

Beachdan Luchd-Sgithidh air a' Ghàidhlig/
Attitude of Skiers to Gaelic

Anailis air dàta cruinn/An analysis of collected data

Air sgàth Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2010

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Anailis air dàta cruinn / An analysis of collected data (2010)

This report comprises the analysis of data elicited by a survey relating to the presence of bilingual signage at Scottish ski centres. The survey was undertaken by Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG), with funding from Highlands & Islands Enterprise. The target group was nominally 'skiers', but several respondents identified themselves as snowboarders, who nowadays share the ski centre facilities. However, for brevity 'skiers' will be used hereafter, as a generic term for both. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is appreciative of the access to this data freely provided by CnaG.

1. Summary

The data was not sufficiently sound for assertive conclusions to be drawn; what it yields is an indication of what several general attitudes may be.

Gaelic-speaking respondents were almost all supportive of almost all views which were favourable to Gaelic. Most non-speakers liked the bilingual signage but only about a quarter would have disliked the signs had they been in English alone: many would not have noticed the absence of Gaelic. Just over a third of non-speakers knew of the Gaelic heritage of ski centre locations. There was overwhelming doubt that use of Gaelic in marketing could increase profits, or that it could induce the respondents themselves to spend more. Even in that portion of the data which had to be disregarded for analysis because of the unregulated method of collection, only half of the disproportionately large number of Gaelic-speaking respondents believed that increased profits were possible.

The picture which emerges from this very limited study is thus of a small minority of Gaelic-speakers who are strongly supportive of the language's promotion and development, a slightly larger minority of non-speakers who are hostile to it, and a large majority of non-speakers who quite like the visible presence of Gaelic, and are passively supportive of the language without according it much importance in their own lives.

2. Quality of the Data

Most of the data is not valid as evidence in an objective investigation, because of defects in the design of the bilingual questionnaire and the method of sampling the respondents. In several of the questions the Gaelic and English versions differed and it seems unlikely that all the responses were based on a common interpretation. In respect of sampling, there were two methods: an online facility which allowed respondents to be self-selecting, and was thus uncontrolled and apparently open to multiple responses by individuals, some of whom may not have been skiers. This is borne out by the four submissions - all antagonistic to Gaelic - apparently made by one respondent, and by a comparison with responses provided by the other sample, taken amongst skiers at the Nevis Range Ski Centre:

Table 1. Comparison of selected data obtained from online respondents and field study respondents at Nevis Range.

Questions as on questionnaire	Online responses (n=177)	Nevis Range responses (n=82)
A bheil Gàidhlig agaibh?/ Do you speak Gaelic?	Yes: 39 (22%)	Yes: 3 (4%)
A bheil sibh eòlach air daoine le Gàidhlig/ Do you know any Gaelic speakers?	Yes: 126 (71%)	Yes: 39 (48%)
A bheil sibh toilichte na soidhnichean dà-chànanach fhaicinn/ Are you happy to see bilingual signs at ski centres?	Yes: 135 (76%) No: 22 (12%) Indifferent: 21 (12%)	Yes: 55 (67%) No: 6 (7%) Indifferent: 19 (23%)
Mura a biodh iad ann?/ What would you think if they used English-only?	Yes: 35 (20%) No: 94 (53%)	Yes: 9 (11%) No: 22 (27%)
A bheil fios agaibh gu bheil Gàidhlig a' buntainn ris an àite seo?/ Did you know that all the ski centres are in areas with a Gaelic heritage?	Yes: 132 (75%)	Yes: 29 (35%)
A bheil thu den bheachd gum biodh deagh bhuaidh aig a' Ghàidhlig air prothaidean chompanaiaidhean?/Do you think it is possible that the profits of an organisation can be increased by including such a feature as Gàidhlig in their marketing?	Yes: 59 (33%)	Yes: 11 (13%)
A bheil sibh den bheachd gum bu choir barrachd Ghàidhlig a bhith mun cuairt an àite?/ Do you think more Gàidhlig should be used in this way?	Yes, unqualified: 110 (62%)	Yes, unqualified: 29 (35%)

It can be seen that the internet sample had a percentage of Gaelic-speakers more than five times greater than that of the Nevis Range field study sample, as well as higher - sometimes very much higher - percentages of respondents who were supportive of Gaelic signage, and of others who were opposed to it.

