

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

What then, is the way forward for people who are concerned with fostering this valuable part of our cultural heritage? What is immediately necessary is that we should begin to define what 'Good Scots' is.. A standard written Scots with a grammar and syntax of its own and a standardised spelling system needs to be established, so that Scots can be taught at school and at adult level as a linguistic system distinct from English. In this context, the word 'standard' would necessarily imply a considerable degree of flexibility.

### **The Scottish Language Project**

Over the last two decades there has been an expanding interest in teaching Scots at both school and university level, and attitudes to teaching Scots have changed in favor of giving it its rightful place in school curricula. In early 1993, all Scottish education authorities agreed to take part in the Scottish Language Project (Robertson, 1993) in partnership with the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum. The object of this project, which was launched in 1996, was to promote the use of Scots and Gaelic in all primary and secondary schools. This objective was to be achieved with the aid of Scotland's *Kist*, an anthology containing prose, poetry and drama, with associated audiotapes and visual teaching aids. The contents of this were published in 1996, and the Scottish Language Project was duly launched (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1996).

Credit for initiating this laudable project was due to Robbie Robertson, then Assistant Director of the SCCC. The project's description stated: 'the kist will also contain audiotape readings of all printed texts in the anthology, made by native speakers of Gaelic and each dialect of Scots. There will be a videotape showing the different locales in which Gaelic and the dialects of Scots occur'. Here, there is no reference to literary Scots, the language in which most writing in Scots has been published. An impression is given here, that while Gaelic was seen as a language, Scots was seen within the project as a collection of local dialects, eroded to different extents under the influence of English in the media and in schools, and that an object of the exercise was to teach surviving dialects.

It is difficult to see how any of the surviving dialects of Scots could be effectively taught in schools. None of them has an extensive literature and none of them, except Shetlandic, has a contemporary published grammar which could be used as the basis for instruction. Furthermore, most teachers in Scotland are not native to the dialect area in which they teach. Scots cannot now be taught solely through the medium of its surviving regional dialects, which are now seriously eroded and infiltrated by English as a result of globalisation and to some extent, as a result of earlier 'educational' policy.

Educational Policy and Scotland's cultural heritage has been the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament since 1999, and the shortcomings in the Scottish Language Project have now been identified. However, despite these difficulties, this project marked an important breakthrough in attitudes to Scots in education, and it is now recognised that teaching about Scots will not be confined to dialect material native to

the areas covered by the various education authorities, and that it should include material in literary Scots, to which children could relate their local dialects.

The normal way to teach any language is by reference to the literature in it, and to the idiom, grammar and syntax which the literature exemplifies. While every language is subject to continuous change, the literary form of each language is an anchor which provides linguistic continuity: a standard which ensures that those changes which become established are evolutionary in their nature. There is a substantial body of literature in Scots from around 1700 to the present time which is surprisingly consistent linguistically, and which could be used as a useful teaching resource. Unfortunately, what now survives as spoken Scots has become linguistically dissociated in some respects from this literature. An important function in Scottish education should be to re-establish the connection between colloquial speech and the body of literature which exists.

In courses in Scots language provided by Departments of English at Scottish Universities, it is understandable that in departments so-named, English may be the measure of all things, and Scots sometimes viewed as a kind of non-standard English. A few years ago at an adult education course at Edinburgh University, the teacher started her course by writing down her definition of Scots on the board. This was: SCOTTISH NON-STANDARD ENGLISH – WORKING CLASS. This definition begs many questions, and she was astonished when members of the class objected to it. Fortunately, this view of Scots now seems to be atypical among university teachers involved in courses in Scots language. The term ‘Scots’ should not be pejorative or politically loaded and should be seen as a generic term covering every aspect of the language: Middle Scots, literary Scots from about 1700, and all the surviving dialects.

