largely devoid of signs. That there has been no language policy applied to this growth reinforces the low status that Gaelic has in Scotland.

### **Concept of 'Linguistic Landscape'**

It is in the language planning field that issues related to the idea of linguistic landscape first emerged. In Belgium and Quebec language planners recognised the importance of marking the boundaries of linguistic territories through the regulation of language-use on public and commercial signs including billboards,



shop fronts, street-signs as well as place-names. It is here that we find what is known as a 'territorial' solution to language problems.

### **Critique**

It can be seen that a clear demarcation or linguistic boundary does not exist for Gaelic and of course Gaelic is in a very different linguistic situation from Flemish or Quebecois. Hard and fast linguistic boundaries would not be useful in helping Gaelic reverse language shift (hereafter RLS) partly because if we made a linguistic boundary in Scotland where would we put it and also it would mean that people outwith that boundary would be outside the projected Gaelic speaking area. So, for example, central-belt Gaelic speakers would not be included in this territory making such a territorial solution both exclusive and unworkable.

However, I would like to get away from a strictly territorial approach and propose that the term 'linguistic landscape' be used without the notion of hard territorial linguistic boundaries and use it more as an apt way of describing signage and place-name issues.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) have stated that the linguistic landscape has two functions, informational and symbolic, and their discussion is summarised below. In addition, one has added a mythological/ folkloric function.

### **Informational**

Landry and Bourhis have noted (1997) that the most basic function of the linguistic landscape is that it serves as a marker of the geographical territory inhabited or previously inhabited by a language community. As we have seen in Belgium it has been used to serve to delineate the territorial limits of a language group. The usage of a language on public signs also conveys the expectation that the language in question can be used to obtain services from public and private establishments in a territory. However, a feeling that one's own language is not respected can be experienced when the language of public signs is not matched by the ability to use it for obtaining services. Landry and Bourhis state (1997:25) 'Such discrepancies are most likely to occur in bilingual environments in which the relative status and functions of competing languages are unstable...'

Landry and Bourhis have noted (1997:26) how the linguistic landscape can also provide information about the sociolinguistic composition of the language groups. Public signs can be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. The predominance of one language on public signs relative to other language groups can reflect the relative power and status of competing language groups. In this situation we find that the majority of signage is written in the language of the dominant language group with only a few signs in that of the weaker language group.

### **Symbolic Function**

It is reasonable to assume that the absence or presence of one's own language on public signs has an effect on how one feels as a member of a language group within a bilingual setting. Having one's language enshrined on most private and public signs should contribute to the feeling that the in-group language has value and status. Landry and Bourhis have suggested (1997:27); 'that the symbolic function of the linguistic landscape is most striking in settings where language has emerged as the most important dimension in ethnic identity'. They also suggest that the presence of the minoritized language (Gaelic, for example) in the linguistic landscape 'can contribute most directly to the positive social identity of ethnolinguistic groups'(1997:27).

Exclusion of Gaelic from signage can convey a message that it is not valued and has little status in society. Furthermore, such exclusion conveys the idea that Gaelic is of little use for conducting public affairs this reinforcing a diglossic situation to the advantage of the dominant language. Absence of the in-group language on signage may also consolidate a sociolinguistic norm leading group members to use their own group language in an ever declining range of language domains.



In combination with other measures of exclusion (e.g. the unavailability or banning of education in the minority language), Landry and Bourhis state (1997:29) 'absence of the in-group language from the linguistic landscape can lead to group members devaluing the strength of their own language community, weaken their resolve to transmit the language to the next generation, and sap their collective will to survive as a distinct language group'. All symptoms that we see with Gaelic.

Landry and Bourhis have noted (1997:28) how 'Absence of the minority language on public signs may lead activists to lobby.. [the] authorities to include the minority language on government signs'.

Such demands may be backed by graffiti campaigns designed to add the subordinated language to signs within the existing or ancestral linguistic zone of the minority group. More radical graffiti campaigns may block out or deface signs in the dominant language and replace them with words in the minority language.

Landry and Bourhis add (1997:26) that 'Dominant group authorities often control the police and judicial apparatus needed to repress such graffiti campaigns, though the financial cost of replacing defaced public signs may be such that the authorities may eventually reach a compromise over the language of public signs'.

