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Da Chanan / Two Languages: creating bi-lingual name authorities

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Abstract:

With a renewed emphasis on Scottish cultural identity comes a growing interest in the minority languages of Scotland. Many organisations now seek solutions to what is an international concern, creating standard name authorities in a bi-lingual environment. Using as a specific example the project undertaken by the Scottish Poetry Library to create name authorities for Gaelic poets, some with Gaelic and English forms of their names, the issues raised will be examined. The creation of standard name authorities in this situation would be of benefit across all domains in Scotland. The problem of "provenance" is central as many similar names exist, which makes it difficult to create acceptable, accurate identifiers using dates and local or given names. Similarly, name authorities can accidentally be duplicated where it is unclear that different forms of a name exist, between English and Gaelic versions and where non-standard spellings are common. Ensuring the creation of multiple cross-references for all known variations becomes necessary. Identifying reliable reference sources is of paramount importance. Difficulties arise in ensuring that libraries remain in compliance with the BLNAF and AAAF Standards while still taking account of the form of name preferred by the poet, how he is referred to within his local community or the form in accepted use by editors and academics. Issues arise in the relationship with larger organisations, in this instance the National Library of Scotland, and how information can be exchanged to take into account the application of these national and international standards while acknowledging the particular subject knowledge of the special library.

...having two languages constantly in my ear
with only a little conflict between them,
they are like the trees
in my garden, gently nudging
and encroaching but keeping their own identity…

by Derick Thomson / Rauraidh MacThòmais
from <u>The rugged mountain</u> / <u>Meall garbh</u>. Gairm Publications, 1995.

There is internationally a recognisable current trend toward increased awareness of regional and minority languages. This is manifested in political policy and in the work of various projects, all with the shared goal of ensuring the survival of these languages and an appreciation of the diversity which they create. The European Union has in Article 22 of the *European Charter of Human Rights* stated that "The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity". Resolutions of the European Parliament have been adopted to "safeguard and promote the regional and minority languages of Europe". With this increased international awareness of minority languages, projects have been initiated at a national level to promote and preserve indigenous languages. Within Scotland the 1991 Census showed 65, 978 Gaelic speakers (1.35% of the population) in stark comparison to the 1901 Census figure of 210, 677 (5.2%). That the Gaelic language has been in decline is without question; that efforts are being made to reverse this trend is equally true. The Scottish Executive has in the September 2000 Gaelic Taskforce Report *Gaelic: Revitalising Gaelic a national asset* outlined its view that Gaelic be "a foundation-stone in the building of the new Scotland … an integral and dynamic component of a self-assured community with economic and social stability and pride in its linguistic and cultural identity". This report led to the establishment of the Gaelic Development Agency who are working to achieve their aim of "secure status for Gaelic and to promote and establish the conditions for Gaelic to grow and flourish".

The Scottish Poetry Library was founded in 1984 and is now housed within purpose built premises in Edinburgh's historic Canongate. The stated aim of the organisation to collect and promote contemporary poetry written in Scotland in Scots, Gaelic and English asserts its position within this climate of linguistic and cultural diversity. In recent months the Scottish Poetry Library has been taking a studied and systematic approach to amending existing name authorities for Gaelic poets in the catalogue and to the creation of new name authorities. The work has in part been prompted by a shortcoming in the current catalogue and further inspired by the fact that the catalogue is now utilising international standard formats for its records, as opposed to the in-house system previously used. The possibilities for accurate cross database searching in the future were also considered. The SPL in this area would appear to be ideally suited to this work having at its disposal published reference works, contacts with individuals recognised as authorities in this field and immediate access to the poems, although not having a Gaelic speaker on the staff. Many organisations face the problem of creating standard name authority entries in a bi-lingual environment and will have common experiences of the inherent difficulties, although some may be particular to Gaelic names.

"It is not so much that people changed their surnames, thought there was a tendency for the obscure to be replaced by the more renowned; rather, changes occurred during transfer from oral tradition to the written record. The ignorance of strangers played its part. But even more damaging to the retention of collective and ancestral identities has been the practice of recording names in an alien orthography, whether of Latin, Scots or, latterly, English."
From *The companion to Gaelic Scotland*. Edited by Derick S. Thomson. P.211 on Gaelic personal names.

