

John Ford

*Evolution and Devolution: An Examination of the
Historical Development of Scottish English*

Résumé: Cet article vise à fournir une perspective historique, politique et sociale sur le langage et les langues en Ecosse, en particulier les variétés qui proviennent du vieil anglais, en complément à d'autres articles publiés ici (voir Colman, ce vol., Durand ce vol., Pukli, ce vol.). Nous ne nous pencherons pas en détail sur la prononciation et la grammaire, surtout en ce qui concerne le point de vue synchronique. En revanche, nous évoquerons les rapports complexes entre l'anglais, l'écossais et le gaélique qui expliquent en grande partie la situation actuelle et les difficultés rencontrées dans la standardisation de l'écossais moderne.

0. Introduction: Devolution and Evolution

On September 11, 1997, the Scottish people voted for the establishment of a new Scottish parliament, the first such institution to exist since the original body voted to dissolve itself in 1707. After the final sitting, the Scottish High Chancellor marked the occasion with the readily identifiable Scotticism: "And there's the end of ane auld sang!" (Gutherie 2004). When the Queen opened the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on July 1st, 1999, she was offered a 'handsel,' a gift intended to bring good luck to something or someone new or to a new beginning (ScottishCorpus 2004). Thus, the closing of the original parliament and the opening of the devolved parliament were both heralded with acts and, more importantly here, words particular to Scotland.

It is the question of words and language in general that is the basis of this paper. What is the place of English in Scotland? What language(s) do Scottish people actually speak? Is theirs an accent, a dialect or a separate language in its own right? These are questions that were widely debated in Scotland before devolution and continue to be debated today. Although there may be no ready answers, it is useful to view the issue historically in order to form a better picture.

The rest of this paper shall therefore provide an overview of the question of language in Scotland, beginning with the early days of Gaelic and "Ynglis." It shall then treat the emergence of Scots, widely recognised as a distinct language derived from the latter of the two. The use of Scots in contrast to Gaelic or English will then be examined, demonstrating its employment as a badge of Scottish identity and its use in a rich literature that contrasted markedly with that produced in England in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The capitulation of Scots to English in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and its subsequent failure to become standardized as a national language – will then be considered. Finally, modern attempts at standardization will be touched upon, as will the difficulty of distinguishing between accent, dialect and language in the English-Scots continuum.

1. Question of Language in Scotland I: Early Days (Gaelic and "Ynglis")

Scholars invariably recognise at least two distinct languages in Scotland: English and Scots Gaelic /'geɪlɪk/, often referred to simply as "Gaelic" /'gæɪlɪk/. Along with Irish, with which it is to some extent mutually intelligible, Gaelic is a member of the Goidelic group of Celtic languages. It was brought to Britain in the 5th century by colonists from the kingdom

of Dalriada in northern Ireland, who originally settled in the southwest of modern Scotland, eventually spreading throughout the Highlands and Islands, the area which remains today the heartland of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd (Irish: Gaeltacht). By the 9th century Dalriada's colonists had so overwhelmed the native Picts in the northern part of Great Britain that the area became identified exclusively by their name: Scotland.

Although the Gaelic speaking Scots were dominant in most of modern Scotland, their arrival coincided with the establishment of another group of settlers in the southeast, the Anglo-Saxons. These Germanic peoples probably began settling along the "Saxon Shore" well before the traditional date of 449, when they were ostensibly invited to protect the Romanized Celts from Picts and Scots after the departure of the Roman legions. These Germanic tribes soon overwhelmed the southern Britons – whom they called *Wealas*, "stranger" or "servant" – pushing them north where they were absorbed by their Celtic cousins in the Kingdom of Strathclyde and into the western part of the island where they maintained their own culture: *Wealas* became Wales.

By the 7th century, the Anglo-Saxons were well entrenched in what is today SE Scotland, holding the kingdom of Northumbria, which stretched from Edinburgh south to Hull. These Northumbrians were descended most directly from tribes of Angles while their Saxon cousins settled mostly in the south. By the 8th century, Northumbria was the most powerful of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain, collectively known as the Heptarchy. It enjoyed a period of cultural ascendancy that made it famous throughout Christendom: it was during this period that Charlemagne chose the Northumbrian Alcuin of York to head his palace school at Aachen. Not surprisingly, Old English literature from this period is more abundant in the Northumbrian dialect than any other. It includes what is arguably the oldest known example of English literature, the famous *Hymn to the Creation* of Caedmon, himself an Anglicized Celt (Drabble 1985: 156).

For the sake of comparison, two versions of the hymn are here reproduced, that of the MS Tanner in early West Saxon (Whitelock 1967: 46-7) and that of the MS Leningrad in the Northumbrian dialect (Whitelock 1967: 182).