Recent campaigns have been seen in Cornwall, Brittany, Euskadi, and Catalunya and most effectively in Wales. Indeed it would appear that it is a norm for a language movement to conduct a signage campaign. So despite the humble nature of our signage graffiti campaigns can provide a dynamic portrait of both current and past conflicts over the language of signage and show how the level of vitality that the minoritised language group has.

Following on from this Bourhis has proposed (1997:29) that the systematic use of the in-group language on signage may result in a 'carryover effect' that can contribute to the emergence or maintenance of a sociolinguistic norm favouring greater use of the in-group language in an increasing range of language functions both public and private. The prevalence of the in-group language on signage contributes to the status of the language which in turn affects how group members perceive the strength and vitality of their own language group.

Landry and Bourhis have then gone on to illustrate empirically that signage can influence language choice. From their studies in Quebec they demonstrated the 'carryover effect' of the linguistic landscape on language behaviour. They state that: 'The presence or absence of the in-group language in the linguistic landscape is related to how much speakers use their in-group language with family members, friends and neighbours' (1997:45). The results of their study suggests that the presence of public and private signs written in the minority language may act as a stimulus for promoting the use of the minority language in a broad range of language-use domains. In addition, with what they term as low and medium-vitality groups, such as Gaelic, they state that they need to ensure the visibility of their own group language on public signs to help maintain or restore the use of their own group language in key domains. Weak vitality groups deprived of visible signs of their language in the linguistic landscape may lose the will to use their own language in certain language domains this further eroding their position. A good strategy for weak groups is to maintain their language on private signage. Landry and Bourhis conclude that these informational and symbolic functions of the linguistic landscape may constitute an important factor in the processes of language shift and language maintenance. They add that (1997:46) language planners and activists can ill-afford to ignore the issue of the linguistic landscape, not only as a tool of RLS but also as another front in 'consolidating vitality'.

### Mythological / Folkloric

To Landry and Bourhis's conclusions I would like to add that there is a mythological function to the linguistic landscape of especial importance to societies that have kept their native religion and to a certain extent with Celtic and Germanic groups. This function is that places in the landscape are so named so as to provide a focal point for various traditional stories, sagas and myths that are part of the in-groups traditional culture. For example, we have Strath Bran, and the stories about a hound, Bran, of Fionn MacCumhail. In Cornwall we have various places associated with Arthur, in Scotland we have various places that hark back to the earlier P-Celtic period with mentions of names like Mabon, a personal, but



also a deity name, found in southern Scotland. In this way names of mythological content act to give added sense of place and belonging of the in-group to its territory and a feeling of timelessness, of being there since the Iron Age. Equally such names are all important to other indigenous cultures especially ones who have suffered from genocide such as the native peoples of the Americas and Australia. Often the surviving name referring to a deity is all that remains of their culture. Such places help the mnemonic device needed in storytelling. They provide the trigger for the story, numerous of which are the 'how this place got its name' type story found for example with older Gaelic native speakers. In this way names help the traditional culture to be transmitted and they help cast a thread back hundreds if not thousands of years.

One last point especially to bear in mind considering Gaelic is how place-names and therefore signage not only represents existing linguistic territory but also past, ancestral territory. It is evident from the amount of interest shown in names that people intrinsically feel that the names on the landscape are identifiable with community and nation. To take away any of these names and replace them with other names in a different language takes something away from the community, it feels like invasion, and adds, literally, territory to the neighbouring language group. It means that names become jealously guarded. They may not reflect the actual linguistic divide at all. In Wales the start of Welsh place-names very much marked the language border well into the 1900s. On the Cornish border, where the language actually faded hundreds of years ago, Cornish names abruptly start and along with the Tamar provide a clear and distinct political border. Names give this sense of place, of living in history.

Furthermore, names on signage re-affirm our sense of place but signage does not stop at place-names, words jump at us with every glance and in Scotland it has become the practice, except for the Western Isles and Skye and some areas of the north west coast, for the signage to be monolingual and in the official language - English. With this usage it utters a denial that Gaelic ever existed and so acts to de-legitimise Gaelic usage amongst users and non-users alike. Every sign and label in the linguistic landscape from those on the roads, on the street, at work, at school, to those on jam-jars, is in the automatic default language - English. This is not the norm in Europe but has become the norm in Scotland.

