

## Indigenous Languages of Scotland: culture and the classroom

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### Summary

Scotland's indigenous languages were, for very many years, under attack. The Gaelic of the Highlands and Western Isles, arguably one of the earliest written European languages, after Greek and Latin, had a brief apotheosis around 1000CE when it was the language of the Scottish Royal Court. Scots, spoken by the mass of the people, was the language of the renowned Mediaeval poets known as the Makars. Gaelic was effectively ignored but for attempts, by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, to engender transient bilingualism in order to have the Gaelic diminished and then forgotten. Following the accession of the James VI of Scotland to the throne of the United Kingdom of England and Scotland, the Authorised Edition of the Bible was commissioned and published but only in English, no Scots version being deemed necessary. After the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, what prestige remained to the Scots language diminished rapidly and henceforth almost the entire written output from Scotland has been in English. Exceptions have included Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry, Liz Lochhead's translation into Scots of Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664/1986), which toured urban working-class areas in the 1980s and to great acclaim, and *Trainspotting*.

As it declined in status, Scots became increasingly confined to the working class, whose route to upward mobility would include replacing it with English or Scottish Standard

English. Gaelic never had such connotations of social class but that did not mean it would be served much better, or viewed very much better, than Scots.

Over many years, Gaelic was attacked on all sides, parents were convinced not to speak the language to their children and those same children might risk punishment if caught speaking the language at school. Distinct as it is from English, it was always considered a language in its own right and eventually could be studied in those secondary schools which offered it as a native language or as a learned language. Beginning the 1980s, publicly funded, Gaelic-medium primary and secondary schools have opened in most parts of Scotland, and, by law, if sufficient parents request Gaelic-medium primary education for their children, local authorities are required to make the necessary arrangements.

Scots, for its part, was, until very recently, frequently denigrated a “bad English” – except for its occasional use in recitations of the poetry of Robert Burns – and its speakers could find themselves punished, whether chastised in schools or routinely mocked in person and in the media. A major effect of this was a linguistic insecurity with the Scots speaker, whether child or adult, becoming self-conscious and tongue-tied in the presence of authority figures.

Until Devolution in 1999, the Scottish Office, a branch of the UK national government, was in overall charge of schooling on Scotland and did little to support Scots in the school curriculum. The creation of the devolved Scottish Parliament, and hence more local responsibility for education in Scotland, saw a shift in attitudes towards the indigenous languages of Scotland, and these have changed out of all recognition in the space of remarkably few years. Gaelic-medium schools continue to expand, even in the face sometimes of difficulties in recruiting teachers sufficiently fluent to be able to teach in the

language. Scottish literature, including literature actually written in Scots, features prominently in school examination syllabuses.

### Keywords

Scottish education, Gaelic, Scots, Scottish Standard English, slang, social class, linguistic hegemony, language extinction, Kailyard, Tartanry, Clydesidism, myths, Lallans

### Introduction

*We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation* [Voltaire 1694-1778]

(Lounsbury, 1902: p248)

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the relationship between the **indigenous languages** of Scotland, **culture** and the classroom. This will be done by offering some background on Scotland itself, what constitutes its indigenous languages and their evolving relationship to the dominant cultures of Scotland before going on to discuss how their relationship with the classroom has evolved. Whether Voltaire was serious or sarcastic in the quote above is for the reader to decide by perhaps comparing it to his discussion of Scottish Presbyterianism in his *Lettres Philosophiques* (Voltaire, 1734/2011).

In 1707, the **Act of Union** brought together the parliaments of Scotland and England. Unlike the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1543 between England and Wales, it was not an annexation after a military conquest, but rather a treaty freely entered into by two parties, albeit aided and abetted by bribery, described by **Robert Burns** as *Bought and sold for English gold* (Burns, 1791).

In theory, the partners in the Union of 1707 were to be equal. In reality, this was an unlikely prospect. England [which included Wales until 1967, when the 1746 Wales and Berwick Act was partially repealed, and a border established between England and Wales] was around double the land area of Scotland, its population outnumbered that of Scotland in a ratio of roughly 10:1, and, by dint of these disparities, its gross domestic product and military power vastly exceeded those of Scotland.

With the Union, Scotland ceased to exist as an independent nation. Although invaded many times by the armies of England, neither they nor the Romans nor the Norse who preceded them ever succeeded in conquering the entire country. Even the Brythonic Celts, who largely displaced the Goidelic Celts, failed to conquer the whole country.

The Union of 1707 was the culmination of a series of events dating back many years but whose most significant was arguably the union of the crowns which took place in 1603. This was the year in which Elizabeth of England died childless, her nearest successor being the son of her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, a woman whose execution Elizabeth had ordered. So, it was that **James VI**, Kings of Scots since his mother's abdication in 1567, became **James I** of the United Kingdom of England and Scotland. James immediately took his court to London, and with him went all the power and prestige of the monarchy. James, having united the crowns, set in place a limited economic union, a limited recognition of dual citizenship and put in place a common flag in 1607 (Kay, 2006).

Raised as a strict Calvinist, James was determined to do all in his power to root out all traces of Catholicism that remained in his now United Kingdom. To this end, he ordered a

translation of the Bible, both old and new Testaments, from the original sources into English. It is notable that he did not order a translation into Scots, as it was seen as sufficiently close to English as to not warrant the additional translation. The extent of the closeness is a matter of perspective, but the absence of a Scots Bible certainly acted to diminish the prestige and standing of the Scots language (Grant, 1997).

The indigenous languages of Scotland are unique in the world but, intimidated by the English language and by Anglophone media and culture, they are threatened with extinction. While it would doubtless be a loss to the culture of Scotland if the dialects of Polish, Chinese, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi spoken by some more recent immigrant groups to Scotland were to no longer be heard on the streets of Scotland's cities, these languages have strong bases in their countries of origin and so their disappearance from Scotland would not be a total disaster. In contrast, if **Glaswegian Scots** were to disappear from the streets of Glasgow, it would be dead. The indigenous languages of Scotland have no large and thriving base, and, despite recent legislation, they are marginalised even within their own homeland.

### What is Scotland?

Scotland consists of a mainland, which is approximately the northern one third of the largest island of the British Isles, plus two archipelagos to the north (the Orkney Isles and the Shetland Isles) and two archipelagos to the west (the Inner Hebrides and the Outer Hebrides).

