

INTRODUCTION

The word, 'Scots' is now a generic term which covers every aspect of the language: the language of the medieval *makkars* and the Scottish Court, the literary Scots which developed after around 1700 and all the surviving dialects, such as the speech of Buchan, the Borders and Caithness. Contemporary colloquial Scots is what is left to us of the State Language of Scotland before the Union of the Crowns in 1603. This book attempts to summarise and codify the predominant patterns in this language, in the hope that this information will be of assistance to those who wish to study Scots, in particular, to prospective writers and teachers.

Whether any form of speech is generally seen as a language or not, is essentially a political question, since it depends to a large extent on the socio-political status of those who speak it. Portuguese, for example, would now be seen as merely another Iberian dialect, if Portugal had not succeeded in freeing herself from Spanish government in the 17th century. Similarly, Dutch would have become no more than another form of low German, had it not been for the historical independence of the Netherlands. The loss of prestige of Scots is therefore a direct consequence of Scotland's loss of political independence. Because Scots has always been closely related to English (though no more closely than the Scandinavian languages are to one another), this political development made it possible to represent Scots as no more than an incorrect or corrupt form of English, rather than the language of a whole people, with a unique character of its own.

Since the Treaty of Union of 1707, generations of Scots have had to come to terms with a situation in which they were taught English at school, and where the way of speech natural to them was officially regarded either as wrong by definition, or as a dialect unworthy of use as a serious medium of communication. Gaelic, the earlier language of the Scottish Kingdom, the *lingua Scotica*, received similar repressive treatment in schools in areas within the *Gaeltacht*. The covert political objective behind this kind of policy was evidently to undermine Scotland's national identity. The dilemma involved, introduced a schizoid element into the national psyche, for with many people, the 'true self' associated with the complex of feelings and attitudes acquired at home in childhood, had to be denied, in favor of a false persona.

At school, a policy of cultural repression became the norm, and generations of children were presented with an image of 'correct' or 'good' English, but little or no attempt was made to present an image of 'good' Scots. Commonly, the natural speech of Scots children was simply represented as a deviation from good English. For example, children were liable to be told that such sentences as, *The nichts is fairlie drawin in*, are bad grammar, or ignorant speech, although this is perfectly good Scots.. James Hogg was criticised by his contemporaries for his bad grammar in writing the song, *When the kye comes hame*, although the practice of using, what would be from an English perspective, the singular form of verbs with plural subject nouns, has been a common feature of Scots since the time of the medieval *makkars*. In the 16th century, Alexander Montgomerie wrote in his poem, *The Nicht is neir Gone: The fieldis ourflowis/ With gowan that growis/ Where lilies lyke lowe is,/ As red as the ro'an*.

Low (1974) has 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 was regarded as unacceptable, the boy's feelings seem to have been fully justified. A situation was created in the schools, which often continued through life, in which Scottish children felt that what they were really like was unacceptable, or even something to be ashamed of, so that the sooner they divested themselves of their identifiable Scottish characteristics the better. The psychological damage caused by this self-hatred is incalculable and the existence of condemnatory attitudes towards the natural speech of children at school has greatly contributed towards the erosion of Scots. In the circumstances, it is rather surprising that Scots has survived so long, either as a means of self-expression or of communication.

The fashion for anglicisation of speech was not confined to the eradication of the surviving lexis of specifically Scots words, but the Scottish accent which came to be associated with the English spoken in Scotland, also came under attack as a deviation. This kind of English had a vowel system derived from that associated with spoken Scots, and although it was well understood internationally, whenever English was spoken, it was for a long time deemed unuitable for drama students, or for use by announcers employed by the BBC in Scotland.

Before the restoration of a Scottish Parliament, there was a burgeoning interest in teaching Scots at both school (Robertson, 1993) and university level, but there now seems to be some doubt whether Scots should be regarded as a language, or as a conglomeration of dialects eroded to a varying extent under the influence of English in the media and at school. It is difficult to see how any of the surviving dialects can effectively be taught in Scottish schools. None of them has an extensive literature and none of them except Shetlandic, a contemporary published grammar which could be used as a basis for instruction in Scots. Furthermore, most teachers in Scotland are not native to the Scottish dialect area in which they teach. Scots cannot effectively be taught through the medium of its surviving dialects, which are now seriously eroded and infiltrated by English as a result of earlier 'educational' policy.

