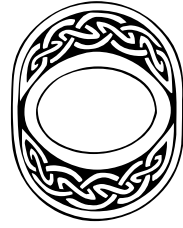


## Scotland's Linguistic Past and Present: Paradoxes and Consequences

Atina L.K. Nihtinen

Department of Nordic History, Åbo Akademi, atina.nihtinen@elisanet.fi

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>



outside Scotland all people with an interest in the country seem to have a certain notion of Scotland's position in history and in the contemporary world, a certain image of Scottish culture or of the Scottish identity. In addition to the nostalgic Highland Romantics, people are aware of the highly problematical English-Scottish relations, which have become well known also to a wider audience through hugely popular action films such as *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*. The Union with England, sometimes described as “in bed with an Elephant” (Scott 1985, Scott 1998) has had undoubtedly wide-ranging consequences with regard to both national identity and linguistic and cultural matters.

According to Adams (Adams 1995, 193) key concepts in selling Scotland to tourists are “uncrowded, beautiful scenery, interesting history, not England”. As he points out, for overseas visitors the image presented can be traced down to Sir Walter Scott and Queen Victoria – meaning either romance and mystery or haggis and shortbread boxes. For domestic consumers the aim has been to *undo* some of the Scott and Victoria image.

In a non-Scottish context there is a general lack of information and understanding of the Scots language and its status within Scotland. Even within Scotland itself there is a degree of confusion, albeit Scottish, British and European legislative, academic and cultural bodies all recognise the importance of the language to Scottish culture. The aim of this present article is to fill the apparent lacuna in understanding concerning the history and present situation of the Scots

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Steve Murdoch, currently of the University of St Andrews, for always providing me with the most useful ideas and suggestions as well as for his help with recent material for this piece of writing in particular. I am also very grateful to Colin Wilson, B.Sc. for his comments on my English in an earlier version of this article.

language to the readership of this journal: by presenting the results of recent research on the subject coupled with an analysis of some important recent developments in Scotland.

Although there is consensus on many of these questions, there are still issues, which have caused much debate in Scotland and which are less familiar in detail to most people abroad. Above all, in most cases, people are inclined to think of Scotland either in terms of Britain and Britishness (meaning in terms of England and the English-Scottish relationship) or in terms of its Celtic image.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar way, Scotland's linguistic and cultural past and present tend to be more simplistic in the 'common' or general view of Scotland abroad. Most people are content to simply know that English is the dominant language of Scotland and that there is a language called Scottish Gaelic, which, although a symbol of the Celtic culture of Scotland, is in a position of drastic decline.

There is an even more obvious imbalance to be found in the fact that most people from outside Scotland (and many in Scotland itself) are unaware of the history and literature of the Scots language as a language closely related to English<sup>3</sup>.

Scots is the traditional Germanic language of the southern and eastern parts of Scotland (*the Lowlands*), Orkney and Shetland and parts of Ulster. The language is descended from the northern version of Anglo-Saxon. Although Scots and English share many features in common, they have drifted apart during the Middle Ages. The relationship between the two is comparable to the relationship, which exists between Scottish Gaelic and Irish, or for example between Swedish, Norwegian and Danish. Differences between Scots and English are not absolute, but there are characteristic Scots words and expressions, loanwords different from those in English (from Scandinavian languages, French, Gaelic, Latin and of Dutch and Flemish origin) as well as systematic differences in pronunciation and morphology.

Until recently, Scots were given the impression by their teachers that there is something deeply wrong or inferior about their language. Scots was, however, the dominant language and language of state in Scotland only three hundred years ago. It was the official language in pre-Union Scotland (until 1707) and it has, in addition to its history as a separate language, an almost uninterrupted literary tradition.

Furthermore, there are numerous sources revealing that Scots was once recognised as the medium of diplomacy and trade and highlighting the status and

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on these terms (Celts, Celtic culture, Celtic image), see chapter 2, p. 3.  
<sup>3</sup> On Ulster Scots, see e.g. Montgomery 2004, 121–132.

wide range of use the language had not only among the Scottish people but beyond the borders of Scotland.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Scots employed the language in relations with other countries and the host countries often demonstrated an awareness and recognition of the fact that Scots was a distinct language. Wherever the Lowland Scots went their native language followed (see Horsbroch 1999, 1–16).

Another recently reassessed view is the discovery of discursive prose written entirely in Scots during the second half of the nineteenth century. This clearly contradicted the earlier view that the vernacular prose tradition died out during the early seventeenth century and the language was permanently damaged by its long battle with Anglicisation (see Donaldson 1989).

Apart from the question of the status of Scots today, many activities in Scotland have been directed towards focusing the language and standardization (see McClure 1995, Allan 1995). This has produced a good number of different suggestions and recommendations on spelling over the years. One of the paradoxes is that the reaction of many linguists towards what they have seen as “subjective, extreme and even cranky” views about Scots, has led them to avoid the term ‘Scots’ and this in turn has operated as a force against the focusing of the language (Macafee 1997, 518).<sup>4</sup>

As far as both nations are concerned, modern historiography has allowed differences between Scots and English and Scottish and English identity to become clearer while also verifying some real differences that existed within Scotland itself, between the Gaels and the Lowlanders. This split in Scottish society between ‘Highland and Lowland’ began during the period 1150–1550, but it was not a clear cut, because Gaelic and Lowland culture were overlapping each other and mixed areas of language existed for quite some time (Horsburgh 1994, 14).

