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## Towards a more complex language identity?

An investigation of opinions on Scots in a sample of policy makers and others\*

### Background to this survey

In a recent study on language policy in Britain and Ireland in a book called “Multilingual Europe” (Battarbee 2005, 131–146), it is argued that the definition and status of Scots are still considered to be controversial in spite of recognition by the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL)<sup>1</sup>, the Scottish parliament and at a UK government level. Battarbee (2005, 140) points out that virtually nothing has been done to enhance the status of Scots apart from some cosmetic<sup>2</sup> use in the Scottish Parliament.

It has been stated several times that whether Scots is seen as a language or a dialect (or dialects for that matter) is dependent on a political point of view. Defining present-day Scots as a language has been difficult for both linguistic and historical reasons (See e.g. Leith 1983, 164 and McArthur 1998). In any case, it was only after the Union of the Crowns (and, even more markedly, after the Union of Parliaments) that Scots gradually came to be regarded as a corrupt form of English and the language lost its status as a result of political events. Had the political situation been different, it can be argued that Scots would have been a national language through the centuries in a similar fashion to many national languages in Europe. On the other hand, contemporary Scots is “certainly distinct enough to be dealt with separately” (Dossena 2005a, 9) and a terminological distinction between Scots and Scottish Standard English “has to be drawn very clearly and explicitly to avoid confusion” (Dossena 2005a, 13).

One of the important issues until recent times was the need for confidence building amongst Scots speakers in order to remove the effects of “centuries of stigmatisation and cultural colonisation” (Kay 1993, 11). Since Scots was perceived as inferior or as bad English and its use was even punishable in schools, these attitudes and practices led to its severe decline. Even today many people are insecure in their usage of language, which is a major educational challenge. Attitudes have changed to some extent during recent decades due in large part to the efforts of various institutions, language groups and individual enthusiasts.

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<sup>1</sup> All abbreviations are listed at the end of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> By cosmetic language policy is meant policy which has only a symbolic value.

Although attitudes have become more positive, it is still the case in present day Scotland that some speakers will interpret the label of the language as Scots and others as Scottish English and different people may perceive their own language and the language spoken in their region in different ways. However, even the language of the largely English-speaking middle class is not totally anglicised and the presence of Scots is clearly discernable not only in phonology, but also in syntax and vocabulary (Dossena 2005a). In contemporary spoken language Scots and English are closely intertwined and this has been seen as an obstacle in collecting reliable data on the number of Scots language speakers.<sup>3</sup>

In recent times, several important studies on the connection between Scots and Scottish identity and, on the other hand, between Scots and political views were carried out in Scotland (See Nihtinen 2005). They clearly showed that there are regions with a particularly high percentage of Scots-speaking people, that Scots is indeed closely associated with national identity and that language policy could be a more important factor in the choice of political party than is usually assumed (See e.g. Murdoch 1996, LIP 1995 and Horsburgh & Murdoch 1997).

Since the completion of many of these surveys, the political situation has changed. With the devolution of political power to the new Parliament in Edinburgh policy expectations were raised regarding all aspects of Scottish life. However, according to most recent research, the first years of the government's existence have given rise to more feelings of dissatisfaction and disillusionment than of change or success in language policy (McClure & Dossena 2002). The Scottish government has indeed given formal recognition to its duty to support and develop the indigenous languages, but has failed to make a difference in the case of Scots. Where Gaelic is concerned, some positive measures, including a Gaelic Language Act, have been initiated. Some Gaelic activists and campaigners have argued that these are insufficient. However, they constitute a significantly greater commitment from government than is the case for Scots where very little has been done.

My aim in this paper is to consider how the language situation and language policy are affected by the present-day attitudes to language of policy makers and others. For this purpose, during the autumn of 2005, I collected some new data by sending letters to policy makers and other relevant groups. I was interested to find out what these attitudes are and how they are reflected in opinions on support for, or opposition to, measures designed to enhance the status of a particular language or encourage its use. I was especially interested in attitudes to Scots, which, in the light of earlier studies, were clearly seen as a more problematic issue than the case of Gaelic.

<sup>3</sup> There has not been a question on the Scots language in the Census yet, but estimates are available, see Murdoch (1996) and GRO(S) 1996. There is also an ongoing campaign for an inclusion of a Scots language question in the 2011 Census.

## Method for collecting the data and selecting the respondents

The data used in this article consists of responses received to letters and questionnaires which were sent to all Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)<sup>4</sup>, Scottish members of European parliament (MEP)<sup>5</sup> and to non-MSP members of the Cross Party Group on Scots (CPG). One member of the European parliament answered the questionnaire over the phone. In addition to these, I have used the comments of language activists and the Scots Language Resource Centre (SLRC) to the UK authorities' second periodical report on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the document itself as well as information on Cross Party Groups and their activity.<sup>6</sup>

Contact information for both groups of MSPs and MEPs was found on the Internet and the non-MSP members of the Cross Party Group on Scots were contacted through SLRC. One of the non-MSP members of the CPG circulated the questionnaire further and in this way I was also able to gather information from people outside the group. This group consists, however, of people who are more knowledgeable and more interested in language matters than the average voter. The latter included among others a number of academics from the Department of Scottish and Celtic Studies of Edinburgh University.