### **Standard Scots**

The existence of a significant literary tradition in writing in Scots from the time of Allan Ramsay at the beginning of the eighteenth century until the time say, of Robert Garioch and Alastair Mackie in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been an important factor in favor of the survival of the Scots language. However, as a result of the treatment of spoken Scots in the schools, many grammatical, syntactical and idiomatic features of the spoken language have seldom been represented in writing. Many of these features can still be found in contemporary speech. A case has been reported of a schoolgirl who, on being late for school, told her teacher: *‘Please Miss, Ah slept in. Ma mither is in hir bed with the cold.’* The teacher’s response was: ‘You mean you overslept. Mother is in bed with a cold’. The girl had been under the impression she had been speaking English!

The need to develop Scots as a national language was argued by Derrick McClure (1980) in a paper which inspired some criticism from A. J. Aitken (1980). McClure drew an analogy with the Norwegian experience in creating Nynorsk, which was perhaps misleading, since this related to the synthesising of an artificial language from ancient roots. In Scotland, a national written language is already incipient in the existing fragmentary literature in Scots and to some extent, in surviving colloquial speech.

Literary Scots was described by Aitken (1980) as, 'a somewhat archaistic and idealised form of central Scots', but it does provide a foundation on which a standard written Scots could be built. While originally based on the speech of central Scotland, it cannot now be said to be any particular regional dialect and the Scots used by most writers, including Burns and MacDiarmid, from the time of Allan Ramsay, is surprisingly consistent linguistically, as is the language of most songs in Scots. It cannot be said that the language of *Caller Herrin* or *Corn Riggs* is in any particular dialect, and such a sentence as, *Willie's gaen tae Melville Castle, buits an spurs an aw; he kissed the lassies aw fareweill afore he gaed awa*, cannot be associated with any particular dialect area. The body of literature which exists in this language is substantial, and there is also a significant amount of writing published in Shetlandic and North-East Scots (now often designated as the *Doric*). Writing in dialects which can be identified with other areas is practically negligible.

While literary Scots is already standardised to some extent and could, given the will, be further developed into a satisfactory standard form of written Scots, there are great problems of definition. Most literary Scots is in verse and the language is very variable, depending on the extent to which it has been anglicised by various writers. We have already seen that Burns switched into English whenever he wanted to be seriously reflective, and MacDiarmid was greatly influenced by the standards of English literature and a distaste for Scots dialect (Milton, 1986), otherwise he would never have written, *Yin canna thow the cockles o yin's hert*, in *A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle* (MacDiarmid, 1987). It is impossible to imagine anyone ever saying such a thing in Scots, or that Burns could ever have written such a line as, *Gin yin meet yin comin throu the rye!*

In an important paper, Caroline Macafee (1980) stated that 'in grammar more than at other linguistic levels, modern written Scots tends to adhere to the model instilled by literacy in standard English'. This is a natural consequence of the representation of Scots over a period of generations, as an incorrect form of English. The adherence by writers in Scots to the standards of English grammar and orthography is not, of course, a modern phenomenon. This has been a characteristic of writing in Scots since the sixteenth century, a trend which was latterly followed by James VI.

Against the background of the continuing erosion of colloquial Scots, it is arguable whether a substantial proportion of recent writing purporting to be in Scots, should be regarded as Scots at all. What can we make, for example, of a sentence such as, 'Ah wouldnae of came if Ah had of knew', quoted by Macafee (1980), as an example of non-standard grammar in Scots? Should this be seen as a kind of Scots or simply as bad, or broken, English? The acceptance of such a sentence as modern Scots, simply perpetuates the pejorative notion that Scots is corrupt English.

Much contemporary writing contains few of the features which characterise the language, and appears to consist of DIY Scots: back translations from English into personal notions of what Scots is. Some of the so-called Scots currently written and published, may be syntactically and idiomatically English and attempt to compensate for its inauthenticity by spelling English words in an unusual way, and/or by spicing the text with bad language. It is not possible to write well in Scots without experience

of colloquial speech or a sound knowledge of Scots idiom and syntax. In the absence of distinctive features of Scots, as exemplified in such sentences as, *Auld men dees an bairns suin forgets*, and *War the no a Kerr bade aince the ferr syde the glebe?* the language loses its unique quality. Good Scots certainly cannot be written by anybody who decides to invent his/her own personal language with its own orthography and grammar, off the cuff., because it is too much effort to discover the standards inherent in speech and in the substantial corpus of literature that already exists. A passage in English cannot be transformed into authentic Scots, simply by substituting Scots words for English words in an English syntactical context, without reference to structure and idiom.

