

# *A Substitute Name System in the Scottish Highlands<sup>1</sup>*

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*The high incidence of identical names among Gaelic speakers in East Sutherland leads to the use of "by-names" almost to the exclusion of official names. Several varieties of by-names are highly offensive. Appropriate use of the offensive varieties demands an intimate knowledge of the communities' social structure available only to their members; by-name misuse is consequently a source of social tension between Gaelic speakers and English speakers in the area. Nonetheless the practice of by-naming has spread to the English-speaking population, where the entertainment value of by-names takes precedence over their utilitarian value in distinguishing individuals bearing the same name. [Scotland; Gaelic, Celtic, names, sociolinguistics.]*

## INTERRELATIONSHIP AND RECURRENT FAMILY NAMES

### *The Gaelic Subcommunities and the Intravillage Distribution of Family Names*

THE NORTHERNMOST communities in Eastern Scotland where Gaelic still remains in active daily use among part of the local population are the three East Sutherland coastal villages of Brora (population ca. 1,400), Golspie (ca. 1,300), and Embo (ca. 275). The Gaelic spoken in this area is a linguistic relic, geographically and historically isolated from all other surviving dialects.

The Gaelic speakers<sup>2</sup> remaining in East Sutherland today are descended from one distinctive occupational group, the fisherfolk who thrived there during the great days of the herring fishing industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is virtually no fishing in the area today, and both the size of the Gaelic-speaking group and its cohesiveness have fallen off drastically. In Brora and Golspie the Gaelic speakers are marginal to the population of the village as a whole, which is overwhelmingly English-speaking. Most of the Gaelic speakers in these two villages are over sixty years old and

have low social and economic standing in the overall village population. The Gaelic speakers of Embo make a stronger showing in three respects: they are younger, on the average; there are more of them; and they constitute a much higher percentage of the total village population (approximately 38%, compared to approximately 5% in Golspie and 3% in Brora). But even though much of Embo's population is homogeneous, sharing a common descent from the Gaelic-speaking fisherfolk, the village is so wholly a satellite of the relatively prosperous and entirely English-speaking village of Dornoch, two miles away, that the Embo Gaelic speakers suffer the same social and economic subordination as their Brora and Golspie counterparts.

The distinctiveness arising from the Gaelic mother tongue and the fisherfolk background<sup>3</sup> results in a community-within-a-community in both Brora and Golspie—that is, in subcommunities of distinctive linguistic and occupational heritage within the larger English-speaking setting. The same is true of Embo as a whole vis-à-vis Dornoch. Each of these subcommunities is deeply and complexly interrelated by blood and marriage, and the degree of interrelationship is reflected in the high frequency of a very few family names.

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Just three surnames<sup>4</sup> account for 71% of the Gaelic speakers of Brora: there were 13 Sutherlands, 11 MacRaes, and 6 MacDonalds among Brora's 42 Gaelic speakers in 1964. The bearer of any one of these names almost inevitably has one or both of the others in his immediate ancestry, and a bearer of one of Gaelic Brora's less common surnames, Dempster or Jack, is also sure to have a strong showing of Sutherlands, MacRaes, and/or MacDonalds among his parents and grandparents.

The same three names that provide 71% of Brora's surnames provide 90% of Golspie's. There the 1964 count identified 24 Sutherlands, 18 MacDonalds, and 7 MacRaes in a population of 54 Gaelic speakers. Again, any Sutherland is likely to be part MacRae or MacDonald, and any MacRae or MacDonald even more likely to be part Sutherland.

In Embo the surnames present are different,<sup>5</sup> but there are still only three that predominate: MacKay, Ross, and Fraser account for 78% of the Gaelic-speaking group (82 out of 105 speakers), and MacKay alone for 53% (56 speakers). Embo is sometimes called "MacKay Village" by Sutherlanders, and it is almost proverbial that anyone from Embo will be at least part MacKay. Embo natives have a special term ("the real MacKay") for villagers with four MacKay grandparents, although there seem to be few such left in the village today.

In all three subcommunities marriages occur between various degrees of cousins, including first cousins. The relationships resulting from these marriages can be quite complex, as in an Embo case where two MacKays who were double second cousins (that is, second cousins both through their respective mothers, who were first cousins, and through their respective fathers, who were also first cousins) married and produced children who are presumably their own third cousins.

#### *Family-name Distribution and Kinship Interaction Across Villages*

Most of the intermarriage has evidently al-

ways been within a given village. Informants all report that intervillage marriage was less common in their grandparents' day than it is in their own; and even today the distribution of surnames indicates relatively little cross-village movement. There are no Dempsters outside of Brora, no Rosses or Frasers outside of Embo, and no MacRaes or MacDonalds in Embo. There were in 1964 only one (Embo-born) MacKay living in Brora, one (Brora-born) Jack living in Golspie, and one Sutherland (Embo-born but of a Golspie-born father) living in Embo. Only one surname group has an oral tradition of spread across two villages, the MacRaes of Golspie and Brora. Otherwise each group thinks of itself as strictly local to the village where it is currently located.

Still, sporadic intervillage marriage has evidently occurred for several generations past, and thanks to the dual pattern of large families and dense interrelationships most Gaelic speakers can establish at least a tenuous kinship to some family or families in one or both of the other villages. These cross-village relationships are loosely kept track of, but not at all well sustained by visiting or other contact.<sup>6</sup> The relationships that count are the extremely involutioned intravillage kinship ties. These are very well kept track of and consciousness of them is supported by constant contact.

The common mother tongue and the fishing background unite the whole Gaelic-speaking group indiscriminately. Kinship to some extent also unites the whole Gaelic-speaking group as opposed to the rest of the East Sutherland population (with the exception of the Gaelic speakers' own English-speaking offspring), but its primary role is to unite each *village* group and establish subgroupings of near or not-so-near relatives within that village.

#### THE BY-NAME PROBLEM

##### *The Nonfunctional Role of Official Names*

When I arrived in East Sutherland in 1963 to begin work on a phonological study

of the local Gaelic dialect, I was immediately confronted with practical problems arising from the prevalence of "by-names," that is, unofficial designations used almost to the exclusion of official names within the Gaelic-speaking communities.

It was quickly borne in on me that official names were virtually nonfunctional in the communities, for the simple reason that too many people had the same name. Not only are there very few different family names among the East Sutherland Gaelic speakers, but certain favorite Christian names occur with very high frequency throughout the population. Since families up to at least World War I were generally large, the result of the narrow range of name choices was that almost any family of Sutherlands or MacKays was likely to have boys named John and William and girls named Margaret, Isobel, or Jessie. Under these circumstances all my attempts to identify people by official Christian name and family name were met by demands for identification by by-name; no one could make out who I meant, and communication was frustrated until I mastered the by-names of my friends and informants.