In a previous migration, the catalogue of the Scottish Poetry Library had lost its cross-references. This was a particular problem for the Gaelic name authorities, since personal names in the Gaidhlteachd are complex; one person can have several variations of their Gaelic name, a give or "local" name, and the English version. In order to re-establish the relationships and institute cross-references between the variant names, and to correct any mistakes in existing entries, a careful revision of the current Gaelic name authorities in the catalogue has been undertaken. At the same time we have the opportunity to make sure that the attribution of poems is correct. Because the Gaelic poetic tradition is tied in to oral storytelling and song, and frequently the person setting down the poem was someone other than the original author, confusion has often prevailed. The catalogue also contains the database of the Scottish Poetry Index, a project which includes the indexing of the poetry content of the Gaelic language magazine Gairm, and this has greatly increased the number of name authorities to be checked.

The creation of accurate and standard name authorities for Gaelic names has implications beyond the use made of them by the SPL. In this project the names of poets taken from individual works, anthologies and from poetry magazines, through the Scottish Poetry Index, are being reviewed. The use made of this by the National Library of Scotland and for the adoption of correct standard name authorities shall be considered later in this paper. There are other areas in which similar work will be required. For example, at present there is an initiative in progress looking to create a database of literature in the minority languages of Scotland. The SCOTS project will in all probability encounter similar problems when it begins to catalogue the works which it is currently collecting. Projects such as the Scottish Cultural Portal proposed by the Scottish Library and Information Council will be reliant on the adoption of standard forms of names, both for individuals and places, for its cross database searching and these will undoubtedly include Gaelic names.

In cases where it is difficult to clearly differentiate between poets with identical names, a common occurrence given the practice of naming children after their parents, it would be ideal to have access to correct information regarding dates of birth, but these are not always readily available. This follows the accepted practice of AACR2 wherin you should "add date(s) to any personal name, even if there is no need to distinguish between headings". For example the following poets where only the dates can be used to differentiate between them, **Caimbeul, Aonghas, 1903-1982** and **Caimbeul, Aonghas, 1908-1949**. In certain incidences where poets can not be assigned dates of birth with any degree of certainty we apply the rules regarding uncertainty over dates (**ca.**) or the indication of period of activity (**fl.**). It is necessary in further cases to make use of local or given names for the poets as qualifying terms as set out in rule 22.19B1, these often include the use of a place name as in **Caimbeul, Niall, of South Uist**. Fortunately suffixes such as this are regularly given to Gaelic poets to differentiate them from other persons with the same name from other localities.

Although in some instances the measures taken to differentiate between poets can prove useful (here used often as a qualifier as set out in rule 22.19B1) a further facet of this practice among Gaelic speakers has proven to be problematic in the creation of name authorities. There is an all to frequent practice amongst the Gaels of assigning to themselves a given or local name, which they may use often in tandem with another name. These would often go further than the addition of a place name to the adoption of another name entirely such as **Am Bard Dubh**, the Black Bard or Poet. Non-standardised spelling is also common with regard to Gaelic names as it is throughout the Gaelic language. Various attempts have been, and continue to be, made to standardise Gaelic spelling. It is still possible for a poet's name to be recorded using numerous spellings for example **Domhnallach, Domhnall, 1887-1967** who is also known by the name **Domhnall, Ruadh Choruna**, and the Anglicised form **MacDonald, Donald**. Where similar names exist these authorities can easily be assigned to records incorrectly, it is also possible that poems written by seemingly different poets could in all possibility be written by one and the same person.