MSPs were contacted first in August 2005 and two reminders were sent by email at a later stage. The other respondents were contacted in November 2005. Regarding the letters my method is that of qualitative analysis. I am looking primarily at the inferences that can be drawn from the figures and at the personal views of politicians and others. My main interest is in expressed opinions and the ways in which policy makers and others consider language matters. Some questions are designed to inform me if their answers are based on considered

<sup>4</sup> Parties represented in the Scottish Parliament, September 2005 (in order of number of seats):

Labour Party – Centre-left, unionist – 50 MSPs  
Scottish National Party – Centre-left, pro-independence – 27 MSPs  
Conservative and Unionist Party – Centre-right, unionist – 18 MSPs  
Liberal Democrats – Centre, federalist – 17 MSPs  
Scottish Green Party – Environmentalist, pro-independence – 7 MSPs  
Scottish Socialist Party – Far-left, pro-independence – 6 MSPs  
Scottish Senior Citizens Party – pensioners' rights party – 1 MSP  
Independent – 4 MSPs

No Party Affiliation – 1 MSP

Presiding Officer – 1 MSP

<sup>5</sup> Scotland has 7 MEPs. These are Alyn Smith (SNP), Struan Stevenson (Conservative), John Purvis (Conservative), Catherine Stihler (Labour), David Martin (Labour), Elspeth Attwooll (Lib. Dem.) and Ian Hudghton (SNP).

<sup>6</sup> The Cross Party Group on Scots is one of several Cross Party groups in which members of the Scottish Parliament meet regularly with non-members. The latter group consists of people with expertise in the field. The aim of those meetings is to discuss Parliamentary policy on a specific issue and to share opinions and information. See Dossena 2005b and <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/crossPartyGroups/groups/cpg-scots.htm>.

understanding of the issue or gut feeling. These questions include their familiarity with scholarship pertaining to the Scots language and their familiarity with their political parties' official position on Scots. Questions sent to the Scottish members of European parliament were altered to include a European angle and the group of non-MSP members were asked for their views on the ways in which Scots should be promoted and encouraged.

The low response rate in the group of MSPs was disappointing. This might be interpreted as a reflection of the general lack of interest in the issue, which is not surprising given the fact that little has been done to enhance the situation of Scots and against the background of earlier research (e.g. Dossena 2005b<sup>7</sup>, Horsbroch 2002, 21–42, Husom 1999<sup>8</sup>). The comments of language activists and the SLRC to the UK second ECRML report also confirmed my expectations of low interest in language issues.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that those MSPs who replied had probably more knowledge or more interest in language issues than the whole group of MSPs. First of all, they expressed their interest in the survey by replying and secondly, many of them expressed a personal interest in language issues, although not necessarily an interest in Scots (in some cases this took the form of a general interest in culture or heritage or an interest in Gaelic).

The reasons behind the low response rate are of course complex and it has to be mentioned that several MSPs or their personal assistants sent their apologies for not having the time to reply to this survey or, for example, explained that they have given priority to questions asked by their own constituents. The replies of the second group (non-MSP members of the CPG and others), on the other hand, often pointed in the direction of conscious attempts by politicians to avoid dealing with “the reality of the language question wherever possible.”

<sup>7</sup> An interesting development in the structure of the CPG is that “while the interest of non-MSPs appears to have increased and extended its scope to academics outside Scotland, that of MSPs seems to have declined dramatically” (Dossena 2005b).

<sup>8</sup> Husom attempted to include Members of Parliament in his survey in 1999, but due to a low response rate (only five of 24 returned the questionnaire) he later decided to exclude the group of MPs (1999, 48).

<sup>9</sup> Comments by Colin Wilson, Bob Fairmie and Michael Hance to Antonio Bultrini, August 2005. The document itself had flaws in its description of the situation of the Scots language and above all in terms of the manner in which the Scots language was not separately and properly named in the report. Michael Hance, the manager of the SLRC stated in his reply “the assertion that the Scots language and Scottish English are the same thing is absurd in a report that purports to list the various ways in which the UK government and the relevant devolved territorial administration support the Scots language. This assertion betrays the careless attitude, which the Scottish Executive and its officials have consistently shown towards the language. One of the biggest problems the Scots language faces is lack of linguistic consciousness amongst its speakers. The continued tendency of the Executive and its officials to refuse to name the language contributes to this problem. It underlines the lack of status from which the language suffers and underscores the popular view that Scots is just bad English.”

Another point worth mentioning, which also has an impact on the reliability of the results, is the wording of the questions, but in this task I had the chance to consult several experts. Only 19 politicians and 22 other informants participated in this survey, which is not a large or representative sample. The results in the first group should not be taken as being representative of all Scottish politicians and neither should the results in the second group be seen as representative of all people with an active interest in language matters. It is, however, useful to look at the individual opinions expressed in replies, because these can be seen as indicative of the political climate in which decisions on language policy are expected to be made.

## **Presentation of the results**

### *Perceptions of the languages spoken in Scotland: group of MSPs and MEPs v. group of non-MSP respondents*

To the question of whether one perceives Scotland as largely monolingual, bilingual, trilingual or multi-lingual a great variety of replies was given by both groups (see Table 1). Most MSPs and MEPs (13 of 19) perceived Scotland as largely monolingual (although some of them stated that this was largely but not exclusively the case), whereas there were more perceptions of Scotland being bilingual, trilingual or indeed multilingual in the group of non-MSP members and others (only 9 of 22 considered Scotland to be largely monolingual). Of the latter group, many of those who perceived Scotland as monolingual stated, however, that Scotland is monolingual in one sense, but multilingual in another and people explained their views extensively, which showed some significant consideration of this issue.