See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland>

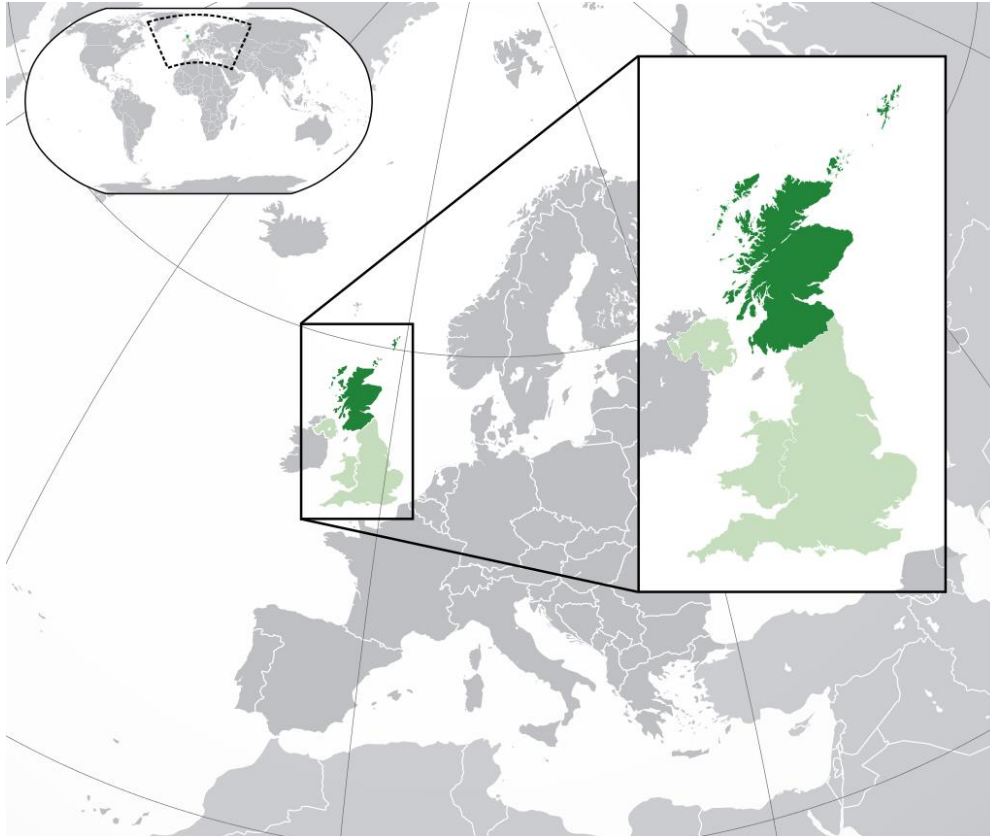


Figure 1: Scotland in Europe and in the World

*Source:* Blank map of Europe (with disputed regions).svg: maix (talk)derivative work:

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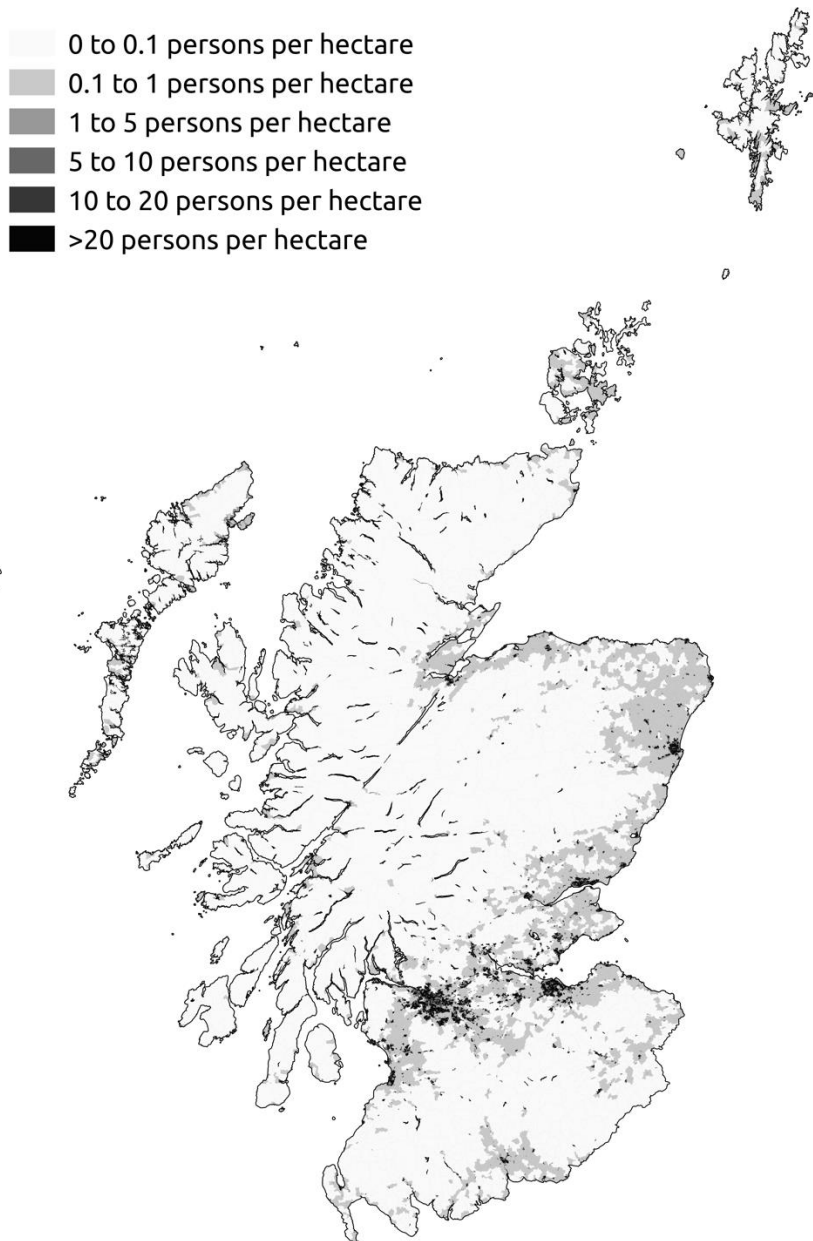


Figure 2: Population density of Scotland according to the 2011 National Census

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### Myths and mythologies

**Myths** are everywhere. They are an essential part of cultural capital and the knowing instinctively what to do when one is in one's group, whatever that may be. Countries create

their myths, whether of the past or the present, be this of fair play, or the frontier spirit, or meritocracy, or egalitarianism, or social responsibility, or whatever. Scotland too has its share of myths, some of which impact directly on its perceptions of its education system, who it is for, and what it is for.