For example, new contacts always wanted to know who had sent me to them and what other people I had talked to. It left them completely unsatisfied to hear that I was working with John MacRae in Brora, since that name conjured up either no one at all or several people of the same name. But when I said I was working with Bookka/*buk:a*,<sup>7</sup> then no one was in doubt any longer. Not everyone in the other two villages knew him personally but all had heard of him and most were able to place him in terms of kinship once I had supplied the by-name by which he was known. Within his own village, of course, the by-name placed him instantly and exactly.

#### *Hazards of By-name Use*

It was also soon apparent that to learn the by-names was a far cry from learning how to use them within the community. They had to be distinguished by kind, since

some varieties were either actually or potentially offensive; and then mastery of the entire complicated network of kinship and friendship was required to ensure acceptable use of the varieties identified as offensive. Sometimes it was easy enough to learn a given man's by-name, since the circles in which I moved used it invariably. But if the by-name was semantically empty, as many are, its offensiveness or inoffensiveness was impossible for me to judge unless it was accompanied by obviously derisive overtones. Consequently the minute I stepped out of my accustomed circles I was hopelessly handicapped by ignorance of (1) the social impact of the by-name; (2) the real name of the person in question; and (3) his relationship (as friend or kin) to any new person I was facing.

"Bookka" proved to be an inoffensive by-name, but others I tried to use proved otherwise. For example, I had heard one Golspie man called nothing but Nogie /*no:gi*/, a semantically empty by-name. I had no idea, until I referred to him that way in what turned out to be his brother-in-law's house, that he, and on his behalf his family and close friends, objected to the by-name. What's more, if I *had* suspected it, I would still have been at a loss for some other name by which to call him, since I had never heard him called anything else.

#### *Prerequisites to Appropriate By-name Use*

The tasks involved in coming to grips with by-names in these East Sutherland communities, and the relative difficulty of those tasks, might be summed up as follows: (1) *Learning the by-names themselves* is simply a problem of learning so many new terms corresponding to so many social entities, in a one-to-one relationship. (2) *Learning the functional varieties of the by-names* is a problem of sorting the new terms into several types, e.g., genealogical, descriptive, nonsense, etc. (3) *Learning to use the by-names* is a problem of establishing the offensiveness or inoffensiveness of each by-name, a quality that is not always inherent in the by-name but may vary with the iden-

tity of the speaker and the designee. That is, for each by-name of (for example) the non-sense variety, one must ask "(in)offensive to whom?" and "(in) offensive from whom?" Each such by-name has to be related through the designated individual to every other individual in the community, in terms of the designee's relationship to each of them, by kinship and/or by friendship.

### *Interaction of Linguistic and Social Competence*

Obviously, the last task is far the most demanding of the three, and it was predictably beyond my capacity as an outsider to the Gaelic communities. Yet I learned to speak the East Sutherland Gaelic dialect passably well, and this, added to the fact that I knew the by-names as *terms*, made my failure to learn the appropriate *use* of those terms all the more conspicuous. By learning the local dialect I became the only exception to an otherwise hard-and-fast rule that use of the local Gaelic is synonymous with blood membership in the group.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, I became that bizarre phenomenon, a speaker competent in a linguistic system but incompetent in the social system underlying it. This is a common fate among ethnographic and linguistic fieldworkers who actually acquire the language of their subjects, and, much more widely, of second-generations bilinguals who learn their parents' language without learning the behavioral norms, or the full range of forms to cover the range of social behavior, for that language community.<sup>9</sup> To *speak* like a native and *behave* like a foreigner clearly invites disaster: the expectations aroused by the linguistic skills often cannot be met by the experientially handicapped foreigner, and his genuinely innocent mistakes will appear to be acts of willful defiance of accepted local behavior.<sup>10</sup>

During the period when I was patently a learner, my by-name transgressions were readily forgiven me, as were those essentially social errors that resulted from faulty Gaelic.<sup>11</sup> But because knowledge of the local Gaelic dialect in all cases except my own

presupposed the intimate knowledge of the social system that goes with blood membership in the group, I inevitably lost the special tolerance accorded to the ignorant outsider as I gained skill in speaking the dialect. The consequence was a paradox: the more Gaelic I learned, the less I dared to use the by-names current among all other Gaelic speakers in the area.

The foregoing explains the use of the word "problem" in the heading of this section. But it should be clear that the by-names are *not* problematic for bona fide members of the Gaelic-speaking subcommunities, who have the social competence to use them appropriately. The next two sections will explore the richness and utility of the by-names for community insiders.

### THE BY-NAMES

#### *Predictability versus Unpredictability of Offensiveness*

The by-names in use in East Sutherland fall into several distinct groups: (1) basic genealogical; (2) descriptive; (3) derisive; (4) nonsense; and (5) secondary genealogical patterns built on the second, third, and fourth groups.

The basic genealogical by-names constitute the only group that is predictably inoffensive. They can be used by anyone and of anyone without giving the slightest offense. The derisive by-names are exactly what the name indicates, and are consequently predictably offensive.

Aside from these two, all other groups are unpredictable as to their offensiveness. The descriptive, nonsense, and secondary genealogical groups each include some by-names that do not give offense and some that do, and it is these ambiguous groups that call for full knowledge of the social system of the communities. A description of each of the groups will make the distinction clear.

#### *Basic Genealogical By-Names*

The commonest variety of by-name identifies the individual in terms of his immediate forebears. In the typical genealogical by-

name the individual's own name appears first, in a diminutive-affectionate form, followed by the name of either his father or his mother, again often in diminutive-affectionate form. For example, one of Embo's Jessie MacKays is called Jessie Sarag /*ʒɛsi sa:rag*/ after her mother Sarah, while another is called Allie's Jessie /*ʒɛsi gali*/ (an abbreviation of the possessive phrase /*ʒɛsi ig ali*/) after her father Allie.

Within the basic genealogical pattern the build-up of genealogical tags, memorializing each of a direct line of ancestors in succession, is theoretically limited only by memory. Old Gaelic tradition took this direction, the last ancestor mentioned being the last one known or claimed (often the real or mythical founder of the clan). But in East Sutherland the standard practice is to include only two generations, Ego and first ascending. Thus the second element of a parent's own by-name is almost always dropped if it is strictly genealogical, so that the daughter of Jean George /*ʃi:n ʃo:rɤs*/ is Nanna Jean /*nan:a ʃi:n*/, rather than Nanna Jean George /*nan:a ʃi:n ʃo:rɤs*/. There are rare exceptions, however, such as Rob's William's Kate /*ket ig il'am ig rɔb*/. It is impossible to say whether these exceptions are truly three-generation genealogical by-names, or two-generation by-names with a double second element. That is, /*ket ig il'am ig rɔb*/ might equally well be analyzed as /*ket*/ + /*ig il'am*/ + /*ig rɔb*/, or as /*ket*/ + /*ig il'am ig rɔb*/.