When asked about what they consider to be their native language most MSPs and MEPs (12 of 19) replied English. The description of native language seemed in some cases to be a political issue – those who were members of ‘nationalist’ parties more often described their language as Scottish English, Scots-English or a mixture of the two, while those who were members of ‘unionist’ parties considered their language to be English, but, on the other hand, it is probable that some of them did not understand the question. There seems to be some degree of confusion about the term native language. In the second group of respondents most stated that their language was Scots or that they were bilingual in English and Scots or spoke a mixture of the two: one was bilingual in English and Gaelic, one had Scottish English as native and four considered their language to be English. Another four respondents had different nationality and/or another native language (these were native speakers of American English, Italian and German and one of the respondents was English).

As far as region or constituency is concerned the three members for Highlands and Islands clearly defined the three languages spoken in their region: one of them stated that mainly English is spoken, but also some Gaelic and Scots and the others defined the languages of their region as a mixture of English and Gaelic and mixture of English and Scots or as a mixture of English and Gaelic and Scots dialects in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland.

English was stated to be the language spoken in their constituency or region by the MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie, North-East Scotland, Glasgow, Mid Scotland and Fife, South of Scotland and for Eastwood (English, very little Gaelic). One MSP for South of Scotland described the language spoken as English, whereas the other for the same region as a mixture of English and local Scots. The MSP for Central Scotland described the local language as a mixture of English and Scots and the MSP for Lothians, stated that English, some Gaelic and several local accents are being used.

Some of the views were in contradiction with the existing estimations on the number of Scots language speakers and for example it was surprising not to see Scots even mentioned in the case of the respondent from North-East Scotland. The replies on the languages spoken in Scotland regionally and nationally were more extensive in the replies of the second group, but, although personal perceptions varied to some extent, most respondents in the second group were currently from Edinburgh or other big cities. Class issues and social distinction between SSE and Scots were stressed in some replies.

The respondents in the second group were asked to summarize how they think Scots is perceived in present-day Scotland. The majority of respondents thought that Scots is seen as a dialect only suitable for colloquial speech or as something of an anachronism (everyday use very limited, but used in poetry and folk music). Many added that this is *sad* or *unfortunate*. The existing attitudes were perceived to be a result of insufficient knowledge or feelings of embarrassment or linguistic insecurity. Some respondents pointed out that there is no consistent perception. Scots can be regarded by some as a linguistic remnant and an obstacle to economic progress, and by others as a valuable aspect of cultural identity.<sup>10</sup> Along the same lines it was stated that some perceive Scots as a language (as a dialect that was once a language or as a low prestige language) and some as a dialect, but that many people do not ever think about it. If people do not know what the language issues actually are, it is difficult to change an attitude which has been present in all areas of society for so long.

<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, there are people in Scotland for whom Scots is essential and they perceive language as central to their identity. Scots is a great source of expression and pride in local culture. It is not clear, however, how many of them actually use Scots in everyday life or just in performance and whether they consider language as a *linguistic* issue of greater importance. See e.g. TV documentary "The Big Scots Road Trip" (2005).

Table 1. Perceptions of Scotland in terms of language situation (MSPs and MEPs)

Political party + Region/ Constituency	Native language + other languages	Opinion on languages used by people in constituency/region	Perception of Scotland as monolingual, bilingual, trilingual or multilingual
Green, North-East, MSP	English	English	Largely monolingual
Labour, MEP	No response to this question	No response to this question	Largely monolingual (but not exclusively)
Conservative, MEP	English, Scots and Lallans (when in Scotland). English the only native (when in Europe)	No response to this question	No response to this question
Conservative, MEP	English + Italian, French	Monolingual*	Monolingual
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	Scottish English	Mixture of English and Gaelic, Scots dialects in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland	Tri-lingual
Labour, Clydebank and Milngavie, MSP	English + some French	English	Monolingual
Conservative, South of Scotland, MSP	English + little French	Mixture English and local Scots	Monolingual
Green, Highlands and Islands, MSP	English + French, some Gaelic	Mainly English, some Gaelic, very little Scots	Largely monolingual (with pockets of minority languages)
SNP, MEP	English + French, German	In an European context English the most important, Scots and Gaelic important as specific to Scotland <sup>†**</sup>	Monolingual or bilingual
Conservative, Lothians, MSP	English + French	No response to this question	Multilingual
Conservative, Glasgow, MSP	English	English	Monolingual + some bilingual speakers of many languages
Liberal Democrats, Mid Scotland and Fife, MSP	English + little French	English	Largely monolingual
Labour, Eastwood, MSP	English + little French	English, v. little Gaelic	Monolingual
Presiding Officer, elected as SNP member; Ochil, MSP	English (easy switch to Scots) + French, Russian, some Gaelic	English and simultaneously Scots dialect. Small number of Gaelic speakers	Largely monolingual, but also areas where Gaelic is the first language and in most of the Lowlands people switch between English and Scots
SNP, Central Scotland, MSP	English (modified by Scots)	Mixture of English and Scots	Largely monolingual
Green, South of Scotland, MSP	English + some French, Spanish and Scots	English	Multilingual
Green, Lothians, MSP	English, Scots + French, German, little Swahili	Several local accents, Gaelic medium school	Many are bilingual

Socialist, South of Scotland, MSP	English + little French	English	Monolingual
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	Scots-English	Mixture of English and Scots; Mixture of English and Gaelic	Effectively trilingual

\* In the case of Members of European parliament this question was modified to include their perception of Scotland from a European perspective.