The data submitted online is thus only useful in consideration of the differential favour given to particular arguments presented in support of the responses given. The data taken at Nevis Range has more validity, and was used as the basis of this analysis. However, as it was gathered at a single location, on a single occasion, and apparently by both face-to-face interviews and unrestricted distribution of the questionnaires (it is not known if all the Nevis Range respondents were confirmed as skiers or snowboarders), the following analysis can only provide an indication of what skiers' attitude to Gaelic may be, rather than reliable findings.

3. Analysis

3.1. Data gathered online

As explained above, the data as a sample is unreliable, but the reasons respondents gave for supporting or opposing bilingual signage may, in their proportion relative to one another, give an indication of the prevalence of different views.

Gaelic-speakers most often cited language status and assertion of cultural/linguistic distinction as their reasons for wanting to see Gaelic on signs; fewer mentioned heritage, and very few thought of possible benefit to tourism or to Gaelic-speaking skiers. Non-speakers of Gaelic who supported bilingual signs most frequently cited heritage, culture, Gaelic/Scottish identity, encouragement of Gaelic, and its status as a/the national language in that order; some simply thought that showing Gaelic was appropriate and that it would be a ‘shame’, ‘disrespectful’, ‘strange’, or denial of a ‘basic right’ not to have it; only one person thought it might help tourism. Amongst non-speakers opposed to bilingual signage, the most frequent and hostile objections raised were about cost (typically, ‘money could be better spent in other ways’), followed by concerns about confusion (with possible risks to safety); some just didn’t see the point – either because they didn’t have Gaelic themselves, or so few others had it.

With regard to the possibility that the use of Gaelic in marketing could increase an organisation’s profits, or induce them to spend more themselves, those Gaelic-speakers giving an opinion most often cited cultural tourism, interest and the attractiveness of the Gaelic ‘brand’ as reasons for possible commercial success. Only three expressed doubts, but many did not answer the question at all. Amongst non-speakers of Gaelic supportive of the notion, the inherent attractions of culture, heritage and history – both for tourists and themselves as Scots – were thought conducive to increased profits, but as many dismissed the possibility. Apparently applying the question more directly to the ski centre than to the hypothetical organisation of the question, this group believed that skiers were primarily interested in skiing, that finance would be better spent on other things, that only the Gaelic-speaking and non-skiing tourist minorities would be interested, and that Gaelic gave no extra value.

3.2 Nevis Range Data

Of the 85 completed questionnaires, 3 which were completed by staff at the Centre were set aside; they were implicated as employees of the organisation(s) associated with the bilingual signage.

3.2.1 Gaelic-speakers

Three of the remaining 82 identified themselves as Gaelic-speakers.

This included an individual who described his Gaelic as ‘beagan’. All three were male: one in the age-range 17-30, one 31-50 and the third did not give his age. They were all happy to see the bilingual signage, and would have been displeased had it been in English alone, citing cultural heritage, local identity and Gaelic’s status as a/the national language as justification for the language’s use.

With regard to the recognition of the Gaelic heritage of the ski centre location(s), two of the three had not known of this - although whether their unawareness referred the Nevis Range alone (the Gaelic version of the question citing ‘ris an àite seo’), or ‘all the ski centres’ (as in the English version) - is uncertain. The youngest thought that use of Gaelic could increase an organisation’s profits; another did not; the third’s response apparently referred to the supplementary question in English - the appearance of Gaelic on signs did not encourage him to spend more.

All three thought that there should be more Gaelic ‘mun chuairt an àite’/ ‘used in this way’, although the respondent with ‘beagan’ Gaelic felt that it was ‘a good idea to a point, but needs to be assessed cost-wise with other necessary things’. Unlike the other two, he felt that ‘cultar ‘s cànan na Gàidhlig’/ ‘the linguistic/cultural diversity of Gaelic’ was not important to him, ‘but quite nice’.

3.2.2 Non-speakers of Gaelic

The data is analysed here, question by question. It is assumed that the responses given were to the English version of the questions. It should be borne in mind that the number of respondents is small and that no great significance can be attached to any particular number of responses or to the percentages.

(a) ‘Are you happy to see bilingual signs at ski centres?’

The consensus was very positive; although a quarter were indifferent, two thirds were happy, and fewer than one in twelve were not. A greater proportion of female than male respondents were pleased.

Table 2. Nevis Range non-speakers: ‘Are you happy to see bilingual signs at ski centres?’