As a result of this division, which has been present in Scottish life and society for centuries, each of their cultures has been considered ‘foreign’ at times and ‘native’ at other times. A Gael and a Lowlander have co-existed sometimes to a certain degree, but sometimes in a ‘cold war’ in attitudes, at least on the official level.

The division has been visible in both the situation in Scotland itself (historically and today) and among the Scots abroad. One cannot, of course, use such broad historical notions as ‘the Highlanders’ or ‘the Lowlanders’ without

---

<sup>4</sup> In some language activists’ opinion it has to be asked why scholars are using such an emotive but vague word as “cranky”. According to Colin Wilson of the *Scots Speakers Curn* “often what they regard as “extreme” are the sort of measures to promote Scots, which would be regarded as normal in the case of any other minority language”, personal correspondence, January 2005.

recognizing that these groups seldom acted as a homogeneous mass and the employment of Scots abroad included large numbers of people from all linguistic communities. Scots went abroad for variety of reasons and 'language loyalty' usually provided the vehicle of expression of, rather than the motivation for, participation." (Murdoch 1996b, 8).

Much of the emigration literature was actually dominated by the Highlanders' experiences and the Lowlanders were often left out of the story. In most cases, however, analysis must include whether a Scot was a Lowlander or a Highlander, because it is crucial in identifying specific Scots communities outside Scotland. There is some evidence that there were significant differences between the two groups.

Some of the recent historical research (see e.g. Hanson 2003, 119–140) has suggested that the Lowland emigration experience was often more individualized, while for the Highlanders it was much more group orientated. While Highlanders dominated the Scottish emigration experience, it was the Lowlanders who often achieved positions of power and prominence.

A further issue to take into consideration is the age of Celtic romanticism and its consequences on the one hand, in producing a different image of Scotland abroad, and, on the other hand, in creating a debate over Scottishness in terms of 'ancient' and 'national'. The period of Celtic romanticism created an atmosphere of great fascination and interest in the Celts.<sup>5</sup> Those images were followed by the images created by Scottish writers which reinforced curiosity about this idea of Scotland and as a result of that the whole country came to be regarded as a place of particular interest and special value. It has been argued, however, that the partiality to 'Celticness' has had also several, less desirable, consequences in Scotland itself.

In this article, my focus is on the issues of language and language identity in Scotland, including the political status of the Scots language and Gaelic and Scots languages' identification with Scottishness. Two things should be pointed out: firstly, the Scottish identity has cultural and linguistic aspects which have been clearly reassessed in recent times, and secondly, the case of Scots and Gaelic in Scotland is an example of a complex situation with several paradoxes: one of them being that in spite of the stigmas, Scots is closely associated with Scottish identity, and another that Scottish Gaelic of today can be described as more Scottish than the Gaelic of earlier times.

---

<sup>5</sup> Interest in the Celts meant an interest in the Celtic contribution to Scotland, which was encouraged by the cultural revivals in Ireland and Wales (see e.g. Mitchison 1982).

## 2. Reinventing the Celts in the case of Scotland

As stated elsewhere, the term ‘Celts’ refers to a group of peoples who shared the roots of a common language and are considered to be the ancestors of the Britons, the Gauls, the Irish and (more controversially) the Picts (Carver 1995, 180–181).

In Scotland we can trace back into the first millennium AD the impact of at least five different self-defined groups of people: the Britons, the Romans, the Scots, the Picts and the Anglo-Saxons followed by the Danish and the Norse. The history of early settlement all over the island of Britain is full of supposed migrations and ethnic take-overs and the Celtic invasions have been among the issues questioned by modern scholarship.

In a large number of studies it has been shown that the whole phenomenon of Celticism is a modern construct and that the notion of Celtic languages or cultures as they are used today, is a modern invention (Sjöblom 2000, 7) However, the peoples described as the Celts had many shared features and spoke related languages. According to Cunliffe (Cunliffe 2003, 111) after the collapse of the Roman world in the West, for more than 1000 years, the concept of the Celts - real or imagined - seems to have passed out of consciousness. It was not until the end of seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century that Celts were brought back to the histories of France and Britain. Thus the re-emergence (or invention) of the Celts came about in the early eighteenth century.

The first Scottish writer who had a major effect on Scotland’s image abroad was James Macpherson who between 1760 and 1763 published what he claimed to be translations from ancient Gaelic poetry, a series of poems ascribed to Ossian, son of Fingal. His work was entitled “*Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse language*” followed by two long poetical epics.

First received with enthusiasm, widely read and endorsed as a source of inspiration for freedom movements in Europe, Macpherson was later regarded with a great deal of disapproval. His poems met with criticism almost immediately and as Paul Scott (Scott 1994, 365) points out Macpherson is “perhaps the only man in the history of literature who has been condemned because his work was his own and not a translation.”

On the whole, the representations of the Celtic ethnicity today are very different from those that researchers connect with the Celtic cultures of earlier times. This is true about the representations of the Celtic ethnicity in all ‘Celtic’ countries, not just Scotland. Nonetheless, the Celtic ethnicity in modern-day Celtic-speaking areas has made a strong second coming through physical recreations of the past: Celtic Art Style, druidism, the use of kilts in Scotland,

Celtic traditional music (Sjöblom 2000, 13–14). Traditions have become a source for national identity, and this has sometimes led people to think that there is something inborn and eternally Celtic in their genes. It has also been a source for nationalism.