\*\* These results are based on a phone interview, 28th November 2006.

### *Perceptions of 'indigenous' languages and the need to support them: group of MSPs and MEPs v. group of non-MSP respondents*

The perceptions of what constitutes Scotland's indigenous languages varied to a great extent (see Table 2). In some cases these perceptions were clearly influenced by the respondent's view on whether Scots is a language or a dialect. Familiarity with research also appeared to have an influence on the respondent's views. In the group of MSPs and MEPs six persons perceived English and Gaelic to be indigenous, in four responses these languages were Gaelic and Scots and in three responses English, Gaelic and Scots. The other responses varied: one MSP saw English as the only indigenous language, one Gaelic, one a dialect or variation of English and in one response it was stated that English and Scots dialects are indigenous. There were two responses with no reply to this particular question.

In the second group of informants eleven people named Gaelic and Scots as indigenous as opposed to one person who saw only Gaelic as indigenous and seven people who counted all three as indigenous. One respondent pointed out that this is not a matter of consideration, but of knowledge, one response was that the indigenous language of Scotland is unknown and one that this was probably Pictish. Interestingly, on the other hand, one person said that in some cases immigrant languages could also qualify.

I asked all MSPs and MEPs to say whether it would be a good thing if Scots and Gaelic died out and if the state should support indigenous languages. The Scottish National Party's MSPs, one of the Green Party's MSPs and the Socialist Party's MSPs had the most positive attitudes to both languages. Some MSPs expressed the opinion that the state should support these languages without specifying how. Some of the Conservative members stressed the importance of Gaelic and the fact that Gaelic should be supported and that it is supported. The Liberal Democrat MSP and Labour members also said that Gaelic should be supported. Many MSPs did not make any statement at all regarding support for Scots. Two of the respondents did not reply to this question.

In the second group, not surprisingly, nearly all respondents (20 of 22) stated that the state should support Scots and Gaelic with some suggesting that it is absolutely obvious that the state should support these languages and that it has a moral and political obligation to do so. One respondent did not reply to this question and one respondent expressed the opinion that only Gaelic should be supported by the state

(this person was, however, from outside the Cross Party Group on Scots and his judgment was based on the belief that Scots is extinct). There were, however, other comments as well. A comment to the questionnaire made outside the group that was surveyed was that “they should put money into providing proper cycle paths and healthcare before trying to save a dead language”. One respondent pointed out that future developments depend above all on the community who use the language and that “you can fund development all you like, but at the end of the day languages are dependent on communities for survival”.

*Table 2. Perceptions of ‘indigenous’ languages and importance of language matters (MSPs and MEPs)*

<i>Political party + Region/ Constituency</i>	<i>Perceptions of ‘indigenous’ languages and state support for them</i>	<i>Perceptions of the importance of language matters to the people of Scotland</i>	<i>Importance of a clear policy on Scots</i>
Green, North-East, MSP	Gaelic. The State should provide support for languages when necessary	Matter to few	Important
Labour, MEP	Happy to see support given to Gaelic, Scots and dialects	No response to this question	No response to this question
Conservative, MEP	No response to this question	No response to this question	No response to this question
Conservative, MEP	English and Gaelic. Gaelic to some extent and it does	Not a lot except among Gaelic speakers	Important to have a clear policy on Gaelic
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	Gaelic and Scots. The state should support them	Small numbers passionate, many just use their particular tongue	Very important to support people’s self esteem
Labour, Clydebank and Milngavie, MSP	English and Gaelic. Some support for Gaelic is required	Not much	Not at all
Conservative, South of Scotland, MSP	English and in some parts Gaelic. Yes particularly Gaelic	Good English important with pride local accents	Left to individuals
Green, Highlands and Islands, MSP	Gaelic, Scots, English. The state should support them	Very important to Highlands and Islands	Important
SNP, MEP	Gaelic and Scots. The state should support them	Not overly high, but the situation is changing	Very important, fundamental. SNP has one for Gaelic and Scots
Conservative, Lothians, MSP	English and Gaelic. Support should be given	A great deal	No response to this question

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Conservative, Glasgow, MSP	English, Gaelic, Scots. The Scottish government supports Scotland's minority languages*	Not made aware of constituents concerns over language	Scottish Conservatives support Scotland's diverse traditional culture and heritage.
Liberal Democrats, Mid Scotland and Fife, MSP	A dialect or variation of English. It would be a bad thing for Gaelic to be lost	Not a great deal which is a pity	Of some importance
Labour, Eastwood, MSP	English and Gaelic. Gaelic should not be allowed to die out. There should be support for indigenous languages	Personally – Gaelic matters very much. Not made aware of constituents concerns over language	Personally – clarity important. Not as much concern over Scots than over Gaelic.
Presiding Officer, elected as SNP member, Ochil, MSP	English and Gaelic. Scots is today used in a dialect form. There is general support to the use of Gaelic.	Matter, but not in the list of top priorities.	Important to support diversity in language use everywhere.
SNP, Central Scotland, MSP	Scots and Gaelic. The state should support them	Matters a lot to Gaelic speakers, the Scots issue to fewer	Not terribly important On a personal level important
Green, South of Scotland, MSP	English. The state should support languages	To a certain extent	Important
Green, Lothians, MSP	English and Scots dialects. Education should encourage children to write in the language they speak.	Not enough	Quite important and we do have a policy
Socialist, South of Scotland, MSP	Gaelic and Lowland Scots. The state should support them	Not much	Very important
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	English, Broad Scots and Gaelic. Duty of the state	Vital, defines who we are, adds to quality of life, self-esteem and other crucial issues	Vital

\* This response includes a great deal of exact information on support given to Gaelic.