#### Function of signage in the RLS effort

The Function of bi-lingual signage for the RLS effort can be seen in 3 ways :

- 1) the re-legitimization of the minoritised language as it becomes an accepted official form
- 2) the reinforcement of the minoritised language in the overall RLS effort
- 3) if Landry and Bourhis are correct, the increase of minority language usage across an increasing range of domains.

#### Examples of signage policy and issues from other bilingual communities

Legislation can only go a certain way in helping RLS as to legislate for the crucial areas such as intergenerational transmission would be difficult. However, with signage policy it can be shown that much can be done by legislation. Introducing signage in the minority language in itself can be seen as an important part of what I call the re-legitimization of the language from an earlier point where the language has been de-legitimised. It is not an end in itself and has to be seen as only part of the totality of the RLS effort. However, their effect is far reaching. I shall not attempt to enter into the realm of economic theory and measure their 'value' as Grin has , as their value is measured to me in social-capital value. They provide a sense of place to the minority language speakers and for everyone travelling through the land an instant language and history lesson. I look forward to the day when Europe's rich mosaic of languages are rightfully reflected by signage.

#### Signage as an issue : Carinthia and Nafarroa

Besides Scotland, Cornwall and Brittany there has been recent controversy over signage issues in both Carinthia, Austria and the Navarre part of the Basque Country.

In Carinthia the signage issue hit the headlines when Jorg Haider of the euphemistically titled Freedom Party clashed with the Slovene minority using inflammatory language. Brigitte Alfter writing for Eurolang in



**CONGRÉS MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**CONGRÈS MONDIAL SUR LES POLITIQUES LINGUISTIQUES**  
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2001 reported that he stated that he 'would do anything he could' to avoid an increase in the current number of bilingual signs and later indicated that the signs represented a 'sneaking Slovenisation' of the southern part of Carinthia. In response the Austrian Constitutional court, to Mr Haider's chagrin, raised the issue of enforcing Austrian minority rights laws such as bilingual public education, bilingual signs and recognition of minority languages as official languages in certain regions. In addition, they changed the minimum requirement for bilingual signs from 25% of minority language speakers in a given area to 10%. Haider refused to implement this ruling and more recently has called for all bilingual signs to be removed. The situation remains unresolved at the point of writing.

In Nafarroa, meanwhile, also starting early last year, the regional government decided to reduce the legal status of Basque in the so-called 'mixed' Castilian/ Euskara area. They stated that all the bilingual signs in the mixed area were now to be in Spanish only along with all official documents, this was to take immediate effect. Criticism came immediately from the Basque community there but without success. However, the President of Nafarroa, Jose Luis Casteljou, has condemned the decision. Again this situation is still ongoing and both examples illustrate the political fallout and anger raised on issues of signage and place-names.

### Cymru / Wales

The signage campaign in Wales: the successful use of direct action to win bilingual signage

The signage campaign in Wales was begun in 1964 by Cymdeithas Yr Iaith (Welsh Language Society) who started writing letters to local authorities and then went on to replace some signs that had been anglicised with the name in its correct form. By 1967, facing official intransigence, English signs were taken down with activists giving themselves up to the police. The authorities then moved to the position where each separate sign had to be applied for (sound familiar). As Ned Thomas observed (1971:86): 'Everywhere direct action is the child of bureaucracy'. In Oct 1968, after further letters to the authorities, the painting campaign started after Cymdeithas decided at its AGM: 'that Cymdeithas start an illegal, non-violent campaign to ensure to Welsh its deserved place in every aspect of local and central government in our country'.

From then on English only signs were painted out. Instructions were precise and responsible, signs were chosen to be deleted, with warnings to avoid danger and private signs. The campaign started in January when 50 Cymdeithas members defaced signs and went to Betws y Coed police station to admit what they had done. Fines ranged from £2 to over £50. All Cymdeithas members pleaded not guilty on moral grounds as they were not guilty of malicious damage. It was conviction, principle and conscience that had stimulated their actions not malice or vandalism. Many refused to pay the fines and many were imprisoned or had property seized as a result.