Tanner MS

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices Weard,
 Meotodes meahte ond his modgeþanc,
 Weorc Wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,
 ece Drihten, or onstealde.
 He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
 Heofon to hrofe, halig Scyppend.
 Ða middangeard monncynnes Weard,
 Ece Drihten, æfter teode
 Firum foldan, Frea ælmihtig.

Leningrad MS

Nu scilun herga hefenricæs Uard,
 Metudæs mehti and his modgithanc,
 Uerc Uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuæs,
 Eci Dryctin, or astelidæ.
 He ærist scop aeldu barnum
 Hefen to hrofæ, halig Sceppend.
 Tha middingard moncynnæs Uard,
 Eci Dryctin æfter tiadæ
 Firum foldu, Frea allmehtig.

Now [we] must praise [the] heaven-kingdom's guardian, [the] Creator's power(s) and his mind's intent, [the] work of the Glory-Father, as he, eternal Lord, established the beginning of each of wonders. He first created for the sons of earth (MS L)/ men (MS T) heaven as a roof, [the] holy Creator; then middle-earth, mankind's guardian, [the] eternal Lord, afterwards fashioned for men the earth, God almighty.

In the Northumbrian version, there are several interesting differences from "standard" West Saxon in the spelling conventions. The most obvious is the use of <th> instead of <ð>

or <ƿ> for dental fricatives; though this practice does appear in other dialects (e.g., the Mercian Epinal Gloss; see Campbell 1959: §57 fn.3), it was particularly characteristic of early Northumbrian. Another typical Northumbria convention is the use of <u> where Tanner has <w> (actually an editorial replacement for the manuscript's Old English wynn <ƿ> of the same phonological value). Both spellings represent /w/, and while <u> is sometimes found for this value outside of Northumbria, this convention remains constant in all Northumbrian texts (Campbell 1959, para. 60; see e.g., Lindisfarne Gospels, Whitelock: 216). It later became peculiar to Scots, differentiating it from the interchangeable use of wynn, <w>, or sometimes <uu> in the "Southron" of England. Elsewhere, unstressed <e> is regularly represented by <i> (e.g., meahte/ mehti, ece/eci, etc.), though by the ninth century, both can be reconstructed as an indeterminate /ə/ (Colman, personal communication August 16, 2004). Additionally, the West Saxon diphthongs <eo> and <ea> regularly appear as <e> and <a>. While some of these are indicative of diachronic rather than diatopic variation (e.g., Tanner <heofon(-)> and <Meotodes> as opposed to Leningrad <hefen(-)> and <Metudæs>; see, e.g., Campbell 1959: §§205 & 210), others do indeed suggest genuine dialectal variation. For example, the <a> in Northumbrian <barnum>, <Uard> (as opposed to West Saxon <bearnum>, <Weard>) represents a retraction of [æ] to [ɑ] instead of the West Saxon breaking of [æ] > [æa]/_r/ + consonant (see, e.g., Campbell 1959: §145 and fn. 1; Mitchell and Robinson, §8). Finally, the loss of nasals in Leningrad <herga> and <foldu> (Tanner <herigea> and <foldan>) point to the characteristic loss of terminal /m/ or /n/ in Northumbrian before other dialects (Campbell 1959: §472). Although it is difficult to establish all of these differences as genuinely dialectal, the distinct orthographical conventions suggest that even at this early stage there were regular substitutions which distinguished northern dialect(s) of Old English from those used in the South.

This does not mean, however, that the Anglo-Saxons' language was anything more than one of several spoken at this point in what is today modern Scotland. In the early eighth century, the Venerable Bede (731: 1.1), thanks to whom *Caedmon's Hymn* survives, lists five languages in Britain: English, Welsh (which he calls British), Scottish (by which he means Gaelic), Pictish, and the language in which he himself was writing, Latin. To these we could add Norn, the language spoken in the Orkneys and Caithness by Scandinavian settlers who arrived about the same time of Bede's writing, and whose language remained until the 15th century (see, e.g., "Norn" 2004). More of an impact was made by the Danes, who arrived later in the century, wreaking havoc in Northumbria before settling down to establish a separate sphere of influence, the Danelaw, which extended from the Firth of Forth to the Wash.

In any case, the situation of language in Scotland was and is complex. The rest of this paper will be dedicated to examining the interaction of these languages and their developments, which resulted in the present linguistic situation in Scotland.

2. Question of Language in Scotland II: Later Days (Gaelic, English, "Ynglis" and Scots) Gaelic and English, the Continuing Struggle

As mentioned, the question of language following devolution became and remains something of a hot topic (see Durand this vol.). Some nationalists clamour for a "reintroduction" of Scots Gaelic throughout the nation, following models offered by the Irish Republic, where Irish is the first official language and English is simply a second one, or Wales, where the Welsh language enjoys considerable privileges.

