A. J. Aitken

The good old Scots tongue: does Scots have an identity? (1981)[1]

Edited by Caroline Macafee, 2015

Editor's Introduction

This paper discusses the arguments for and against the proposition that Scots is a distinct language, in the context of the status of Scots in the modern period and up to 1981.

As suggested in the Editor's Introduction to 'The Scots Language and the Teacher of English in Scotland' (1976, 2015) in the present edition, the 1970s was probably the nadir of Scots in education, when middle-class Scots were ceasing to speak the language or participate in its culture. The results of the 2011 Census question on the Scots language suggest a steep decline in self-reported Scots language skills amongst people born in the 1950s and 1960s, but there is sometimes a slight rise in the figures for those born in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Macafee, 2014, in progress), perhaps reflecting increasing cultural confidence in the language as they were growing up. This comes later in the cities, where, as Aitken points out in the present paper, and as subsequent studies confirm (Menzies, 1991; Macafee, 1994; [Máté], 1996; Macafee, 2000a), speakers have long been taught to regard their vernacular as slang. (However, this is not without covert prestige, and O'Donnell (2003) describes a tendency in Glasgow to disparage language perceived as old-fashioned or couthie.) For the urban dialects, the gulf is therefore particularly wide between the spoken language and what Aitken calls 'Ideal Scots' – an ideal that sometimes appeared in the 1996 Census question testing as an unfavourable comparison with the language of Burns (Macafee, 2000a).

The view that is now predominant bridges the gap Aitken describes by embracing the urban dialects as Scots, and by applying the term 'Scots' not only to the Scots pole of the continuum but to all the mixed varieties short of the English pole. The Scots pole itself suffers attrition with each passing generation, as AJA describes in 'Scottish Speech: a historical view with special reference to the Standard English of Scotland' (1979a), though he is unwilling to concede that what is happening is language death, taking the long history of reports of this to indicate that it is a myth.[2]

The status of Scots has improved considerably since 1981 in many of the ways being advocated and debated at that time. The range of uses of Scots has been expanded, and the magazine *Lallans*, in particular, can be credited with creating a readership for non-fiction prose in Scots that hardly existed previously. Perhaps contrary to expectations, successive editors have not insisted on a purified Ideal Scots (Macafee, 2012).

The output of *Lallans* marks the first large-scale departure from the orthography of literary Scots, which Aitken describes in the present paper as "fairly standardised". It is rather surprising now, after

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[1] Originally published in Einar Haugen, J. Derrick McClure and Derick Thomson, eds., *Minority Languages Today* (Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 72–90. Reproduced by kind permission of J. Derrick McClure and Edinburgh University Press.

The text has been edited for uniformity of style with other Aitken papers. Quotation marks have been removed from some technical terms. The original page numbers are shown in square brackets. All notes are editorial.

[2] For further references on lexical erosion see the Editor's Introduction to AJA's 'Scottish accents and dialects' (1984a, 2015) in the present edition.

several decades of rivalry between novel Scots orthographies,[3] to read of Scots orthography having "strictly limited variation", but although there was orthographic experimentation from the 1940s on, it was not endorsed by the leading literary figure of the twentieth century, Hugh MacDiarmid, in actual practice, nor by the Scottish National Dictionary Association.[4] I have argued elsewhere (Macafee, 2000b, 2012) that the effect of attempts at spelling reform has been to undermine such standardisation as already existed.

There is now (2015) a small measure of official recognition in Scotland, and some encouragement within the education system. There are occasional gestures of goodwill in the shape of official documents translated into Scots, but it has not become normalised in official use, and is often in the thin, English-dependent style that Aitken exemplifies in 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b: 531; 2015). Because of the particular political context in Northern Ireland, Ulster Scots has been accorded official recognition to balance the recognition of Irish (see editor's note 17 in 'New Scots: the problems', 1980, in the present edition). Regular discussion and reporting on the status of the language in Northern Ireland and Scotland took place in the 2000s in a series of conferences organised by John Kirk and Dónall Ó Baoill at Queen's University, Belfast (see conference papers, including Kirk and Ó Baoill eds., 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2011). For an overview of recent developments see C. Young (2014), and for further references see the Editor's Introduction to 'The Scots Language and the Teacher of English in Scotland' (1976, 2015) in the present edition.[5]

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[72] Though Scots people have for centuries written of Scots, spoken and written, as 'the Scots language' as if it had an identity of its own, they never appear to do so in the same breath as they talk of Gaelic, to which it is harder to deny the identity and status of a language. The first person I have noticed equating Scots and Gaelic in this way is, not too surprisingly, Hugh MacDiarmid in 1934, when he writes of "English, Gaelic and Scots" (MacDiarmid, 1934: 182) or "Scots, Gaelic and English" (p. 186). Burns's reference in 'Address to the Deil' to "Lallan tongue" and "Erse" is not, I think, in the same spirit.[6] Though it would not surprise

[3] For references, see editor's notes, especially n. 10, to AJA's 'New Scots: the problems' (1980, 2105) in the present edition.

[4] Now Scottish Language Dictionaries.