The magazine, *Lallans*, the journal of the Scots Language Society, is the only publication in existence which regularly appears in Scots. As such, it has provided an important outlet for writers who want to try their hand at Scots. Since it appeared in 1973, the editorial policy initiated by its founder, J. K. Annand, has been to set standards for written Scots, in particular, to encourage prose writing in Scots with a view to extending its use in areas where it has never adequately developed in accord with social change. The numbers of *Lallans* which have now been published, together with an anthology from the first 21 years called *Mak it New* (MacCallum and Purves, 1995), constitute a valuable archive of writing in dialect and literary Scots in both poetry and prose since 1973.

While it would require a social revolution in Scotland to re-establish Scots for discursive prose at every level, the *Lallans* magazine has developed prose in Scots for reviews, and is now an unrivalled source of fine poetry in Scots written over the last quarter century. This includes renderings in Scots of poems in English and Gaelic and in every major European language. *Lallans* is also a unique source of renderings of poems by Chinese masters in the long coherent tradition of Chinese poetry extending over two and a half millennia, and the versions in Scots often possess a *frisson* which is absent from equivalent English versions of the same original poems in Chinese.

Nevertheless, we are now in a situation where it seems unlikely that literacy in Scots can be sustained for very long, unless Scots is effectively taught both at schools and university level;. Before this can be done, two resources which are obviously necessary, are an up-to-date Scots grammar and a generally-recognised orthography for Scots. Until 1997, the most recent publication which could be regarded as a grammar of Scots was the *Manual of Modern Scots*, by Grant and Dixon, Cambridge University (1921). The publication of an up-to-date grammar was therefore long overdue, although a grammar of Shetlandic, which can be regarded linguistically as a branch of Scots, had been published in 1952 and reprinted in 1991 (Robertson and Graham, 1991). This described many features with parallels in mainland Scots and in 1997, The Saltire Society published the first edition of a Scots grammar' of contemporary relevance (Purves, 1997). A revised, extended edition of this appeared in 2002.

## Scots Orthography

In the courtly poems of the Makkar's of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Scots was a State language, the rather loose system of spelling used was phonetically superior to that used by later writers, who had to be content with a state of affairs in which Scots had been downgraded for socio-political and economic reasons. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the time of Allan Ramsay, Scots was starting to be regarded in influential circles as a rustic dialect of English, rather than a national language, which had been independently derived from a common ancestor. Ramsay himself employed a system of spelling in his writing that reflected this parochial attitude. There was no satisfactory model of written Scots so, instead of basing his spellings on the relevant, but outdated, practices of the *Makkars*, Ramsay turned to English and embarked on large-scale anglicisation of Scots spelling (Robinson, 1973). Ramsay also introduced unnecessary apostrophes into Scots words with similar English equivalents, thereby giving the impression that they were really careless versions of their English counterparts.

Although Ramsay is now seen as a Scots patriot, this attitude can be seen as early evidence of the Scotch provincial cringe. Successors of Allan Ramsay, such as Fergusson, Burns, Scott and Galt, tended to follow his spelling ideas, and the general trend throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to adopt further spelling practices from English, since this was the only accessible standard. By the end of the nineteenth century, Scots orthography was in a state of utter confusion as a result of hundreds of years of piecemeal borrowing from English, and it has long been impossible for anyone to write in Scots without using a host of spelling forms adopted from English. The Scots language had come to be seen as a parochial form of speech, and the spellings employed by various *Kailyaird* writers in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected this attitude.

A completely phonetic system of spelling was devised by Sir James Wilson at the beginning of the twentieth century (Grant and Dixon, 1921) and the following stanza from *Caller Herrin*, gives an impression of the appearance of Scots written on this basis.