Matheson (2000) discerns and discusses the potential origins of three major myths in Scottish education:

- a) that the Scottish curriculum, at whatever level, is wider than anyone else's;
- b) that Scottish education is better than anyone else's;
- c) that Scottish education is more egalitarian than anyone else's and that every learner can go as far as his/her talents permit. This is based on the myth of the 'lad o pairts,' whereby the teacher, the *Dominie*, identifies talent in a young scholar whom he then nurtures and supports until the young scholar leaves school and goes to university.

He could detect a scholar in the egg, and prophesied Latinity from a boy that seemed fit only to be a cowherd. It was believed that he had never made a mistake in judgment, and it was not his blame if the embryo scholar did not come to birth (Maclaren, 1894: p9).

Whether any of these myths withstand any great scrutiny is, in many respects, irrelevant. Myths do not need to be true; indeed, their very essence is that they are irrational but believed (Robter Bell & Grant, 1974). Scotland's educational myths have entered the national psyche with a sense that education is a public good and it is this positiveness which has acquired a mythical status of its own (D. Matheson, 2015). Education as a public good helps engender



not only faith in education itself but also faith in those charged with delivering education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development – OECD (2008)).

Scotland performs at a consistently very high standard in the **Programme for International Student Assessment** (PISA). Few countries can be said with confidence to outperform it in mathematics, reading and science. Scotland also has one of the most equitable school systems in the OECD (p14).

This is not to say that education in Scotland does not have major challenges to face, as the OECD (2008) report makes clear. **Urban deprivation** blights many city areas and parts of Glasgow have the lowest **life expectancy** at birth in the UK, if not in Europe: 68.4 years for males and 75.1 for females (National Records of Scotland, 2017a). In the Orkney Islands, one in four males born in 2014-16 could expect to live for 90 years or more if current age specific mortality rates remained constant throughout their lives. In contrast, only one in ten males born in Glasgow city could expect to reach the age of 90 under the same conditions. For females, one in three born in East Renfrewshire could expect to live until they were 90 while only one in five born in Glasgow city could expect to reach the same milestone (National Records of Scotland, 2017b: p11). East Renfrewshire is, incidentally, a relatively affluent area which abuts Glasgow.

### The Languages of Scotland

Scotland, from ancient times to the Union and beyond, has been a land of several languages; and Scots, in their continual moving to different parts of their own country and into England and further afield, gained a degree of linguistic sophistication which their English cousins south of the Border often lacked (Shepperton, 1986: p20).

However, Scotland is unusual among smaller European countries since none of its native languages has ever been *both* national and official. Gaelic was the language of the Royal Court and of the government from 800 until 1100 and Scots replaced it from 1100 until 1707. Scots, in turn, was supplanted by English which from the Union of 1707 was, for many years, the only *official* language of Scotland, being that of the government but not that of the law courts until the 19th century, a reflection of **Scots Law** having remained independent of that of England (Kay, 2006).

Until the creation of the devolved **Scottish Parliament** in 1999 following the **Scotland Act 1998**, the historical plurilingual nature of Scotland was similar in some ways to those of Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and even Wales. What made Scotland different was that only English was recognised there as the official language while the other countries mentioned were [and are] all officially plurilingual (C. Matheson & Matheson, 2000).

Leaving aside the languages spoken by the more recent immigrants, Scotland has four languages: Scottish Standard English, English, Scots and Scottish Gaelic.

The first might best be described as English with a Scottish accent, and some words from Scots and Gaelic, as well as some non-English constructions, words, phrases and grammar.

Scots words like **dreich** [wet or penetrating damp] or **scunneret** [fed up beyond words] are rarely used in Scottish Standard English other than for comic effect or occasionally for



Figure 3: Gaelic words

emphasis. Words of Gaelic origin include: *clan*, from *clann* [children or family]; *galore*, from *gu leor* [enough]; *gob*, from *gob* [beak or bill]; *pillion*, from *pillean* [pack-saddle]; *smashing*, from

's *math sin* [that is good] and of course *whisky* from *uisge-beatha* [water of life]. Notably these and many other Gaelic words have entered not only Scottish Standard English but, in many cases, English itself, the pronunciation of the English being scarcely changed from the Gaelic.

The non-English constructions in Scottish Standard English include the use of the past participle in some places where a speaker of Standard English would use a present participle. In this way, the Scottish person is more likely to say *my hair needs washed*, compared to the Standard English *my hair needs washing*, while at Halloween, the tradition of using one's teeth to fish apples out of a bucket of water is *dooking* (D. Matheson, 2002).

Scots, for its part, is descended from **Old Northumbrian English**, and its main locus covers the area lying to the north, east and south of the Scottish Highlands and it includes Scotland's great cities and industrial centres. (Aitken, 1985/2015: 1)

Scots developed in parallel with what would become Standard English while Gaelic is Q-Celt and a close relative to Irish. Old Norse was, until a few centuries ago, also a language of Scotland. Indeed, until the start of the 20th century, a dialect of Norse, known as *Norn*, was still spoken in the Northern Isles (i.e. the Orkneys and the Shetlands) and the influence of

Norn can still be heard in the version of Scots spoken in these archipelagos. It is worth noting in passing that for Shetlanders, Mainland is the largest of the Shetland Isles while they will refer to *going to Scotland* when they are going to the Scottish mainland, a phrase which indicates that they may not feel themselves to be Scottish at all (C. Matheson & Matheson, 2000).

‘Old Irish, the modern name for the language the Scots spoke, was by a long way the first European tongue to develop a written literature after Greek and Latin’ (McClure, 1988: p9). Brought first into Scotland by settlers from Ireland, it spread quickly from Argyll on the west coast over most of the country.

