

THE CURRENT STATE OF SCOTS

Scots in Education

Ever since the Treaty of Union of 1707, generations of Scots have had to come to terms with a situation in which they had been taught English at school and where the way of speech natural to them was officially regarded as wrong by definition. This created a situation in which many Scots felt that the way they spoke was unacceptable, or something to be ashamed of, so that the sooner they rid themselves of their Scottish characteristics the better. A case is on record of a school in Fife where a five-year-old girl complained to her teacher: *'Please Miss, yon laddie hut me'*. When the teacher enquired which boy she was talking about, the girl informed her, *'It wes John Potato.'* The infant mistress was puzzled by this, since there was nobody with that name in the class, but it suddenly dawned on her that there was a boy by the name of John Totty. The little girl had translated the boy's name into 'English' for the teacher's benefit.

The educationist, John Low (1974), cited the case of a schoolboy who was asked to compose a sentence containing the word, 'bell' and offered the following: *The skuil bell skunnert ma lug.* Since this imaginative sentence, involving relevant social commentary, was dismissed as unacceptable, the boy's feelings appear to have been fully justified.

To a significant extent, what we have had in Scotland, in place of education over many generations, is a process of deracination---a process of separating children from their linguistic roots---the opposite of education. Education should help children build upon their cultural heritage. It is really a wicked thing to tell a five-year old child at school. 'The way you speak is wrong and must be corrected, so that you can become right.' To tell a child this is very damaging. The child's cultural identity is undermined and the child's whole family insulted. This treatment of generations of children in Scotland has probably introduced a schizoid element, an element of self-hatred, into the national psyche. Associated with this, is self contempt, the well-known Scottish cringe.

The Anglicisation of Place Names

One consequence of the loss of justifiable pride in Scots identity has been the 'zeal' of local authorities, local tourist boards and cartographers in anglicising Scottish street names and place names. Avenues, terraces, hills, crescents and lanes have been ruthlessly substituted for our native *closes, gaits, raws, braes, wynds, loans* and *vennels*. Church Hill replaces *Kirk Brae* and *The Sauchiebrae* is transformed into the Willowbrae Road. In St Andrews, Baxter's Wynd was disgracefully transmogrified into Baker Lane! The velar fricative in *haugh* is often dropped, so that a street named Pan Ha' appeared in place of *Pan Haugh* near Kirkcaldy, on a *haugh* where salt used to be panned. Sauchiehaugh Street reappeared as Sauchiehall Street.

The surname, *Waugh*, becomes pronounced *Waw* and *Loch Menteith* becomes *The Lake of Menteith*, by corrupting *The Laigh o Menteith*, the name of the adjoining carse. Whole communities have lost their Gaelic or Scots names. *Applecross* suddenly appears in the North-West Highlands and cartographers transmogrified *Muirbattle*, the dwelling place on the *muir* in the Borders (where *muir* was pronounced in the same way as *mair*) to *Morebattle*.

In recent years there have been moves by parochial tourist boards to anglicise the native descriptions of Scottish topographical features and attempts have been made, against public opposition, to rename Clydesdale as Clyde Valley, and Strathspey as Spey Valley. The Firth of Forth suddenly re-emerges as The Forth Estuary. It is difficult to discover what authority or purpose, exists for such changes. In any self-governing country, native place names which reflect the history of the country are seen as valuable national assets, which have a value for tourism and which require government support and protection.

Social Attitudes - 'Good' and 'Bad' Scots

Although most people in Scotland use Scots to some extent, because of its close relationship with English, for most people, colloquial Scots is now part of a continuum with English, in which the content of Scots words and idiom varies according to the social situation. The problem with Scots in education is compounded by representing it as incorrect or corrupt English at school. Since education is properly concerned with imparting a view of the world based on our social roots, no educational or moral purpose can be served by representing Scots in a denigratory way. For generations, Scottish children have been given an image of good English at school, but no satisfactory image of good Scots. Instead of being given an image of good Scots, children have sometimes been presented with the psychologically-damaging notion that Scots is inherently bad or ugly, and some parents have collaborated with this treatment.