In 1969 the Secretary of State for Wales, then George Thomas, stated that he did not like these tactics and the Government, while accepting a principle of 'equal validity', did not accept bilingualism. Cymdeithas issued a 12 month amnesty while the authorities were again written to.

The General Meeting of November 1969 resolved: 'that we inform all the local authorities of Wales that we are stopping the painting of signs for a year and press them in the meantime to erect every sign in Welsh (giving priority to Welsh) in spite of the recommendations of the Welsh office'.

In 1970 further imprisonments (Dafydd Iwan) and protests followed. By October Cymdeithas decided the following:

'Since the truce has come to an end and the local authorities have not responded to our requests (with some exceptions) we must move to eradicate the remaining English road signs. A proclamation will be placed on these signs and then we will proceed to remove them systematically, avoiding as before any signs which warn of danger'.

The authorities were again written to and some local councils began to move towards adopting a bilingual policy. However, in December 1970 removal began at Post Mawr/ Synod Inn.



The list sent out of signs to be removed included: English only names of towns (Swansea); misspelled Welsh names (Caerphilly); English-only signs on government and council buildings; car park; lay by; in; out; no exit; station; bus station; British rail; bus stop; public-footpath; scenic route; mountain road; ancient monument; toilets; gents; ladies; picnic area; camping; caravan park; alternative route; waiting limited.; road clear; no through road; litter; no litter; library; town centre; pier; to the beach; museum.

By February 1971 the government stated it was going to set up a committee to look at the issue but at the same time arrested eight leading members of Cymdeithas for 'conspiracy to move and destroy road signs'. They were given suspended sentences for up to a year.

Protests and arrests rocketed, signs continued to be destroyed and the state responded in an increasingly strong arm way throughout 1971 and on into 1972. By September 1971 however, the battle had been won. Even before the Bowen Committee reported local authorities abandoned erecting English-only versions although the Welsh Office had responsibility for them, while the Welsh Office itself was said to be preparing for a wholesale change over.

### The emergence of a signage policy

Place-name recommendations to the Bowen Committee are also of interest in our comparison with Gaelic, as they show the development of a policy.

1. Welsh names or words which are obviously of Welsh origin. The correct Welsh spelling should be accepted as the official and only form of these words, e.g. Porthmadog, Caernarfon, Aberdyfi, Cydweli.
2. Welsh names which have English equivalents. Both names should be officially recognised and both should appear on every sign with Welsh first: e.g. Abertawe / Swansea, Abergwaun / Fishguard, Caergybi / Holyhead. There was also a suggestion that in the Welsh speaking areas of Wales, there is no need for an English name for villages, and that the Welsh name should be the only official name.

3. English names. In the few cases where there is and has been no Welsh name at all, the English word should be recognised. But Cymdeithas asked that where there was once a Welsh name and it has been lost, it should be brought back and recognized officially on signs.

Technical aspects of signage in the UK follow the advice given by the Worboys Committee in 1963, for which there is not space to discuss in detail.

### Present day signage policy after the Welsh Language Act (1993)

Following the Welsh Language Act of 1993, Welsh Councils had to prepare Welsh language schemes. Part of this dealt with signage. For example, Cardiff's signage policy states: 'All newly provided and replacement public information signs for which the County Council is responsible, including highway signs, those on vehicles, and external and internal signs at buildings owned or occupied by the County Council, will be bilingual'.

It further stipulates that:

'For highway and road traffic signs, and public car parks, new and replacement bilingual signs will be provided in the course of maintenance and improvement works. However, it is proactive in this replacement stating: 'A ten year programme for the replacement of all highway and road traffic signs will be implemented to ensure that, ultimately, every sign of this type in the City and County of Cardiff is bilingual. Within this programme, priority will be given to those signs in the City Centre and on the main access routes to the City'.

### Legislation in Euskadi and Catalunya

#### Euskadi

The law is as follows:

Basic law of the standardization of the use of Basque (1982)

Article 10

1. The official names of the territories, urban areas, groups of population, geographical features, urban roads and, in general, all place-names of the Basque Autonomous Community, will be established by the government, the Provincial Institutions of the Historic Territories or local corporations in their respective areas, always respecting the original Basque, Romance or Spanish, with the correct academic written form of each language.

