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Hi-tech tool helps computers get to grips with Scottish Gaelic

An online tool has been developed that will help to secure the future of Scottish Gaelic in the digital age.

The device helps computers understand Gaelic text and can be used in a range of functions such as voice recognition and online translation, as well as grammar and spell checks.

Linguists and computer scientists who developed the technology say it has applications that will assist people to understand and learn the language.

Researchers have used a database of more than 100,000 Gaelic words to develop an application, called a part-of-speech (POS) tagger, which allows computers to pair a word with its grammatical label, such as a noun, verb or adjective.

The team says that the tool helps computers to correctly categorise and order a language – a key process in digital applications, such as computer generated speech.

POS taggers have already been developed for a number of other languages, but this is the first such language technology to be tested for Scottish Gaelic.

The product has been developed by researchers at the University of Edinburgh, with support from the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow, Edinburgh Napier University and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye, which forms part of the University of the Highlands and Islands.

The project, which is funded by the Carnegie Trust and Bòrd na Gàidhlig is being launched at a Gaelic research conference called *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* ('Researching Gaelic') at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye on Friday (June 24).

Dr William Lamb, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, said: "Corpus and speech technology in Scottish Gaelic remains in an embryonic stage, in contrast to the leaps made for other languages in this area in recent decades. This project provides the means to redress the situation and brings the language forward – with a vital technological and intellectual push – into the 21st century."

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