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range analysis						Females: Total and age range analysis					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Happy	52 (66%)	27 (56%)	-	4	17 (61%)	5	1	25 (81%)	1	10	10	4	-
Not happy	6 (8%)	5 (10%)	-	3	1	1	-	1 (2%)	-	-	1	-	-
Indifferent	19 (24%)	14 (29%)	-	3	9	1	1	5 (16%)	-	3	2	-	-
No response	2 (3%)	2 (4%)	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

(b) 'Do you know any Gaelic-speakers?'

The proportions of respondents knowing and not knowing were approximately similar; this also applied to male and female respondents as groups.

Table 3. Nevis Range non-speakers: 'Do you know any Gaelic speakers?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range analysis						Females: Total and age range analysis					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Knew	36 (46%)	21 (44%)	-	6	10	4	1	15 (48%)	1	5	6	3	-
Didn't know	39 (49%)	25 (52%)	-	2	18	4	1	14 (45%)	-	8	5	1	-
No response	4	2	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	-

(c) Analysis of those respondents knowing/not knowing Gaelic speakers in respect of their being 'happy to see bilingual signs at ski centres'.

This was undertaken to see if acquaintance with Gaelic-speakers, and hence possibly some recognition of issues relating to the language, might have been related to the reaction to the bilingual signage. However, it appeared to have made no difference, and this applied equally to males and females.

Table 4. Nevis Range non-speakers: respondents knowing/not knowing Gaelic-speakers vs reaction to bilingual signage.

	Respondents	Reaction to bilingual signage			
		Happy	Not happy	Indifferent	No response
Knowing Gaelic-speakers	36 (46%)	25 (48%)	1	9	1
Not knowing Gaelic-speakers	39 (49%)	25 (48%)	4	9	1
No response	4	2	1	1	-
Total	79	52	6	19	2

(d) ‘What would you think if they used English-only signs?’

Almost two thirds of respondents did not give a strong opinion either for or against the proposition: a quarter did not offer an opinion at all, and two-fifths were indifferent, with no great difference in the proportion amongst males and females. Of the remainder, those who would not have liked English-only signs outnumbered those who would have been pleased by them by a ratio of two to one. There was a greater proportion of females than males in favour of such signage, but the numbers involved were too small for this to have any significance.

Table 5. Nevis Range non-speakers: ‘What would you think if they used English-only signs?’

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
In favour	9 (11%)	4	-	2	1	1	-	5	-	1	3	1	-
Not in favour	19 (24%)	13	-	3	6	3	1	6	-	3	2	1	-
Indifferent	31 (39%)	18	-	1	14	3	-	13	1	7	5	-	-
No response/ unclear/n/a	20	13	-	4	7	1	1	7	-	2	3	2	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

Comments supportive of the retention of bilingual signage mentioned heritage, culture, pride in Scottish identity and the need to encourage the use of Gaelic, in fairly equal frequency, while those of respondents who would have been content with English-only signs tended to focus on their own inability to understand Gaelic and the pointlessness of providing for a small minority who could read English signs anyway.

(e) 'Did you know that all the ski centres are in areas with a Gaelic heritage?'

Just over a half of respondents did not know: this included a greater proportion amongst females (especially young females) than amongst male respondents. Just over a third, overall, did know, with the cognisant proportion amongst men being twice that amongst females.

Table 6. Nevis Range non-speakers: 'Did you know that all the ski centres are in areas with a Gaelic heritage?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Knew	28 (35%)	21 (44%)	-	7	9	4	1	7 (23%)	-	-	5	2	-
Did not know	43 (54%)	22 (46%)	-	1	17	4	-	21 (68%)	1	10	8	2	-
No response	8	5	-	2	2	-	1	3	-	3	-	-	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

- (f) 'Do you think it is possible that the profits of an organisation can be increased by including such a feature as Gàidhlig in their marketing?'

This question was the first of two in English presented on the questionnaire alongside a single question in Gaelic. Respondents frequently gave a single answer, and in those cases it was presumed to be a response to this first question, unless the content obviously referred to the second. While this question was about a hypothetical organisation, most answers and comments appeared to refer to the ski centre in particular.

Only one in eight thought that an increase in profits was possible; two-thirds did not. The proportions - overall, male, female - show consistency. Amongst this sample, there was clear doubt about the efficacy of Gaelic as a marketing tool.