For instance, the Scots National League, formed in 1920 to promote Scottish national self-determination, was imbued with racial ideas and “believed that Scotland’s culture was Celtic, but, like Ireland, had been subverted by Saxon imperialism” (Finlay 2004, 135):

“The foundation – the bedrock of our Celtic origin – is already there awaiting the builders, and the cornerstone – our Gaelic language; the only national language of Scotland, is already in the hands of the hewers.” (Liberty, July 1920, Finlay 2004, 135).

As a result of all these developments, according to relatively recent, but erroneous views of Scotland’s historical and linguistic history Gaelic was seen as and claimed to be the true ‘Celtic culture’ of the country which statement was ignoring the fact that the Gaels were the last of the Celtic peoples to arrive in Scotland (see e.g. MacMhuirich 1996). Another erroneous view was that in Scottish residence the Lowlanders are more recent than the Highlanders and their forefathers were English-speaking people who worked their way northwards from England. Both assertions were incorrect from a historical point of view (the language spoken was Anglo-Saxon and only few ‘came north’).

As far as the Scottish population as a whole is concerned, many Lowlanders are of ‘Gaelic’ origin and many carry ‘Gaelic’ names. Language contact, language shift and bilingualism have been playing a major role in reshaping the linguistic history of Scotland (Murdoch 1996b, 9).

The Gaelic culture and language are by no means the only national language and culture of Scotland neither *the native* nor the *true* culture of Scotland today (see Horsburgh 1997, 7).<sup>6</sup> In fact, many studies support the idea that Scottish Gaelic and Scots are equally indigenous and equally national in a country which is built from three cultures.

---

<sup>6</sup> Horsburgh points out that “fundamental mistakes have been made in the reading of Scotland’s past.” In fact, even the BBC describes Gaelic as “Scotland’s native tongue”. See for example <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4020631.stm>

### 3. Two images of Scotland

“If you sell tartans on the ground of their clan associations, you are always going to be short of angles, because there is little to the idea apart from what you and your fellow-hucksters make up, and you have to avoid contact with reality for fear of exposure....” (Hills 1994, 97).

The author of the article “The Cultural Potency of Scotland” Phillip Hills states further that the real Scotland is much more romantic and much more fascinating than the fake one. In his opinion, Scots history, Highland and Lowland, “is so full of extraordinary incident that it needs no faking”. By the notion of “the fake Scotland” Hills refers to the Mythic Highlandism which remains strong “in the imagination of expatriate Scots and Scotophile foreigners” and points out that the revival of an authentic Scottish culture should matter the most, not the “junk-historical fantasy”, however profitable.

The Highland Myth (see e.g. Horsburgh 1997, 7–24) was successful in turning Celts into “noble savages” and giving rise to a system of beliefs and values in which process Highland and Gaelic-speaking became to be viewed as equal to national identity, which however had little ground in reality. A different set of beliefs is represented in the popular perception of Scotland and by authors such as Robert Burns<sup>7</sup> who form a very important part of Scottish identity by standing for the voice of the Lowland and the Scots-speaking common man. In contrast to the general image of Scotland abroad, it is the Lowland Scots culture that is considered by many Scots to be the real and the authentic culture of Scotland and the one that matters or should matter most to the majority of Scotland’s population.

There is thus a need to distinguish between the image of Scotland and its nation in the eyes of its own people and the image which it projects to other countries. The external and internal image of a country are not necessarily the same and the era of Celtic Romanticism and Celtomania in Europe have influenced especially the external image, although they have had their internal consequences, too.

---

<sup>7</sup> In Finlay’s opinion for example, the popularity of the work of Robert Burns was “testament to the appeal that Scots still held in Scottish society.” One figure who most actively pursued the issue of language and its relation to culture and politics was Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid). Language was regarded by him (as by other European nationalists) as “the bedrock of national identity.” The role of language was central to his philosophy of cultural nationalism. Finlay points out that the Scots language was omnipresent in Scottish society and “although existing in many regional forms there was arguably a sufficient base for its reconstruction into a working national language” (Finlay 2004, 136).

The affection towards Celticness and all things Celtic has caused in Scotland inconsistency in claiming Scottish Gaelic as *the* national language (a claim based on a period of dominance that ended eight hundred years ago) whereas nobody has claimed the same either about English or about the Scots language. Moreover, the language of England has been the dominant language in Scotland since the 18<sup>th</sup> century but most Scots would reject the idea that this makes English the national language of the country (see Horsbroch 2002, 21–42). Scots was dominant only three hundred years ago, but few would support the view that Scots alone is the national language of Scotland. Clearly, one cannot and should not assume that a period of political dominance alone makes a language the national tongue in a country with a very complex linguistic history.

This is leading to other major questions such as: 1) to what extent is Scotland Celtic in the eyes of its own people? 2) when was Gaelic Scottish? Celtic nationhood is, for instance in Horsburgh's opinion (and I agree with it), a misleading notion when connected to present day Scotland, because in the common mood of romanticism Lowland Scots culture does not seem to fit with the ideal. Even the rock group Runrig (quoted in Horsburgh 1997, 8) used to sing: "The Lowland Scot with English habits, has brought me to his Lowland manners." If that kind of image was communicated to people even by some scholars, it is no wonder that the image of Celtic Scotland came in part to be seen as untruthful and fake and it produced a debate over both cultural and political issues.