To some extent, their appeals have met with success. Signs around the Scottish Parliament appear in English and Gaelic. Glasgow's Queen Street Station is also "bilingual," travellers being welcomed by a sign that says: *Fàilte gu Sràid na Banrighinn* "Welcome to Queen Street". Elsewhere in Glasgow, customers at the Uisge Beatha or any pub in Sauchiehall Street are more likely to toast each other with "slainté" than cheers; "Ceud Mile Fàilte" appears on the doors of many of the town's hotels. Ceildhs remain popular and there is sporadic television programming in Gaelic. Furthermore, since 2000, it has been possible to study for a higher degree taught exclusively through the medium of Scots Gaelic at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig* in Lewis. While most of these examples predate devolution and are individually insignificant, taken together they suggest an awareness of the Gaelic heritage even among non-Gaels, and a continuing desire to preserve and promulgate it throughout Scotland.

Things have not been entirely rosy for the Gaelic cause, however; indeed, at times they have been downright thistly. In 1996, a policy was adopted by the Highlands regional council which said that bilingual signs would be introduced wherever existing signs needed replacing when there was a local tradition and a clear demand. In March 2004, a subsequent proposal calling for bilingual signs throughout the Highlands met with opposition. One newspaper said: "Additional costs involved will be hard to justify at a time when local authorities are being attacked for significant increases in local taxation. And there will be resistance in Caithness - where [as we have stated] the area has a Norse rather than Gaelic heritage" ("Gaelic on the Map" 2004).

3. From "Ynglis" to Scots – Scottish Nationalism and a Third Language

Such divergent attitudes are not surprising given that language in Scotland has always been able to raise emotions. During the reign of James IV (1488-1513), William Dunbar penned the famous *Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*. A flyting is a verse contest in obloquy, often quite ribald, and though rare in England, they became rather common among the 16th-century Scottish poets who called themselves *makaris*. In this particular flyting, Dunbar takes the cause of the Lowlands Scots, speakers of "Ynglis," while his opponent Kennedy upholds the position of the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders. Although Kennedy was a fellow *makar*, and apparently a friend of Dunbar, the insults exchanged are more than a bit coarse. The first printed version (1508), contains such choice morsels as "wan fukkit funling [foundling]" and "cuntbitten crawdon [coward]." Dunbar thus enjoys the curious distinction of being responsible for the first printed use of that powerful four-lettered word for fornication (Crummy 2004; Drabble 1985).

As interesting as that may be, perhaps of more interest is Dunbar's consistent use of "Ynglis" to refer to his language. This "Ynglis" is probably not what most would consider "English" today, but it very closely resembles what is often identified as "Scots." However, even at the close of the 15th century, the term "Scots" still referred to Gaelic, just as it had for Bede seven centuries earlier. This Scots is denigrated as the language of "brokin men" and "savages." The irony is that Lowlanders such as Dunbar did consider themselves willing subjects of the King of Scots; they were proud of their Scotland and of their Scottish heritage. Nevertheless, they were ever careful to call the language they spoke "Ynglis" (Ward & Trent 2000).

Perhaps this is because Dunbar and the likes had little or no difficulty in understanding the Southron English spoken south of the border. Indeed, Lowlanders often identified more easily with their English cousins than with "those barbarian Highlanders speaking an

impenetrable tongue.” Furthermore, between the 13th and 17th centuries, the border between Scotland and England was generally undefined – so much so that the region became identified simply as “the Borders.” And, of course, just as it was impossible to find an easily identifiable boundary between the two countries, it was impossible to draw a line separating the peoples and their accents. “Ynglis” was just the northernmost variety of “English.”

4. Early Scots Literature and Differences from English

It is therefore not surprising that Scottish English was always strongly influenced by “Anglo-English.” Almost from the beginning, with James I’s *Kings Quair*, the *makaris* were influenced by English poets, particularly Chaucer – so much so that the great medieval Scottish poets are often called “Scottish Chaucerians.” The writings of Dunbar, Henryson, Lyndsay and Douglas are often considered superior to those of their English contemporaries whom they often replace on the university syllabus for medieval English literature (see, e.g., Duncan 2003), though their language is clearly distinct from that found south of the border(s).

Medievalists have no difficulty in immediately identifying Scotticisms based on certain defining characteristics. For example: the use of <qu> in place of <wh> in words like “whom” or “what”; the use of *tae* or *nae* for “to” or “no”; use of <ch> in place of <gh> in words like “night” or “bright”; use of <i> after another vowel grapheme to indicate lengthening, indicating compliance with Atkin’s Law (see Pukli, this vol.); simplification of the 2nd- and 3rd- person conjugations; use of <is> or <es> for terminal <s>, including plurals and possessives; the use of <t>, and more usually <it>, in place of preterite <ed>, even after voiced sounds. For example, this short Renaissance poem (James VI 1581) shows most of these characteristics:

Sen thocht is frie, Think quhat thow will,
O troublit hart to eiss thy paine
Thocht vnrevelit can doe na ill
Bot wordes past out cummis not againe
Be cairfull ay for to Invent
The way to get thy awin Intent

