With our focus upon West Wales and the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, the traditional hinterlands of Welsh and Gaelic, our paper explores a variety of claims on who ‘owns’ the languages under investigation and who constitutes a legitimate speaker of these languages. We build on work by Newcombe (2007, 2009) and Robert (2009) in the case of Welsh, and Glazer (2007) and MacCaluim (2007) in the case of Gaelic, with the aim of establishing a commonality between the different linguistic contexts, and draw conclusions that may point towards certain new-speaker universals, while making the connection between the debates over native and non-native speakers in majority languages as and when appropriate. In particular, we emphasize the apparent paradox of the non-acceptance or delegitimization of ‘new’ speakers in rural areas, where the traditional speech community has come to be largely associated with an ever-shrinking rural hinterland, against new categories of speakers which can be seen as the predictable outcome of successful language policies, so successful in some contexts that urban, middle-class ‘new’ speakers outnumber traditional ‘native’ speakers but who seem to offer some hope for the continuation of endangered languages, albeit in a hybridized, adapted form.

Keywords: welsh, gaelic, new speakers.