In this sense, although the notion of Celtic countries<sup>8</sup> (see e.g. O hUiginn 2000, 105–118; Latvio 1993, 139–141) is a good term to cover the geographical area of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, especially in comparative studies, the notion of Celtic culture is in my view more problematical in its broader meaning, because in the case of Scotland it can be used to refer to the Highlands and the Gaelic-speaking culture of today, often as *opposed* to the Scots-speaking culture and Lowland culture in general.

Traditionally, regional or local identities have been very strong in Scotland and this is true for the whole country. From the situation with the Scots language we know that there are areas with a strong Scots-speaking population whereas others have almost completely lost their Scots-speaking people and Scottish English (with some variation on the individual level) is largely spoken. In any case, it is more appropriate to speak about Scottish (or national) *cultures*, not about *one* 'home culture'.

---

<sup>8</sup> This use of the term Celtic is based on its geographical application and carries associations with the broader 'Celtic' world. Thus the use of Celtic does not imply that there is something uniquely Celtic about Celtic music, art, fiction etc., but rather that these are now found in those regions which are considered to be or have been Celtic.

#### 4. Gaelic Scotland – a junior branch of Irish culture?

Another aspect of the relationship between the two languages and respective cultures can be judged against the fact that the average Irishman or woman considers the Gaelic language spoken in Scotland today to be a dialect of Irish - in a similar fashion to the way in which Scots has been regarded as a dialect of English. (See Horsburgh & Murdoch 1998, 9–10) A work entitled “An Historical Account of the Highlanders... states (in 1715) that the people of the Highlands although called Scots are more properly Irish and claim their affinity to the Irish, by retaining “the Habit and Language of the Ancient Irish” (Leneman 1988, 108).

A recent Irish scholar Thomas F.O. Rahilly has stated that to the Gaelic-speaking Scotsman of the past, Ireland was the mother-country and the same literary language as in Ireland has continued to be employed by Scottish writers down to comparatively recent times (O’Rahilly 1972, 123; Horsburgh & Murdoch 1998, 9–10). This view is supported also in other recent works.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the idea that Scottish Gaeldom formed a distinct cultural province, with a distinct language, was refined by Scottish scholars. Irish and Scottish Gaels were forced to assess their cultures in response to the expansion of both England and Lowland Scotland. In the modern period, however, Scottish Gaels have often chosen to play down the common culture and language, while on the other hand, Irishmen often regard Scottish Gaeldom as an adjunct of Irish culture (see Horsburgh 2000, 231–242).

The common perception of Gaelic culture in Scotland prior to 1600, among both Gaels and non-Gaels, was that Ireland was indeed the mother country. During the period 1400–1700 the Gaels in Scotland had to define themselves increasingly against the Scots-speaking Lowland culture. During the Jacobite period Gaelic became ‘the ancient language of Scotland’ with emphasis exclusively on Scotland and not on a common culture with Ireland. By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Scottish* Gaelic culture, language and identity were established as Scottish and as clearly distinct.

Horsburgh (2000, 239) clarifies a very interesting role-reversal. Written Scots, on the one hand, had become increasingly anglicised during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while common Gaelic was increasingly *scotticised* in Scotland. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the written language of the Lowlands (for most public purposes) had become English with some Scottish characteristics. In the Highlands, however, the Scottish Gaelic vernacular had come of age and was a lively new expression of Scottishness. Both languages had, in fact, reversed the positions which they enjoyed relative to each other in 1600.

### 5. An important decade for the Scots tongue

“Syne he gaed on tae talk aboot his veesits till Embro an Inverness, an aboot hoo he wisna etflin tae gang tae Glesca the way that there isn't much to see. Glasgow is a big place. A did ma dirteneest tae pit him straucht on this but it

seems at Glesca still hes an eemage problem, fur aw the PR wark at's been duin. Mibbie theres no eneuch castles, bens an lochs on Sauchiehall Street.”  
(Scots as written by a Scots-speaking friend from Glasgow)

The negative influence of language attitudes, stigma and prejudice led to the situation where Scots was often considered as ‘slang’, ‘dialect’, ‘careless speech’, ‘bad English’ and socially the most damaging of all ‘the speech of the uneducated’ (see also McClure 1988; Menzies 1991, 30–46).<sup>9</sup>

Another problem until recent times was that Scots has been often depicted as a language with many names, it was called Doric or Lallans (i.e. Lowland Scots) or Scotch or broad Scots and at times just by the name of a particular dialect of Scots - Glaswegian, Shetlandic, Buchan etc. In addition to that, Scots was sometimes wrongly described as Scottish English and sometimes confused with Gaelic, because of its name (Scottish Gaelic, occasionally Scots Gaelic).

Historically, by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Lowland language was called Scots and Gaelic was called *Erse* (‘Irish’) by the people of the Lowland. Before that Gaelic was known as the *lingua Scotica* whereas the Lowland language was called *Ingilis* (Horsburgh 1994). By the reign of James VI of Scotland there was a clear awareness of two distinct forms of speech at the courts of England and Scotland. Only an Englishman spoke *Suddron*, only a Scotsman spoke *Scots*, though both taken together could be said to speak *Ingilis* in a general sense (Horsbroch 2002, 21–42).

The name issue has caused ambiguity and has produced confusion and misunderstanding. Apart from confusion concerning the very name of the language, another problem has been the lack of data on the population in Scotland who speak Scots. Two significant pieces of research both carried out in the nineties proved that Scots is the largest lesser-used or minority language in the British Isles, but, as one of the many paradoxes, this was in contrast to the financial support for it (see e.g. Murdoch 1996a).