The dominant language in Scotland between AD 800 and 1066 was a variety of Gaelic, sometimes called “**Ersche**” (Irish) because it arrived in Scotland with an invading tribe from Ireland back in the sixth century AD. This was the language of the Scottish court by the time of the arrival of William the Conqueror in England [in 1066] (Corbett, 1997: p4).

This apotheosis did not last long, and Gaelic was soon retreating before another incoming language, the one would develop over the centuries into Scots as it absorbed a series of influences from Gaelic, Norse, neighbouring English dialects, Dutch and French.

Anglo-Saxons had invaded the east coast of Britain ... and settled as far north as the Forth... From the speech of these Anglo-Saxons our lowland Scottish language was formed (Gould & Thompson, 1971: p79).

Not that the invaders would have termed their language Anglo-Saxon, they named it **Englisc** (Grant, 1997).

Older Scots is conventionally dated from AD 1100-1700... The linguistic ancestor of Scots was a blend of Old English and Old Norse as spoken by the inhabitants of Northern England between the time of the first Viking invasions of around AD800 and the Norman Conquest of 1066 (Corbett, 1997: p4).

Inasmuch as was the case for other languages of the time, written Scots was relatively standardised and in addition to developing a rich literature was used as the language of the court, in education and in the church. In contrast to Gaelic which remained essentially rural, Scots maintained a strong position in the towns (Grant, 1997). Scots and English were always sufficiently close to one another, especially in their written forms, as to make mutual comprehension possible, albeit with some effort on both parts. So much so that when **Authorised Version of the Bible** (known as the King James Bible after James I of the United Kingdom (James VI of Scotland)) appeared in English, no Scots version was thought necessary (R Bell & Grant, 1977). Consequently, Scots declined thereafter as a written language. Even poets such as Burns who attempted to write in Scots often slipped into English or peppered their words with apostrophes to indicate **glottal stops** or where the Scots words lacked a letter or two that might appear in the English version of a word (Kay, 2006).

These were the exceptions and there are a few more, especially in the last few years and increasingly in the fields of drama, literature and film. In drama, one sees examples such as Liz Lochhead's translation into Glaswegian Scots of Molière's **Tartuffe** (Molière, 1664/1986) which, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, toured peripheral housing estates in Glasgow and thereabouts to great acclaim. In literature, **Trainspotting** (Welsh, 1993) is a prime example, whose use of the vernacular was inspired by Welsh's reading of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (Selby, 1966/2011; Welsh, 2011). It is worth noting that the dialogue in the 1996 film is English and

Scottish Standard English with a pronounced Edinburgh accent. The latter caused the film's distributors in the USA to demand that the first 20 minutes or so be dubbed, by the original actors, into a speech pattern expected to be more easily understood by an American audience (Arnold, 2017).

Beyond these, almost the entirely written output from Scotland has been in English. This goes as much for the **Scottish Enlightenment** philosophers and economists as it does for twentieth century writers, regardless of the extent to which they actually spoke, or speak, Scots (Kay, 2006). As a result, many Scots speakers experience extreme difficulty when it comes to writing in their own language, a fact not helped by many Scots and English speakers having long held that Scots words were slang or at best bad English. However, slang consists, by its very nature, of neologisms which are usually transient (Macafee, 1988), while **'Bad English'** ... is what is spoken by, let us say, an adult foreign learner with an imperfect knowledge of the language, making mistakes which he [or she] presumably would avoid if he could: Scots, a speech form existing in its own right, is not to be likened to this (McClure, 1988: pp16-17).

Taken together, these phenomena produce a sense of linguistic inferiority neatly summed up as: **'The cannie Scot'** is weill-cryit: he cannie think, he cannie speik, he cannie express hissel' (Grant, 1997: p30) – *the canny Scot is well named: he can't think, he can't speak, he can't express himself.*

Macafee (1988) describes how:

The Glasgow working-class have been diagnosed, on the evidence of teachers and employers, as suffering from **'linguistic insecurity'**, becoming self-conscious and

tongue-tied in the presence of authority figures... Working-class Glaswegians can find it difficult to get themselves taken seriously or treated with respect outside of their own milieu (p90).

As Scots grew, so Gaelic retreated into the Highlands and into the islands of the Hebrides, a pair of parallel archipelagos off the west coast of Scotland. Gaelic was essentially rural and, despite the emigration of Gaels into the cities of Scotland, has remained so. It was split effectively from its Irish cousin through the **Plantation** by James I & VI who:

conceived the notion of driving a wedge between the Scottish and Irish Gaels by settling large numbers of English and Lowland Scots in Ulster; the effects of that piece of social engineering are still being felt, in our time (Grant, 1988: p157).

This 'planting' was of often austere Calvinist Protestants from England and Lowland Scotland who would merge into the Scotch-Irish (Leyburn, 1962), with their own dialect of Scots diverging over the centuries from its parent language. However, from at least 1998, **Ulster Scots** attained a status and recognition that Scots would not achieve until more than a decade later.

All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland (*The Belfast Agreement*, 1998: p24).

The Gaelic heartland in the Highlands was nearly eliminated by the **Clearances** of the 19th Century (Prebble, 1963) and through more voluntary emigration which took large numbers of

Gaels into the cities of Scotland and to numerous countries across the world (McGrath, 1981). Those few Gaelic speakers who remained were confined to the west coast of the Scottish mainland and to the Hebrides. Those that emigrated took their language with them, but it seldom survived more than a generation or two. It became like a river lost in the desert, *se mar abhain air call ann am fàsach*.