### Views on the importance of language matters: views of non-MSP respondents

Views on how important language matters are to the people of Scotland were divided in this group as follows:

**Table 3. Importance of language matters (non-MSP respondents)**

<i>Opinion on importance of language matters (non-MSP respondents)</i>	<i>Number of replies</i>
Language issues do not matter much to most of the population	8
Attitudes vary greatly	3
Vital	2
Matter a lot to some	2
Should matter more	2
Fundamental to any society	1
Not much, but this is changing	1
Minority interest, but matter a lot to the Gaels	3

One respondent in this group pointed out that "generally there seems to be widespread apathy, punctuated by determined efforts by small groups of keen language supporters. A widespread problem seems to be the reduction of language to something that is only relevant in economic terms." Another informant also stated that there is a great deal of indifference. On the whole, especially amongst those who were not members of the Cross Party Group the view was expressed that most people in Scotland give very little thought to language issues. Some respondents from the Cross Party Group supported this view also. Respondents tended to blame the educational system and the media for this state of affairs but there was also expressed the view that many people had more pressing issues of material well-being to consider and language was not seen as important as other concerns.

In addition to these views one respondent expressed the view that Scots is under attack by the establishment.<sup>11</sup> Another respondent complained that "Scotland continues to be treated as an English colony, with the compliance and active collaboration of most of its *supposedly* independent institutions." The fact that the Scottish parliament is only "semi-independent" was mentioned frequently.

### Views on language and identity: group of MSPs and MEPs v. group of non-MSP respondents

As far as the relation between language and identity is concerned the opinions expressed represented a relatively unified front (see Table 4). Most respondents

<sup>11</sup> He wrote that the normal way to denigrate the language is to deliberately anglicise it e.g. by the addition of apostrophe marks in inappropriate places such as *e'e*, or by mistranslating it to make it appear little different from English in, for example, the use of the expression *wey oot* as a substitute for the English word exit (rather than the purportedly correct Scots form "*ootgang*").

claimed that Scottish identity is not based on language or, in any case, not on one particular language. In the group of MSPs and MEPs there were eight replies to the effect that all three languages (Gaelic, Scots, English with a Scottish accent) are an expression of Scottish identity. Of this group two respondents added that Scottish English is the most common or that a Scots accent is considered to be the prime identifier of a Scot. Five respondents stated that one can express Scottish identity in any language, including recent immigrant languages or in general in any language spoken in Scotland today. Four other respondents answered differently (see Table 4). In one reply it was stressed that although Gaelic and Scots can be considered as expressions of Scottish identity, identity in Scotland is not based on language, but on distinctive institutions and on history. One respondent stated that he would not call Scots a language, but a tongue. Two respondents did not reply to this question.

When compared to other replies from the same people, these responses show that Scots can mean significantly different things to different people with respondents sometimes meaning Scottish English by Scots or Scots by Scottish English. Sometimes contradictory ways of naming Scots and varieties of Scots were present in the same sentence.

In the second group of respondents, replies could largely be divided into two main groups: those who thought that all three languages are an expression of Scottish identity (12 of 22) and those who felt that only Scots and Gaelic are a mark of distinct identity (4 of 22). However, in this group there were three respondents who stated that Scottish identity could be expressed in any language (the three mentioned and many other languages) or this was seen as a divisive question.<sup>12</sup> One respondent felt that only Scots qualified as a mark of identity and two responses implied that Scots is the most important.

<sup>12</sup> These respondents were not members of the Cross-Party Group.

Table 4. *Language and Identity (MSPs and MEPs)*

<i>Political party + Region/Constituency</i>	<i>Views on what language or languages are considered to be an expression of Scottish identity (Scots, Gaelic, English with a Scottish accent, other?)</i>
Green, North-East, MSP	Gaelic, Scots, Doric
Labour, MEP	No response to this question
Conservative, MEP	No response to this question
Conservative, MEP	Scots, Gaelic and English
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	All three
Labour, Clydebank and Milngavie, MSP	All could be, but a Scottish accent is probably the most common expression of identity
Conservative, South of Scotland, MSP	English with Scottish accent
Green, Highlands and Islands, MSP	All three
SNP, MEP	All these languages are an expression of identity, but in different ways
Conservative, Lothians, MSP	All three
Conservative, Glasgow, MSP	Can be expressed in any language
Liberal Democrats, Mid Scotland and Fife, MSP	Any Scottish dialect
Labour, Eastwood, MSP	All three
Presiding Officer, elected as SNP member, Ochil, MSP	Gaelic and Scots mark a specific Scottish identity, but identity in Scotland is not based on language.
SNP, Central Scotland, MSP	All noted plus English with both Scottish accent and another, e.g. Scots-Italian, or Scots-Asian
Green, South of Scotland, MSP	Significance of other minority languages should be remembered – Urdu, Hindi, Chinese etc.
Green, Lothians, MSP	In any language. Most people see a Scots accent as being a prime identifier of a Scot.
Socialist, South of Scotland, MSP	Scots
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	All of them and others from the New Scots who express their affinity with Scotland and its values in many tongues