A third problem is concerning the consequences of the lack of ability among younger Scots in particular, in fields such as Scottish history (e.g. students’ inability to read Scottish historical documents which left Scottish history open to interpretation) or such as understanding of folk song lyrics or storytelling – this

---

<sup>9</sup> A similar situation exists in Ulster. Michael Montgomery (see Montgomery 2004, 131) points out that Ulster Scots “as a subject matter and as a language faces many difficulties”. Among them are inattention from scholars and “a severely handicapped public image” because of its relation with English.

inability has been an alarming feature showing that many Scots are being alienated from their own culture.

The reasons lie in the low status and limited use in society which the language has had after the Union in 1707 and the existence of prejudice and social stigma during the periods of history that followed. With the Union of the Crowns in 1603 the court of James VI moved to London which led to several changes including also the focus of literary life moving to London. With the Union of Parliaments in 1707, anglicising influences were significantly strengthened, but although English became the language of government, the vast majority of people continued to speak Scots.

Educational policies sought until recently ways of eradicating both Scots and Gaelic. In spite of the low status the language had officially until recent times, spoken Scots has survived in various forms and dialects and literary Scots has enjoyed a period of new revival.

However, from a linguistic point of view, the nature of Scots can be described also as an unfocused language variety, “being a long way along a trajectory which is taking it towards integration with English as a continuum between the two shrinks, apparently inexorably, towards the English pole.”(Macafee 1997, 546). This is why many people who speak the language do not identify themselves as speakers whereas people who hardly speak it might like to think of themselves as speakers, especially if the issue is connected to extra-linguistic factors, such as identity or nationalism. Many, especially middle-class people use a large body of Scots vocabulary and idiom, but would not think of themselves as Scots speakers.

This situation has led to different views on standardization. Some of the people involved in language planning supported clearly the national perspective for the language and expanding the use of Scots in new fields. Others thought that the most important areas are those in which Scots has a long tradition, such as creative writing, storytelling, folksongs etc. and considered status planning (revitalization and acceptance of the use of Scots in all areas) as a prerequisite of corpus planning (establishment of the internal norms of the language, grammar, vocabulary and spelling).

In both cases, however, concerns of the well being of the language have been continuously expressed. On the one hand, it was thought that Standard Scots would increase the status and prestige of Scots in both a public and an academic sense, but, on the other hand, due to the existence of several distinct dialects, the creation of an uniform written language has proved to be a difficult task.

According to Macafee (1997, 546) it seems likely that broad dialects of Scots will survive only in communities with immunity from external forces, meaning mostly rural communities with less migration of the younger generation, such as the north-east, Orkney and Shetland. In Macafee's opinion, middle-class people and teachers who have grown up in the area speaking the local dialect, are able to provide children with role models in being local and successful at the same time and in being bilingual. In spite of the vocabulary loss (or gaps in vocabulary for different purposes, see MacLeod 1993, 115–128) and challenges to the educators, at least the most recent changes have been positive and the interest in the language has been growing on local and national level.

Various institutions, including the Scots Language Society and the Scots Language Resource Centre have contributed greatly to the cause of revival of Scots in the nineties. The first public body to give Scots a political status was the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages by recognizing it as a minority language in 1995. In 1999 the new Scottish parliament confirmed this status and in 2001 this was recognized also by the UK government (see e.g. Horsbroch 2002, 21–42).

Apart from some important success in status planning, a significant step in language planning (both corpus and status) was the publication of several new dictionaries as well as the bringing into being of the first Scots language course in 2002 (Wilson 2002)<sup>10</sup> and the publishing of the first academic history journal entirely in Scots (*Cairn*, published since 1997 by the AU Scots Leid Quorum).<sup>11</sup> A new and very important resource *The Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech* (SCOTS), compiled by the University of Glasgow, has been available online from St Andrew's Day, 30 November 2004.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> It is worth mentioning that the course was not developed by any university or any government body, but by a language enthusiast with no formal linguistic training and without any financial support from the state. The state provided, however, about 2000 euros to the publisher to help with the cost of publishing.

<sup>11</sup> As I was one of the contributors to its second issue (*Cairn*, Aberdeen, 1998), in my personal experience the use of academic Scots is a very challenging, but also an interesting and rewarding task for the learner. In my view, Scots as the medium of writing in this case was more appropriate for the subject I was studying than English would have been.

<sup>12</sup> See [www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk](http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk). There are also several recent translations into Scots of important documents, e.g. *The United Nations Universal Declaration o Human Rights*. According to the SLS it is "a translation into Scots of what is probably the most significant and influential international instrument of modern times." Its launch coincided with the anniversary of the original adoption of the Universal Declaration, in 1948, by member states of the United Nations.

## 6. Scots and identity

“Scots has a unique role as the tongue which is rooted deeply in the physical landscape we inhabit and has expressed our relationship with it for hundreds of years... Scots is essential for Scotland as her folk, her towns, her fields and rivers. It is a mirror of Scotland’s soul.” (Kay 1993, 189).

Many studies have emphasized that the Scots are fortunate to have three languages and three cultures: on the one hand, English, which is now the most powerful and prestigious language in the world, but on the other hand, Scots and Gaelic, which are the linguistic foundations that give Scotland its unique cultural identity (see e.g. Fladmark 1993, 311–318). So, if there is a connection between Scots and Scottish Identity, how strong is it? Is the language just an additional identifying factor, or an issue of greater importance?