Although such spelling conventions are no longer conventional, some sounds can still occasionally be heard from Scottish speakers today. Furthermore, there is historical evidence for certain pronunciations that are suggested by the spelling, but which are no longer found. It is known, for example, that the <i> in *-it* or *-is* endings was once pronounced (e.g. “Glamis”), but here that cannot be the case for it would disrupt the metre with excessive syllables. As for the distinctive *quhat*, Alexander Hume, author of *Of the Orthographie and Congruite of the Britan Tongue* (1617), “advanced the argument that a labial symbol should not represent a guttural sound: that *w* was a labial symbol and the initial sound of *quho* ‘who’ a guttural” (Smith 1996: 170; Dobson 1968). Hume, a Scottish schoolteacher in Bath, was promptly put into his place. He was told, “the proposition is Scottish and the conclusion false.” But his argument makes clear that his Scottish pronunciation was something closer to /xʌo/ than modern Scottish /hu:/ (or, presumably, /ʌo/), and furthermore, that he viewed it as a worthy model for spelling throughout the United Kingdom.

5. The Early Days of English vs. Scots (English Wins)

The retort, however, also points out the beginnings of proscription in respect to pronunciation throughout Great Britain. Prior to the sixteenth century, variation in accent was taken for granted (see, e.g., MacMahon 1997: 3), and was naturally reflected in spelling. In the late fourteenth century, for example, the northern clerks in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* were teased for their accent, reproduced in Chaucer's orthography, but it was not a reflection on their status as gentlemen or scholars. A gentleman's speech was characterised by liberal sprinklings of French, not a particular accent. In the early 16th century (1530), a scant generation after Dunbar, Lydgate is quoted as saying: "Oure language is also so dyuerse in it selfe that the comen maner of spekyng in Englysshe of some contre can skante be vnderstandid in som other contre of the same lond" (see Tan 2004). He too seems to take accent variation for granted. Sixty years later, however, Puttenham has very precise ideas about language, denigrating even that of Lydgate and Chaucer in his *Art of English Poesie* (1589: 121):

Our maker therfore at these dayes shall not follow *Piers plowman* nor *Gower* nor *Lydgate* nor yet *Chaucer*, for their language is now out of vse with vs: neither shall he take the termes of Northern-men, such as they vse in dayly alke, whether they be noble men or gentlemen, or of their best clarkes all is a matter: nor in effect any speach vsed beyond the riuer of Trent, though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so Courtly nor so currant as our Southerne English is, no more is the far Westerne mans speach: ye shall therfore take the vsuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much aboue.

Within less than a decade, even the maker of the Scottish poem quoted above (written c. 1581), would feel this pull. He was none other than James VI, who in 1603 became James I of England.

Immediately upon his succession to the English throne, James seems to have wholeheartedly embraced what has contentiously been called "Anglo-English." Many of his own works were republished in a revised English that reflected that of the London court. For example, this extract of *Basilicon Doron* ("King's Gift") shows the text from James's 1595 manuscript on the left and the 1603 revision for distribution to his English subjects on the right (James VI 1598, 1603).

Scots

... choose auld experimented captaines & young abill soldatis, be extreamlie straitte & seuere in discipline alsuell for keiping of ordoure (quhilke is als requisite as hardiment in the uarres) for punishing of sleuth (quhilke at a tyme maye putte the haill airmie in hazairde) as lykeuayes for repressing of mutinies (quhilke in uarres is uonderfullie dangerouse), & looke to the Spangnoll, quhaise greate successe in all his uarres hes onlie cumd throuh straitnes of discipline & ordoure, for sic errouris may be comitted in the uarres as can not be gottin mendit againe:

English

Choose olde experienced Captaines, and younge able souldiers. Be extreamlie straitte and seuere in martiall Discipline, as well for keeping of ordour, whiche is as requisite as hardinesse in the warres, & punishing of slouth, which at a time may put the whole army in hazard; as likewise for repressing of mutinies whiche in warres are wonderfull dangerous. And looke to the Spaniard, whose greate successe in all his warres hath onely come through straitnesse of Discipline and ordour: for suche errors may be committed in the warres, as cannot be gotten mended

...

again.

These texts reflect the differences between the speech that was used in the English Court at London, and that spoken in the Scottish Court in Edinburgh. To the untrained (modern) eye, the version on the left is difficult, though one might recognize some Scottish characteristics. Most, however, will find it largely impenetrable, for it is an obsolete form of speech descended from Old English which is represented by now unfamiliar spelling conventions, some of which appear in the Northumbrian text of *Caedmon's Hymn* given above (viz. <u> for <w> in words such as “wars”). The speech on the right, however, is somewhat easier because it is this form that ultimately evolved into “Standard” English.

