

Linguistic Naturalism and Language Activism

Timothy Currie Armstrong
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Linguistic naturalism is an ideology where real or authentic language is understood as a natural behaviour, as something that native speakers acquire in early childhood and use without artifice (see Eckert 2003). In this talk, I will examine linguistic naturalism as it is expressed in discourses around the revival of Scottish Gaelic. I will propose that language revival is best theorized as a project that succeeds or fails primarily as a social movement, as a collective project prosecuted by self-aware actors that is entirely artifice. In this regard, ideologies of linguistic naturalism may lead language activists to misunderstand the ideological work required to alter language behaviour, to set inappropriate goals for the revival movement, and to fetishize some speakers as they delegitimize others, all potentially limiting the impact of the revival on the continuing vitality of their language.

Eckert, Penelope (2003) “Elephants in the room.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(3): 392–397.