### Views on how Scots should be promoted: non-MSP respondents

Most respondents supported the view that Scots should be given full recognition and used widely in all areas, although there were also people who felt that the language should be encouraged mainly as a cultural issue or in some specific areas. Only one respondent stated that he was not sure about the ways to protect and encourage the language, because of the problems connected with changing attitudes. Some respondents expressed the view that the state should support the promotion of a unified orthographic convention and that Scots should be promoted in the same way as other minority languages in the UK (e.g. the Celtic languages) such as: a proper service of radio and TV programmes; taught as a subject in schools; and used as a teaching medium where there are families who want this.

Others stressed that it should be recognized as the first use language of a very large minority – possibly even a majority of the indigenous population. One respondent argued that there should be a question on the language in the next census. Other respondents made the following points:

- Should be used on radio and TV and in school – but I would hesitate to require people to speak more than one language.
- Promoted as a majority language and as a cultural issue.
- Taught at all levels of schooling.
- Learnt and accepted in a full range of educational, cultural and social context.
- Recognising and supporting Scots in schools would help the pupils with their English and their modern languages as well.
- Encouraged mainly as a cultural issue.
- Promoted in the correct fora.
- Promoted as a part of an overall strategy to protect and encourage the languages of Scotland.
- Encouraged through Scots medium education and open access learning.
- Taught in schools and an ending to the Anglicisation by authority and media and the use of multilingual signs.
- Encouraged in different situations, not just in poetry and family.
- Promoted as an important language resource supported by language rights legislation.
- Encouraged in schools and home environment.
- Taught as a separate, closely related linguistic system from English.
- To begin with, encouraged as a minority language with great cultural value. Greater linguistic awareness might then lead to more widespread use.
- Taught and used in schools.
- Cultural: in the arts, film and television.

### **Familiarity with scholarship and with party's language policy in relation to other replies**

Nearly all MSPs and MEPs stated that they were not familiar with any scholarship pertaining to the Scots language (see Table 5). The familiarity with scholarship in the second group of respondents was significant in the case of non-MSP members of the Cross Party Group. This was not surprising, because some members are in fact leading contributors to it and others are knowledgeable and well informed on various issues concerning both the history of Scots and its present situation. This was visible in responses to other questions in this group and confirmed the

impression that these responses are based on a considered understanding of the questions concerned.

Almost all MSPs and MEPs stated that they were familiar with the language policy of their party. Conservative members stressed that their party is supportive of Scots. However, this seemed to be more of a general statement of positive attitude considering all of the expressed views. The only Liberal Democrat MSP who replied to my survey was not familiar with his party's language policy on Scots, because in his opinion this was not a major issue in the Lowland area he represents. Interestingly, in a similar fashion, the only person who was a supporter of the Liberal Democrats in the second group of informants was not interested in the party's language policy on Scots. An informant who supported Labour also stated that language issues do not affect his vote. These were only individual opinions, but on the basis of all the replies there seemed to be a relatively strong connection between interest in Scots and party affiliation.

Table 5. *Familiarity with scholarship and party's language policy (MSPs and MEPs)*

<i>Political party + Region/ Constituency</i>	<i>Familiarity with scholarship pertaining to the Scots language</i>	<i>Familiarity with party's language policy</i>	<i>Other comments</i>
Green, North-East, MSP	No Aware of support for the study of Gaelic	Yes	Sad that for most of us Scots, our native indigenous language (Gaelic) is completely unknown to us and we are not able to pronounce even the most basic words.
Labour, MEP	No response to this question	No response to this question	No comments
Conservative, MEP	No response to this question	No response to this question	No comments
Conservative, MEP	No	No	No
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	Yes	Yes (Policy described)	Gaelic and Scots are great boost to self- esteem and distinctive Scottishness. They are unique and an essential part of the world's diversity of cultures and ideas.
Labour, Clydebank and Mingavie, MSP	A little, very dry and boring	Yes	No
Conservative, South of Scotland, MSP	No	No	Important English becomes Europe's predominant language.
Green, Highlands and Islands, MSP	No Aware that studies exist	Not sure about policy	No

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SNP, MEP	No	Yes	Many of our people are deeply interested in this issue. Positive developments.
Conservative, Lothians, MSP	No response to this question	No response to this question	No response to this question
Conservative, Glasgow, MSP	No	Yes (Supportive policy)	No
Liberal Democrats, Mid Scotland and Fife, MSP	No, but aware that studies exist	No, because it is not a major issue in the Lowland area represented	The biggest danger to the Scottish language comes from American TV programmes.
Labour, Eastwood, MSP	No	Yes. (We are supportive of Scots).	No
Presiding Officer, elected as SNP member, Ochil, MSP	Yes, but not in any great depth	Yes	Stressing that language is not the main channel of identity in Scotland.
SNP, Central Scotland, MSP	No	Yes	No
Green, South of Scotland, MSP	No	Yes	No
Green, Lothians, MSP	No	Yes	No
Socialist, South of Scotland, MSP	No	We don't have one	No
SNP, Highlands and Islands, MSP	No, but open to hearing more and to helping via the Scotland Funds and the Ireland funds	Yes	No