But why should it have been London English to evolve into the modern standard and not some other variety? Well, as Puttenham's passage makes clear, for some time London English had served as a model throughout England (as it still does now, see Carr this vol.). It was the variety of speech used in the capital, the centre of both government and commerce; it was used in the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge; it was used by Chancery clerks writing royal writs and decrees for publication throughout the kingdom. For these reasons it had been making headway as a national norm in England well before 1603, especially among the educated upper classes. Those who could imitate it did, and those who could not at least emulated it in writing.

6. Arrested Development of Standard Scots

With James's accession to the English throne, this process was accelerated by the king's evident new preference for Anglo-English. He reissued his writings in “Chancery English,” gave patronage to English writers such as Shakespeare, and perhaps most consequentially, acceded to the wishes of his new citizens in providing a new English translation of the Bible. This new “Authorized Version,” composed in the Midlands dialect, appeared in 1611; it was often the only written work in any household, serving as an example of how English should be written (and spoken) regardless of the actual vernacular of the inhabitants. Furthermore, with the king in London, the prestige formerly associated with a separate northern speech was greatly diminished, and the influence of London's English was now extended to Scotland.

Prior to 1603, however, the Scottish idiom enjoyed a great deal of prestige in the north. It was used in the royal court and in parliament, much as London English was used in England; the issuance of writs, laws and proclamations written in this speech gave it a high level of distinction throughout the kingdom. It was, like London's Midlands speech in England, used in Scotland's political capitals: Edinburgh and Stirling. Very similar accents were used in the two major economic centres, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Furthermore, similar accents were heard in all three of Scotland's medieval universities: St. Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen. These universities had flourished during the fifteenth century, when the Wars of the Roses threw Oxford and Cambridge into disarray, and lingering animosity from the Hundred Years' War meant that the University of Paris remained an unlikely option for many. The serious English student desirous of an education was therefore forced to seek it north of the border(s). Thus, Scottish speech patterns even attained a certain degree of prestige in parts of England.

Given such evidence, it is widely believed that if a separate Scottish kingdom with its own monarch and its own parliament had remained, a different language standard would have

emerged in Scotland. It is clear that the Scottish people themselves were beginning to consider what they spoke to be more than simply a dialect of English. Whereas before they had called their speech “Ynglis,” now they were calling it “Scots.”

Even James seems to have originally shared this sentiment. In lambasting his childhood tutor, George Buchanan, James said: “he gart [made] me speak Latin ere I could well speak Scots” (McClure 2004). Not only did he write political tracts like *Basilicon Doron* in Scots, he also promoted its use in essays on literature and poetry, such as *Ane Schort Treatise Containing some Reulis and Cautellis to be Obseruit and Eschewit in Scottis Poesie*. In true Renaissance style, he had encouraged a literary revival in the Scottish court with ‘the Castilian band’ of poets led by Alexander Montgomerie. Furthermore, James was something of a *makar* himself. He produced two volumes of his own poetry: *Essayes of a Prentise in the Divine Art of Poesie* and *His Maiesties Poeticall Exercises at Vacant Houres*. The high quality of some of these works still merits recognition, such as *The Phoenix* or *Lepanto*. Even today, he is remembered in the name for the seven-line iambic pentameter verse form that he frequently employed: *rime royal* (Abrams 1988:178).

It can therefore well be believed that Scots would have evolved into a separate standard formally used at all levels of society north of the border if it had continued to receive royal patronage. The Scottish parliament continued using it for 104 years, and even in England it was often considered more than simply a dialect of English. To mark the four hundredth anniversary of the Union, for example, Glasgow University Library’s Department of Special Collections put several contemporary documents on display, including a copy of a *Declaration made by King James in Scotland concerning Church-Government and Presbyters*. The original 1585 declaration written in Scots appeared nine years before James became king of England, but this 1646 London edition appeared 21 years after his death. The title is clearly in Anglo-English, however, on the bottom of the front page it says: “Now printed in English and Scotch.” This bilingual edition suggests that even late in the reign of Charles I, many were willing to accord Scots a special status as a national language of the northern kingdom.

So why did James and his descendants turn their backs on Scots? The reason most often given in James’s day is that the king wanted his new subjects to understand his message and not be confounded by his language, though the prestige of the English court certainly played a part. It is true that this policy ultimately gave English a homogeneity in its writing that had not been enjoyed since the time of Edward the Confessor, a situation that continues to be useful today. English speakers from around the world manage to understand one another’s writing with relative ease, regardless of differences in accent or dialect. But this convenience comes at what expense?

One clear expense was the death of the Scottish tongue as a prestige model for standardization. A great tradition that began with James I, the first *makar*, ends with James VI, the last. But as a spoken medium Scots has lived on and has continued developing different dialects. In signing the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages in 2000, the British government recognized Scots as a separate language, a policy which came into effect on July 1, 2001, exactly two years after the opening of the new Scottish parliament. Furthermore, the language has continued to be used sporadically in written forms by poets such as Robbie Burns and Hugh MacDiarmid, and more recently by novelists such as Iain Banks or Irvine Welsh. However, due to Scots’ lack of a written standard, many readers find these “dialect passages” difficult. There is much variation, each writer representing the

language differently, so even Scots speakers who are used to reading only “Standard” English are often confounded, especially when the writer has picked a dialect that is not their own.