*Neebur weifs, noo tent ma tellin.  
Hwun dhu boanay fush yee'r sellin,  
At ay wurd bee in yur dailin.  
Truith ull staun hwun awthing's failin.*

Although this system may have been valuable for recording details of pronunciation, the outlandish appearance of Scots written on this basis, ruled it out for general purposes. If the familiar appearance of written Scots is to be preserved, a largely phonetic system is required which will employ traditional spelling precedents for most of the vowel sounds.

Following a spate of Lallans poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, a significant step towards introducing some order into the spelling of Scots was taken at a meeting of the Makkar's Club in Edinburgh in 1947 chaired by A. D. Mackie, where the 'Scots Style Sheet' was approved (Makkar's Club, 1947). This consisted of a number of recommendations designed to standardise many of the vowels and digraphs

commonly used in spelling Scots. The use of apostrophes in words to indicate a letter which would have been present if a related English word had been used instead (e.g. he'rt for heart) was discouraged in this document. However, the introduction of an extra unnecessary digraph, 'aa', into the language was recommended, as a kind of disguised apostrophe signifying a missing 'll' to create spellings like *aa*, *baa*, *caa* and *faa*. Since satisfactory spellings like *aw*, *baw*, *caw* and *faw* were already present in Scots dictionaries, this proposal seemed to serve no useful purpose. Many of these ideas were subsequently adopted by Lallans poets, and J.K. Annand, Douglas Young, Robert Garioch, A.D. Mackie, Alastair Mackie, Robert McLellan, Alexander Scott, Tom Scott and Sydney Goodsir Smith all followed the recommendations in the Style Sheet to some extent.

These proposals closely followed the ideas of Douglas Young and A.D. Mackie and although they were very limited in their scope, as a result of their influence, modern Scots poetry came to look much less like a careless version of English, plagued by swarms of parochial apostrophes. Nevertheless, much greater consistency in the spelling of Scots was required and it was seen as necessary to carry this development a stage further. Since the proposals in the Scots Style Sheet amounted to about a single page of print, and no guidance was given on how to represent the vowel in words such as *ben*, *ken*, *gled*, *sned* and *redd*, they were hardly adequate guidelines for spelling a language. Further proposals for the rationalisation of Scots spelling were published by the author (Purves, 1979) following support for reform from C.M. Grieve.

A second set of guidelines entitled 'Recommendations for Writers in Scots' was published in Lallans 24 (Scots Language Society, 1985) and these represented a consensus view of a representative group of writers currently employing Scots, following several years of debate and consultation. This document was essentially a developed version of the 1947 Style Sheet, based on traditional spelling precedents, in order to preserve the familiar appearance of written Scots. It did not include the introduction of the unnecessary 'aa' digraph. On the basis of this system, it is possible to deduce the pronunciation of nearly every Scots word from its spelling.

As a result of the work done by the Scottish National Dictionary Association, Scotland is well-served with Scots-English dictionaries. However, since it is the function of dictionaries to reflect past spelling practices (or malpractices) and spelling reform involves improving present anomalous practice, the authority of dictionaries can sometimes be a bar to progress in this area. In the Scottish National Dictionary and the Concise Scots Dictionary, three or four options can be found for the spellings of some words. The Concise English-Scots Dictionary (CESD), the first of its kind, was published in 1993 (MacLeod and Cairns, 1991). This dictionary was unusual in that only one, or at the most, two spellings are given for each Scots word. Although the publication of the CESD is unlikely to end controversy over the spellings of particular words, it should have a useful effect in reducing the number of spelling options currently used by writers. However, there is no indication of this in a more recent Scots dictionary (The Essential Scots Dictionary, Macleod and Cairns, 2004) which regresses to a preference for the 'oo' digraph borrowed from English, over the traditional Scots digraph in *dout*, *doun*, *loun* and *toun*, though not in *dour* and *stour*!