In general, institutions like the Presbyterian Kirk, the Scottish legal system and the Scottish system of education have been the foundations of the Scots sense of ethnic identity whereas language has ceased to play a differentiating and unifying role.<sup>13</sup> Divisions within Scotland itself and strong regional identities are also a contributing factor to the fact that the language issue is not considered to be the most important element in forming or shaping national identity.

During the nineties, however, several important investigations connected to the Scots language and Scottish identity were carried out in Scotland and they clearly showed a connection between the two. In 1992 Flavia IacuanIELLO (1992, 62–71) surveyed Scottish students at Aberdeen University about their attitudes to the language. The sample of native speakers examined 88 informants from all regions of Scotland. Most participants (62%) confirmed in their replies inclination for a link between political independence and a better official status for Scots. The majority of the students expressed a desire to encourage Scots officially.

Around the same period, Janet Menzies (1991, 30–46) conducted a survey amongst two groups of pupils in a Secondary School in Glasgow’s East End. Pupils were requested to complete two different types of questionnaire as well as to participate in group discussions on questions about Scots and Glasgow dialect. With regard to nationality, 68% regarded themselves as Scottish and 32% as British; but if they were taken to be English, 70% of the older group stated they would be bothered about this. Most pupils thought Scots spoke differently from the English (87%) and felt this to be a *good thing* (51%) or *interesting* (43%). Feelings of national and regional identity were strong, and although Scots was often synonymous with ‘slang’ in the opinions of these pupils during the first part of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Concerning methodology, for the unifying and separating (differentiating) functions of a standard language see Garvin (1959, 28–31).

study, their attitudes to language changed towards very positive ones after learning more about the history, status and use of Scots as spoken language and in Scottish literature.

These studies were followed by a very important study conducted by Steve Murdoch (Murdoch 1996b). This was the first serious attempt to estimate the proportion of the population of Scotland who consider themselves to be Scots speakers. The question he asked was: *What do you consider your native language?* Answers such as Doric, Shetlandic or Glaswegian were taken to mean those dialects of Scots and not dialects of English unless otherwise stated.

Data were collected in fifteen communities throughout Scotland and from 450 individuals. Interviews were conducted in the language most appropriate to the community. 57 % of the sample and 67 % with the Gaelic communities excluded, confirmed themselves to be Scots speakers. The most striking variability was both for regions of residence and schooling. The lowest figures in the Lowlands were for Strathclyde, Central and Glasgow, while the highest were for Shetland, Orkney and Grampian. General Register Office for Scotland's (see GRO(S) 1996) survey of Scots in 1996 produced an estimate of 30 % of the Scottish population, or 1,5 million, as Scots-speaking. When people were interviewed about Scots, associations with national identity were found in many responses.

In the previous survey, Murdoch (1996b) found also a connection between language and voting intentions in Scotland and concluded that language policies have the potential to be a more significant political issue than is usually assumed. Murdoch (1996b, 28) also concluded that "The desire to use Scotland's older languages grows within her population as the opportunities to do so increase" and "as awareness of them grows, linguistic questions become more 'overt' as electoral factors to all of Scotland's electorate, regardless of their own particular mother tongue." With regard to politics the most striking example of the links between politics and the language issue was that in 2000 all the unionist parties<sup>14</sup> voted against inclusion of a question on Scots language ability in the census while those parties, which were in favour of Scottish independence supported the inclusion (see Horsbroch 2002, 21–42).

---

<sup>14</sup> There are three parties that actively support Scottish Independence: The Scottish National Party, The Scottish Socialist Party and The Scottish Green Party. All the others, The Conservative and Unionist Party, The Liberal Democrats and The Scottish Labour Party are unionist in that they wish to maintain the union. Of these, the Liberal Democrats want to renegotiate a Federal settlement. In a Scottish context, if a political party will not consider dissolving the Union of Parliaments, that party is de facto 'unionist'. Similarly, in Scotland, the terms 'unionist' and 'nationalist' do not carry the negative or loaded connotations they sometimes do elsewhere.

## 7. The language that follows?

“Thaim wi a guid Scots tongue in their heid are fit tae gang ower the world”  
(an old saying)

A study carried out in Brussels (Hardie 1995/96, 141–147) among the expatriate Scottish community showed a clear division between the nationalists and non-nationalists<sup>15</sup>. Those nationalists who participated had a remarkable knowledge of the linguistic history of Scotland and of the history of Scots in particular whereas the non-nationalists were largely unaware of the linguistic background of Scotland. Some of the latter group were thinking that Gaelic was not spoken at all and they had a high level of confusion about Scots. On the other hand, the non-nationalists knew and used the words in Scots, which were presented to them while the nationalists seem to not know what the words meant.

Knowing what Scots is, was a different issue from actually knowing Scots and the results were opposite in both groups. The link between language and nationalism was obvious with regard to all parameters.

An interesting topic for further research in this area would be to identify specific features of the Scottish communities in non-English speaking countries with a particularly high level of knowledge of English in all age and social groups. This research could be carried out not only with respect to political and language issues at home but regarding the new country and its influence in considering the home culture from a different perspective.