In a study of social attitudes to the use of Scotticisms in Edinburgh, Karl Sandred (1983) discovered striking differences in the prestige accorded to certain Scots words within and between different social classes. Astonishingly, the word *ken* was classed by eighteen informants as 'Good Scots' and by twenty-two informants as 'Bad Scots'. Clearly, there can be nothing inherently bad about a word like *ken*. It can only have been perceived in this way by Sandred's twenty-two informants, as a result of some imagined association with economic or social failure. Sandred (1983) also reported the case of a girl whose mother hit her so hard on the face when she heard her using the word, *ken* that she lost two front teeth.

A J. Aitken drew a distinction between *tumshie* Scots and *neip* Scots on the basis of social acceptability and there is certainly a widespread notion that bad (or gutter or *tumshie*) Scots is spoken by socially disadvantaged people who have not been deracinated by what has passed for education in Scotland, while some facility with good (or *neip*) Scots is a resource for the more economically successful. It is perhaps inevitable that patterns of speech associated with economic deprivation or squalor should be regarded with disfavor by those who have been more fortunate. To some extent, the Scots language as a whole, has shared this disagreeable image and low status associated with economic failure.

Also associated with the low status of Scots and the Scottish provincial cringe, is the notion that Scots is simply bad English, or a comic language not suitable for serious purposes, but appropriate for Buttons and the Ugly Sisters in a pantomime. The fact that Cinderella speaks a different language from her sisters is really a political statement. Scots is certainly a wonderful language for humor, and numerous books were published in the last century which were full of reminiscences centered on the Kirk, of funny stories about ministers and beadles (Ford, 1895).

Over the last few decades, Scots has come under increasing pressure from English as a result of the influence of British radio and TV, and the genuine article is becoming more and more hard to find. There is no doubt that as a spoken language it is now becoming rapidly undermined and eroded. Scots has also suffered from the misconception that it is a disreputable dialect compared with the various kinds of Scots-English (representing varying degrees of anglicisation) which are now spoken in Scotland and which are seen to constitute some kind of norm. This notion has led to a bizarre state of affairs where Scots speakers speaking in a relatively natural way in their own country, may suffer from a social handicap and may be treated as quaint or amusing, by people who actually speak in an artificial or affected way. There is certainly no rational basis for this view, since all patterns of speech are dialects, although some may be more ephemeral than others.

The extent of erosion of spoken Scots under the impact of English is now so great that there is now a problem of definition with spoken Scots. David Murison (1979) in a paper on the historical background to the languages of Scotland has stated: 'Because of its kinship and similarity to English, Scots is becoming more and more confused and corrupted by it, and so fewer people speak it correctly, perhaps even fewer than Gaelic. Murison's concept of a correct Scots, however, does not seem to be shared by Aitken (1982), who has appeared to deny the existence of a spoken Scots language. Aitken stated: 'Scottish language can fairly be called a highly distinctive national variety of English.' Thus Murison saw spoken Scots as having been corrupted by the influence of English, while Aitken evidently regarded it as an eccentric kind of English. To some extent, these appear to be as much political as linguistic judgments, and the question arises whether it is proper to describe a 'national variety of English,' as any kind of English at all. Certainly, nobody would describe official Norwegian, which is certainly closely related to Danish, as a national variety of Danish.

The notions of good and bad Scots are relative concepts. Nevertheless, in a considerable paper, Aitken (1982) attacked the concept of an 'ideal, perfect good Scots' in an immaculate English, which showed no signs of any deviation from the current notion of 'ideal perfect English'. He went on to state: 'condemnation of dialects like Bad Scots for alleged slipshodness, lack of correctness and ugliness, ultimately represent a response not to their qualities as language, but to social evaluations of the sort of people who speak them.' While this view is often accepted, Aitken's observance of the current standards of good English implies that he had a notion of linguistic quality of language which was independent of social evaluation. This is a chicken which will not fight, because the quality of a language is a value judgment which is inseparable from its social evaluation.