In the case of a conflict between the local corporations and the Basque Government over the official names mentioned in the previous paragraph., the Basque Government will resolve the conflict after consulting the Royal Academy of the Basque Language.

2. Traffic signs installed on the public highway will be written in bi-lingual form, while respecting in all cases the international norms and the need for security and legibility by the users.

3. If these names are considerably different, both will be considered official, with regards to highways signs.

### **Catalunya**

From the 1998 law on language policy:

Article 18

Place names

1. The Catalan version of the place names of Catalonia are the only official ones, in accordance with the linguistic norms of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, except those of the Aran valley, where they shall be in Aranese.

2. Decisions regarding the names of municipalities and comarques are governed by the legislation on local authorities.

3. Decisions on the name for urban streets and villages of every kind are the responsibility of the local councils, and decisions on other names in Catalonia, including inter-city roads, are the responsibility of the Generalitat.

4. Names that paragraphs 2 and 3 refer to are the legal ones for all purposes and signs shall be written accordingly. The Generalitat, heeding in all cases the international regulations which have become part of internal law, shall regulate the normal use of Catalan on public signs.

We can see that both these are a substantial piece of legislation with the clear aim of normalising both Basque and Catalan in their respective linguistic landscapes. While Gaelic is not as widely used as Basque or Catalan, it is a policy such as this with such a scope that would benefit Gaelic both in its relegitimization and for its increased usage.

### **Brittany**

In this most repressed of Celtic countries which still faces up to policies of linguistic genocide from a jacobin dominated French state incremental progress is being made toward bilingual signs. Several major towns and cities have bilingual signs e.g. Kemper (see Fig.) Even in Roazhon / Rennes many of the street name signs are bilingual. Brittany offers a useful contrast to Scotland, albeit with a far greater number of

Breton speakers compared to Gaelic speakers in Scotland. It is here that we have the Breton speaking population in the west yet with high densities in the two cities Rennes and Nantes, areas that were never very strongly Breton speaking. This compares well with the distribution of Gaelic speakers on the northwest coast and islands and high concentrations in the central belt.

Current policy appears to be where the community at commune or town level decides on signage. Research into place-names is currently being conducted at the Karaes branch of Ofis ar Brezhoneg in order to supply the correct forms to local councils. This follows on from the work of the Skol Uhel ar Vro (Institut Culturel de Bretagne) which under Divi Kervella set up Ar Greizenn Enklask war an Anviou-lec'h ar Panellou-henchan, (the commission for toponymie and signalisation). This body is paid for by the Breton regional authority.

European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML)

Under Part 3, Article 10, para. 2, (g), the ECRML, ratified by the UK, provides for regional and minority language place-names.

It states:

2) ( preamble) 'In respect of the local and regional authorities on whose territory the number of residents who are users of RML's is such as to justify the measures specified below, the parties undertake to allow and/or encourage:

the use or adoption, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s), of traditional and correct forms of place-names in RML's'.

We may ask the question that do any of these (or others) offer a useful model compared to Scotland's linguistic situation? Only indirectly. We know that Gaelic usage is far less than Basque or Catalan but need the issue of signage necessarily be part of a numbers game anyway. Not only are we reflecting the linguistic rights of Gaelic speakers in our signage but are we not also reflecting the shared Scottish linguistic heritage and the inheritance of most Scots to a broader Gaelic heritage.

### **Scottish signage: the macro picture**

Issues with Gaelic and Scots: Scotland's present and past linguistic situation

Scotland herself has a diverse linguistic heritage. Medieval Scotland had a linguistic mosaic and the charters we have reflect that many scribes may have been multilingual. Scotland then was made up of five distinct ethnic groups. Often it is only with place-names that we can seek to discover anything about these peoples yet incredibly, despite this untapped wealth of information, they are ignored. There are now no place-name departments and no funding for research.

#### **Scotland's five historical ethnic groups**



Firstly we have the Pictish language which although found all over northern Scotland was eventually driven into the north-east after which the language declined after the linking of Pictavia with Gaelic-speaking Scotia. Gaelic spread out from its earlier base in Argyll to encompass all of northern Scotland. Eventually from the 10th century onwards it spread into southern Scotland. Galloway remained a Gaelic speaking area until the 17th century.