[5] AJA makes frequent reference in this paper to his 'Scottish speech: a historical view with special reference to the Standard English of Scotland' (1979a). It has not been possible to include this in the present (2015) edition of his papers, but there is a large overlap with the two 1984 papers, and the remaining 1979 material is covered in notes to those papers in the present edition.

[6]

> But a' your doings to rehearse
> ... ...
> Wad ding a' *Lallan* tongue, or *Erse*
> In prose or rhyme.

me if I have missed other references from Scottish Renaissance writers, it is not until the 1970s that I know of frank declarations that Scotland is a multilingual nation in a number of allusions to its "three languages" (Fraser, 1974; Low, [1974]: 21). The book *Languages of Scotland* (Aitken and McArthur eds., 1979) was similarly the first ever, to my knowledge, to treat all three tongues on a more or less equal footing, though except for one article[7] the treatment of Gaelic on the one hand and Scots coupled with English on the other is separate, which is how things have always been in the past.

So since MacDiarmid and especially recently, it appears that some of us have been thinking of Scotland as a multilingual country. I regret therefore to have to point out that according to the typology devised by Stewart (1968), Scots qualifies as no more than a dialect and neither as a standard nor a classical language. Using Stewart's terminology, its functions are marginal to the patterns of communication within the polity: in fact it has unquestionably only one of the functions (*literary*) which Stewart takes into his reckoning, unless we consider it has the *group* function within the working class. As a spoken language it lacks *standardisation*; it is heteronomous with – bound up in a sociolinguistic continuum with and constantly influenced by – Standard English, and therefore conspicuously lacking in the crucial attribute of *autonomy*. It has indeed only two of the four attributes used by Stewart in assessing language type. It does possess [73] the attributes of *historicity* and, though perhaps questionably, *vitality* – questionably, because by some definitions of Scots it could be said not any longer to be spoken by more than a tiny minority. This makes it what Stewart calls a dialect.

Equally, of course, there is no sense at all in which Scots could count as a national or an official language according to the terminology proposed in the 1951 Unesco report on Vernacular Languages (Fishman, 1968: 689). In official pronouncements, the public media, advertising, religious services, even in oral use in public speaking, it is all but unheard of.

Scots is not, either, a medium of education or even, more than quite marginally, a school subject, and it is never learned, except in the most casual way, by foreign learners. As Craigie said (c. 1924): it has never been regarded as a necessary part of the education of any Scot that he should have even an elementary knowledge of the history of his own language and literature.

So it is not really surprising that Scots receives no formal official recognition whatever: it is not a language which is admitted by government authority to exist and towards which there exist some declared policy and specific official provisions, as there do towards the Celtic languages in the United Kingdom and Ireland or towards Frisian in the Netherlands. Even educationists, who confront Scots speech every day, have until this decade given it only the most cursory and passing attention, and that almost always hostile (Withrington, [1974]; Aitken, 1979b: 139; McClure, 1980: 13–15). To be fair, some of the Scottish universities have recognised since 1949 that there is a Modern as well as a Middle Scots, and Scots now exists as a minor sub-discipline in three of the universities. And there has always been some, and recently more, research into Scots, centred especially in Edinburgh University (Aitken, 1972a, 1979b).

(quoted from James Kinsley ed., *Burns. Poems and Songs*, Oxford University Press, 1969)

[7] Murison's chapter on the historical background (1979a).

Perhaps all this negativity or non-entity of Scots follows predictably enough from its past history. Down to the middle of the sixteenth century it had been gradually growing apart from the developing Standard English of England, the latter broadly a variety of London English; and for that period, the age of the Stewart kings of Scotland and the Tudor kings and queens of England, it is often described as an autonomous "full national language showing all the signs of a rapidly developing, all-purpose speech, as distinct from English as Portuguese from Spanish (etc.)" (Murison, 1979a: 9). "As a spoken and written language [it] stood on a level with English", according to Craigie in 1921 (Craigie, 1924: 4); and many other similar assertions could be cited. But it could also be said and indeed has been said in effect by Donaldson (1961: 287–94) that its autonomy was never quite complete. For one thing it was commonly referred to by either of two names: one, *Scottis*, had been in use only since 1494 and was, as yet, less commonly used than the older name *Inglis* or 'English' which embraced the Anglo-Saxon vernaculars of both the Scottish and English kingdoms. Thereafter the two names remained in competition: by the eighteenth [74] century this competition was all but won by 'Scots' in the Lowlands but continues to this day in the Gaidhealtachd. In any case, between the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and of the Parliaments in 1707, whatever autonomy Scots had possessed disappeared and the situation which essentially is still with us came into existence.

Today the national and official language of Scotland is Standard English, shared with, and of course having originated in, England. Standard English, too, is the language of the literature most people mostly read. (The audience for serious Scottish literature is probably only a few thousand, though of course the Scots of the comic strip and comedian's patter has a huge audience, and serious drama in Scots is increasingly successful.) Standard English is also the language of all forms of what Abercrombie (1963) calls 'spoken prose'. In speech there is a continuum between varieties of Standard English, spoken either with RP or with more or less Scottish accents at one pole and non-standard Scottish dialects at the other pole.