If a pattern of speech becomes associated in the public mind with economic failure and urban degeneration, it automatically becomes 'bad' by association, with a quality of life seen as undesirable. In the long term, what kind of Scots is seen as 'good' will be defined by the body of literature which survives in it, as a testimony to its worth.

Scots as a Means of Cultural Expression

Although spoken Scots appears to be in danger of dying out altogether as a living language, there is now considerable interest in Scots as a means of cultural expression. The poet Sydney Goodsir Smith used to argue in public in an ERP accent, that it was necessary for him to write in Scots, because English had become a global technological language which had lost contact with its social roots. English, he argued, had become spiritually worn out and was no longer a suitable medium of poetic expression. This view was an echo of assertions made by Hugh MacDiarmid in 1923 (Buthlay, 1977), when he described Scots as:

a vast unutilised mass of lapsed observations made by minds whose attitude to experience and whose speculative and imaginative tendencies were quite different from any possible to Englishmen and anglicised Scots today. Just as psychologically, we have lost certain powers possessed by our forefathers – the art of wiggling our ears, for example – so we have lost word forming faculties peculiar to the Doric for the purposes of both psychological and nature description. There are words and phrases in the vernacular which thrill me with a sense of having been produced as a result of mental processes entirely different from my own and much more powerful. They embody observations of a kind which the modern mind makes with increasing difficulty and weakened effect.

There have been a number of useful developments in the last few decades in relation to Scots. The Lallans Society (later renamed the Scots Language Society) was founded in 1972 and *The Lallans* magazine was launched in 1973. *The Scottish National Dictionary* was completed under the editorship of David Murison in 1976. Professor Lorimer's *New Testament in Scots* was published in 1983 and although perhaps about 400 years overdue, this turned out to be a best seller. *The Concise Scots Dictionary* appeared in 1985 and in the same year, the Scots Language Society published *Recommendations for Writers in Scots*, a set of consensus guidelines on Scots orthography. Robert McLellan's *Linmill Stories* were published as a complete collection in 1990, and the Scots Language Resource Center was established in Perth in 1991. There is certainly a dearth of good prose in Scots and the *Linmill Stories* help to remedy this deficiency by providing a useful model for writers of narrative prose. *The Concise English-Scots Dictionary* appeared in 1993.

In 1997 the first edition of *A Scots Grammar* was published by the Saltire Society. This was the first Scots grammar to be published since 1923. It quickly sold out and was followed by a revised, extended edition. (Purves 2002.)

In 1999 a Scottish Parliament was re-established with responsibility for education at every level and for the role of the Scottish Arts Council. The protection of the national cultural heritage, including the linguistic heritage, then became clearly the Parliament's responsibility. A Cross Party Group on the Scots Language was therefore created in the following year. This Group published *SCOTS, A Statement of Principles 2003*, calling on Government to uphold the European Charter on Minority Languages as part of a coherent policy for Scots. In 2005, the Scottish Executive became committed to formulating a National Languages Policy for Scotland, although it was not clear how it could be possible to implement such a policy without some control or influence over broadcasting in Scotland.

Scots and lesser-Used Languages

Much more interest is now being shown within the European Union in the condition of the lesser used languages of Europe: such as Basque, Breton, Catalan, Cornish, Frisian, Occitan, Scots, Scots Gaelic, Welsh and the Romance languages of Northern Italy. There has been a European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) with an office in Dublin for several years. This is an institution financed by the EU which has the object of improving the status of such languages within the member states.