### Scots languages – evolving attitudes

For many centuries, Gaelic faced *mi-rùn mòr nan Gall*, the great malice of the Lowlander, an attitude whereby all things Gaelic were equated with barbarism, and this in a manner much more extreme than that of the ancient Greeks to whom *all* non-Greeks were **barbaroi** on the basis that the former thought that all foreign languages consisted of nonsense sounds such as *bar-bar*. An example of the great malice is James VI & I's 1616 **Act of Privy Council** which stated:



Forasmekle as the kingis Majestie haveing a special care and regaird that the trew religioun be advanceit and establishet in all pairtis of this kingdome, and that all his



Figure 4: School Establishment Act 1616

Majestie's subjectis, especiallie the youth, be exercised and trayned up in civilitie, godliness, knowledge and learning, that the vulgar Inglishe tounge be universallie plantit, and the Irishe language, quhich is one of the cheif and principall causis of the continewance of barbaritie and incivilitie amongis the inhabitants of the Iles and Heylands, may be abolisheit and removit; and quhairas thair is no means more powerfull to further this his Majesties princelie regaird and porpois than the establisheing of scooles in the particular parrocheis of this kingdome... thairfore the kingis Majestie has thocht it necessary and expedient that in every severall porroche of this kingdome where convenient means may be had for interteyning a scoole, that a scoole sall be establishet, and a fitt persone appointit to teache the same. (School Establishment Act 1616)

The Act is written in Scots – which the reader is encouraged to read aloud in order to make sense of it (bearing in mind that *quhairas* becomes *whereas* in English) and s/he may find that it is no more strange than some of Shakespeare's writing – but refers to extirpating Gaelic (*the Irishe language*) in order to replace it with *Inglishe*. Such was the continuing antipathy of the Lowlands towards the Highlands that Samuel Johnson, a man not generally noted for his sympathy to things Scottish, wrote of the Highlanders he met on his famous tour with James Boswell:

There remains only their language and their poverty. Their language is attacked on every side. Schools are erected in which only English is taught and there were lately some who thought it reasonable to refuse them a version of the Holy

Scripture, that they might have no monument of their mother tongue (S. Johnson, 1791: p128)

The **Scottish Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge** (SSPCK) in the 19th Century began eventually to alter the situation, but the Society's aim was transient bilingualism, teaching children in Gaelic (as they had no other language) with a view to having them learn English in order to forget Gaelic (Grant & Docherty, 1992).

In 1891, **An Comunn Gaidhlealach** was founded with the main aim of establishing a Gaelic Festival along the lines of the *Eisteddfod*, a Welsh reinvention of an ancient Druid ritual which was reborn in the 19th Century as a celebration of Welsh language and culture. In 1984, *An Comunn Gaidhlealach*, in association with various other bodies, founded **Comunn na Gàidhlig** (CNaG), a social enterprise which acts as the national development agency for Scottish Gaelic (Comunn na Gàidhlig, 2012). One of CNaG's missions has been encouraging the establishment of Gaelic-medium education at all levels, an effort which led to the **Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act (2005)** whose preamble describes it as:

An Act of the Scottish Parliament to establish a body having functions exercisable with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language, including the functions of preparing a national Gaelic language plan, of requiring certain public authorities to prepare and publish Gaelic language plans in connection with the exercise of their functions and to maintain and implement such plans, and of issuing guidance in relation to Gaelic education.

From the Act came the *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education* (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2016) and specific provisions for Gaelic-medium education in the Education (Scotland) Act (2016). The former includes a process whereby parents and carers of children not yet at primary school can petition for assessment of the need for Gaelic-medium primary education in their area (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2016: p36).

Until well into the 20th century, pupils risked being physically punished for having spoken Gaelic and, as if such punishment were not enough, humiliation was all too often the order of the day with use being made of the *màide-crochaidh* — a stick on a string hung round the necks of children caught lapsing into Gaelic and marking them out for punishment' (Grant & Docherty, 1992: p149).

This is comparable to the *Welsh not*, a block of wood with the letters WN inscribed on it which was ritually hung round the necks of children caught speaking their own Welsh language at school in order to humiliate them. A child on whom the device had been put had to catch another child speaking the proscribed language and then put the device on them. The unlucky child who had the device on them at the end of the day would be physically beaten. Thus, the children were obliged to participate in their own linguistic subjugation. The irony is that in both cases the teachers carrying out the punishment probably spoke themselves the language they were attacking.

There were, and are, significant differences between the situation of Gaelic and that of Welsh. Welsh is spoken by around 19% of the population of Wales (562,000 inhabitants), according to the 2011 Census (StatsWales, 2018)) while Gaelic is only spoken by 1.7% of Scotland's population (87,100) (National Records of Scotland, 2015). While Welsh benefited

from the appearance of non-conformist evangelism and also absorption into industrial areas, Gaelic and Irish did not (Corner, 1984). Gaelic and Irish remained rural languages with Gaelic only being used to any great extent in religion by the **Free Church of Scotland**, a fairly small group which broke from the rest of the Church of Scotland in 1834 and then proceeded to splinter even further (D. Matheson, 2015). Welsh was able to find an urban heart and also a place in the general Welsh identity. The knowledge of Welsh among the mass of the population of Wales may amount to little more than the occasional song sung at rugby matches but this has sufficed to give the Welsh people the feeling that Welsh is theirs. In contrast, the Scots seem to see Gaelic not as a language belonging to the whole of Scotland but only to the Highlands and hence occupying a very marginal part of Scottish identity.

The experience of the Welsh with **bilingual education** and the cultural ramifications thereof have done much to inspire the Gaels to do likewise and the growth in **Gaelic-medium school** is testimony to the success of these efforts. There are now Gaelic-medium primary and secondary schools across most of Scotland, other than areas without a historical connection to Gaelic – such as the two northern archipelagos of the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Isles – or where there is insufficient demand from parents/carers for a Gaelic-medium primary education to be established. Somewhat ironically, this includes the ancient county of Galloway (now part of Dumfries and Galloway) whose name in English is derived from *Gall-Ghaidhealaibh*, or *land of the foreign Gaels* (D. Matheson, 2015).

Gaelic has had the consolation of always having been considered a language in its own right. The same cannot be said for Scots, which has always had a degree of mutual comprehensibility with English and this especially in their written forms. However:

The Spanish ambassador at the court of James IV reported to his master that the King's Scots was as different from English as Aragonese (i.e. Catalan) from Castilian (McClure, 1988: p28).

'The vowel is shorter (than in Standard English) [and] the Norse influence is one which differentiates Scots and northern English from southern English' (Corbett, 1997: p5) There are also differences in, for example, the rolled/aspirated /r/ [*girl* versus *gi:l*], and the **wine-whine distinction/merger** [where the traditional Scots pronunciation distinguishes /w/ and /hw/].