Speakers with RP and other English accents are quite numerous in some places and their proportion to the total population has increased noticeably in this century: in 1971 (Census, 1971) 5% of the population of Scotland (279,340 out of 5.5 million) had been born in England, as against 1.5% in 1851 and 3.2% in 1911.[8] RP-accented Standard English is the variety spoken universally by the upper class of the Scottish landed gentry; still favoured by the broadcasting media, though admittedly a little less so than, say, thirty years ago; and, perhaps since some time in the last century, the variety of greatest social cachet, albeit not universally liked by those who do not speak it themselves (Aitken, 1979a: 110).[9]

But the accent spoken by most middle-class Scots is a different one. This middle-class Scots accent shares many, though by no means all, of its features with local working-class Scots speech; and its speakers also make very occasional use, some much more than others, and men more than women, of various sorts of Scotticisms of vocabulary and idiom and in some cases also of selectional form (see Aitken, 1979a: 99–110).[10] But these Scotticisms remain, in middle-class Scottish speech, only rare interlopers in the stream of Standard English. At the opposite pole of the continuum working-class Scots speakers offer a noticeably higher type and token frequency of lexical and especially formal Scotticisms (like *hame* and *doon* for *home* and *down*) and speak in accents marked by stigmatised features,

[8] 8.7% in the 2011 Census.

[9] "Though the feelings of many Scots about the kind of English which characterises such speakers seem ambivalent – it simultaneously raises hackles and overawes – it *is* associated with people who are almost universally of high social standing."

[10] In the present edition, see 'Scottish accents and dialects' (1984a, 2015).

some publicly recognised as stereotypes, others noticed and reacted to, but not identified, by other speakers. But the situation is a continuum, so there are intermediate varieties, much room for idiosyncratic variation, and much obvious inconsistency in performance. Both dialect-switching and what I have called style-drifting occur. And all varieties share a very large common core.

The three following passages illustrate the working-class end of the continuum. All are transcribed verbatim from tape-recordings made about 15 years ago.

[75] 1)Two speakers from Auchterless, Aberdeenshire:

Far wist e come fae?

Aboot e Black Hills. He wis feet it at big ferm i Yokies Hill, near Mintla. Oh, a great big toon, e gid hame for orra man. There wis een i the horsemen took ill an he had to tak a pair. Oh, he vrocht awaw. An the wis ae day at e foreman an him they were gin to tak is ploo to e smiddy.

2) Speaker from Middleton, Midlothian:

Well that wis the case long ago, where a man always had tae have the two horses in the hey time away tae Croalls i Shawfair – or – cairtin hey. Two horses, one wi the half moon at the back, an the other wi the half moon at the front. An the horse wis completely enclosed, in the twae cairts o hey. The back o the furst yin, an the front o the second yin.

3) Speaker from Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire:

For the month i April, May, June, July, August and September they caught aboot two hundred thousand crans. So that's how the fishing is now by it was when they startit in the sail-boat days.

Ignoring features of accent and considering only grammar, word-form, vocabulary and idiom, on a rough count I reckoned the first passage as containing thirty-five Scotticisms in seventy words, the Scotticisms fairly evenly distributed between content and function words and between idioms and distinctive cognate forms, with the rest common core items. So this passage differs from Standard English much more than the Nynorsk does from the Bokmål in the specimens in Haugen's 1959 article 'Language planning in modern Norway' (pp. 685–6). But Aasen's Landsmål, as exemplified by Haugen, scores almost identically in its difference from Riksmål (twenty-six Landsmålisms in fifty-one words in the first paragraph). At any rate, the sort of Scots exemplified in the first passage is quite distinctive.

It is also very rare. You will see that the other two passages, which are more widely typical, score very much lower for distinctiveness. The general run of even working-class Scottish speech no doubt has a token frequency of Scotticisms comparable with the second and third passages – though I hasten to add that no-one so far as I know has actually tried to count Scotticisms, as tokens in passages of this sort. I would also guess that not many Scots, other than literary and philological pundits, command as extensive a repertory of non-literary Scotticisms as types as our speaker of the first passage does.

So the Scots speech which most people in Scotland hear most often is, in McClure's terminology (1979a: 29–31), quite 'thin' Scots, that is, it displays a low token-frequency of Scotticisms. In effect it is English spoken in some Scottish accent and with an occasional distinctively Scots form or word sprinkled through it. Most such Scots indeed contains far fewer and no more frequent Scots words and idioms than does the narrative prose of John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*. But most critics of the *Annals*, who include Douglas Young,

Murison and McClure, deny to this the [76] designation Scots, calling it instead 'Scotticised English'.[11] Now the habitual speech of many Scots today probably contains more distinctively Scots *forms* than Galt's narrative prose, like *hame* and *doon* as against *home* and *down*, but far fewer distinctive words and idioms. Should we not also then be labelling it Scotticised English rather than Scots?

This is my rough estimate of what Scots speech is like now. You may think it conforms to my assessment of its place in Stewart's typology and the Unesco symposium's terminology. You may even feel that our officials and educationists have been justified in granting it no different treatment from that commonly accorded to non-standard English elsewhere in Britain: that is, neglect, leavened by occasional denigration, especially of the urban varieties or some of their stereotyped features, and conversely, nostalgic concern for the archaic and regional words and forms of the rural dialects. Over the past two centuries there have been many, though not always a majority, of those Scots who concerned themselves with such matters, whose position was very like this.