It is well known that many Scots abroad are often employed in jobs and positions related to the use of standard English, as language teachers on various levels – everywhere from playgroup to university, private or official - or as translators or language revisers or elsewhere where English native language skill is needed. The home environment on the official level has encouraged the majority of Scots to be monolingual rather than multilingual and tried to equate only English with advancement and success in life. One of the paradoxes might be that in a similar fashion the very same is automatically happening in the new country.

The need to use English in the foreign country is for these communities usually greater than the need to use the new language. In theory, an English-speaker (and Scots are automatically assumed to be that) is being respected more

---

<sup>15</sup> Hardie uses both terms 'non-nationalists' and 'unionists' (see my earlier comment). I am using 'non-nationalist' in this case. It is worth mentioning that there is no one unionist block between those parties which support the union just as there is no one nationalist block between those parties which want to break the union. Some voters for the unionist parties do not consider the unionist element of the party manifestos they vote for. They may do so because they are voting on other issues like tax increases, the national healthservice or for the trade union vote.

when using the local language, but, in practice, speaking of English is often treated with more respect than if a supposedly English speaker was trying to use the new language on everyday basis. Thus even those who master the language very well, are sometimes drawn back to the use of English, if they ever ended it, as their main means of communication after living long periods of time abroad.

This raises the questions of how much the surroundings in the new home country are encouraging or discouraging in maintaining or changing one's language identity and language attitudes in the case of Scots and how is this linked to all other aspects of identity? One hypothesis may be that the social pressure coming from the new environment, towards using Standard English in particular could be influencing attitudes both towards the new language and towards one's own cultural background.

From the point of view of linguistics, and especially historical linguistics, our University of Helsinki makes a notable contribution to research into older Scots in publishing 'The Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots'<sup>16</sup> The main purpose of the supplement of Older Scots was the interest in and the study of diachronic and dialectal varieties by comparing the Scottish corpus with the main body of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts and its Early American English supplement.

From the perspective of the present, further research on the issues considered above would provide welcome additional information. In the case of Finland, for example, ties between both countries have existed for centuries (see e.g. Matley 1986, 76–77)<sup>17</sup>. Thus the possibility of evaluating features of these communities and their ancestors as a continuum could be particularly intriguing in this case.

Apart from research on material in archives as well as on writings in the press, it would be interesting to have more information on two issues: firstly, on Scottish expatriates' identity with regard to retaining their Scots language or preserving typically Scots features and idiom, and, secondly, in relation to acquiring the new language and awareness of the society and culture of the new country. In the latter aspect, due to their different cultural background, Scots might differ significantly from the other native English-speakers.

---

<sup>16</sup> It was compiled by Anneli Meurman-Solin to illustrate the Scots language when it differed significantly from the language of England.

<sup>17</sup> See also database on Scotland, Scandinavia & Northern Europe [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne).

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented some of the paradoxes of Scotland's linguistic past and present and some of the consequences, which the Union with England in 1707 and the Celtic romanticism later on have had on Scotland's linguistic and cultural history. With regard to the Scots language these consequences have been drastic. The situation with Scots has been sometimes described with the saying: "Scots is like a geranium in a student flat: nobody means to kill it but everybody else thinks somebody else is watering it."<sup>18</sup>

Fortunately, the language issue is no longer forgotten or dismissed. By reading recent research on the language and following the language situation in Scotland, the conclusion that should be drawn is that the situation of Scots has been improving steadily. Scots has been recognized as a language distinct from English not only by the Scottish Executive and parliament, but on UK government level, through signature of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. Another positive feature has been the establishment in the Scottish parliament of a Cross-Party Group on the Scots language. There still is, however, a need to produce a steady policy for promoting Scots on all levels. Another important step would be an inclusion of a Scots language question in the 2011 Census.

In the case of Gaelic, the situation seems to be relatively secure regarding promotion and Gaelic's importance in identification with Scottishness, but, considering the low number of speakers, further efforts and support for both languages should be secured and encouraged. Murdoch's research in 1995 (Murdoch 1996b) helped to dismiss the myth that the Scots and Gaelic speakers form barriers to the development of each other's languages. This study showed that large proportions of every Scottish language group would like to learn another Scottish language. Most people supported equally the right of both of the older Scottish languages to flourish and develop.

Finally, the question of the preservation of the older languages of Scotland and their use is, apart from being a political, historical and linguistic question, also an emotional one. It is a question of not only knowing but having an emotional bond with the language issue. In other words, it is a matter of appreciating a diverse background and heritage and communicating on a different level of understanding.

---

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Macafee (one of the leading academics in Scots language research and in campaigning for the inclusion of a Scots language question on Census) used this comparison e.g. in a letter to Minister Henry McLeish, Scottish Office, 8 July 1997. She pointed out that there was an urgent need for political decisions in order to save the language, because "it is easy to lose a language without even noticing."