Part of the problem is that all Scots speakers understand English and all can speak it to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, Scots speakers have available a variety of lexicons that they move between according to the social context and the effect which is desired (Corbett, 1997: p21). What most Scots cannot do, except with some difficulty, is to write their language other than by transliteration based on English language spelling, syntax and grammar. However, inconsistencies abound as the very home page of the **Scots Leid Associe** describes its biannual magazine *Lallans* as showcasing the best in *new Scots screivins* [i.e. new Scots writing] but a few lines later this has become *nui* [sic] *screivin in Scots* (Scots Leid Associe, 2018). *Lallans* itself is a sort of synthetic Scots, based on varieties of Older Scots as spoken especially in the Northeast of the country and is very rural in its roots (C. Matheson & Matheson, 2000) which makes it challenging to understand for the majority of Scots speakers who now live in cities and it is especially distant from the urban Scots of the working class in the central belt of Scotland (D. Matheson, 2002).

While **Lallans** is linked to the rural areas of the Scottish Lowlands, Scots as such is very much associated with the lower social classes and this especially in the urban areas where it is generally seen the language of vulgarity and lack of education and sophistication (D. Matheson, 2002). It is worth underlining that in the United Kingdom the way one speaks is usually taken as being indicative of one's socio-economic class (Edwards, 1979). Attitudes are critical as the case of Norwegian, Danish and Swedish demonstrates: their relative comprehensibility depends not only on the points of intersection of the languages but also on the patience of the speakers and their willingness to understand each other.

Yet in the UK in general and in Scotland in particular:

Scots... is not used publicly for any purpose where the content is more important than the medium; for that, English with a Scots accent is acceptable, not Scots grammar or vocabulary (Grant & Docherty, 1992: p153).

The school system which punished children in the Highlands for speaking Gaelic also made strenuous efforts to eliminate all trace of Scots in the Lowlands. Children were routinely humiliated and scorned by teachers for their accents and speech patterns. Kay (2006) describes in detail the antagonism and mockery of the Scots tongue by some members of the first post-devolution Scottish Parliament, and in 2000 it remained possible to write that:

For the pupils, Scots is the language of the unsophisticated, the uneducated, the unserious. To appear sophisticated, educated or merely serious, English is the order of the day, no matter where one hails from (C. Matheson & Matheson, 2000: p217).

Not only the children, but also their parents, teachers and society in general, were drawn into this discourse. The role of parents in linguistic death is not restricted to Scotland or to the

Scots language. The decline over many years of Welsh and virtual extinction of the Franco-Provençal of French-speaking Switzerland as well as the near-death of Scottish Gaelic would have been impossible to achieve quite as rapidly as occurred had it not been for the convincing of parents that their use of their native tongue would limit their children's life chances so that the parents then strove to prevent their children from speaking it (D. Matheson, 1989, 1992, 2015). Matheson (2015) describes how his paternal grandparents, both native speakers of Gaelic, were dissuaded by teachers from speaking Gaelic to their children on the fallacious grounds that speaking Gaelic would retard the children's acquisition of English.

In principle, the status of Scots has improved. The Scottish Government has a Scots language policy which states that the Scottish Government is “continuing to take important steps to raise the profile of the Scots language” (Scottish Government, 2015a). In keeping with a long-standing policy of raising the visibility of Scots by means of having all webpages that might pertain to Scots actually available in Scots, the policy appears online in version written entirely in Scots except for the title which, for no reason given, is in English (Scottish Government, 2015b).

Scotland's national curriculum for compulsory school, *Curriculum for Excellence*, sets out ten curricular areas for children to study. While all documents on the relevant Education Scotland webpages are in English and Gaelic, none is in Scots. Indeed, under the heading of Languages, one finds documents on Policy and Practice – in both an English version and in Gaelic one – for *literacy and English*, but none for Scots (Education Scotland, 2018b). The principles and practice for literacy and English state that:

The languages, dialects and literature of Scotland provide a rich resource for children and young people to learn about Scotland's culture, identity and language. Through engaging with a wide range of texts they will develop an appreciation of Scotland's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. This principle suffuses the experiences and outcomes and it is expected that practitioners will build upon the diversity of language represented within the communities of Scotland, valuing the languages which children and young people bring to school (Education Scotland, 2018a: p4)

This leaves very much open to question to just how much literature actually in Scots a learner would be exposed. The *Benchmark statements for literacy and English* by which teachers are to judge their pupils' progress make no explicit mention of Scots (Education Scotland, 2017a). In the subjects available for National Qualifications, Scots is not listed (SQA, 2018c, 2018d), despite there being a short course [available at SCQF levels 3-6] entitled the *Scots Language Award*, whose module *Scots Language: Understanding and Communicating* has as purpose

to allow learners to develop their ability to understand, and communicate in, the Scots language. This will involve listening to or reading texts in Scots and creating and producing communications in Scots (SQA, 2014).

*Higher Grade English* has no formal requirement to study a text written in Scots, but does require study of a text from a prescribed list of Scottish texts, (SQA, 2017b), as well as including at least one extract in Scots in its Critical Reading paper (SQA, 2017a).



Higher Grades are subject-based qualifications that can be used for entrance of higher education and are most usually taken in the fifth and sixth years of secondary school as well as in colleges of further education. Possession of the relevant Higher Grade is usually a necessary condition for admission to courses leading to Advanced Higher, roughly equivalent to the English, Welsh and Northern Irish A-level.

Oddly enough, among the Scottish texts there is at least one (McGrath's (1981) play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*) which is *about* Scotland but not *of* Scotland insofar as the writer was English, a point which underlines the confusion over exactly what is Scottish literature. The dialogue in *The Cheviot* is almost exclusively in English and in Scottish Standard English, which contrasts with McGrath's (1976) play about alcoholism in Scotland, *Out of our Heads*, whose dialogue is largely in urban Scots.(McGrath, 2001).

Currently, there is the paradox of the Scots language being officially and formally promoted by the Scottish Government, all the while it not being an official language (unlike Gaelic) and not being recognised as language to be studied in its own right by the body responsible for national examinations in Scotland. This said, things have certainly moved on since the 1990s when the then **Scottish Office Education Department**'s guidelines for the teaching of English to pupils aged five to fourteen could implicitly deny Scots the status of language and state that:

The classroom use of dialects and languages other than standard English can also reveal much about the nature of language generally, and set English in perspective as a world language operating across cultural, geographic and ethnic boundaries (*English Language 5-14*, 1991: p7).