Over consecutive generations the descent is sometimes traced (1) through the male line, sometimes (2) through the female line, and sometimes (3) through a mixture of both:

- (1) present  
     generation: John Sandan  
                 /*ʒɔn sandan*/, etc.  
     father: Adam's Sandan  
                 /*sandan ig a:dam*/
- father's  
     father: Adam . . . /*a:dam* . . . /<sup>12</sup>
- (2) present  
     generation: Willie Maggie

/*wɤli magi*/, etc.

mother: Maggie Sal /*magi sal*/

mother's

mother: Sal . . . /*sal* . . . /

(3) present

generation: Jessa Jean /*ʒɛs:a ʃi:n*/, etc.

mother: Jean George /*ʃi:n ʃo:rɤs*/

mother's

father: George . . . /*ʃo:rɤs* . . . /

There seems to be no social significance attached to the choice of mother's name versus father's name as the genealogical tag in the by-name. In fact, it is not uncommon for a family of siblings to be split down the middle, with some of the children by-named after the mother and some after the father, as in one Embo family:

father: Jimma Duncan /*ʒim:a dɤnkan*/

mother: Jaynach /*ʃe:nax*/

son: Jimma's Ad /*ad ig ʒim:a*/

son: Willachan Jaynach

/*wɤlɤxɤn ʃe:nax*/

daughter: Jimma's Dolina

/*dɔlina ig ʒim:a*/

daughter: Maina Jaynach

/*mai:na ʃe:nax*/

Less common are cases where an individual has two alternative by-names, one in which his father's name appears as the genealogical tag and another in which his mother's name appears: Hughie Jessen /*ɕui ʒɛsɤn*/ (mother: Jessen) or Hughie Rob /*ɕui rɔb*/ (father: Rob).

Rarest of all among the basic genealogical by-naming patterns seems to be the skipping of a generation. In such a case the parental generation is skipped over in favor of the grandparental generation in the genealogical tags:

mother's

mother: Elag /*elag*/

mother: Johannie Elag /*ʒohani elag*/

daughter: Katie Elag /*keti elag*/

Here there is a special reason for the omission of the parental generation: the daughter Katie was an illegitimate child, raised by the grandmother and therefore by-named after her.

The same element of social realism that results in the grandmother's name being attached to the child she raised sometimes leads to what might be called "broken" genealogical by-naming, where kinship patterning of by-names gives way to "social" patterning. In a Golspie family whose children bore the name of the mother, Johnnie's Jess /ʒes ig ē:ni/, and were therefore called Hugh Jess /çua ʒes/, Charlan Jess /čɔ:rlan ʒes/, Johnna Jess /ʒɔ:n:a ʒes/, Chrissie Jess /krɪsi ʒes/, and so forth, one daughter was nonetheless called Mary Belle /meri bel/ instead of the expected Mary Jess /meri ʒes/. The mysterious "Belle" proved to be the woman next door, in whose house the daughter Mary spent more time than in her own home.

The genealogical pattern of by-naming is also occasionally broken in favor of a husband, whose name replaces the parent's in his wife's by-name. The replacement may be only partial, however, so that the wife has alternative by-names, one after the husband and another, chronologically prior, after one or the other parent. This was the case with the Embo woman Coddie's Bellag /belag ig xɔdi/,<sup>13</sup> alternatively Davie's Bellag /belag ig da:i/, after her father Coddie and her husband Davie.

Although it is very common for one of the children to have the same given name as a parent, there seems to be a general tendency to avoid direct repetition of the same name in exactly the same form within a genealogical by-name. Instead, the second-generation individual gets a slightly different diminutive form of the name in question, as in the following cases: Nannie Nanna /nani nan:a/, Bella Belle /bel:a bel/, Peter's Pete /pid ig pidɪr/, Tomi's Tom /tɔm ig to:mi/. In a collection of several hundred by-names, there were only two cases in which direct repetition of a given name form occurred, and in each of these cases there is a third element in the by-name that prevents it from being purely a repetition of syllables: Willie Willie Ross /vuli vuli ɾɔs/ and Willie Willie Meadhon /wɪli wɪli mē:n/. Both of these cases are from Embo.

The relatively small number of people who have double given names (e.g., Bella Jean, Donnie Hugh) often appear to be exempt from genealogical by-naming, since they are usually referred to by just their own two given names in ordinary daily conversation. But if there is any particular need to identify such a person more specifically, say for the benefit of someone who has been away from the community for a long time, most such individuals will prove to have genealogical tags available. A Brora woman customarily referred to as Kate Ann /ket an/ can be identified more fully as Little John's Kate Ann /ket an ig ʒɔn veg/ if necessary, and an Embo woman called Maggie Ann /magi an/ is sometimes specified as Peter Ross' Maggie Ann /magi an ig pidɪr ɾɔs/. However rarely they may be used, these are genuine genealogical by-names and not spur-of-the-moment creations to fill a temporary need. In spite of the dominance and regularity of the genealogical pattern in by-naming, genealogical by-names are not freely manufactured: an individual either has one or he doesn't. The brother of a Brora woman by-named after her father Donelly /dō:l'i/ was never himself by-named Donelly even though he and his sister lived in the same household. His by-name was Willie Crae /wɪli kre:/, and informants rejected any suggestion that he might acceptably or intelligibly be referred to as Willie Donelly /wɪli dō:l'i/.

If there should be two individuals in any village with exactly the same sequence of two given names, the genealogical tag will simply never be subject to omission. An Embo woman called Annie's Jessie Ann /ʒesi an ig ɔrnag/ was invariably referred to with the genealogical tag intact, and the reason for this became clear when a second Jessie Ann appeared in the Embo by-name survey, distinguished from the first as Jeanna's Jessie Ann /ʒesi an ig ʒin:a/.

Since genealogical by-names usually affect a whole group of siblings, the family as a whole sometimes comes to have a *collective* genealogical by-name. For example, the Golspie family with the genealogical tag

Davie /*dai*/ are known collectively as The Davies /*nɤ daiç*/.

### *Descriptive By-names*

Just as the genealogical by-names identify individuals objectively in terms of their immediate forebears, the descriptive by-names identify them objectively in terms of physical characteristics, occupation, or place of origin or residence.

Big Bella /*bel:a vo:r*/ and Red-headed Jockan /*ʒɔkan ruɤw*/ are simply described in terms of their size and hair color, respectively. The same physical disability serves to describe Sinkyan the Leg /*sinkyan ɤ xas*/ and Lame Sandy /*sandi xru:bax*/.

The father of Jessie Cobbler /*ʒesi ɤre:siç*/ was in fact a cobbler, and occupation also accounts for Sandy (the) Ferry /*sandi (ɤm) pɔrʃt*/. This second case is striking in that the man Sandy became a ferryman only in middle life, yet even at that relatively late date he acquired a new descriptive by-name.

The family of Andrew Cromarty /*āū:ntra xru:pa*/ came from the village of Cromarty in the next county to the south, and the father of Jeannie Square /*ʒini skwe:r*/ worked for a time on a croft called "The Square."