In the south the earlier language was British, it developed in the same way as Old Welsh to Middle Welsh and was known as Cumbric ( cf. \*Combrec > Cymraeg 'Welsh') by the 10th century. It provides Scotland with her oldest literature, Y Gododdin being referred to as 'The Oldest Scottish Poem'. Cumbric declined rapidly in the 12th century (after a 10th century expansion) as the burghs were set up and Anglo-Norman landlords brought in English speaking farmers or in some cases such as Lanarkshire it was displaced by Gaelic speakers.

However, English was not a recent arrival, the Anglians had been established in the south east Scotland since the mid 7th century as the northern part of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria. Even though their power waned they left their language which would develop from northern middle English, or Inglis, into Scots. The other language which has made a mark on Scotland's toponymy is Norse, which was still spoken in the Orkney's until the 19th century (known as Norn). It was found along many of the coastal areas from Galloway to Lewis with extensive settlements in Caithness. It is in some of these previously partly Norse-speaking areas (i.e. in the 12th century), such as the Western Isles, that we find the strongest surviving Gaelic speaking communities today.

Scots became the language of commerce and prestige, and importantly for place-name research, the language of official documents as it gradually replaced Latin. In the medieval period and with the development of the Baltic trade it spread up the north-east coast. Gaelic held fast along the Highland Line and in the south-west.



However, with the collapse of Gaelic Scotland, a process symbolized by the 1609 Statutes of Iona and Culloden in 1745, the notion spread that Gaelic somehow held Scotland back from being 'North British'. Not only was English power against Gaelic but much of the lowland Scottish establishment as well. In the face of prejudice and a hostile education system Gaelic declined away to the west coast and the islands and this situation and process of decline remains today. Today the linguistic map is made up of Scottish Standard English mingled with some Scots speakers and increasingly marginalised Gaelic speaking communities in the Western Isles with a large numbers of speakers living in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

It is with place-names however that we can see this diverse linguistic heritage and see the earlier extent of Gaelic usage throughout much of today's Scotland.

### **The process of anglicisation**

Charters in the middle-ages were written in Latin and later in Scots. It was a time of low literacy levels. The government was Scots-speaking and when noting orally transmitted Gaelic names it appears they spelled them using Scots. Its not that there was not a Gaelic spelling, just that there was no role for Gaelic in official documents. For example, even though we have Gaelic A'Mhorbhainn, charters such as RMS spell it as Morvarne, 1476, today spelled as Morvern. Also we have Raterne, 1488, RMS, for Rath Eireann and Bin Wreck on Pont's map for Beinn Bhreac.

### **The Ordnance Survey (OS) Gaelic names policy**

The OS today does have a Gaelic names policy drawn up with the Gaelic liaison committee. This may reflect the current attitude of the OS towards Gaelic and has some controversial aspects to it. For example, within the natural environment category it states (2000:6) for landform features that historical mapping, local usage and the Gaelic committee will be consulted but for water features the committee will not be consulted. Within the man-made feature category it states that 'map preference will be given to the English only depiction', suggesting somewhat that Gaels both, pre-date, and did not name, man-made features or water features. Overall the OS policy reflects a minimalist approach to Gaelic usage where Gaelic is offered as a favour rather than a right

The usage of signage casts an actual and imagined line of demarcation of language usage. On crossing the Severn, the Tamar or the Channel one is immediately struck by the change of language on place-name signage and it is this combination of a language change with a political border that gives place-names and signage their political bite. In Scotland this perception seems to remain at the Highland Line although this has not been a linguistic border for a 100 years. Therefore when planning our bilingual signage should we follow this perception and what do we do about Gaelic speakers in the Central Belt

This leads onto the following important and key questions:

- Where should the Gaelic signs be - where Gaelic is actually spoken, or where it was spoken?
- How far back are we to go?