Table 7. Nevis Range non-speakers: 'Do you think it is possible that the profits of an organisation can be increased by including such a feature as Gàidhlig in their marketing?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Yes	10 (13%)	6 (13%)	-	2	2	2	-	4 (13%)	-	2	2	-	-
No	52 (66%)	32 (60%)	-	6	21	4	1	20 (65%)	1	7	8	4	-
No response	17 (22%)	10 (21%)	-	2	5	2	1	7 (23%)	-	4	3	-	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

Amongst appended comments, the most frequent - although not very frequent - reasons given for a possible increase in profits were the interest which Gaelic might have for tourists, and the loyalty it might induce in Gaelic-speakers. There were only two relevant comments by respondents who doubted the possibility of an effect on profits: 'not really' and 'if you can't read it you don't notice it'.

- (g) (With regard to the use of Gaelic in an organisation's marketing): 'Does it encourage you to spend more money?'

Further to the explanation in (f) above, this was the second English question about the use of Gaelic in marketing. The large 'no response' number shown here is due, in many instances, to one answer having been given for both questions, and in the absence of clear evidence it was presumed to refer to the first question rather than this second one.

A quarter of the respondents gave an identifiable reply to this question, and all rejected the idea that the use of Gaelic would encourage them to spend more.

Table 8. Nevis Range non-speakers (w.r. t. the use of Gaelic in an organisation's marketing): 'Does it encourage you to spend more money?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No	21	14	-	4	8	2	-	7	-	2	4	1	-
No response	58	34	-	6	20	6	2	24	1	11	9	3	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	-

In supplementary comments, a few supposed that tourists might spend more because of an interest in heritage. Respondents' reasons for not doing so focused on disbelief in a connection between their own spending habits and display or use of a language they didn't understand.

(h) 'Do you think more Gaelic should be used in this way?'

The results show that close to a half of these respondents (a slightly greater proportion amongst males than amongst females) were in favour, with 34% being unreservedly positive. Others in this supportive group expressed some reservations in supplementary comments, e.g. Gaelic should be used in one way but not in another. About a fifth, overall, didn't want any extension of the use of Gaelic.

Table 9. Nevis Range non-speakers: 'Do you think that more Gaelic should be used in this way?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Yes	27 (34%)	17 (35%)	-	4	9	3	1	10 (32%)	-	5	4	1	-
Yes, qualified	10 (13%)	7 (15%)	-	1	3	3	-	3 (10%)	-	-	2	1	-
No	17 (22%)	10 (21%)	-	3	7	-	-	7 (23%)	-	3	4	-	-
Indifferent	11 (14%)	7 (15%)	-	1	6	-	-	4 (13%)	-	2	2	-	-
No response	14	7	-	1	3	2	1	7	1	3	1	2	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

(i) 'Is the linguistic/cultural diversity of Gaelic important to you?'

The difference between the Gaelic and English versions of this question (the Gaelic version asked about 'cànan 's cultar na Gàidhlig') would not have been of consequence to the respondents without Gaelic, but the use of the term 'diversity' rendered the English version ambiguous: did it mean Gaelic as a part of the linguistic/cultural diversity within Scotland, or linguistic/cultural diversity (dialects and local traditions and practices) within the Gaelic speech community – which, for non-speakers, might have been an esoteric consideration, and elicited a negative response? Whether or not the respondents involved in face-to-face interviews sought and received an explanation of the meaning, others apparently completed the questionnaire by themselves. Without being certain of what respondents understood by the question, it is not possible to assess the data solicited.

Table 10. Nevis Range non-speakers: 'Is the linguistic/cultural diversity of Gaelic important to you?'

	All Respondents	Males: Total and age range percentages						Females: Total and age range percentages					
		Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Total	0-16	17-30	31-50	51-65	65+
Yes	19 (24%)	14 (29%)	-	2	8	3	1	5 (16%)	-	1	2	2	-
Yes, qualified	11 (14%)	6 (8%)	-	1	3	2	-	5 (16%)	-	-	4	1	-
No	34 (43%)	20 (25%)	-	4	13	3	-	14 (45%)	1	8	4	1	-
Indifferent	10 (13%)	4 (5%)	-	1	3	-	-	6 (19%)	-	4	2	-	-
No response	5	4	-	2	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-
Total	79	48	0	10	28	8	2	31	1	13	13	4	0

J.M.K.Galloway, an Lunasdal 2010.