7. Attempts at Standardization of Scots

It is not, therefore, surprising that there have been periodical calls for a standardization of Scots, the most influential of these perhaps being MacDiarmid’s advocacy of Lallans (i.e., “Lowlands”), a version of Scots based on the Lowlands speech of the *makaris*. The major difficulty with MacDiarmid’s Lallans, however, was that it was too reconstructionist. He suggested seeking a model for Lallans in the historical roots of Scots, adopting the slogan “not Burns – Dunbar!” (Bawcutt 2000). He had hoped to create a revitalised version of the original language, achieving in Scotland for Scots what *Nynorsk* had achieved for Norwegians in Norway after that country’s independence from Denmark. While many Scots speakers admired MacDiarmid’s drive and were sympathetic to his cause, they found his reconstructions too artificial and overly academic.

The problem was that, when still spoken exclusively, Scots had become the preserve of a largely disenfranchised segment of society that was generally deprived, both economically and educationally. This situation was the result of centuries of erosion. In the 17th century, upper class and educated Lowlanders began to speak English instead of Scots while their Highlander counterparts adopted it alongside or instead of Gaelic. By the 18th century, this trend had spread further, into the middle classes in both communities. These trends continued over the following centuries, with English increasingly encroaching on Scots and Gaelic. Today, nearly all Scots speak Scottish English, either as their only language (especially in the north) or in addition to Scots or Gaelic. Many educated Lowlanders code-switch between Scots and SSE (Standard Scottish English) – a variety of English described as having “a grammar and vocabulary almost (although not quite) the same as that used by educated speakers of Standard English in England, but [combined] with an essentially Scots pronunciation, albeit modified somewhat in the direction of Received Pronunciation” (Smith 1996: 166-67; see also Durand, this vol.). It is this group to whom MacDiarmid’s pronouncements most directly appealed. However, the group who should have formed the backbone of the movement, the minority of “monoglot” Scots speakers, were disillusioned by Lallans. To them, MacDiarmid’s proscriptive reconstructions meant that, rather than finally being allowed to speak their language freely, they were again submitted to the same frustrating corrections that they had suffered in the classroom at the hands of proscriptionist SSE-speaking schoolmarm.

8. Scots: Dialect or Accent?

A further problem with Scots is that it is often difficult to know where exactly to draw the line between accent, dialect and language. Most speakers who switch between SSE and Scots do so almost subconsciously, and it is not always possible to tell where one form leaves off and another begins. To give an anecdotal example, the first year I lived in Glasgow I went to see the municipal crèche in George Square at Christmastime with an English friend, Dr. Claire Jones, a fellow doctoral student at the time. We descended into the square and discovered that, to the great amusement of many of the visitors, someone had stolen the figure of the baby Jesus from the manger. Dr. Jones wryly commented in her RP English, “Well, that would be an easy child to take care of, then!” To which a woman beside her added, “Och, aye, hen! Bes’ kin’ a bairn; disnae eat, disnae greet!” Claire, who had lived in Glasgow for several years, chimed in, “Absolutely!” I, however, need a translation.

Preserving the Scotticisms, Claire “translated” the expression as: “Och, aye, hen! best kind of bairn; does not eat, does not greet.” I could work out what was meant by “och” and “aye,” commonly recognised “dialect words,” but I still needed an explanation for “bairn” and “greet.” I was also curious that Claire was not offended by being called a hen, an appellation I found rather insulting. She explained that in Glasgow English “hen” is a term of affection for addressing women; “bairn” means “child,” “greet” meant “cry.” Perhaps in her own variety of English, this would have come out as: “Oh, yes, dear! Best kind of child, doesn’t eat, doesn’t cry!”

The question at this point, however, is: what language was the woman really speaking? English, Scots or something in between? Is “disnae” simply the pronunciation of “doesn’t” in a Glaswegian accent, or is it morphologically and/or lexically different? Are “bairn” and “greet” foreign words from a language called Scots, or are they simply dialect words like Scottish English “och” and “aye”? The situation is complicated, especially when one considers that certain aspects of the woman’s pronunciation and vocabulary are closer to Old English than my General American or Claire’s RP. For example, some of this speaker’s back vowels missed the Great Vowel Shift, so when she goes home she can spy “a moos loose about the hoos”; her “och” shows that she still has a velar fricative, so she might indeed say, “It’s a braw [splendid] bricht moon-licht nicht the nicht.” Furthermore, both her “bairn” and “greet” are directly descended from Old English, as are “handsel” and “flyting.” Although these forms have died out in England, they still remain in Scotland; it is “Anglo-English” which has changed here, not the Scottish tongue.