Although these by-names may seem as dispassionate and neutral as the genealogical by-names, they do not share the uniformly inoffensive character of the genealogical by-names. After all, a man may or may not object to being reminded that he has red hair or a lame leg; a woman may be good-naturedly cheerful about being stout, or she may be touchy on that subject. A father who was a cobbler might be a source of pride to one person, yet a source of shame to another. Consequently the appropriate use of the descriptive by-names requires familiarity with the attitude of the individual toward that by-name and, of course, toward the attribute that supplies it.

### *Derisive By-names*

Derisive by-names are also a form of descriptive by-name: they are always based on some personal attribute of the individual

in question. But unlike other descriptive by-names, they are not in any way objective or dispassionate. Instead, they reflect a critical view of the attribute singled out, and they are therefore unambiguously offensive.

Some such by-names are painfully pointed. An effeminate man in one of the villages was known as Johnnie Lassie /*ʒɔni lasi*/, and a man who wet the bed when a boy as Spootie /*sputi*/. Jeannie Hen<sup>14</sup> /*ʒini ɤerk*/ is a woman who gabbles incessantly, and Robber John /*rɔbɤr ʒɔn*/ is a tight-fisted shopkeeper whose real name is Robert John. The play on sound evident in the last example is also prominent in the by-name Maggie Juggie /*magani pigani*/ for a woman who was always playing with broken dishes when she was a child.<sup>15</sup>

A number of derisive by-names would seem on the surface of things to be just the reverse, namely, flattering. The by-name The King /*ɤ ri*/ occurs in two of the villages, and in Embo The Laird /*ɤ le:rd*/ and The Bard /*ɤm bɔ:rd*/ as well. But far from being flattering, these by-names are intended to take the individual down a peg for his pretensions to lordly bearing or special talents, and they are unhesitatingly identified as offensive by-names by community members. In general, favorable by-names are conspicuous by their absence in East Sutherland. The closest local equivalents of American nicknames that express admiration for individual prowess ("Champ," "The Rock," "Bullet," "Speedy") are perhaps the soccer by-names mentioned at the end of the next section; but even these are probably derisively intended more often than not.

### *Nonsense By-names*

A third kind of nongenealogical by-name in use in East Sutherland is the nonsense by-name. "Nonsense" is used here very loosely to indicate any by-name element that has either no lexical content or no obvious connection with the individual to whom it is applied. Some by-names that may originally have been derisive or otherwise descriptive are now considered essentially meaningless by the informants who supplied them, and

this current evaluation is accepted here. The word /e:u/, for example, means 'a shout' in East Sutherland Gaelic, but informants refused to identify the second element in the by-name /ali e:u/ with that lexical item. Since it is to them only a part of this particular Allie's by-name, and not the "word" /e:u/ 'shout,' it is to all intents and purposes a "meaningless" element. Other such nonsense by-names of probably meaningful origin are /bɣmbɣl/ (Eng. bumble?), /dɔʒi/ (Eng. dodge?), /braman/ (Gaelic *braman* 'devil?'), /ɣnʒ ɛlan/ (Gaelic *an t-eilean* 'the island?').<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand many of the nonsense by-names consist of wholly meaningless syllables unrelated to any surviving English or Gaelic word: /pwip/ (possibly after the sound of the blasting-whistle in the quarry where he worked), /moyag/, /bigɣri/, /dɣtag/, /brɣ:sk/, etc. Again, some of these by-names may well have been descriptive, but the circumstances of their origin are not remembered by present-day speakers.

One other group of by-names may be reckoned to the nonsense by-names: those which apply to an individual a recognizable given or family name, but one which has no connection with his own official name. Such by-names are fairly common, and a source of great confusion to outsiders. An Embo man named Alec MacKay is known as Charles /ča:rl/, and a John MacKay as Ted /tɛd/. Similarly a Brora man named William Sutherland is invariably called Miligan /mɣligan/, and a Golspie MacRae was known as The MacLeod /ɣn klo:ʒax/. All such cases seem to involve men, and an Embo informant suggested as one source for this type of nonsense by-naming a penchant for dubbing local football players after outstanding players in national or neighboring teams.

Nonsense by-names in particular are difficult to evaluate as to offensiveness, since there is no lexical content to go by. The by-names Fildy /fɣldi/, Cut /kɣt/, and Nogie /no:gi/ give offense; the by-names Dodgey /dɔʒi/, Bebban /bɛban/, and Surl

/sɣrl/ do not. But no outsider could predict which names were the offensive ones. Members of each community are in no doubt about any local by-name, but a Brora Gaelic speaker in Embo, for example, or vice-versa, is sometimes in difficulties. Should anyone be uncertain about the acceptability of a nonsense by-name, or not know how closely his conversational partner is related to a man he would ordinarily refer to by a questionable by-name, the genealogical by-name which is so often also available offers a neutral alternative.

*Secondary Genealogical By-names:  
Genealogical Patterns with  
Descriptive, Derisive, or Nonsense  
Components*

The genealogical pattern is by all odds the commonest. Even individuals who have a prominent by-name of one of the other types will often have a genealogical by-name as well, however rarely it may be used. Big Bella, for example, is alternatively Bella Donnelly /bɛl:a dɔ:l'i/, after her father Donnelly, and Johnny Lassie is alternatively Johnny Willie Meadhon /ʒɔni wɣli mɛ:n/, after his father Willie Meadhon.

Since the genealogical pattern is dominant, it is not surprising that the other varieties of by-name are very often absorbed into the genealogical pattern. That is, a parent's descriptive, derisive, or nonsense by-name is likely to appear instead of his or her real name as the genealogical tag in the children's by-names.

The children of The Island /ɣnʒ ɛlan/, for example, have the genealogical by-names Willie Island /wɣli ɛlan/, Dollackie Island /dɔlaki ɛlan/, etc., and the children of The King /ɣ ri:/ in Golspie have the by-names Robbie King /rɔbi ri:/, Andrew King /āu:ntra ri:/, etc. The Kings /nɣ ri:ču/ are further recognized as a genealogical collective, just like The Davies, mentioned above. The most extreme case of a nongenealogical by-name used within the genealogical pattern is that of the Embo man Bumble /bɣmbɣl/: not only his children have the



genealogical tag Bumble (e.g., Bumble's Jimmag /ʒiməg ig bʏmbʏl/), but also his grandchildren (e.g., Johnnie Bumble /ʒɔni bʏmbʏl/). Even his wife's genealogical pattern was broken in his favor; she was called Sarah Bumble /sa:ra bʏmbʏl/.

Genealogical by-names with two Christian-name components, or with Christian name followed by a descriptive, derisive, or nonsense component, are very common. On the other hand, by-names of the genealogical type in which neither the first nor the second element is a Christian name are very rare. The only three examples in my material consist of two nonsense elements in succession: Bulldan No /buldan no:/, Dodgey Nigi /dɔʒi nigi/, and Fildy's Nal /nal ig fʏldi/. Rarest of all is a first element that is not a Christian name followed by a second element which is. The sole example in my materials comes from Golspie: Jim's Fiddler /fi:lar ig ʒim/.