In such circumstances issues of provenance become central and identifying reliable reference sources, not only for the assigning of dates, but for correct or preferred spellings and variant forms becomes essential. It also clearly becomes important to ensure that cross-references to all possible variations are created. The selection of useful reference works was approached by the SPL at an early stage in the project. It became clear that in many instances returning to the original work which was catalogued did not provide the necessary bio-bibliographical information to differentiate between poets when confusion arose. Problems for the SPL were increased by the practice of including name authorities in catalogue records for many poets who have contributed to anthologies, who perhaps had not published monographs. Many editors do not provide indexes to anthologies and give little or no information on the poets included. Further sources of information had to be sought in the form of bibliographies of Gaelic literature, reference books and the consultation of anthologies which did provide bio-bibliographical information. It became apparent that certain editors were able to provide more information regarding the Gaelic poets and the works of experts in the field such as Derick S. Thomson, editor of The companion to Gaelic Scotland [Rev. ed.] Gairm Publications; Glasgow, 1994 and author of An introduction to Gaelic poetry [2nd. ed.] Edinburgh University Press; Edinburgh, 1989 and Ronald Black, editor of both An lasair: anthology of 18th century Scottish Gaelic verse Birlinn; Edinburgh, 2001 and An tuil: anthology of 20th century Scottish Gaelic verse Polygon; Edinburgh, 1999, came into daily use. It is also possible on some occasions to contact these and other individuals directly to clear up difficulties which arise. We are also constantly consulting the online catalogues of the British Library and the National Library of Scotland for clarification, which has the distinct advantage of providing us with models for name authorities which comply with international standards.

In instances where there are multiple variants to a name it is important that authorities are used consistently between organisations. Difficulties arise when seeking to remain in compliance with international standards for name authorities, such as BLNAF and AAAF, while taking account of the form of names preferred by poets or in accepted use by editors, or by which the poets are referred to within their community. The institution best placed to be used as a guide for the SPL in cases where multiple variants of a name exist is the National Library of Scotland. The NLS since its adoption of the USMARC format has utilised the Library of Congress Name Authority File for the establishing of authorities. In addition it submits new name authority records to the Library of Congress as part of the NACO Program for Cooperative Cataloguing. Given the position held by the NLS and the standards to which it adheres it is necessary that the SPL follows the practice of the NLS as a model for international standards, and in instances where a preferred name is in doubt the practice of the NLS will be followed.

Very broadly, the practice of the NLS when Gaelic and English variants of a name exist could be summarised in the manner that Donald John Macleod explains his selection of preferred forms of names in his publication of 1980, 20th Century publications in Scottish Gaelic, that the "author's name is always given in English in the heading, since this is the practice in most reference works and because of the lack of uniformity in the spelling of Gaelic surnames". There were instances when the research of the SPL into the poets themselves and the application of the AACR2 rules appeared at odds with the practice of the NLS. Rule 22.2A1 regarding Choice among different names states "If a person is known by more than one name, choose the name by which the person is clearly most commonly known, if there is one. Otherwise, choose one name or form of name according to the following order of preference: a) the name that appears most frequently in the person's works b) the name that appears most frequently in reference sources". It would often be the case that "the name that appears most frequently" according to the SPL research would be the Gaelic variant where the NLS, and thus the adopted standard, was to use the English variant as the preferred form. The NLS use **MacDonald Donald, 1926-2000** where two Gaelic variants exist and the one in more common use is **Domhnall, Aonghas Bain, 1926-2000**, a poet who used Gaelic for daily use. In these instances as in others the practice of the NLS was followed. It would however be of benefit if procedures could be put in place by which the specific knowledge and research of

specialist libraries such as the SPL could be filtered into the work of larger organisations, such as the NLS.

Channels for information exchange taking in to account the application of standards while acknowledging the particular subject knowledge of the special library are what is required. As the NLS is in a position to submit name and subject authorities to the Library of Congress for adoption as international standards so it would be of benefit for similar processes at local levels to allow for the incorporation of qualified suggestions and submissions from smaller organisations. Ideally the creation of name authorities should be undertaken by subject specialists with cataloguing knowledge and a firm grasp of the AACR2 rules and current international standards, and if necessary a knowledge of the languages required. In many instances this is not the case and those completing this type of authority control are experts because they are undertaking the work rather than undertaking the work because they are experts. The ideal situation would be to create the opportunity to feed suggestions for new authorities or amendments to existing authorities into processes by which they can be approved by larger organisations and in this way contribute to the standards applied internationally.