And what about the question of mutual intelligibility? It is true that I had no idea what the woman was saying, but her interjection was clearly intended as a response to Claire’s statement. She fully expected it to be understood, and would surely have been insulted if I had asked her to repeat herself “in English.” Furthermore, Claire did understand it and her response was comprehensible to both the woman and myself. Initially, I would have been prepared to accept that the woman was speaking a foreign language. Claire later commented that the dialect was difficult. The woman herself probably assumed she simply spoke English with a Scottish accent. Knowing where to draw the line and then standardizing the Scots half of the Scots / Scottish English continuum is no easy task.

9. Scots and SSE accent variation

If, however, one accepts that Scots is a separate language, one comes back to the problem of standardization. What form of Scots should be selected as a model? Today there are separate dictionaries and resources for the Doric spoken in Aberdeen, which seems to be struggling for a separate identity from Lallans within the context of Scots. Then there is Buchan, spoken in northern Aberdeenshire. Is Buchan itself separate from Doric, or part of the same continuum? With the exception of the Gàidhealtachd and Caithness, it could be argued that each corner of Scotland has a separate Scots dialect to go along with a particular accent that is also used by the region’s SSE speakers. It is perhaps for this reason that the new parliament does not have signs posted in Scots alongside English and Gaelic. No one could decide whose version to use.

Furthermore, we frequently mislead ourselves by speaking of SSE as though it were a Scottish equivalent of RP (see Durand, this vol.). It is more an equivalent of Standard English as spoken in Scotland, one which takes into account grammar and lexicon more than

pronunciation. Scots readily differentiate between “East Coast,” “West Coast” and (again), “that strange speech of the Highlands and Islands.” Nevertheless, while these accents do have differences, they also share a great number of similarities. They are all rhotic; they tend to have /ʌ/ in *wh-* words; they tend to preserve a vowel’s strong variant in all positions while other English speakers reduce it to /ə/ in weak syllables (see, e.g. Durand, this vol.). Therefore, where an RP speaker would pronounce the sentence “When in Stirling, Gertie bought a fur coat for forty pounds sterling” as:
 /wen ɪn stɜːlɪŋ ɡɜːti bɔːt ə fɜː kəʊt fə θɜːti paʊndz stɜːlɪŋ/, an SSE speaker would be more likely to say: /wɛn ɪn stɪrlɪŋ ɡɜrtɪ bɔt ʌ fɹ kɔt fɹ θɪrtɪ pɹaʊndz stɜrlɪŋ/. Such aspects of Scottish speech are often reported by foreigners as being “very clear and easy to understand” (see, e.g., “RIP RP” 2000).

While such clarity might make the Scottish accent a favourite of the foreigner, it also appears that British people themselves generally like Scottish accents. The accent has historically been accepted as an alternative to RP where other regional accents, including “national” ones such as Welsh and Irish, have drawn scorn. Additionally, speakers with regional accents who are distrustful of RP and critical of other “broad” accents are more accepting of the “brogue.” This might account for the notable increase of Scottish speakers in the news and on television programmes, and it is certainly responsible for the displacement of call centres to Scotland. Callers are sometimes said to “trust” Scottish accents.

Outwith the UK, the accent also draws acceptance among English speakers. News reports in the United States mention that “[the accent’s] soothing qualities outweighing any pesky concerns such as comprehension for consumers from England to Asia” (Richissen 2004). This may be because that, as foreigners often claim, there is some basis for the belief that Scots have a very clear and concise fashion of pronouncing English. The Call Center News Service, for example, reported that Scottish accents were more easily interpreted by voice recognition systems than other accents (Call Center News 2004). Perhaps this explains why manufacturers of automated message recording services frequently include male and female Scottish accents alongside “standard UK” and “General American” (see, e.g., “rVoice” 2004).

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is therefore likely that Scottish accents will be increasingly heard throughout Britain, while the Scots language itself will continue to receive more direct attention in schools and universities in Scotland itself. Much as is hoped in the song, people are indeed, “thinking again.” With its new parliament, the dream that Scotland might rise and become a nation again has symbolically been achieved. In this new environment, Scots itself is privileged to receive special consideration through actions like the “Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on the Scots Language.” Such special attention means that Sir David Steel’s declaration for Scotland and her people, given at the “reconvening” of the Scottish parliament” is also perhaps true for her languages. It is “the start of a new sang.”