Although some of these languages are in a healthier state than others, most of them are now taught in the schools to some extent, and are provided with radio and TV slots. A large proportion of TV programs in Catalonia are now in Catalan, and Catalan, Frisian, Irish and Welsh now have the status of official languages. The contrast between the treatment of these languages by governments of the states in which they are spoken and the treatment of Scots by the UK Government, is extraordinary. For the past fifteen years, Gaelic has received substantial annual government support in an annual grant to the *Comataid Telebhisein* (Gaelic Television Committee).

While nobody in the Scots Language Society would grudge support for the ancient language of the Scottish Kingdom, when it is considered that Scots was formerly the State Language of Scotland and that around a hundred times as many people know some Scots than understand Gaelic, it can be argued that the BBC should now be spending over £500 million per year in supporting Scots in broadcasting! However, by comparison with Gaelic, support for Scots in broadcasting has been almost negligible and in general, Government support for Scots language has been confined to small sums for the Scottish National Dictionary Association and the Scots Language Resource Center.

The Scots Language in Drama

Since Scots is potentially a powerful dramatic register, its use in drama is certainly more limited than it should have been. However, many of the major theatres in Scotland and many amateur companies have produced plays in Scots. Perhaps too many of them have been translations of plays by Molière, Chekhov, Tremblay and others, rather than original work in Scots. The view seems to have become popular in theatrical circles that Scots is a particularly suitable language for use by Molière's monstrous caricatures. The linguistic register involved in the Scots used in plays

which have been recently produced, ranges from the colloquial Scots of *The Steamie* and *The Guid Sisters*, to the sixteenth century Scots of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. This has been produced as a centre piece of the Edinburgh International Festival on five occasions since 1948. This morality play in Middle Scots by Sir David Lyndsay, was also performed in Warsaw by the Scottish Theatre Company, where it received a standing ovation before the abrupt abandonment of the company in 1988.

Traditionally, the use of Scots has been an important feature of drama in Scotland for hundreds of years, although until the mid 1930s, its use had become largely confined to comic characters. These roles reflect a denigratory attitude to the language, but after the mid 1930s, there was some extension of the traditional comic use of Scots by a new breed of playwrights. A one-act play by Robert McLellan called *Jeddart Justice* was produced in 1934, and this was followed by a full-length play, *Toom Byres*, which was produced in Glasgow in 1936. Other plays by McLellan included *Jamie the Saxt* (1937, Torwatletie (1946) and *The Flouers o Edinburgh* (1948), which explores the language problem in Scotland in the nineteenth century. Other playwrights of merit who followed McLellan's example in the post-war period were Robert Kemp, who wrote *The Other Dear Charmer*, *The Scientific Singers* and *The Laird o Grippy*, and Alexander Reid, who wrote *The Lass wi the Muckle Mou* and *The World's Wonder*. There have also been a number of plays popular with amateur companies in the genre of *Johnny Jouk the Gibbet* by T M Watson, and *The Honours of Drumlie* by James Scotland. Here we have a closed world, populated by *galluss lads*, *chaumer louns* and *wurthie beylies*. The action in such plays is frozen in historical time. However, since the late 1930s, the use of Scots on the stage has not been entirely restricted to pantomime and this genre, and there have been productions of plays in demotic Scots, social commentary on contemporary life by a range of authors.

A comprehensive list of plays written in Scots since 1900 was compiled by Charlotte Reid (1991) for the Scots Language Society and published by Glasgow City Libraries, running to 44 Pages. Most of these plays are comedies, but Scots certainly has the linguistic resources to cope with any dramatic situation, from comedy to tragedy and from pantomime to high drama. In this connection, it is of interest that much of the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is recorded in Middle Scots in the Bellenden Manuscript dated 1536. There is now great scope in the theatre for extending and upgrading the dramatic use of Scots outside its conventional association with pantomime and mock-historical comedy. There is no good reason why Scots on stage should not be employed in tragedy. It was this end in view that the author made a translation of *Macbeth* into Scots (Purves, 1992). The following is a well-known passage from Act II, Scene 2:

*Cum blinndin nicht, hap up the tender ee
o peitie, an wi yeir bluidie
inveisible haund, blouter the lyfe
that hauds me aye in fear! The nicht faws,
an hame the craw flies til the mirk wuid.
The guid things o the day begins ti dover owre,
an the beiss that hunts the derk begins
ti steir thairsells an set aboot thair wark.*

*Ah see ye wunner at ma wurds!
Nou juist you caum yeirsell!
Things wi ill sterts growes strang wi wickedness.*

Scots still has the resources to cope with any dramatic situation and its image should not be confined to pantomime *coamies* or to lavatorial humor at the level of *Chewin the Fat* on television comedy.

