
Since the publications of Edward Dwelly’s and Malcolm MacLennan’s still widely used dictionaries of Scottish Gaelic almost a century has gone by, and the need for a modern dictionary of the language—modern both in the words and phrases included and in its user-friendly make-up—has long and ever more urgently been felt. This gap has now been filled by Colin Mark’s new Gaelic-English dictionary. The material for the dictionary, reputedly over 90,000 entries (counting headwords and examples of their usage), has been collected in twenty years of study of modern Gaelic literature. As a consequence of M’s emphasis on literary sources, however, terminology from the field of modern information technology (like eadarlàn ‘internet’ or dio ama ‘disc’) is almost entirely absent, coimpiutair ‘computer’ being one of the few words to have found their way in (a list of such terms from modern Gaelic can be found at http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/gaidhlig/faclain/ cuspair/coimpiutair.html).

In the preface M gives a detailed account of how to use his dictionary (xi–xix) and dedicates several pages to the spelling and the notoriously difficult phonology of Scottish Gaelic (xx–xxxviii). M uses IPA symbols to render the pronunciation of vowels, consonants, and peculiar combinations of letters, but in addition to that he has endeavored to explain things in laymen’s terms for those who are not familiar with the conventions of IPA.

The dictionary itself consists of 622 double-columned pages. Headwords, paradigmatic forms, and compounds are entered in bold type. A particular strength of the book lies in the countless idioms recorded for almost all headwords. These are printed in italics and will be a great help for any nonnative student of Scottish Gaelic. Only English translations and explanations are in plain type. Every headword is identified as to parts of speech. Gender is of course always noted. For most nouns and adjectives the genitive and, where applicable, the nominative plural is given. In the case of irregular or difficult verbs like faic ‘to see’ or feum ‘has to, must’, an extensive number of paradigmatic forms is cited, arranged clearly and according to category. Long, complicated, and important entries are contained in boxes that immediately catch the eye of the reader. The clear and exemplary layout makes the dictionary easily accessible for all users. One minor layout error must be noted though: The guidewords at the top of each page have been generated automatically, but unfortunately ‘boxed’ entries were ignored in the process. For example, the very long boxed entry for cuir, cur ‘to put’ goes from p. 192 to p. 197, but the guideword at the top of pp. 192–96 is cupreas ‘cypress’, the last entry immediately before the box on p. 192.

Appendices 1–12 (623–736) deserve special attention. These effectively amount to an easy-to-use reference grammar of Scottish Gaelic: Appendices 1–8 are titled, in order, ‘The Gaelic verb’, ‘The
Gaelic noun’, ‘The Gaelic adjective’, ‘Adverbs’, ‘Conjunctions’ (including various types of clauses), ‘Pronouns’ (including conjugated prepositions), ‘Prepositions’, and ‘Lenition’. All of these sections contain useful tables and are arranged for the benefit of the users. Apart from these elements, which one expects to find in a grammar, the following sections merit separate praise. Appendix 9, ‘The points of the compass’, contains, in addition to an elaborate compass rose, numerous notes on directions and ways of expressing direction in Scottish Gaelic. Appendix 10, ‘Time’, explains the differences in usage and meaning between the various words for time in Scottish Gaelic. Five general words and sixteen more idiomatic expressions for time are dealt with in great detail and with many examples. These are followed by the hours of the clock and numerous calendar terms. Appendix 11, ‘Numerals’, is made up of two sections, the first one explaining the traditional vigesimal Gaelic counting system, the second one explaining the new decimal system that has been introduced to counter the tendency of bilingual speakers to switch to the shorter and more convenient English system, especially when talking about larger numbers (as an example of this M quotes the sentence Rugadh m’athair ann an eighteen ninety-seven ‘My father was born in 1897’, instead of Rugadh m’athair anns a’ bhliadhna ochd ceud deug crìthich fìchead ’s a seachd deug, lit. ‘... in the year eight hundred and-ten (and) four (times) twenty and seven and-ten’).

Appendix 12, ‘Proper nouns’ (forenames, traditional Scottish surnames, and national and international place-names), rounds off this section.

Although Edward Dwelly’s Illustrated Gaelic-English dictionary (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001 [First published, Glasgow, 1901–11]), on account of its sheer mass of entries, will remain the prime source for certain specialized academic work, it can be predicted with confidence that Colin Mark’s Gaelic-English dictionary will soon supereude it as the generally used handbook of the twenty-first century in all other fields of Scottish Gaelic language studies. Beside the hardcover edition here reviewed, a paperback edition has been issued at $47.95, which will make this useful and indispensable tool for learning contemporary Scottish Gaelic affordable for students. [David Stifter, University of Vienna.]


While many minority languages of the world are well studied today and receive attention from linguists and nonlinguists, there are some that, regrettably, are underrepresented in linguistic studies. Such is the case with Romani. This well-informed book provides much needed, up-to-date information about Romani in all its aspects: historical development, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, sociolinguistics, and dialectology.

The first two chapters (1–13) provide an overview of Romani-speaking populations, their histories, and the principal dialects of Romani, together with a map showing the distribution of Romani dialects in Europe and Turkey. Matras notes that British and Iberian Romani are extinct, and that Domari should be considered a different language rather than a dialect of Romani.

Ch. 3 (14–48) discusses different hypotheses concerning the place of Romani origin, migrations of the Rom, and the position of Romani in the Indo-European family. Innovative and conservative features of historical phonology, morphology, and lexicon in different dialects of Romani are presented. The discussion is supported by many examples of lexical correspondences together with an extensive table of sound correspondences between Old Indo-Aryan and Romani, including not only vowels and consonants, but also consonant clusters.

Ch. 4 (49–71) presents a comprehensive description of vowel and consonant systems in Romani. The phonological systems of Proto-Romani and Early Romani are discussed. The development of these systems into the modern dialects is presented in a set of tables for consonants and for vowels. Various phonological and morphophonological processes such as prothesis and truncation, jotation, s/h alternation, and loss of final -s are discussed within the entire range of dialects.

Chs. 5 (72–116) and 6 (117–64) treat nominal and verbal morphology in Romani, respectively. M emphasizes a unique feature of the Romani noun—the existence of two different morphological patterns: one for pre-European vocabulary and another for later European loans. Among the phenomena presented here are derivation and inflection of nouns and adjectives; the development of the pronominal system, with an emphasis on deictic and anaphoric devices; and stem-formation, derivation, and inflection of verbs. The development of tense, aspect, and modality in the various Romani dialects is also discussed.

Ch. 7 (165–90) is devoted to the syntactic structure of Romani, covering such topics as constituent order of the noun and verb phrases, negation, and complex clauses. Ch. 8 (191–213) looks at grammatical borrowings. The unique sociolinguistic situation of Romani explains the fact that it is common for Romani speakers to borrow not only the vocabulary but also various aspects of the grammatical structures of their languages with which they are in contact. Dialects of Romani display crosslinguistically rare examples of the borrowing of prepositions, negative markers, and deictic elements from German, Slavic, and Hungarian, respectively.