And yet some other Scottish philologists and other Scots writers have either, like Craigie (c. 1924: 1) been willing to entertain the notion, or have positively argued, not only that Scots once was a national language on an equal footing with English, but that in some sense it still has, or ought to have, its own distinct identity as the national tongue of the Scots nation. To be sure, only one of those I am thinking of, Lord Brougham in his Installation Address as Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh in 1860 (Ramsay, 1872: 89–90), actually states that Scots is "a national language, used by the whole people in their early years, by many learned and gifted persons throughout life, and in which are written the laws of the Scotch, their judicial proceedings, their ancient history, above all, their poetry". Brougham is echoed by J. Logie Robertson[12] in 1878 (p. 48). Later, in 1946, Young insists on "the national status of Lallans" (p. 3) and in 1979 Murison rates Scots and Standard English as "two distinct historic speeches" (1979b: 62).

These and other writers do seem to imply the identity of Scots. The trick is to begin by undertaking to dispel what they describe as a widespread popular misconception or "the amount of nonsense talked about Scots" (Murison: 1971: 171; McClure 1980a: 12–13), to wit, that Scots is "a mere dialect of English" (Young, 1946: 3) or merely bad English or "Standard English corrupted by uneducable Scots" (Murison, 1971: 171) or corrupt English or slang (Templeton, 1973: 4), and, having denied this, then go on to say that none of this is true because Scots is not English at all: it is a separate language with its own distinct history. Graham does this succinctly (1977: 9): "It is remarkable how many people regard Scots as merely a degraded form of Standard English, when the fact is that each is derived from a distinct dialect of the Germanic tongue."

How far, one wonders, is the Scots whose separate origin is being extolled the same linguistic system as the Scots which is the subject of popular [77] misconception? Just as one wonders, can the Scots which is one of "Scotland's three great languages" be the same as the Scots one hears about one in the streets (against which, I hasten to say, I have no complaints)? Or perhaps it is what one reads in Scots literature, or maybe only some Scots literature? The fact is that the term 'Scots' has for long presented a chameleon-like character in use and that its users have been apt to conflate rather different applications of it. At times it

[11] Murison uses this term: "Galt, who experimented with a kind of Scotticised English in the narrative of his novels" (1977: 7); as does Douglas (1949: 13), who also calls it 'Anglo-Scots' (pp. 9, 13). McClure (1979) describes the narrative of *Annals* as modulating between English and Scots.

[12] Better known by his pen-name, Hugh Haliburton.

is used for "a group of low-prestige dialects" (McClure, 1979b: 93), at times for an archaistic literary variety, at times for the perfect Ideal Scots which if it is not ought to be, and at times for a conflation of two or three of these. In order to disambiguate this, in what follows I shall be introducing a few qualified terms of my own.

The principal arguments of those who have claimed some kind of separate identity for Scots have been its separate origin (the most common), as well as the copiousness of its distinctive vocabulary, and, less common, the great antiquity of its original separation from English. Among those who have argued on these lines have been Jamieson in 1808, Trotter in 1901, Young in 1946, Templeton in 1972, Murison in 1971, 1977 and 1979, and Graham in 1977. McClure in 1980 (Letter to the *Scotsman*, 7 May 1980) adds to this the possession by Scots of a non-dialectal literature (that is, it has a mainstream literary tradition represented by such writers as Burns, Scott and Hugh MacDiarmid, as opposed to 'dialectal' literatures in more localised forms of Scots); or, again, Scots "is a rich and flexible language, with a large vocabulary and an abundance of expressive idioms" (McClure, 1980a: 12). Young in 1946 (pp. 9–10) thought there was a case in that 'Lallans' was formerly a national and a copiously literary language, and David Angus in 1980 points to the fact that there was once a national standard of Scots (Letter to the *Scotsman*, 7 May 1980).

Aitken has added his mite to this (1976: 50–51; 2015). Although it is quite true that many of the features popularly supposed by Scots to be distinctive of Scots are in fact shared with the Northern English of England though not with Standard English, there are many others, phonological, grammatical, and especially lexical, which are unique to Scots. Scots is a dialect island in Britain, and (I guess) the largest and most important bunch of isoglosses in Britain is that around the Scottish-English Border. Some of Glauser's findings on Borders vocabulary appear to support the view that Scots speakers have, recently at least, displayed greater dialect loyalty than their English neighbours across the Border. The following items are found in use just north of the Scottish-English Border (and in Scotland generally of course):

> *ay* (always), *poke* (bag), *redd* v. (comb), *kame* (comb), *filler* (funnel), *ingan* (onion), *pooch* (pocket), *speeder* (spider), *steek* (stitch), *soop* v. (sweep), *twaal* (twelve), *gaed* (went), *kye* (cows), *shuin* (shoes), *een* (eyes), *nicht* (night).