Evidently a striking parental by-name is quite likely to carry over to the children, whereas a striking by-name in the younger generation so effectively identifies the individual that reference is rarely made to the parental generation. (Within a given village, all descriptive, derisive, and nonsense by-names are unique.) Even in the three cases above where a man's own nonsense by-name appears followed by his father's nonsense by-name, the second element is freely dropped. There are a number of No siblings, often identified collectively as The Noes, and the parental nonsense element probably adheres to Bulldan primarily because it automatically adheres to each of his brothers and sisters (who have Christian names as the first elements of their by-names). The Embo man Nal predeceased his father by many years, and the dominance of the father's image over that of the long-dead son may account for preservation of the second nonsense element in that case. As for Jim Fiddler, the parental identification is probably explained by the fact that there is another man in Golspie who has a by-name derived from his fiddle-playing, The

Fiddler /ʏm fi:lar/, so that an extra distinction is called for.

#### Multiple By-names

There is a great variety of circumstances that may give rise to more than one by-name for a single individual. Some have already been mentioned in passing in the sections above, but the whole range of circumstances will be presented briefly here.

Within the genealogical pattern, two different individuals may compete for recognition: mother versus father (Kirst's Jessie Ann /ʒesi an ig kʏrst/ versus The Devil's Jessie Ann /ʒesi an ig ʏm braman/), or husband versus parent (Betsy (the) Post /betsi (ʏm) pɔst/ versus Aben's Betsy /betsi ig e:bʏn/).

Very frequently the genealogical pattern itself competes with a nongenealogical pattern: descriptive (Billa Babag /bil:a ba:bag/ versus Billa (the) Post /bil:a (ʏm) pɔst/) or nonsense (Belle's Donald /dɔ:l ig bel/ versus Nogie /no:gi/). Rarely, two nongenealogical patterns compete with each other: nonsense (The MacLeod /ʏn klo:ʒax/ versus descriptive (The Fiddler /ʏm fi:lar/). Sometimes this same competition between types of by-name occurs, but in the parental generation and consequently only in the second element of the by-name. The father of a woman named Jeanna had both a genealogical and a descriptive by-name, the latter derived from his white-blond hair. The daughter now has alternate by-names, just as her father did: Jeanna White /ʒin:a hwʏt/ and Jeanna Hughie /ʒin:a çui/.

Occasionally a man will have one by-name in general use in the community and another in use among his cronies. This may become virtually a sex-differentiated use of by-names, as seems to be the case with the Golspie man Willie Island /wʏli elan/, known only among the local men as Bonggie /bɔŋgi/. Obscene by-names are also used only among the men of the community, while the womenfolk use alternative by-names for the same individuals.

Sometimes an individual has essentially

one central by-name, but it is attached to him in a variety of forms: with or without Christian name, with or without nonsense element, in a phonologically variant form, in a straight genealogical pattern, etc. This is the case with the Golspie man Bulldan, who is also called Hector Bulldan /*hɛktər buldan/* and Bulldan No /*buldan no:/*; and with the son of the Embo man The Laird, who is variously called Lairdie /*le:rdi/*, Airdie /*e:rdi/*, and The Laird's Alec /*ɛlik ig ʏ le:rd/*.

There is a great deal of casual variation in the precise form of a by-name, so that an individual will seem to have several by-names, although in reality he has just one with several possible forms. For example, many nouns in the local dialect can follow either of two patterns in construction with the definite article, especially among the youngest group of speakers, so that Sandy the Ferry may be /*sandi ʏm pɔʀʃt/* [*sɑn:di (ʏ) bɔʃt*] with the "nasalizing" form of the definite article or /*sandi ʏ fɔʀʃt/* [*sɑn:di (ʏ) fɔʃt*] with the "leniting" form of the definite article. (The definite article is also sometimes omitted altogether in the case of this particular by-name: Sandy Ferry /*sandi pɔʀʃt/*.) Or the diminutive form of the Christian name may vary, either in the descendant generation or in the parental generation: Tomman Dunc /*tɔman dʌnk/* versus Tommie Dunc /*tɔmi dʌnk/*, and Betty Tòm /*bɛti to:m/* versus Betty Tòmàs /*bɛti to:mas/*. Such minor variations in diminutive form cannot always safely be ignored, however. On the contrary, they are sometimes crucial: Wee Kenna /*kɛn:a veg/* and Wee Kennie /*kɛni veg/* are two different men of the same community.

#### *Absence of By-names*

There are very few members of any of the Gaelic communities who are without a by-name altogether (roughly sixteen in my collection). In most such cases the official family name is distinctive; for example, Betty Cowie and Alan Watt in Embo and Kathy Mary MacPherson in Golspie. On the other hand, a distinctive family name is no guar-

antee that the individual will not develop a by-name. Of the three Mair siblings (the only Mairs) resident in Embo, two have no by-names but the third has multiple by-names.

If a particular family name is unique in one of the villages, it may itself come to function almost as a genealogical by-name—that is, it becomes inseparable from the given name in referring to the individual, and the combination is spoken with the same characteristic stress pattern as a by-name (main stress on the last element). This is especially likely if the family name concerned is monosyllabic or bisyllabic. The Jack family of Brora is a case in point. There was evidently one man with the family name Jack who married relatively recently into the Gaelic-speaking community, and four of his children are among the surviving Gaelic speakers in Brora today. They are called Maggie Jack /*magi ʒak/*, Lizzie Jack /*lɪsi ʒak/*, and so forth. If in another two or three generations the Jacks were to multiply greatly, then presumably more distinctive by-names would be found for subsequent generations of the family. This seems to be what has happened with the Rosses of Embo. Among previous generations there were several individuals with Ross /*rɔs/* as the second element of their by-names: Willie Ross /*vuli rɔs/*, Kennie Ross /*kɛni rɔs/*, Peter Ross /*pidɪr rɔs/*, etc. But now that the number of Rosses in Embo has increased, no one in the present population has just /*rɔs/* as the second element of his by-name. Several have the father's full name as a compound second element, e.g., Sandy Willie Ross /*sandi vuli rɔs/*, Teenie Peter Ross /*tini pidɪr rɔs/*; but others have the mother's name as genealogical tag instead, and a number have developed non-genealogical by-names.

There is just one instance in my materials of an individual bearing one of the dominant family names yet going without a by-name, a MacRae in Brora. Although it is true that he has a double given name (John Donald), and that people with double given names are somewhat more resistant to by-

naming, I suspect that a wider canvass of Brora informants might produce a by-name in this case, too.

#### THE FUNCTIONS OF THE BY-NAMES

##### *Use of Offensive By-names as an Index of Social Solidarity*

All of the derisive by-names, plus some of the descriptive and nonsense by-names, give offense. Yet obviously they do not give offense to everyone, or they would disappear. Instead they circulate through the communities along established lines of communication and exist as covert knowledge where they are not in active use.