Following the demise of the Scottish Theatre Company in 1992, the Advisory Council for the Arts in Scotland set up a committee to campaign for a National Theatre for Scotland. The campaign received the support of the Scots Language Society and many arguments have been advanced in favor of the establishment of such an institution. Because of the erosion of spoken Scots under the impact of English in the media, actors may not now be sufficiently familiar with the uncompromising Scots used by some playwrights, so that many productions have been marred by solecisms and mispronunciations of Scots words. Attempts at Scots by some actors sound embarrassingly inauthentic, although most actors know enough Scots to correct mistakes if given a little informed advice. Against the background of the way in which theater has been organized in Scotland, such advice has seldom been sought. Furthermore, some playwrights have not seemed to be concerned whether the Scots they wrote was authentic or not. In the play, *Bondagers*, by Sue Glover, a social commentary on the lives of female agricultural workers in the Borders in the nineteenth century, the language did not correspond to Border speech in the last two centuries.

A National Theatre was launched in 2003 with an initial funding of £7.5 million and a creative director has since been appointed. Such a theater would presumably be concerned with providing resources, information and advice to help directors to improve standards of authenticity in performances in Scots. This would be an obvious key function and an educational challenge for a National Theatre. In any country, the proper function of the theater is to extend awareness at a more universal level in the context of the native cultural heritage. A global view of human relations has to be presented from the country's own national perspective. In the past, in the absence of a National Theatre, there has been no effective general commitment in the theater to Scotland's indigenous culture and it has been to a large extent, an extension of the theater in London. In Scotland we have three principal linguistic registers for dramatic productions: English, Scots and Gaelic. Two of these registers are indigenous and unique to Scotland and each is a valuable dramatic resource.

Since the Scots language is what is left to us of what was once the State Language before 1603, it is an important part of our cultural heritage. For many people, the theatre now provides the only opportunity for hearing the Scots Language in a relatively uneroded form. The dramatic potential of Scots can only be properly realised against the background of a National Theater which can provide a focus for Scotland's indigenous culture and a basis for a living dramatic tradition. At the time of writing it remains to be seen whether there is any will to achieve these objectives.

Scots in Broadcasting

In general, the media behave as if the Scots language does not exist, except as a curiosity, although a majority of the population know and employ some Scots every day. A negligible amount of material in Scots is published in Scotland's 'national' newspapers. The pattern is much the same in radio and television. In radio in Scotland, there has been some limited devolution to local and to BBC Radio Scotland, which, however, continues to employ newsreaders with affected, jolly-hockey stick English (rather than Scots-English), accents, presumably to set an 'educated' example on how the language should be pronounced. However, television in Scotland is almost entirely London-centered. Few television programs are produced outside the London area and only a small proportion of these are produced in Scotland. The number of plays in Scots is so small that there is little prospect of the development of satisfactory expertise and associated infrastructure in this area. The same can be said of the possibility of developing an indigenous film industry.

TV features which are produced in Scotland are often starved of adequate funding and expected to conform to the pattern seen as suitable for broadcasting on the 'network'. In practice, this means that programs often have, like 'Monarch of the Glen' to project an outdated image of Scotland congenial to viewers in the London area. In consequence, the few TV plays produced in Scotland are usually in demotic Scots, and have often involved the 'hard-man' image associated with urban deprivation in west central Scotland. This is true, to some extent, of the current soap opera, 'River City', presumably based on life in contemporary Glasgow. This is interesting in that in performance, the cast are evidently allowed to Scotticise a script in English by spontaneously employing some Scots words and idioms. While this can be dramatically effective, it does nothing to dispel the notion that there is any necessary association between the Scots language and urban deprivation.