South of the Border only the Standard word is found. In most of these cases too it can be shown that Northern English has only quite recently given up the dialect word (Glauser, [78] 1974: 286, 292–3). Converse cases – of Scots having a Standard word and Northern English a dialect one – also occur, but much more rarely. (From what I have been and will be saying, of course, it would be natural to expect greater dialect loyalty from the Scots towards their national tongue than from the English towards their provincial dialect.) Judging from the contents of the *Scottish National Dictionary* – which, even leaving out the special case of Orkney and Shetland vocabulary, has upwards of 30,000 main entries, many of them with numerous sub-senses and idioms, and few marked obsolete – general and local Scots presents a very large list of distinctive word-types, larger than regional dialects such as those of England or the United States are likely to boast. The predominant part played by Scottish material in the *English Dialect Dictionary* also supports this. Unfortunately, Scots is let down as an autonomous language by the comparatively low token-frequency with which these numerous types are actually used in speech.

And Scots *does* possess an archaic literary variety of long history which is broadly standardised, as well as several other varieties of more recent origin based on various

regional dialects and stereotypes. The orthography of literary Scots is also fairly standardised – admitting variation but strictly limited variation. In recent times Scots literature has ranged from sophisticated poetry by Hugh MacDiarmid to the dialogue of the comic strips of the D. C. Thomson[13] and Outram presses[14] and the stereotypes of the Scottish music-hall comic.[15]

McClure (e.g. 1980a: 12) has rightly stressed the great bulk, distinction and variety of Scots literature, which incomparably outshines any other of the English vernacular literatures, such as the dialect literature of the English regions, in both quantity, quality, celebrity and influence outside Scotland. This is certainly a very important plank in the platform of those claiming a distinct identity for Scots.

To some extent Scots has had its own philological discipline of Scots language since 1710 (Ruddiman, 1710), which has lately flourished more than ever before, though perhaps less than we might think proper or desirable. In consequence, Scots has already been to some extent codified – certainly far more fully than any other non-standard vernacular of English (e.g. in Grant and Dixon, 1921; *The Scottish National Dictionary*; Murison, 1977; Graham, 1977).

So Scots has all these attributes which have been thought to entitle it to claim the status of "a language distinct from English" (McClure, 1979b: 97), or at least much more than that of a mere regional dialect. The English, it is true, do not accept this. The National Portrait Gallery in London has recently (1980) acquired a bust of Hugh MacDiarmid, who is described on the caption as a nationalist who often wrote in dialect. A Scot would have known to say "in Scots". On 24 April 1980 the newspaper *The Scotsman* carried a letter in slightly imperfect Lallans by the leading Scottish Nationalist, William Wolfe, arguing for more of the Scots leid on the wireless, including a daily news-reading in Scots: the caption read, "Scots ilk day on [79] B.B.C."[16] This brought a reply in excellent and copious Lancashire dialect, arguing that the latter shared all the attributes implied by Mr Wolfe for Scots and that both were equally dialects of English.[17] But much earlier than this (Skeat *et al.*, 1907: 521) Professor W. W. Skeat pointed out "how misleading it is to talk about 'the Scots language'". No doubt it would be possible to seek out still earlier dissentient English voices, between the sixteenth century (when they are first heard) and the present century.

But some Scots at any rate hold and have long held a different view. A favourable and defensive attitude towards something variously called 'Scots', 'our own tongue', 'our own language', 'our native language', 'our own dialect', 'broad Scots', 'Lallans', 'the Scots or Scottish tongue', 'the good Scots tongue', 'the old Scottish tongue', 'good old Scots', 'the Scots language' and no doubt other terms I have forgotten, has been held by many Scots, and at times probably a majority of Scots, from the sixteenth century to the present. These attitudes have been expressed in writing by poets, novelists, authors of reminiscences,

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[13] Publisher of the *Sunday Post*, with its 'Oor Wullie' and 'The Broons' comic strips.

[14] Publisher of the Glasgow *Evening Times*, with Bud Neill's 'Lobey Dosser' comic strip and cartoons by Bill Tait.

[15] AJA may be referring to the booklets of jokes and comedy scripts that appear from time to time.

[16] It begins, "Sir – In Januar, "The Scotsman" cairrit a screed fae me, bleirin BBC Radio Scotland, an pyntin oot that the natral thrang tae hark at them are the fowk whae are leal tae Scotland the natioun."

[17] From D. W. S. Mason, on 1 May 1980, who writes:

> ... There's places i' Lancashire tha could carr a' day listenin' ter th'owd fowk fradgin' an' chunnerin' in t'street beht understonnin' moor 'n hauf tha heered.
>
> An' yet tha dunt hear t'fowk dehn theer skrikin' abeht recognition o' t'way they talk. Ah've sin 'em summat an' chauved as it's deein' eht, reet enough, bur Ah've never heered ony on 'em ca' t'road they talk "a language." It's English ...