The most offensive group of by-names (including all of the derisive by-names and some of the descriptive and nonsense by-names) can be used only in the absence of the person named. Each community member is familiar with nearly all of these offensive by-names, but uses only some of them himself, and then only circumspectly. Precisely because they can give such extreme offense and cause such serious social rupture, actual use of the offensive by-names takes on great social significance. An individual can use a highly offensive by-name only in the company of like-minded people, that is, among friends who share with him the generally critical, patronizing, or otherwise socially distanced attitude that the by-name inevitably expresses toward the man or woman it attaches to. Consequently one way in which a group of friends express social solidarity is in freely using certain offensive by-names among themselves. The assumptions are that all members of the group share the same stance toward the offensively by-named people and that no member of the group will betray the use of the offensive by-names to parties who would take offense.<sup>17</sup>

Refusal to use a highly offensive by-name is of course equally an act of social support, but in this case support for the individual who bears the by-name. It is usually assumed that near relatives and close friends will be loyal enough to refrain from using the offensive by-name. In my experience

close friends are reliably loyal, but near relatives occasionally lapse. Relationship is evidently a weaker claim to loyalty than friendship in the matter of by-names.

There is an intermediate group of offensive by-names (including many of the nonsense by-names and some of the descriptive by-names) whose offensiveness comes and goes with the identity of the user. A friend and contemporary can use this kind of by-name to the individual's face with impunity, where the same usage from a younger man or a recent acquaintance would be resented. The informants who supplied the by-name *Cut /kʏt/* for a fellow-villager, for example, reported that they themselves would not address him as *Cut* but that others nearer to him in age and friendship do. Since these by-names are used in address at the tolerance of the by-named person, their use serves primarily as a measure of the social solidarity between the user and the person named, whereas the use of the *highly* offensive by-names serves primarily as a measure of social solidarity among fellow-users.

##### *The Identifying Function of By-names*

The utility of by-names in the East Sutherland Gaelic communities, with their high incidence of identical names, is beyond question. The English-speaking teachers in the Embo school, faced with some thirteen William MacKays in the early years of this century, called the boys Willie A, Willie B, Willie C, and so forth, creating a substitute name system of their own in response to the same problem that evokes the by-names within the communities.

The inoffensive by-names, available for open use by anyone at any time, are genuinely indispensable to communication. Many people with a genealogical by-name, for example, are rarely referred to without the genealogical tag attached. The more common the form of the Christian name, the more inevitable the genealogical tag. Embo's four resident Jessie MacKays are invariably referred to with their respective genealogical tags attached, especially since there are numerous other Jessie MacKays among

Embo's emigrant living and recent dead. On the other hand, if the diminutive form used for the Christian name is distinctive enough, the tag may be dispensed with in daily use. To the best of my recollection I have never heard the two Christinas in Embo (Teenie Peter Ross /*tini pidʔr rɔs*/ and Reenie Bets /*rini bɛts*/) referred to by their full genealogical by-names, but only as Teenie and Reenie. One of them told me her genealogical by-name and the other one I elicited from informants. But whether or not the genealogical tag is in daily use within the community, it is always available for handy reference and will be produced instantly if there is any question about identity. People show no hesitation in introducing their own genealogical by-names for reference purposes. If an emigrant returns to East Sutherland for a visit after many years away, for example, community members will freely identify themselves by genealogical by-name.<sup>18</sup>

The extent to which the genealogical by-names, in particular, are acknowledged and accepted by community members as part of their identifying nomenclature is strikingly illustrated by instances of conflict with an outside world that fails to recognize the validity of unofficial names. During World War I there was more than one case of an East Sutherland serviceman who found himself in legal trouble because he had used a signature which included a genealogical element. Thomas MacKay of Embo, known locally as Tom Brown /*tɔm brʊn*/ after his father /*brʊn*/, filled out some of his military papers as "Thomas MacKay" but others as "Thomas MacKay Brown," adding the "Brown" as a distinguishing element just as he would in Embo. His effort to be helpfully exact was seen as an attempt at fraud by the military, who knew nothing of by-naming practices in the north of Scotland. But the man himself clearly regarded both the family name and the genealogical tag as part of his rightful name and suitable even for such formal use as filling out military papers.

Nowadays awareness of the distinction between community usage and outside usage in the matter of names is forced on community members by the frequency of their contacts with officialdom and with extracommunity institutions in general. But it remains true that official family names have little currency or utility within the community.<sup>19</sup> Identifications in terms of family names are very rarely made, and even small children, who are not encouraged to use by-names, use instead only first name rather than "Mr." and "Mrs." plus family name.

The relative prominence of by-names as opposed to family names is also evident in a tendency to lose track of the family names of the great village characters from a generation earlier while their by-names are the very cues used to evoke their images. Long discussions were sometimes necessary to retrieve the family name of a familiar figure from an informant's childhood years, while the by-name was as well remembered as the person himself.

#### *The Entertainment Value of By-names*

Although there is no doubt that the by-names are useful, there is also no doubt that their value for the communities goes far beyond utility. If this were not so, there would be no multiple by-names, and people with distinctive Christian or family names would never develop by-names. In actual fact, of course, the least "useful" by-names are the communities' greatest delight: the highly offensive by-names that have to be used with such circumspection. These by-names have great power to offend, but they also have great power to amuse. They are likely to be very apt, with a trenchancy relished by those who use them. There are often such richly humorous associations connecting the by-name to the person named that the mere mention of the by-name is enough to produce hilarity in a group of friends who share its use.

In gathering by-names, I found that the offensive by-names operated as a kind of cue: when one of these by-names was men-

tioned, it unleashed a flood of recollection about the person named, streams of anecdote and incident. Inoffensive by-names were far less likely to produce this result. Either the most colorful people attract vivid by-names, or the existence of a vivid by-name provides a mnemonic link to colorful incident; or perhaps both tendencies exist and reinforce each other.

Nongenealogical by-names are easily acquired. Almost any individual trait or trivial incident can give rise to a new by-name.<sup>20</sup> The wife of an Embo emigrant, brought home by him for a vacation, was promptly dubbed "Mrs. Wellington" because she was forever in rubber wellington boots, no matter what the weather was like. The Brora man Bookka got his by-name as a boy when the uncle who was cutting his hair for him remarked on a hard-to-cut curl shaped like a certain local seashell, the buckie /*buki*/.

Nongenealogical by-names develop so easily, in fact, that it is almost surprising to find a good number of community members apparently without them. The number of such cases may well reflect a bias built into this collection of by-names. The eliciting of by-names was such a delicate undertaking that I relied very heavily on the one or two informants I knew best in each village, only rarely checking a particular case with some other "safe" informant. In Brora and in Embo my informants were drawn from intersecting groups of friends and relatives whose use of by-names largely coincided. In Golspie, however, I had some informants who interacted with each other not at all. It is suggestive that it was in Golspie, even without deliberate cross-checking, that I heard the greatest amount of nonoverlapping by-name use. One informant might regularly use a genealogical by-name for a given man, for example, while another informant used a nongenealogical by-name just as regularly for the same man. It seems quite possible that if by-names were collected independently from each member of any community, more and more people would prove to have nongenealogical by-

names in use among one group of villagers or another.