Historically, it has been the case that children could go through school without sight of any Scottish literature, especially not in Scots, and could grow up perpetuating the myths that somehow English literature was for school while Scottish literature was beneath it. Now, at least in Higher Grade English, candidates are required to “apply their skills of understanding, analysis and evaluation to previously-studied Scottish texts from the prescribed list” (SQA, 2018a) and will at least see one extract in Scots in their written examinations (SQA, 2017a). This last inclusion shows literature in Scots on exactly the same footing as literature in English, a necessary, if perhaps not sufficient, condition to raise the emotional status of Scots from that described above into something less negative. There is, however, no indication that a candidate is free to *write* Scots, as well as to *read* it.

Concomitant with the efforts to diminish Scotland’s languages were strenuous efforts to diminish and even efface Scotland’s history from the school curriculum. In this light, Scotland had a long history of teaching English history in preference to its own. ‘The world view thus presented [was] not only parochial—it [was] not even their own parish’ (Grant, 1982, p. 22).

The contrast now could scarcely be greater. In the *Curriculum of Excellence*, the **Benchmarks: Social Studies** (Education Scotland, 2017b) ascribe a central spine to Scotland, its history and cultural development, geography, its peoples and how these relate to the wider world while in Higher Grade History the history of Scotland is a compulsory and major section (SQA, 2018b). Just as Higher English allows much latitude as to which Scottish literature is studied (SQA, 2018a), **Higher History** does similar with Scottish history which it not only requires to be studied as Scottish *per se* but, in the context of British, European and world history, also allows candidates the possibility of studying Scottish history in relation to

English. or British, history (SQA, 2018b). This shows the extent to which Scottish school curricula have moved in the years since the Scottish Parliament reconvened on 12 May 1999, following the passing of the Scotland Act (1998). Scottish history is now “real” history, not a passing phase that learners might go through before starting British (which really meant English) history.

### Language, Culture and Identity

Language and culture are clearly interlinked, and it can be argued that where one thrives then the other will do so also. Both represent facets of identity, the ways and means we employ to define ourselves and the groups to which we subscribe. As Sapir (1974) puts, ‘language is a great force of socialisation, probably the greatest that exists’ (p. 53). In this way, language arguably acts as a determinant of how we form our culture. But the relation must forcibly be bidirectional: just as the language acts on the culture then so the culture must act on the language. In this vein, where the culture weakens then the language may weaken also but where the culture strengthens then the language may also draw strength. As discussed below, perhaps aided by various initiatives aimed at cultural revival, there may be hope on the horizon as the Scots appear to move through some of the cultural phases which Fanon (1963) reckons are necessary precursors to taking one's destiny into one's own hands.

Identity may be defined in terms of markers which include such outward references as dress, religion, language (Grant, 1984). Grant underlines however that separate identity comes from a deeper layer: it comes from *feeling* separate. One may share every identifiable characteristic with another group but still feel separate from that group. In this sense, Canadians are not American despite the overlap of their cultures. Montenegrins are not Serbs despite sharing language and religion. In a similar vein, the Scots are not English, no matter

how their languages, literatures and histories may coincide or overlap. There is of course place for one set of identities to attempt to usurp or overwhelm another. ‘Throughout the ages, **cultural contact** has usually meant conflict, with the weaker being eliminated, absorbed or driven to a precarious existence on the periphery’ (Grant, 1988: pp155-6). Where this form of struggle can be distinguished from cultural imperialism is a moot point. To have a national identity, it is necessary that those who form the nation see themselves and are seen by others as sharing certain characteristics which distinguish them from other peoples. These characteristics form the basis of their culture. Their identity then derives from their belonging to their culture and in an analogous manner their culture reflects their identity. While it is difficult to define where identity ends and culture begins, Brand (1980) tells us that: ‘A regional feeling become(s) a feeling of national community... when some of the popularly accepted symbols take on important political meanings.’ (p31)

Apple (1993) argues that dominant interests in society exercise **hegemony**, *à la* Gramsci, and exert a predominant influence on all individuals in the society, with sometimes subtle, but always powerful, mechanisms of control. In this respect, the dominant elements will try to force their culture *and* their identity on the subordinate groups. One of the key, indeed classic, means for doing this is through the school and its curricula, both overt and hidden, each of which will exercise an influence over the attitudes which develop towards the language one speaks or which one chooses to speak.

The importance of language as a marker of identity should not be underestimated. A language is more than just a collection of words to express ideas. As the **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** tells us, thought is determined by the language we use (Child, 1997). We can even go further and through comparison of expressions find that the very ideas we are *able* to

express, and not just how we express them, are in good measure determined by the language we use.

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society (Edward Sapir in Whorf 1974, p. 57).

On this basis, if Sapir and Whorf are right, language not only influences culture but in large measure decides how we see the world and hence how we see ourselves. Logically, therefore, a way to raise one's self-concept is to either adopt a high-status language or heighten the status of the language one already has by not only increasing its output in literature, theatre and other generally cultural domains but also by increasing the audience for its literature, its theatre, its culture. At this point in time, Scotland seems to be going through such a cultural phase, but on two fronts, the Gaelic and Scots, simultaneously. The result so far is that for the first time in centuries Scottish cultures are developing which are not neurotic or twisted, that are willing to be seen as confident **markers of identity**. There is still a long way to go but the first steps on this journey of a thousand miles have already been taken.

### Cultural schisms and split identities

Scotland is a divided country, ill at ease with itself. The Lowlands view the Highlands with suspicion and awe. The Highlands view the Lowlands as having lost the meaning of life (C. Matheson & Matheson, 2000; D. Matheson, 1989). There are major religious divides, especially in West Central Scotland, though mercifully these seem to be on the decline as football becomes less identified with religion and schools become more mixed in a Catholic-non-Catholic sense (D. Matheson, 2015).

In addition to these linguistic and religious divisions, there are three further divisions in Scottish culture which are fundamental in understanding Scottish identity and the ways in which it is represented and viewed both within and outwith the Scottish nation.