The current view of the BBC in relation to Scots is perhaps embodied in the Green Paper reviewing the BBC's Royal Charter (2005). The original Royal Charter made no mention of the existence of either Scots or Gaelic, but the recent Green paper inviting consultation, now states: (p.41) "Devolution has changed the political fabric of the UK, and the BBC should continue to provide a larger amount of dedicated programming in and for each of the devolved nations; (P.42) The BBC has a crucial role to play in safeguarding Gaelic cultural heritage and it has a history of commitment to Gaelic across a number of platforms". Scots receives no mention in the Green Paper, which is odd in view of the fact that devolution gave Scotland the parliament it had lost in 1707, and that that parliament conducted its business exclusively in Scots.

It is also odd to mention, alongside devolution, another highly significant event that has taken place within the life of the present Royal Charter: The UK's acceptance, with effect from 1 July 2001, of certain obligations to the Scots language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. If the new Royal Charter fails to mention the Scots Language, we can expect the BBC to continue the crucial role it will have to play if the UK is to meet its obligations to the language under the European Charter. Without its co-operation, the Scottish Executive will be unable to

implement a credible National Languages Policy for Scotland in which there is a gross disparity between the treatment of Gaelic and Scots by the BBC.

Following a representation on the treatment of Scots by John Barrett MP in February 2005, to Mr Michael Grade, Chairman of the BBC, a statement was received from Ian Small, Head of Public Policy, BBC Scotland as follows: “Scots is not generally used in formal scriptwriting, reflecting the reality that that speakers of Scots/Lallans – with very few exceptions – choose not to use the language in formal contexts.” The reality is that they can hardly be said to make a choice when the only one of the two Anglic languages they have ever been taught to write or use in formal context, is English. This is a tragic situation that must be addressed if the UK’s commitment to the European Charter is to be honored.

It is difficult to foresee any marked improvement in the broadcasting situation without a return to democratic government in Scotland. A move in the right direction might be the creation of a fully-empowered Broadcasting Council for Scotland which would draw its membership from representatives of the Scottish audience. This body has been impotent in the past in its efforts to protect Scotland’s interests. Failing this, against the background of a Scottish Parliament, the creation of a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation might then become a possibility.

The Scots Language and National Identity

The Scots language is an important badge of national identity and its erosion and present status constitute a political problem that cannot be tackled properly (or even addressed) until there is a return of decision-making to Scotland. The problem relates to the question of national identity: whether we see ourselves as Britons or Scots. At present, most of us in Scotland vary our speech over a linguistic continuum with Scots-English (the cumulative result of the attempts of several generations of Scots to speak English) at one pole and what is left of Scots at the other. The latter is now largely confined to those who have not been deracinated by the influence of what has passed for education.

In speech, most people move along this spectrum to a varying degree, to accommodate the social circumstance in which they are placed. We try to vary our speech according to what we think is expected of us. This is to say that we suffer from linguistic insecurity. Many of us employ the odd Scots word in the context of English sentences to produce results like: *Alasdair is a very kenspekkil figure on the golf course these days*, or *The’r a wee bit of a stramash going in the front row of the scrum*. This may give spice to our speech and serves as a signal that while the speaker is sufficiently educated not to use Scots all the time, he or she has knowledge of the language as a potential resource. In Scottish courts, the use of Scots is evidently not expected of us. Once universal, the use of Scots in Court now seems to be regarded as a subversive political act, to judge by the experience of a man who was consigned to the cells in 1993 by a Sheriff in Stirling (reputedly a Burns enthusiast), for using the word *Ay*, to address the bench.

/THE WAY FORWARD