#### BY-NAMES ON THE BICULTURAL SCENE

##### *Use of the Gaelic Speakers' By-names by English Speakers*

The local English speakers fall into three groups with respect to their relationship to the Gaelic communities. The dominant group, both numerically and socially, consists of people born and raised elsewhere but earning a living now in one of these villages.<sup>21</sup> A second, smaller group consists of people with roots in the area, themselves born and raised locally. The third group consists of the essentially monolingual offspring of the Gaelic speakers, sometimes passively bilingual if both parents were Gaelic speakers or if they are Embo-raised, but much more often completely unfamiliar with Gaelic, and inevitably (since there are no Gaelic speakers under forty) married to English monolinguals.

The third group know most of the by-names current among the Gaelic speakers and use them appropriately, since they are well aware of both kinship and friendship networks in the Gaelic-speaking population.

The second group also do fairly well with the by-names, since they have the great advantage of familiarity with at least the primary kinship lines among the Gaelic speakers, and usually some inkling of friendship clusters as well.

It is the first and largest group of English speakers who are seriously handicapped when it comes to by-names. It often happens that they know a Gaelic speaker's by-name without knowing his official name, and also without having any clue as to the content or significance of the by-name. They are unlikely to know the Golspie man they hear referred to as "Willie Sheen" had a mother named Jean /*š̌i:n*/, or even that /*š̌i:n*/ is a woman's name. Any by-name with a Gaelic element is automatically a "nonsense" by-name where they are concerned, since it is semantically empty for them. (This is not true of genealogical by-names for the second

English-speaking group, because they will normally have known the parent whose name appears.) The first group generally use all the by-names indiscriminately as the functional equivalents of official names or nicknames until they are brought up sharply by anger or laughter, depending on whether the misused by-name is offensive or inoffensive.

Mistakes in the use of offensive by-names are clearly the more serious. Members of each Gaelic community know when to use and when not to use an offensive by-name, since their friendship and kinship connections with all other members of the community are well established. The English speakers often come to grief by imitating inappropriately the usage of their Gaelic-speaking acquaintances. Each community has its own stock of stories recounting shocking breaches of by-name etiquette. In one case from Brora an English-speaking woman who occasionally employed Jeannie Hen sent her a package with that name on it under the mistaken impression that "Hen" was her family name. Jeannie Hen thereafter refused to work for her former employer and for some time even to speak to her. The community at large was vastly amused at the expense of both parties: at the English speaker for her appalling ignorance (after years of residence in the district), and at Jeannie Hen (whose standing in the community is poor in general) for her confrontation with the by-name she so richly deserved.

An individual who has a highly offensive by-name is confronted with it only through the actions of some socially irresponsible person. English speakers often fall into this category from the point of view of the Gaelic subcommunities. They are irresponsible through ignorance, like children. Children, along with drunks and blindly angry people, are potential sources for *internal* breaches of by-name etiquette in the Gaelic subcommunities. But although there is always a supply of children, drunks, and hot-tempered people at hand, the incidence of social rupture through misuse of offensive by-names is certainly much higher in the bi-

cultural situation than in the Gaelic-speaking group alone.

Mistakes involving offensive by-names are more serious, but mistakes involving inoffensive by-names are probably more common. Even the innocuous genealogical by-names can cause difficulties for the English speakers, because they are so easily mistaken for surnames. This kind of error is made with entertaining regularity by the first group of English speakers. A girl universally called, say, Katie Belle, after her mother Belle, might mistakenly be called "Miss Bell" by a schoolteacher, especially if the teacher had heard a crowd of the girl's siblings also tagged Belle. The subcommunities relish this display of ignorance on the part of English speakers and have many such incidents to relate, but no offense is taken by anyone. This is in sharp contrast to the violent emotion aroused by inappropriate use of an offensive by-name.

Apart from genuine mistakes in the use of Gaelic speakers' by-names, it is possible to make a kind of deliberate misuse of them. Attaching a well-known genealogical tag from the Gaelic community to a descendant who has "passed over" into the English community is one way of putting that individual down, by calling attention to his lowly origins. The by-name Bookka is completely inoffensive to the man with whom it originated; he belongs unambiguously to the fisher-folk, even though he spent only one season at the fishing. But his daughter, who speaks far better English than Gaelic and moves primarily in English-speaking circles, says she feels distinctly put in her place when she is called Dorothy Bookka.

#### *The Use of By-names among the English Speakers*

The practice of giving by-names has long since carried over to the larger English-speaking communities of Brora and Golspie, even though the greater variety of the family names available very much reduces the practical value of by-names. As one might expect, however, the genealogical by-names dominant among the Gaelic speakers are al-

most absent among the adult English speakers. Most of the latter are "incomers." No one on the local scene knew their parents, and so there is no possibility of identifying them by referring to a familiar parental generation. The English-speaking children of Gaelic speakers sometimes have genealogical by-names, but these are used primarily among the Gaelic speakers themselves when referring to the younger generation.

On the other hand, the descriptive, derivative, and nonsense varieties of by-name flourish among the English speakers and are equally likely to appear in any of the English-speaking groups. Two English-speaking men raised by their widowed Gaelic-speaking aunt are known as Big Bonk and Little Bonk; and the English-speaking "laird" of Embo (whose family has for several generations held all the village lands in feu and lived in the nearby manor house) is popularly known as Horsey. Incomers are just as vulnerable. The wife of an incomer from Inverness-shire was overheard calling him "darling,"<sup>22</sup> and he has been Jim Darling (behind his back) ever since. Interestingly enough, though this man has lived in various communities in the northeast Highlands all his life, he never acquired a by-name until he came to East Sutherland.<sup>23</sup>

The case of Jim Darling is interesting from another point of view as well. One of his daughters relates that she and her sisters almost immediately found their father's new by-name attached to themselves by the schoolchildren (all English speakers, of course). They were Sheila Darling, Elspeth Darling, Rosemary Darling, and Iona Darling for a year or two. Evidently there is still some tendency to make by-names hereditary, but, characteristically for the English-speaking community, the daughters eventually lost the tag, while the father is still known only as Jim Darling to many local people, most of whom have no idea how he came by that by-name.

It is clear that the Gaelic-speaking communities of East Sutherland will not survive much longer. Gaelic is already terminal in Brora and Golspie, and has at most forty or

fifty years of increasingly feeble life in Embo. By-naming practices in the area owe their existence to a Celtic society in which the bulk of the population shared a very few clan names, but it now appears that the practices themselves will long outlive the Gaelic-speaking communities that gave rise to them. The institution has effectively been transferred to the surrounding English-speaking society and shows no signs of weakening.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on materials gathered during four periods of residence in East Sutherland during the years 1963-1968, while I was engaged in a study of the local Gaelic dialect. The by-name typology that constitutes the third section of this paper was originally presented in a slightly different form to the International Summer Course in Linguistics at the University of Kiel, Germany, in 1968 and will appear in *Folia Linguistica*. I am grateful to Professor Werner Winter of the University of Kiel for permission to incorporate some of that material in the present paper and to Professor William Labov of Columbia University for a number of suggestions that gave direction to this expansion of the original presentation.