These are **Kailyard**, **Tartanry** and, to a lesser extent, **Clydesidism**. Together these stereotypes, or rather mythical structures, form Scottish kitsch and many of the means by which Scotland and things Scottish are identified both within and outwith Scotland. At the outset, Kailyardism was a popular literary style from the end of the 19th Century which celebrated the picturesque rusticity of the Lowlands wherein there was little but bucolic intrigues and small-minded village jealousies. The essential characteristics of Kailyard are humility, modesty, piety, honesty, poverty, perspicacity and cunning as seen in Maclaren (1894). Unlike Kailyard, Tartanry was not a literary movement but a whole series of symbols and images of the Highlands which the Lowlands took for themselves: the tartan, the bagpipes, the sublime and picturesque mountain scenes, the mysterious fogs and mists. Typical sentiments in Tartanry are patriotism, heroism, nobility of spirit and heart, and having ancestors coming from the Highlands (Martin-Jones, 2009).

There is a strange irony whereby Lowlanders who often are heard to disparage the Highlands and things Highland will bedeck themselves in tartan for sporting occasions and refer to a person from England as a **Sassenach**, a Scots corruption of the Gaelic word for Saxon [*sasanach*]. However, as McCrone (1996) says: ‘Tartanry and Kailyard maintain cultural hegemony over Scotland’s sense of self’ (p. 186). Both phenomena are essentially backward-looking to some mythical golden age. Nonetheless, they do give the Scots a sense of having originated somewhere and of having a heritage and this in spite of their having been initially

articulated outwith Scotland before being adopted by Scottish literature, theatre, cinema and television. The fact that these mythical structures were not sooner rejected indicates well the intensity of the cultural colonisation in the heart of the country.

The difficulty is in translating the positive aspects of this heritage into a force that looks towards the future. Interestingly, the most successful Scottish-made films of recent times (as distinct from foreign-financed films made in or about Scotland) have centred on the urban condition and if Tartanry or Kailyard appear at all in them then they are disparaged totally. This is a relative novelty since Scottish cinema has habitually suffered from a tendency to actively flee the reality of urban and industrial life in favour of almost exclusively rural representations.

This is exemplified in a notable scene in *Trainspotting* where the main characters take a trip to the countryside, to what seems like the bleakest part of the Pentland Hills, just outside Edinburgh, with not a trace of anything attractive about it, and proceed to make telling comments about how awful it is to be Scottish (Welsh, 1993) The actual Tartanry phenomenon is shown in the American-financed *Local Hero* (1983) where the outsiders are seduced by the beauty of the Highland scene and become effectively *converted* to the Highlands and its way of life. In Tartanry films, there is always inevitably a native woman who acts as the female-personification of Highland beauty and represents mythical Scotland and Mother Earth (Corbett, 1997: p188). Tartanry films almost always end on a **ceilidh** (a traditional form of Scottish country dancing ball) and this includes Vincente Minelli's 1954 *Brigadoon!* A point to note is that the musical forms used in ceilidh, especially in films, are largely Lowland/Shetland in composition and style (D. Johnson, 1997).

As for Clydesidism, this mythology does not turn towards the mythical rural past but towards a more recent past where on one side is lined up the proletariat and on the other the bosses, in other words the oppressors. Clydesidism depicts the fruitless combat of the workers against a socio-economic system which forces them to alcoholism, violence and socialism coupled oddly with the occasional flash of philosophical analysis. Poverty is not seen as the virtuous state it appears as in some Tartanry. In general, an air of gloom pervades, and the overall ambience is one of inferiority. What is seldom made clear is to whom the characters actually feel themselves to be inferior. Clydesidism acts as a powerful vehicle for reinforcing, if that were at all necessary, the notion that urban Scots is the language of the oppressed, the underclass. Tartanry and Kailyard, for their part, do their bit to keep rural Scots as a quaint, old-fashioned image incapable of dealing with modern concepts (Martin-Jones, 2009)

Scotland is not only split by religious conflicts but also linguistically and culturally fragmented. In addition to the divisions at the level of mythical structures for the dominant cultural representations, Scottish culture is itself seen as being divided and ill-defined (McCrone, 1996). This perception, first articulated by Sir Walter Scott whose works are a brilliant illustration, is that of a Scotland torn between the ‘heart’ representing the past and Scottish society, and the ‘head’ representing the present, the future, the intellect and the British State. This ‘split personality’, which Smith (1919) terms the *Caledonian Antisyzygy* is a division between the Scottish ‘heart’ and the British ‘head’ and is ‘one of the most common characterisations of Scotland’ (McCrone, 1996: p175). It is rooted in the Scottish tradition of thinking and speaking one language whilst writing another whose inevitable consequence is a type of neurosis in the collective consciousness. In this light, it is hardly surprising that Scottish literature and thinking reflect this neurosis in their content. One only has to look as far as James Hogg’s (1824/2001) *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,



RL Stevenson's (1886) *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and RD Laing's (1965) *The Divided Self* to witness classic examples of the genre. One of the consequences of this split is the paradoxical capacity to praise the Scots language as a rich part of Scotland's cultural heritage while at the same time condemning its use as a means of conveying academic or intellectual ideas, situations where – as D. Matheson (2002) makes clear – the almost automatic reaction, even among Scots speakers, is to ignore the content and hear mainly how it is said, rather than what is said.

## Conclusion

Formal attitudes to Scotland's indigenous languages have changed out of all recognition in the space of remarkably few years. The number of **Gaelic-medium schools** continue to grow, even in the face sometimes of difficulties in recruiting teachers sufficiently fluent to be able to teach in the language. Scottish literature, including literature actually written in Scots, features prominently in school examination syllabuses. Spoken Scots is less prominent, a feature not helped by the lack of a standard form, a point which renders difficult allowing examination candidates to present their work in Scots. Scots may lack the status of official language of Scotland in the manner enjoyed by Gaelic, but it is less and less being seen as a corrupt lexicon to be expunged at all costs from the mouths of schoolchildren. Perhaps there is a future beckoning where young Scots speakers will grow up to be **diglossic** in Scots and Scottish Standard English, recognising and valuing the worth of the speech patterns of the mass of the urban poor (D. Matheson, 2002) while preparing them to function successfully in the wider world where speech patterns more akin to English are more readily understood and useful. With such valuing, it becomes conceivable to see an end to the '**linguistic insecurity**' of speakers of Glaswegian (Macafee, 1988) and other dialects of Scots where they

notoriously become self-conscious and tongue-tied in the presence of authority figures and Scots no longer

seen as a low-status language fit only for comedy, a cause and sign of depravity, practically on a level with slang and swearing (Law & McHardy, 1997: p5).

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