- What do we define as a 'traditional' Gaelic speaking areas - today's areas or the Highland Line, wherever that may have been, or something else?
- If we do get a bilingual policy who will have to do the research to provide the correct Gaelic forms? If these are not ready the totality of an envisaged bilingual policy cannot be implemented.
- What about Gaelic-only signage areas?
- While the above points deal with the past and present, of language as both existing and as 'heritage', how do we reflect the aspirations of the Gaelic-speaking community and the development of new Gaidhealtachd's?
- What is the policy when these aspirations clash with those of English-speaking Scots?
- Do we need bilingual signs in Roxburgh and Selkirk, Inglis / English-speaking areas since the mid-7th century?
- Should we start introducing signage in Gaelic for English names in the south-east, for example, that never had a Gaelic form? (This also refers back to aspirations of the Gaelic community and future Gaidhealtachd areas).
- Should there be a role for the local community in deciding their signage?

#### **Current Scottish Executive 'policy' and ongoing issues.**

A recent letter (27th April, 2001) from Sarah Boyack, the previous Scottish Minister for Transport, outlined current practice. Firstly, bilingual road signs were found to require special authorisation and before this could be granted 'several important road safety and technical issues had to be resolved'. After taking 'some time' over this a format was established. The format will be both languages in the same type-face with Gaelic in green above English in black. On trunk roads the format is for Gaelic in yellow above English in white. The executive sent 'formal authorisation' to the Highland Council to put up these signs in April 2001. There is still no sign of these signs!

This unresolved issue has carried on further with one Highland Councillor, Dr. Michael Foxley, accusing the Executive of 'institutional racism' because of their inertia over the erection of bilingual signs.

Furthermore the Executive now finds itself in the unenviable position of contravening the ECRML (Part 3, Art.10, para.g.) which the UK has ratified, which I have mentioned above

A current website forum set up by Highland Council has given us a view of an evolving Highland Council 'signage policy'. It states that bilingual signs can go up when two criteria have been met. These are:

- 1) that bilingual signs be approved by the local community following a consultation exercise;
- 2) that they only be erected once the English-only signs have become damaged.

As can be seen it is hardly the principle of 'active offer', or anything proactive about it at all. Rather the paradigm from which this operates is a kind of grudging admittance that some signs have to be provided. But as we can see nothing about what level this signage is to go down to, i.e. street level, or town planning level. Other get-out clauses indicate that there will be no bilingual signage on trunk roads at all. Of interest though is that Highland Council have stated that where the Gaelic form is close to the English one the Gaelic only will be used and they add, tellingly, so as to 'avoid the general clutter of bilingual signage'. . . Meanwhile the familiar default is still in operation i.e. for English-only signs. Despite these promises English-only signs are still going up.

It reflects the general malaise of a monoglot English-speaking paradigm being the constant default position of all government bodies, where English is always the assumed correct official form and where everything for Gaelic has to be campaigned for. As I have shown, in other countries bilingual signage is implemented de-facto, without question, it is the norm, it has full legislative backing, and it has become institutionalised. Here if there were no campaigners it is unlikely anything would happen and the government would dismiss the signage issue. One may conclude that these government agencies are not the people to trust with the Scottish people's linguistic landscape and heritage.



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So when planning for signage Should there be a national policy, a regional one, or a local one, all of these, or a combination of these? It may be asked as well as to what extent, if any, we should include in our signage the other historic languages; Cumbric, Pictish and Norse.

**Scottish signage: problems with practice and implementation**  
**Linguistic problems**

The anglicisation process appears in the documentary record as early as the Pont maps (16th century) and with Blaeu (1633), much of Scotland is still, unfortunately, controlled by a small elite of landowners running large estates. It was here on many of these estates that implemented policies of the anglicisation of place-names. In the 1850s the British government published its Ordnance Survey of maps and these also acted to anglicise Gaelic place-names. When I say 'anglicise' this process happened in two ways: 1) the translation of the Gaelic form into English (Gaelic Drochaid Neithich to English Nethybridge) English then becoming the official form; or 2) the rendering of the Gaelic form into a soundalike word in English (e.g. Kyle of Lochalsh derived from Gaelic Caol Loch Aillse). This process has continued today with little modification and has played its part in de-legitimizing the language It has meant that we have had the creation of 'gibberish' place-names which mean nothing in either English or Gaelic but have become the official form today.