<sup>2</sup> Each of the villages has a sprinkling of Gaelic-speaking residents from other parts of Scotland, but such outside Gaelic speakers are excluded from consideration here. The phrases "Gaelic speaker" and "Gaelic-speaking" refer here only to native-born East Sutherlanders.

<sup>3</sup> It is true that many of the surviving Gaelic-speaking men never actually fished themselves, nor did the women go through the district with creels of fish to sell. But all saw their parents, and often older brothers and sisters, doing these things. And all were caught up as children in the ancillary activities of a fisherman's household, especially in the endless round of work connected with the local "white" fishing: gathering shellfish as bait and extracting the meat; cleaning and untangling the hundreds of feet of haddock lines and baiting the hundreds of hooks; gathering pinecones for smoking fish; and so forth.

<sup>4</sup> Married women are identified for this purpose by maiden name, and illegitimate children by the mother's maiden name.

<sup>5</sup> The change in surnames is matched by a considerable number of isogloss boundaries in lexicon, phonology, and syntax, even though Embo Gaelic is just as clearly "East Sutherland Gaelic" as are Brora and Golspie Gaelic.

\*The only exceptions are current cross-village marriages where both marriage partners are still alive; in the few such cases cross-village visiting of relatives may be fairly frequent. Ill-health and lack of transport often hinder contact even under these circumstances, however.

<sup>1</sup>Gaelic forms will be cited throughout in a morphophonemic notation based, with subsequent modifications, on my dissertation (Dorian 1965).

<sup>2</sup>The local Gaelic is by almost any criteria substandard and has very low prestige. Consequently it is unheard of for outsiders to acquire it deliberately. The anomaly of dialect use without a birthright to it is reflected in the reaction of a London-based Embo exile, home for a brief summer holiday, to whom I was first introduced through the medium of the local Gaelic. She was explicitly told that I was "from America," yet after exchanging a few remarks with me in Embo Gaelic she turned back to the introducer and asked in Gaelic, "Who does she belong to?" (that is, "Whose relative is she?"). She was again told that I was an American, to which she responded, "Yes, but who does she *belong to*?" She was able to accept me as a speaker of the local dialect if I was the offspring of an East Sutherland emigrant to the United States (her own London-bred daughter speaks Embo Gaelic); but it was inconceivable that I should speak the local Gaelic and yet have no blood connection with the village.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Susan Ervin-Tripp 1967: "Members of a speech community know what to say and how to say it in terms of the social features of the participants and the situation. Even the so-called true bilingual may lack such competence. American Japanese sound rude in Japan, for they do not use honorific forms when they should; American Lebanese sound ignorant, being unable to use the classical Arabic appropriate for formal events; many second-generation Americans do not know the formal second person address form and sound presumptuously familiar."

<sup>4</sup>It is completely unconvincing, for example, to explain to a traffic policeman whose arm movements you have just misinterpreted that you are an ignorant foreigner if you do so flawlessly in his own language. This plight is more common than might be supposed, even among classroom-produced bilinguals. It has been my own experience frequently in Germany, and I have heard similar reports from other Americans in German- and Spanish-speaking countries.

<sup>5</sup>The second person pronouns *thu* /u/ 'you-singular/informal' and *sibh* /ʃi/ 'you-plural/respectful' have the same underlying dimensions of solidarity and status that are found in other European languages with second person pro-

noun options (Brown and Gilman 1960; Brown 1965). The situation is complicated for Gaelic by the existence of a corresponding option in the very high-frequency "conjugating prepositions" of Celtic. Initially I made gross mistakes in the use of both the pronouns and the conjugating prepositions. But since age proved to be the only determiner of the feature 'respectful' that came into play in connection with community members, and a visible determiner at that, this system was far more easily dealt with than the invisible social network underlying the use of by-names.

<sup>6</sup>Ellipses indicate an incomplete by-name.

<sup>7</sup>This by-name belongs properly to group (5), secondary genealogical by-names.

<sup>8</sup>A good many of the by-names have both an English and a Gaelic version—/ʃini ʃerk/ is actually called Jeannie Hen in English. But others have only a Gaelic version, e.g., /magani pigani/ below; Maggie Juggie is my own translation. Still others have only an English version: Johnnie Lassie was never called Johnnie Chaileag /ʃni xalag/ the Gaelic equivalent, even by his fellow Gaelic speakers.

<sup>9</sup>The choice of /pigan/ 'water jug' to represent the broken dishes was probably dictated jointly by the resemblance between /magan/ and /pigan/ and by the existence of a locally popular children's rhyme about a broken water jug.

<sup>10</sup>These probable origins are accepted hereafter for the purpose of providing English glosses for the by-names in question.

<sup>11</sup>It should be noted that kinship loyalties, as well as asymmetrical friendship networks, interfere with this consensus rather frequently; for example, four of a five-member group of friends might use a particular offensive by-name regularly *except* when their fifth member, a cousin of the person in question, is present.

<sup>12</sup>This can also occur with inoffensive descriptive by-names.

<sup>13</sup>J. M. Synge (1911), speaking of what he calls "epithets" attached in lieu of surnames to every individual in the Aran Islands, gives a charming instance of the primacy of by-names: "The schoolmaster tells me that when he reads out the roll in the morning the children repeat the local name all together in a whisper after each official name, and then the child answers. If he calls, for instance, 'Patrick O'Flaherty,' the children murmur, 'Patch Seaghan Dearg' or some such name, and the boy answers."

<sup>14</sup>The emergence of a new by-name is probably only a symptom of what must be a constant flow of dubbing: some epithets are an instant success and adhere to an individual ever after, while others are immediately forgotten. By-names do come and go. One informant laughingly supplied a nonsense by-name by which she



was known in her youth, although no one ever calls her by that name now; she had only a vague idea of how she came by this early by-name and none at all of why people stopped calling her so. But for the most part nongenealogical by-names, once acquired, are stable, within at least a certain circle. If an individual has multiple by-names, two different groups of people may each refer to him by a different by-name, but they will generally be consistent in their usage even though well aware of the alternative by-name.

<sup>21</sup> Small as they are, Brora and Golspie are Sutherland's largest centers of population and the economic heart of the county.

<sup>22</sup> The influence of the Gaelic community was strictly indirect, since the eavesdroppers were English speakers.

<sup>23</sup> This fact supports my impression that by-naming remains much stronger in East Sutherland than in many other Highland areas where the practice once prevailed. For example, inquiries I made in Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, relatively near the still strongly Gaelic-speaking Outer Hebrides, indicated that by-nam-

ing is no longer widespread in that area.

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