### Views on the importance of language policy in the choice of political party

In the group of non-MSP respondents, nearly all supporters of the SNP (10 of 11 supporters of the SNP) knew the language policy of their party. They were familiar with either the exact policy or what it is supposed to be. Opinions were divided on whether the language policy of the SNP should be clearer or if the party should campaign more actively for it. Some respondents felt that a clearer policy would be important only after independence and that no change should be expected at present. A number of respondents either had no political affiliation or did not mention any preference for a single political party (see Table 6). One respondent in this group expressed the view that none of the political parties had a viable policy on Scots, which may be considered to have some justification in view of the fact that even the SNP policy is based merely on the promotion of a positive attitude towards Scots. One respondent also argued that if a policy promises support without funding, then it is useless.

**Table 6.** *Importance of language policy in the choice of political party (non-MSP respondents)*

<i>Views on how important language policy is in the choice of political party (non-MSP respondents)</i>	<i>Number of replies</i>
Important	5
Very important	2
Should have a clearer language policy	2
Some importance	2
Current policy sufficient	1
Not important	4
Not a party matter	1
None has a viable policy	1
No strong support for any party	4

### Some concluding observations

Some of the views expressed in the survey showed that questions surrounding Scots are being considered from various angles in the group of non-MSP respondents. On the basis of all the replies it can be concluded that language matters are indeed a political question in Scotland. It is also clear that the re-convening of the Scottish parliament has not changed the attitudes of policy makers dramatically. In general language issues are not considered to be a constituency matter or an issue of interest to most constituents. In replies from both groups of informants it was stressed that Scots matters above all to a few, very passionate language activists and to people in the cultural sector, but most politicians and a number of the other informants felt either that Scots matters little to the general population or that it should matter more. Some informants in the second group expressed the view that language does matter, but that for many people this was often felt at some subconscious level.

Earlier research on language is familiar to a very small number of MSPs and MEPs. However, there is a clear correlation between attitudes and familiarity with research in both groups. This shows that opinions can change if and when people become aware of the existing information. Gaelic is still considered as more important in terms of support, whereas opinions on Scots are more divided. Mobilising public sympathy rose as one of the key issues for the future of Scots – in this respect some informants in the second group felt that attitudes are a result of the lack of knowledge and thus could be changed, but others stressed that it would be “difficult to change persistent attitudes”.

In the light of the opinions expressed in the survey carried out among non-MSP members and others, the political party which has or would have the biggest role in language policy is the SNP, not only because it regards both languages as very important, but because it also seems to be the party supported by many of the people with an interest in the language. Although some would like to see an even

more clearly expressed policy, some respondents regard the party's positive attitude as very important and sufficient at this stage. It should be mentioned, however, that there were people among the respondents who did not see language as a party political issue and thought that it should not be considered in that way.

I paid attention to some of the key words used in replies in the group of non-MSP members – among the most frequently used words and expressions were ‘pay lip service’ (used in a few responses) and awareness, self-esteem and confidence. The latter group of words was also to be found in the replies of SNP MSPs, which suggests that in terms of attitudes these two groups are close to each other. One non-MSP respondent pointed out, however, as a somewhat disapproving comment, that all parties are content “to pay lip service to the idea of parity with Gaelic”.

There seem to be individual MSPs in all parties who take an interest in language issues and, for example, Kenneth Macintosh, Labour MSP, who is also a member of the Cross Party Group on Gaelic, stated that he wishes “there was clarity for everyone's sake”. Undoubtedly, one of the best ways to bring about more clarity would be by establishing through a census question the exact number of Scots speakers. Even if the results were based more on self-perception than on real ability, this would certainly make a difference.

Only a small number of politicians and other informants participated in this survey. However, the survey was successful in collecting information which included opinions of politicians of all political parties and representatives of different parts of Scotland. The inclusion of a second group of informants brought a useful and interesting basis for comparison. Although the results should not be taken as being representative, they can be seen as revealing complex and interesting details of the general political climate regarding languages and language policy.

### **Towards a more complex and diverse language identity?**

Recently, a growing concern in the area of language policies in Europe is the question of the ever-growing role of English. Sometimes English is seen as an expression of cultural imperialism, sometimes as a language, which can give a status of equality in situations where it is a foreign language for both parties. Some new concerns are also expressed. If in the very near future everyone in Europe speaks at least two languages, one of which is English, what would happen to the relationship between national identity and language, what would happen to the English language itself and to monolingual English speakers? It has been suggested that language identity will become increasingly complex and diverse and that much more variation will be acceptable in language use. Could monolingual English speakers become isolated from the more complex linguistic identities, which are emerging, ending up as “prisoners of one language”? (Chesterman 2005, 115–129).

The importance of English in a Scottish and indeed European context was either explicitly or implicitly expressed in the opinions of most politicians. The differences of political views seemed to be reflected in support for either a monolingual or trilingual (or multilingual) society. As Scotland has always been multilingual, it seems only natural to value this view. It was this “diversity of language and origin” that disposed the Scots to association and intercourse with other countries (Scott 1998, 98). In fact, what has defined the Scots through the ages has been to a great extent the diverse nature of its inhabitants and their interaction with other countries and languages.