**Disempowerment by Design**

We have seen that the Executive has determined that Gaelic names appear above the English one in green. But is this acceptable? It can be argued that the black version 'looks' more 'official' than the green version, thus reflecting the power relationship between the two languages, leading to disempowerment by design. It can be argued that the Gaelic version be in black as the proper official form and that the anglicised versions be in a less bold colour. In Gwynedd, Wales, for example, the Welsh form on signage always comes first.

**Levels of signage: evolving an appropriate policy for Scotland**

'Levels of signage' refers to what extent signage is applied into the landscape. The Scottish Executive appears to assume that only place-name signage is at the centre of the issue. It is not. The issue is every level of public-sector signage down to the toilets in the local tax office, and then beyond that the issue of the usage of bilingual signage in the private sector.

It means also street signage. Are anymore 'Acacia Avenues' acceptable as part of Scotland's place-name heritage when her own languages are ignored? It means also that Gaelic and Gaelic signage has to have its place in all stages of town-planning, and indeed as the Welsh have found with their language, there is a great need for an awareness of the needs of Gaelic speakers within town-planning and how certain projects can impact detrimentally on Gaelic language use.

**Initial Recommendations**

ECMRL

that the state is made aware of its obligations to do with signage, re. ECMRL Part 3 for Gaelic and Part 2 for Scots. And takes immediate proactive action where bilingual signs are assumed to be the norm unless certain other criteria overrules this.

Gaelic / Scottish Place-Name Board + Gaelic Language Board (+Scots)

The creation of a Scottish Place-Names Board, either free standing or working with, and funded by a Gaelic Language Board and/or a separate Scots Language Board.

The functions of this board will be to:

1) Research into current and lost forms of place-names. It is explicit that there is the immediate need for the establishment of a Scottish place-names board researching into names in Scots and Gaelic in order to

provide the correct forms for signage and mapping. Examples of the current crisis are the re-naming of relief features in Arran where the original Gaelic forms, as the language as lost ground there, have been replaced by often superficial nick-names in English given by the climbing, rambling and fishing population (Consolation Tor, Pagoda Ridge, Rosetta Stone, Laidler's Bend, Two Rock Pool, Sharp's Pool). In addition, much research needs to be undertaken to establish the correct Gaelic forms in place-names throughout Scotland.

2) That as a matter of urgency the Scottish Executive in consultation with a Gaelic Language / Place-Name Board devise a place-names policy for signage in Scotland. (c.f. the 1972 Cymdeithas proposals above).

It is envisaged that this policy may vary according to area and the wishes of the local community. These will include issues of whether to have Gaelic-English signage, Gaelic-Scots signage, Scots-English signage, or perhaps all three. The principle to be applied should be that of 'active offer'. The norm will be to replace English monolingual signage with bilingual signage. Furthermore, it is suggested that Gaelic monolingual place-name signage should be encouraged. This will aid the normalisation process. If a community wants English monolingual signage each separate sign will have to be applied for. There have been some complaints about Gaelic signage from those in the tourist industry who, in the press, have been suggesting that Gaelic signage may somehow mislead tourists. It may be asked as to how they know what language the visitor speaks. To a European, for example, English will seem just as foreign as Gaelic.

3) Policy could operate on three levels, national, regional and local. At a national level for example, at airports, stations, motorways, I would suggest that all signage should be bilingual Gaelic and English, ( eg. at Dublin airport with Irish and English signage and Barcelona airport with (Catalan, Spanish and some English signage), which language comes first will need to be established. The principle at the national level is that as Gaelic is a national language then it should be represented on the signage of its national institutions. Therefore as Edinburgh is the national capital and is host to many of these national institutions it follows that Gaelic should be included in its signage. Rennes for example is the 'regional' capital of Brittany. It is not perceived as traditional Breton- speaking area but has many bilingual street names.

4) It is a travesty that there is not today one single post in any Scottish University that deals with onomastics as a discipline. This needs to be redressed. However, thanks to the Scottish Place-Name Society, we do have a voluntary body offering expertise.

5) For the provision of private sector signage it is suggested that the Executive proposes a Scottish version of the very successful Kontseilua project Bai Euskarari ('Yes to Basque'). This has recently adopted by the Bretons as Ya d'ar Brezhoneg. The project encourages the private sector to introduce bilingual signage at work and in their advertising.

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