

Indexing heritage, iconizing language: Linguistic ideology in discourses of Gaelic acquisition in Nova Scotia and New England

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This seminar will examine Scottish Gaelic revitalisation initiatives and linguistic ideologies among disparate diaspora communities in Nova Scotia, Canada and New England, USA. Notwithstanding the advanced state of intergenerational disruption in contemporary Gaelic communities in Scotland and Canada, second language teaching has been prioritized in recent decades as part of official language policy to create new cohorts of speakers. Based on five years of ethnographic research in Scotland and Canada, this paper examines such ‘new’ speakers’ narratives concerning their language learning motivations, identities, and prospects for language revitalisation in each country. I will also discuss preliminary data from a 3-month Fulbright scholarship in Massachusetts, a major destination for secondary emigration from Nova Scotia since the 1870s. This research will assess how Gaelic learners in New England construct and convey their linguistic ideologies and identities, and how these may relate to the better-known Boston Irish diaspora. I show that challenging sociodemographic circumstances in the remaining Gaelic-dominant communities in Scotland and Nova Scotia contrast with current policy discourses concerning the language’s future prospects. In particular, I consider the relative strength of Nova Scotian new speakers’ sense of heritage identity in relation to Gaelic, compared to Scottish speakers’ language ideologies concerning the ethnolinguistic Gaelic community.

Friday, April 29th, 2022

2 – 3:30 PM

Zoom registration: <https://bit.ly/SLXAPRIL29>

GC room 4422 in-person tickets (CUNY community only):

<https://bit.ly/SLXEBAAPR29>