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank John Anderson, Fran Colman and Jacques Durand for their help and encouragement with this article, including their critical reading and many helpful suggestions.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1988). *A glossary to literary terms*. (5th ed.) Ft Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bawcutt, Priscilla (1998, 2000). William Dunbar: poet, c. 1460-1513. Originally published In *Discovering Scottish Writers*. SLAINTE: Information & Libraries Scotland. 9 August 2004 <<http://www.slainte.org.uk/scotauth/dunbadsw.htm>>.
- Bede (731). *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. Trans. William Hurst, 1814. The Saint Pachomius Library. 9 August 2004.
<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/St.Pachomius/bede1_01.html>.
- Call Center News Service (15 April 2004).
http://www.callcenternews.com/specials/ws_990205.shtml.
- Campbell, Alistair (1959). *Old English Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Carr, Philip (this volume). *London English*.
- Chronology of Scottish politics -- the three estates until 1707 (1996). *Scottish Politics: The Almanac of Scottish Politics*. Ed. Ian G. Old. 8 August 2004
<<http://www.alba.org.uk/timeline/to1707.html>>.
- Colman, Fran (this volume). *On diachronic linguistics, variation and English phonology*.
- Crummy, Andrew (2004). William Dunbar. 8 August 2004
<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~crumey/william_dunbar.html>.
- Dobson, E. J. (1968). *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Drabble, Margaret (ed.) (1985). *The Oxford companion to English literature*. 5th ed., rpt 1990. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duncan, Ian (Spring 2003). On the study of Scottish literature. Course home page for Scottish Literature. Department of English Literature, University of Glasgow. 9 August 2004.
<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Studying_Scottish_Literature.html>.
- Durand, Jacques (this volume). *English in early 21st century Scotland: a phonological perspective*.
- Final curtain for dodgy accents (29 November 2001). BBC News, Scotland. 9 August 2004 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/1682371.stm>>.
- Gaelic on the map? (March 13, 2004). *Scottish Snippets* 361. 9 August 2004
<<http://www.rampantscotland.com/let040313.htm>>.
- Gutherie, R. R. Lingard (2004). Notice of a seal of James, first Viscount Seafield, afterwards Lord Chancellor of Scotland." 8 August 2004
<<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/seafield.htm>>.
- James VI, King of Scotland (1581). "Sen thocht is frie." In James VI, King of Scots (2004) by Derrick J. McClure. *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 9 August 2004
<<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5482>>.
- James VI, King of Scotland (1589; 1646). *Declaration made by King James in Scotland concerning Church-Government and Presbyters*. London. Specific copy in holdings of Glasgow University Library, Document number: Sp Coll Bf72-e.5: item 7. 9 August 2004 <<http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/sep2003.html>>.
- James VI, King of Scotland (1596, 1603). *Basilikon Doron (extracts)*. Online text provided by the English Department, University of Stockholm. 9 August 2004
<<http://www.english.su.se/nlj/vk5/lect4/L04-doron.htm>>.

- McClure, Derrick J (2004). James VI, King of Scots. In *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 9 August 2004
- MacMahon, M. (1997). *Basic Phonetics*. Glasgow: English Language Department of the University of Glasgow.
- Mitchell, Bruce and Fred C. Robinson (1995). *A Guide to Old English*. 5th edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nicholson, Len (1986, 1987). The union of the Scottish and English parliaments. 8 August 2004 <<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/lennich/1707.htm>>.
- Norn – The language of Orkney (2004). In *Orkneyjar: The Heritage of the Orkney Islands*. 8 August 2004. <<http://www.orkneyjar.com/orkney/norn.htm>>.
- Pukli, Monika (this volume). *Scottish English and The Scottish Vowel Length Rule – An Empirical Study of Ayrshire Speakers*.
- Puttenham, George (1589). *Art of English Poesie*. Representative Poetry Online. Online text copyright © 2004, Ian Lancashire for the Department of English, University of Toronto. 9 August 2004 <http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/displayprose.cfm?prosenum=17&subfile=puttenham_artofp_3.html>.
- Richissen, Todd (1 February 2004). Friendly nature, Scots' burr paying country dividends. *The Seattle Times*. 9 August 2004 <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2001848579_scot01.html>.
- RIP RP (21 December 2000). BBC News UK. 9 August 2004 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1081717.stm>>.
- rVoice (2004). Introduction to products and services of Rhetorical Corporation. 9 August 2004 <<http://www.rhetoricalsystems.com/tts-en/languages/english.html>>.
- Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech, Background. (2003). Maintained by the SCOTS Project, directed by John Corbett. 8 August 2004 <<http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/background/>>.
- Smith, J. (1996). *An historical study of English: function, form and change*. London: Routledge.
- Tan, Peter (2004). The standardisation of English. Course home page. Department of English, National University of Singapore. 15 April 2004 <<http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elltankw/2262/Standardisation/C.htm>>.
- Ward A. W., W. P. Trent, et al (2000). The Scottish language, 'Scots' and 'Ynglis.' In *The Cambridge history of English and American literature in 18 Volumes*. Vol. 2, Chp IV, § 1. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907–21; New York: Bartleby.com, 9 August 2004 <www.bartleby.com/cambridge/>.
- Whitelock, Dorothy, ed. (1967). *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon reader*, Oxford: Clarendon.