In the present-day language situation in Europe both the significance of English and the existing perceptions of language identity and distinctiveness are increasingly seen as equally important. If one pursues to protect and develop the Scots language, the best approach is probably the one already employed. The language is perceived as a mark of distinctiveness, although not necessarily in conflict or in contest with other languages, but as something unique and typical for Scotland and, as one MSP put it, “an essential part of the world’s diversity of cultures and ideas”.

### List of abbreviations

CPG	Cross Party Group
EBLUL	European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages
ECRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
GRO(S)	General Register Office (Scotland)
Lib.Dem.	Liberal Democrats
LIP	Language in Politics – survey
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
MSP	Member of Scottish Parliament
SLRC	Scots Language Resource Centre
SNP	Scottish National Party
SSE	Scottish Standard English

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Phone interview: reply to the questionnaire

Alyn Smith, MEP, 28.11.2005

Letters: replies to the questionnaire

22 replies of non-MSP respondents. The information of these informants is kept anonymous as they answered as private individuals.<sup>13</sup>

Report

The UK authorities' second periodical report on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Comments to the second ECRML report

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Michael Hance, August 2005

Colin Wilson, August 2005

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<sup>13</sup> I would like to thank all of them for their assistance and in particular prof. M. Dossena. Special thanks to Michael Hance for his assistance during the whole project.

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## Appendix. Questionnaires used in the study

### Questionnaire sent to all MSPs (129 seats) and to all Scottish MEPs (7)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently working on a project on Language and Politics in contemporary Scotland. In part the project will consider how the language situation and language policy are affected by the attitudes of policy makers and others. I would like to find out how these attitudes are reflected in support for, or opposition to, measures designed to enhance the status of a particular language or encourage its use. I will be considering this matter in relation to both Scots and Gaelic but I am especially interested in your attitude to Scots. I am interested in the views of different political parties on the Scots and Gaelic languages as well as in your personal view. My report will be for publication.

My key questions are:

1. Would you describe Scotland as largely monolingual, bilingual, trilingual or multi-lingual?
2. What do you consider to be your native language? What other languages do you speak?
3. What languages are used most by people in your constituency/region – English; Scots; Gaelic; mixture of English and Scots; mixture of English and Gaelic; mixture of Gaelic and Scots; other? Please specify\*
4. What do you consider to be Scotland's "indigenous" languages?
5. Would it be a good thing for the Scots language or for the Gaelic language to die out? Should the state support Scotland's indigenous languages?
6. What language (Scots, Gaelic, English with a Scottish accent) do you consider to be an expression of Scottish identity?
7. In your opinion how much do language issues matter to the people of Scotland? And to the people of your constituency/region?
8. How important is it for your party and for you personally to have a clear policy on the Scots language?
9. Are you familiar with any scholarship pertaining to the Scots language? If so, what? (for example GRO(S) *A Report on the Scots Language Research*, Edinburgh, 1996; S. Murdoch *Language Politics in Scotland*, Aberdeen, 1996)
10. Are you familiar with your party's official policy on Scots?
11. Would you like to make any other comments on this issue?

I hope that you will be able to assist me by answering these questions. I look forward to receiving your reply. I would much appreciate a reply from you by 10 October at the latest.

Yours Sincerely,  
Atina Nihtinen

\* In the case of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) this question was altered to include a European angle and the whole country instead of particular region or constituency. My question was: from a European perspective and from the perspective of future developments would it be important that Scotland is monolingual, bilingual, trilingual or multi-lingual?

*Questionnaire sent to non-MSP respondents (these were contacted through SLRC)*

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently working on a project on Language and Politics in contemporary Scotland. In part the project will consider how the language situation and language policy are affected by the attitudes of policy makers and others. I would like to find out how these attitudes are reflected in support for, or opposition to, measures designed to enhance the status of a particular language or encourage its use. I will be considering this matter in relation to both Scots and Gaelic but I am especially interested in your attitude to Scots. My report will be for publication.

My key questions are:

1. Would you describe Scotland as largely monolingual, bilingual, trilingual or multi-lingual?
2. What do you consider to be your native language? What other languages do you speak?
3. What languages are used most by people in your region (In your place of birth? In your place of residence?) – English; Scots; Gaelic; mixture of English and Scots; mixture of English and Gaelic; mixture of Gaelic and Scots; other? Please specify
4. What do you consider to be Scotland’s “indigenous” languages?
5. Should the state support Scotland’s indigenous languages?
6. Please summarize (in a couple of sentences) how you think Scots is perceived in present-day Scotland (as a language? a dialect? only suitable in colloquial speech? only appropriate to poetry?)
7. And the ways in which Scots should be promoted and encouraged? (as a majority or a minority language, as a cultural or a linguistic issue or both, in traditional or in new areas of use etc.)
8. What language (Scots, Gaelic, English with a Scottish accent, other? please specify) do you consider to be an expression of Scottish identity?
9. In your opinion how much do language issues matter to the people of Scotland? And to the people of your region?
10. What political party do you support? How important is it for you to support a party, which has a clear policy on the Scots language?
11. Are you familiar with any scholarship pertaining to the Scots language? If so, what?
12. Can you summarize your party’s official policy on Scots in a few sentences?
13. Would you like to make any other comments on this issue?

I hope that you will be able to assist me by answering these questions. I look forward to receiving your reply. I would much appreciate a reply from you by 20 December at the latest.

Yours Sincerely,  
Atina Nihtinen