The normal way to teach any language is by reference to the literature in it, and to the idiom and grammar 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 the 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. However, what now survives of spoken Scots, has become linguistically dissociated in some respects from this literature. There is now a serious disjunction between current colloquial speech and the substantial body of literature in Scots. This has created a problem for some Scots writers who feel that, in order to represent the way Scots people now speak, it is necessary to write in personal versions of their own local dialects. The ongoing debate on this tendency has recently been discussed by Corbett (1999).

As David Murison pointed out (1979), the eighteenth century saw the disappearance of Scots as a full language in which the spoken form was employed for every purpose of life. This book, therefore, cannot be regarded as comparable with a grammar of any language for which a full canon still survives. It has to be viewed more as a description of grammatical features identified with Scots since the beginning of the development of the present literary tradition.

Although the existence of a significant literary tradition in Scots has been an important factor in favor of its survival, as a result of the treatment of spoken Scots in the schools, many grammatical and syntactical features of the spoken language have seldom been represented in writing. Some of these features can still be found in contemporary speech. My purpose in listing such features in this book, was to provide a grammar resource for teachers and writers in Scots who may be unaware of their existence. All of the examples of sentences quoted to illustrate the existence of such features, are either well-known in the body of literature, proverbs and song in Scots, or are familiar to the author in colloquial speech. English translations are not invariably given for the expressions quoted, and it has been assumed that the reader already has a rudimentary knowledge of Scots and access to one of the many Scots dictionaries now available.

The need to develop Scots as a national language has been argued by McClure (1980) in a paper which inspired some criticism from Aitken (1980). McClure made an analogy with the Norwegian experience in creating Nynorsk. This analogy is perhaps misleading, since it relates 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. While literary Scots, could, given the will, be developed into a standard form of written Scots, there are great problems of definition.

Most of literary Scots is in verse and the language is very variable, depending on the extent to which it has been anglicised by various writers. Burns, for example, switched smartly into English in poems in Scots 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).

Contrary to public opinion, anglicisation of native grammar and syntax is not uncommon in MacDiarmid's writing in Scots. Furthermore, in recent years, a fallacious belief has gained ground (Purves, 1997) that MacDiarmid invented a new artificial language called *Lallans*. This was a notion he repudiated in his autobiography, when he stated:

There is a consensus of opinion that I have achieved a miracle—inventing a new language out of the dialects into which Scots has disintegrated..... and writing indisputably great poetry in this unlikely, if not impossible, medium.

Macafee has stated in an important paper (1980) : ‘In grammar, more than at other linguistic levels, modern written Scots tends to adhere to the model instilled by literacy in Standard English’. This a natural consequence of the representation of Scots in schools over a period of generations, as an incorrect form of English. The adherence of writers in Scots to the standards of English grammar and orthography is not, of course, a modern phenomenon. It has been a characteristic of writing in Scots since the late sixteenth century.

The magazine, LALLANS, which is the journal of the Scots Language Society, is the only publication which regularly appears in Scots. As such, it has provided an important outlet and useful models, for writers who want to try their hand with Scots. Since it first appeared in 1973, the editorial policy, which was initiated by J. K. Annand, was to encourage prose writing in Scots with a view to extending its use in areas where it has never been adequately developed. To write a review or obituary or a piece of discursive prose, presents a challenge to writers who are competent in writing verse or narrative prose in Scots.

Against the background of continuing erosion of colloquial Scots, it is arguable whether a substantial proportion of recent writing purporting to be in Scots, can properly be regarded as Scots at all. Much contemporary material contains few of the features which characterise the language, and appears to consist of attempts at back translation from English into personal notions of what Scots is. What can we make, for example, of such a sentence as, *Ah wouldnae of came if Ah had of knew you had went?* Should this be described as some kind of Scots or simply as bad English?