Probably more than 50 per cent of the lexis of Scots consists of words used in common with English. In the present state of Scots orthography, there seems no good reason to alter the spellings of such words if the English spelling leaves no doubt about the pronunciation, even if another digraph would be preferred in the Scots system. For example, words like *deep* and *sleep*, *see* and *wee*, *field*, *here*, *scene* and *croon* (meaning ‘sing’) are probably best left alone. Also, there seems no justification for representing the word *for*, as *fer*, *fir* or *fur*, since the vowel is unstressed and virtually undifferentiated. The same applies to representing *the* as *thi*. If the spelling of a word used in common with English is irregular and there is a traditional precedent for a better Scots spelling, there is a case for using this. For example, *hir* for *her*, *thay* for *they*, *thair* for *their*, *thaim* for *them*, *cum* and *sum* for *come* and *some*, are sensible traditional spellings which were used by medieval Makkars.

In practice, some writers, in accordance with the traditional Scottish tendency for *ilkane ti gang aye his ain gait*, appear to invent their own personal spelling systems off the cuff and introduce additional options, sometimes with bizarre consequence. For instance, it is not unknown for writers to use the spelling, *oan* to indicate a difference in pronunciation from the English, *on*. On this basis, *or* might be spelt *oar*, and *clock* as *cloak*. The word, *land* is sometimes spelt, *laun(d)* for similar reasons, and on analogy with such spellings, we might feel obliged to use *Scoatlaun(d)* for *Scotland*. It seems generally unwise to try to alter the traditional orthography of Scots to the extent that unfamiliar forms like this are the logical result. The object of the exercise of spelling reform is, while preserving traditional aspects of Scots orthography, is to create a state of affairs where there will be only one spelling option for each Scots word, and where those who read Scots will be in no doubt from the spellings, about the pronunciation of any word. Since any language is a communal system of communication, rather than a collection of individual systems based on the personal whims of writers, the present chaotic state of affairs undermines the status of Scots as a language and confirms its image in some quarters as a kind of broken, *dounmercat* English.

### **Reforms Necessary to Improve the Status of Scots**

The Scots language is an important badge of national identity and its erosion is a serious national problem in a world where communities based on trust everywhere are being destroyed by the process of globalisation. The following reforms are necessary to arrest this decline and improve the status and prestige of Scots. The present condition of what was formerly the State language of Scotland, is a direct result of the loss of control of the Scottish people over their own destiny. Since the re-establishment in 1999 of a Scottish Parliament responsible for Scotland’s culture and linguistic heritage, it is a reasonable expectation that the following reforms will be implemented:

1. In a self-governing Scotland, the Scots language should have official status and should be recognised in public life, including the Courts and the Law, as a valuable part of the national heritage.
2. The Scots language should be included as an essential part of school curricula, both at primary and secondary level, and courses should be available at Scottish Universities.

3. In teaching at both school and university, the Scots language should be regarded as a separate, though closely related, linguistic system from English, with its own idioms, grammar, syntax and orthography.
4. The definition of the grammar and syntax of Scots and the standardisation of Scots orthography are necessary before Scots can be taught effectively at any level. The body of literature in Scots provides a foundation on which a standard written form could be based.
5. In order to create an image of 'good Scots' to which local dialects could be related, it is desirable that the teaching of Scots should refer to the substantial body of literature in Scots. Where there is some literature in local dialect, this will be a valuable complementary resource.
6. Scotland's National Theatre should have as one of its primary functions the provision of resources, information and advice to help directors to improve standards of authenticity in dramatic productions in Scots.
7. In view of the fact that Scots is a language which can be understood to varying degree by the majority of people in Scotland, the Scots language should be given its rightful place in the media as a valuable aspect of the linguistic heritage.
8. The Scottish Parliament is now responsible for Scottish culture and linguistic heritage, and responsibility for broadcasting in Scotland would be necessary before Scots language could be given its proper place in radio and television.
9. The indigenous Scots names of streets and topographical features are vital parts of the national heritage and steps should be taken by Scottish government to prevent and reverse the anglicisation of such names.