commentators on local life, literary historians, philologists and others. There are indications too that this attitude has not been confined to littérateurs like these, though I am afraid I can only offer hearsay evidence to this: but I take it that Long Rob of the Mill's celebrated defence of 'Scotch' in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (Part III) is meant to typify the common man's position in this.[18] The term 'Scots language' or 'Scottish language' is perhaps the term most often used, and sometimes, as in the title of Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808), this is intended to claim for Scots the standing of an actual or potential national language or, popularly, a 'language' rather than a mere 'dialect'. In section II (a), Works of Antiquarian Interest, of Woolley's *Bibliography for Scottish Linguistic Studies* (1954), the name "Scottish language" appears in eleven titles as against different designations like "the Scottish Dialect" or "the Scoto-English Dialect" in only eight other cases. A number of publications of the present decade have implied similar claims in their titles (and of course in their content as well). In 1966 the University of Glasgow founded a lectureship which it elected to call a Lectureship in Scottish Language, and in 1976 a society founded in 1972 as the Lallans Society renamed itself the Scots Language Society, and in neither case to the best of my knowledge did anybody protest or suggest that the denominations were preposterous. So there are and have been many Scots ready to dignify the national vernacular with the designation 'language'.

However, even when they uphold the claim of Scots to national language or national dialect status, virtually all commentators, philologists and laymen alike, immediately go on to, as we might suppose, sell the pass by revealing that the Scots people are failing to uphold their language as they should or have allowed it to fall on evil times or alternatively that they have allowed it to be encroached upon by the hostile tongue of the South. I interpret this as an admission that when we say portentous thing about the [80] Scots language we are talking of an imaginary Ideal Scots which may perhaps have corresponded to something more actual in the recent or less recent past, but that the present reality of what Scots people actually now do falls in various ways short of this ideal.

What the criterial characteristics of Ideal Scots are we learn partly from direct descriptions and partly by inference from accounts of the shortcomings of actual Scots. An important characteristic is that Ideal Scots is consistently fully Scots: it possesses a large repertory of Scotticisms and selects them invariably and exclusively in preference to the corresponding Standard English options. It is homogeneous, maximalist, consistent, pure. A leading complaint about what I shall be calling Bad Scots is that it is not homogeneous. So when McNaught in 1901 (p. 27) tells us that "nine-tenths of so-called Modern Scots is a concrete of

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[18] The much-quoted passage is:

> Up at Rob's table an argument rose, Chris hoped that it wasn't religion, she saw Mr. Gordon's wee face pecked up to counter Rob. But Rob was just saying what a shame it was that folk should be shamed nowadays to speak Scotch – or they called it Scots if they did, the split-tongued sourocks! Every damned little narrow dowped rat that you met put on the English if he thought he'd impress you – as though Scotch wasn't good enough now, it had words in it that the thin bit scrachs of the English could never come at. And Rob said *You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glanching or well-henspeckled? And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar; and you're hardly that, Mr. Gordon.*
>
> (quoted from Pan edn., 1973: 153)

Aitken discusses the competing terms 'Scotch' and 'Scots' for the language in 'Gaelic, Scots and Gullane' (1972b, 2015).

vulgarised, imperfect English, in which are sparsely embedded more or less corrupted forms of the 'lovely words' with which Burns wove his 'verbal magic'", we conclude that Ideal Scots is the opposite of this: *it* is not imperfect English and lovely words are *not* sparse in it.

As well as being homogeneous, Ideal Scots is also very conservative. Morphological innovations are disallowed. Murison well indicates both these requirements – homogeneity and grammatical conservatism – in his textbook *The Guid Scots Tongue* (1977: 56):

> Modern Scots rarely matches up to the description and criteria we have been prescribing [*sic*] above. Like dialects everywhere, it is under the severest pressure from the standard language and is rapidly losing its historic forms and structure through constant confusion with the official speech. Scots and English forms are jumbled up haphazardly so that a clear and consistent pattern can no longer be traced, and a systematic grammar has gone out of the window.

People who have very good Scots and speak good or rich Scots – as commented on by Dean Ramsay (e.g. 1872: 87), Craigie (1924: 16–18), and many since – approach these ideals. Of course it is true that English and other dialectologists often speak approvingly (Harold Orton and Stanley Ellis, for example) of 'good speakers' of English dialect in the same way. 'Good' English dialect too is meant to be homogeneous and conservative.

But, as everyone agrees, Scots is unhappily falling away from this perfect condition of Ideal Scots. It is "evanescent" (George Paton, 13 May 1776, in Falconer, ed., 1961: 133),[19] "decaying" (Hugh Haliburton in Skeat *et al.*, 1907: 522), "receding" (Craigie, 1924: 10), "declining" (Craigie, 1924: 12), "dying" or "dying out" (Craigie, 1924: 12), or "going out as a spoken tongue every year" (Cockburn 1838, in Cockburn, 1874: I, 189), while apparently still vigorous in written use. This belief could be exemplified in hundreds of quotations between 1776 or earlier and now. More colourful metaphors have also been employed: Scots, it is said, is being "bludgeoned out of existence" (William Will quoted by Grieve, 1926: 239),[20] is undergoing "hammering and attrition" (Murison, 1976b: 59), or is "suffocating under a mountain of ignorance and [81] prejudice" (McClure, 1978: 1). The malign influences responsible for this may be identified. "What 'the mail-coach and the Berwick smacks' have left undone," says Millar in 1903 (p. 314), quoting Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, "has been achieved by the railroad and the locomotive." In 1960 the minister of Old Deer (in *The Third Statistical Account*, County of Aberdeen, p. 379) singled out the travelling cinema as the chief enemy.[21] Maurice Lindsay (1962: *Preface*) was incautious enough to allege that "during the 50's the Scots tongue receded more rapidly than ever before under the impact of television and has now been reduced to a mere matter of local accent". Both Murison (1979b: 59, 62) and McClure (1980a: 13 f.) are very severe on the Scottish Education Department, even though that Department has only existed since 1872 and the alleged diminution of Scots is constantly mentioned long before then. The "big battalions of state and bureaucracy, press, radio, television, education, social cachet" are of course often mentioned (Murison, 1979b: 59; and compare Murray, 1873: *Preface*, and Craigie, 1924: 12). Less metaphorically, what all this presumably means is that the number of distinctive Scottish lexical types in use by