## Bibliography

- Adams, G. 'Access to a Nation's Assets' Fladmark, M. ed. *Sharing the Earth. Local Identity in Global Culture*. Aberdeen: Donhead 1995, 191–201.
- Allan, A. 'A language Planning Programme', paper presented to the Conference on Scots Language, University of Aberdeen, September 1995.
- Carver, M. 'The North Sea Highway. Cultural Arena or Political Barrier' Fladmark, M. ed. *Sharing the Earth. Local Identity in Global Culture*. Aberdeen: Donhead 1995, 177–189.
- Cunliffe, B. *The Celts. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.
- Donaldson, W. *The Language of the People. Scots Prose from Victorian Revival*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press 1989.
- Finlay, R. 'Gaelic, Scots and English: the politics of language in inter-war Scotland' In Kelly, W. & Young, J.R. eds. *Ulster and Scotland 1600–2000. History, Language and Identity*, Dublin: Four Courts Press 2004, 133–141.
- Fladmark, M. 'Towards a Trilingual Scotland'. In Fladmark, M. ed. *Sharing the Earth. Local Identity in Global Culture*. Aberdeen: Donhead 1995, 311–318.
- Garvin, P. 'The Standard Language Problem – Concepts and Methods.' *Anthropological Linguistics* 1:3/1959, 28–31.
- GRO(S) *Scots Language GRO(S) A Report on the Scots Language Research* carried out by the General Register Office for Scotland, Edinburgh, 1996.
- Hanson, T. 'Gabriel Johnston and the Portability of Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century North Atlantic World'. A. Mackillop & S. Murdoch, eds. *Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers c. 1600–1800. A study of Scotland and Empires*. Leiden: Brill 2003, 119–140.
- Hardie, K. 'Scots: matters of identity and nationalism'. *Scottish Language* 14/15, 1995–1996, 141–147.
- Hills, P. 'The Cultural Potency of Scotland.' Fladmark, M. ed. *Cultural Tourism*. Aberdeen: Donhead 1994, 89–100.
- Horsbroch/Horsburgh, D. *Gaelic and Scots in Grampian*. Aberdeen: Celtic Society 1994.
- 'The hail kintra is gat begunkit. The thrawn historie o Scotlan's cultures.' *Cairn*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Scots Leid Quorum 1997, 7–24.
- 'Nostra Vulgari Lingua: Scots as a European Language 1500–1700.' *Scottish Language* 18/1999, 1–16.
- 'When was Gaelic Scottish? The Origins, Emergence and Development of Scottish Gaelic Identity 1400–1750' *Rannsaichdh Na Gaidhlig 2000/*

- Scottish Gaelic Studies Conference, Aberdeen University, 2–4 August 2000, 231–242.
- ‘The Scots language: An historical and political assessment’. *Studia Indogermanica Lodziensia*, Vol. IV. Lodz, 2002, 21–42.
- Horsburgh & Murdoch *Kenin yer Earse fae yer Alba. The Scottish Office, the Gaelic Lobby and the Scots Language (a discussion document)*, Aberdeen: AUSLQ 1998.
- IacuanIELlo, F. ‘Linguistic Awareness and attitudes in a sample of Scottish speakers’, *Scottish Language* 11–12/1992–1993, 62–71.
- Kay, B. *Scots. The Mither Tongue*. Ayrshire 1993.
- Latvio, R. ‘Summary of the General Discussion.’ *Entering the Arena*. Etiäinen 2, 1993, 139–141.
- Leneman, L. ed. *Perspectives in Scottish Social History*. Aberdeen 1988.
- Macafee, C. ‘Ongoing Change in Modern Scots’ Jones, C. ed. *The Edinburgh History of the Scots Language*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1997, 514–548.
- MacLeod, I. ‘Research in progress: some problems of Scottish lexicography.’ *English World-Wide 14:1*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1993, 115–128.
- Matley, I. ‘The Scots in Finland’, *Terra*, Helsinki 1986, 76–77.
- McClure, J. D. *Why Scots matters*, Edinburgh: The Saltire Society 1988.
- *Scots and its Literature* Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins 1995.
- Menzies, J. ‘An Investigation of Attitudes to Scots and Glasgow dialect among secondary school pupils’. *Scottish Language*, 10/Winter 1991, 30–46.
- Mitchison, R. *A History of Scotland*. Routledge 1982.
- Montgomery, M. ‘Ulster Scots: lost or submerged?’ Kelly, W. & Young, J.R., eds. *Ulster and 2004 Scotland 1600–2000. History, Language and Identity*. Dublin: Four Courts Press 2004, 121–132.
- Murdoch, S. /Mac Mhuirich, S. ‘Language of nationalism divides partisans’. *Scotland on Sunday*, Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1996.
- Murdoch, S. (1996a) ‘The Condition o the Mither Tongue’. Paper presented at the Scots Language Census Question Forum hosted by the General Register Office (Scotland), 28<sup>th</sup> February 1996.
- (1996b) *Language Politics in Scotland*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Scots Leid Quorum 1996.
- Nihtinen, A. ‘Language, Cultural Identity and Politics in the cases of Macedonian and Scots’, *Slavonica* 5/1, Sheffield Academic Press 1999, 46–58.
- O hUiginn, R. ‘Celtic Twilight and Political Reality’. In *Aspects of Celticity*, Jyväskylä: SFKS 2000, 105–118.

- O'Rahilly, T. F. *Irish Dialects Past and Present with Chapters on Scottish and Manx*. Dublin 1972.
- Scott, P. *In Bed With an Elephant: The Scottish Experience* Edinburgh: Saltire Pamphlets, Saltire Society 1985.
- 'The Image of Scotland in Literature' In Fladmark, M. ed. *Cultural Tourism*. Aberdeen: Donhead, 1994, 363–374.
- *Still In Bed With an Elephant* Edinburgh: Saltire Pamphlets, Saltire Society 1998.
- Sjöblom, T. 'Introduction: Representing Celticity.' In *Aspects of Celticity*, Jyväskylä: SFKS 2000, 7–16.
- Wilson, C. L. *Scots Language Learner. An Introduction to contemporary spoken Scots*. Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited 2002.