And what can we make of the following excerpt from ‘Lament for a lost Dinner Ticket’, by Margaret Hamilton, which was included for study in a course on Scots Language.

*They sed Wot heppind?
Nme’nma belly
Na bedna hospital
A sed A pitinma
Washnmaschine.
They sed Wees thees chaild eb slootly
Non verbal?
A sed MA BUMSAIR
Nwen’y ssleep.*

This has its charms, but the projection of this kind of DIY language as modern Scots, simply perpetuates the notion that Scots is corrupt English.

The line, *thi psychopomp huz huddiz oor*, appeared in a piece of verse in The New Makars, ‘an anthology of contemporary poetry in Scots’ published in 1991. This is of interest because it raises the question of whether it is possible to write poetry in a personal register which is evidently intelligible only to the author.

Some of the so-called Scots currently written and published may be syntactically and idiomatically English, and attempts to compensate for its bogus character, by spelling English words in an unusual way. It is not possible to write well in Scots without experience of colloquial speech or without a sound knowledge of Scots idiom and syntax. In the absence of distinctive features of Scots grammar, as exemplified in such saying as, *Auld men dees an bairns suin forgets*, the language loses its unique quality. Good Scots certainly cannot be written by anybody who has no respect for the language and decides to invent his 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 which already exists. A passage in English cannot be transformed into Scots, simply by substituting Scots words for English, without reference to structure and idiom.

One of the consequences of representing Scots at school as a corrupt kind of English requiring correction, has been the now popular view that 'Good Scots' does not and cannot exist and that all Scots is simply a deviation from 'Good English'. The Swedish linguist, Sandred (1983), in a study of social attitudes to the use of Scotticisms in Edinburgh, 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. The politically-based notion that somehow, Scots is inherently bad has been implanted over a period of centuries in the Scottish psyche, and this will be difficult to dispel. There is something far wrong with the ethos of a country in which a schoolgirl (reputedly in Broughty Ferry) felt impelled to refer to the Tay Brig as the 'Toe Bridge', for fear of being guilty of using a Scots word.

Properly, 'Good Scots', ought to be seen as Scots which is internally consistent, in which traditional linguistic features have not been seriously ignored by the writer. This being said, it would hardly be realistic to expect that future writers employing Scots should regard all grammatical features referred to in this work as rules to be rigorously obeyed in any acceptable writing. For example, the use of what appear to be singular forms of verbs with plural noun subjects (as in, *bairns is easie pleased*) will probably continue to be seen as an option, rather than as an obligation, by Scots *makkars*.

Now that a Scottish Parliament is established with responsibility for education and the arts, no doubt there will be major changes in educational policy for the Scots language. At the time of writing, the Scottish Executive advocates the inclusion of Scots in the school curriculum. In the present situation, it seems unlikely that literacy in Scots can be sustained for very long, unless the language is effectively taught both at school and university level. This can only be done by regarding Scots (Purves, 1997) as a linguistic system in its own right, distinct from English, although closely related to it. Two resources which are obviously necessary for this purpose, are a generally recognised orthography and a recent Scots grammar. In recent years there has been some progress towards standardisation of Scots spelling (see following chapter on The Spelling of Scots and existing consensus guidelines on spelling reform: Appendices I and II: The Scots Style Sheet 1947 and Recommendations for Writers in Scots, published by the Scots Language Society, 1985).

The most recent publication which could be regarded as a Grammar of Scots was a 'Manual of Modern Scots', which appeared in 1921. Thus the publication of the present work is long overdue. A grammar of Shetlandic, which can be regarded as a branch of Scots, was published in 1952 (Robertson and Graham) and reprinted in 1991. The Shetland grammar describes many features which have parallels in mainland Scots. The Shetlandic work has been the inspiration for this book and provided a model for it.

More recently, a grammar of Ulster Scots was published by Philip Robinson (1997), and this is a valuable reference work for the Scots language as it has developed in Ulster. Many of the numerous examples of Scots idiom and syntax quoted are still relevant to mainland Scots. The scope of the present work is more limited, but this revised edition of 'A Scots Grammar' is again offered on the grounds that *bannoks is better nor nae breid*.