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[19] "D[r] Cuming ... is extremely anxious that a *Dictionary of our Scots Langage* [sic] should be set about and that immediately as he justly observes that it is almost evanescent ..."

[20] "Mr William Will ... has recently been telling the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club that the Doric was not dying from natural causes, but was being bludgeoned out of existence by miserable purse-proud specimens of our fellow-countrymen."

[21] Though so far not successful on the field: "The Buchan tongue remains little influenced by the travelling cinema."

Scots is declining, and also, presumably, that their frequency of use as tokens is going down. Fewer Scotticisms are being used less often by fewer people. To some degree and in some ways this is doubtless true.

The process of dying out of Scots is often felt to be inevitable and sometimes desirable (*The Third Statistical Account*, 1962, Dumfries, County of Dumfries, p. 112).[22] Whether this is so or not, statements about it are commonly accompanied by regret that as Scots dies, so in consequence "many fine old words which once salted and adorned conversation" (*The Third Statistical Account*, 1964, Ashkirk, County of Selkirk, p. 287)[23] will no longer be heard and that we will lose "countless expressive phrases with no exact equivalent in Standard English" (Craigie, 1924: 24) or many "soft and beautiful words untranslatable into any other language" (Oliver, 1902: 12); sometimes these are exemplified, e.g. "westlin and eastlin winds, loaning for lane, yestreen in the gloaming" (Oliver, 1902) or "compluther", "devaal", "go by and re-by" (*The Third Statistical Account*, 1964, Ashkirk, County of Selkirk, p. 287). Of these only *compluther* may now in fact be obsolete.[24] The delightfulness of the threatened words and expressions, which is regularly stated, is presumably a consequence of the fact that they are stylistically marked for Standard English speakers or in a situation in which Standard English is the unmarked variety; whether they would carry the same overtones in an exclusively Scots-speaking situation seems doubtful. The idea that there is a threat to the existence of "many ancient and emphatic terms, which now occur only in the conversation of the sage of the hamlet, or are occasionally mentioned by him as those which he has heard his fathers [*sic*] use" (Jamieson, 1808: vii) goes back to 1768 or earlier (Aitken, 1979a: n. 6).[25] All this stuff has a strangely timeless quality about it. This particular notion is repeated many times thereafter; also, for example, by Dean Ramsay in 1858 or Lewis Grassic Gibbon as Long Rob of the Mill in 1932. Whether this myth was true when it was first invented (whenever that [82] was), or merely due to faulty generalisation from observed differences in the vocabularies of a few contemporaries, I do not know. It is now a very firmly held and constantly repeated belief, despite the fact that some of us are given to pointing out that if Scots has been dying since, say, 1768, it is taking a long time about it. I agree with Craigie in his 1921 lecture (1924: 15–18) that the experiments which purport to prove the dwindling of Scots by comparing the knowledge of selected vocabulary items of speakers of different generations are fallacious (see Will, 1930, for a report of one such experiment).

As well as allegedly declining internally, externally Scots is being used by fewer and fewer Scots less often. Statements to this effect exist from the eighteenth century onwards, particularly that it is being abandoned by "the higher and better educated classes", or that it is

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[22]

> The old Dumfries tongue can still be heard but it is disappearing, and few lovers of the spoken word will regret the passing of this local dialect with its ugly long vowel and sing-song lifting drawl. On the other hand it has many pithy old Scots words and expressions, which it would be a pity to lose for ever.

[23] In the original, wrongly placed in Roxburghshire.

[24] *The Scottish National Dictionary* regards "*to go by and re-by*, to pass and re-pass", known only from this source, as "Nonce and phs. idiosyncratic".

[25] For the 1768 quotation, from Alexander Ross, see in the present edition 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b, 2015: n. 10).

only now heard "in the more retired parts of the country" (Ramsay, 1872: 91–2), and so on. There is, I dare say, some truth in this.[26]

How does one explain this long-standing and abiding interest in and concern for the diminution of the old national tongue and its encroachment by the language of the more powerful nation to the south? I suppose it is relevant to this that *not* all Scots or even most Scots are much concerned in this way, though many of course have heard about it and feel a lukewarm concern – often confused with more or less opposite attitudes due to the current sociolinguistic situation of Scots. The misconception that Scots is merely a corrupt dialect of English has been held since some time in the eighteenth century at least, and hostile feelings towards Scots are frequently very strongly expressed between about 1750 and 1850. About the middle of this period a desire for the total extinction of Modern Scots was the normal establishment position (Aitken, 1979a: 96–7).[27] As late as 1845 the minister of Kelso wrote that his parishioners "speak the Scottish tongue in the most Doric of its forms; nor does there appear any prospect of a speedy improvement in this particular" (*New Statistical Account*, County of Roxburgh, p. 323). That this hard-headed, practical attitude to Scots continues – after all, the *useful* dialect in our society is Standard English – is shown *inter alia* by the continuation into the nineteenth (*Never too Late to Learn: Scotticisms Corrected*, 1855) and the present century (Masson, 1929: 40–52) of the old tradition launched in 1752 of publishing lists of Scotticisms for Scots to learn to avoid (Aitken, 1979a: 96, n. 7).[28]

Conversely, those Scots who are unhappy or distressed at the steady reduction of the lexical resources of Scots and its encroachment by English are no doubt a different breed from those we have just been considering, a backward-looking, soft-headed lot – antiquarians, poets, philologists, schoolmasters a lot of them, whose business is old forgotten far-off things, not the practical economic issues of the present day. When, between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, actual and Ideal Scots as it were parted company, some Scots people of this kind resented the submergence of "gueed auld Scots", the Scots' "ain leid", by the tongue of the nation to the south: these people included Alexander Ross (see [83] Aitken, 1979a: 95, n. 6)[29] and the author[30] of 'An Address in Scotch on the decay of that language' (1788 in Shirrefs, 1790: xxiv–vii). They looked back to a happier time when Scots was both autonomous and unmixed with "Southren gnaps", when all Scots was Ideal Scots. Adherents of Ideal Scots then and since have been encouraged by the presence of surviving national institutions of local government, law, the church and the rest, and the persisting concept of Scottish nationhood sustained within the long-standing disciplines of Scottish history, literature and philology. These have reinforced the notion of a *national* tongue, one which bears the nation's name – something that no mere provincial dialect of England can claim.

It is almost certainly also true that more people have felt more strongly about the plight of Scots in this century and particularly since Hugh MacDiarmid than ever before. No doubt many of those have been Scottish nationalist activists and sympathisers, such as MacDiarmid himself and some of the other authors cited in this paper. The increased concern for the Scots

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[26] AJA also expands a little on the topic of nineteenth century attitudes in his 'Address and Toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns'([1990], 2015).
[27] In the present edition, see 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b, 2015: n. 10).
[28] In the present edition, see 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b, 2015: n. 10).
[29] See n. 25 above.
[30] Charles Keith (Reid ed., 1897). For the relevant quotation, see AJA's 'Address and toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns' ([1990], 2015: n. 6).

language is in this and no doubt in other ways thus linked with the expansion of political Scottish nationalism since the First World War.

The beliefs I have been considering are apparently free of social comment or value judgement, except that the facts they allege are mostly held to be regretted. Another body of comment on the fallen state of Scots does introduce social prejudice and other value judgements.

I mentioned that in the second half of the eighteenth century most of the Scottish establishment viewed Scots as a "very corrupt dialect of the tongue we make use of" (David Hume 1757, in Smith, 1970: 107). This disapproval of Scots by the intelligentsia and the middle classes at this period is also sometimes stated in explicitly social terms. In 1763 James Boswell attended a tea-party in London where he met some fellow Scots. Complaining of "the common style of company and conversation" and the "coarse gibes of this *hamely* company", he felt that "the Fife tongue and the Niddry's Wynd address were quite hideous" (Boswell, 1952: 120). Again, in 1800 James Sibbald describes "Scottish" as "the familiar dialects of the meanest vulgar" (1802: IV, xlv); and for other evidence of a middle-class feeling, dating from 1710 onwards, that Scots was 'the language of the common people' rather than of 'the more polite people', see Aitken (1979a: 93–8).[31]

Quite early in the nineteenth century, however, the establishment, influenced no doubt by the work of Burns, Scott and other writers in Scots, by the revelation provided by Jamieson's *Dictionary* (1808), and by the expansion of Scottish antiquarian and historical research from Register House, the publishing clubs and the universities, seems to have revised some of its views on Scots and begun to regard it with nostalgic regret for a dying but richly expressive tongue. At the same time the social rejection of Scots is on occasion ruefully commented on (e.g. Cockburn 1853, in Cockburn, 1874: II, 302; see p. [87] below). More recently this lack of social prestige has been seen as a serious problem by would-be restorers of Scots of our own time, such as Craigie (c. 1924: 25), Murison (1971: 178–9; [84] 1979b: 58–9), Low ([1974]: 17, 25; etc.) and McClure ([1974]: 68–9; 1980a: 16; etc.). "We have to find means," says Low ([1974]: 26), "of breaking the social-status barrier. If Scots were to regain something of status in society, the problem of teaching and encouraging it in schools would lessen considerably." The means most often suggested for breaking this barrier is to encourage more teaching and study of Scots in schools and universities (e.g. Craigie, 1924: 37 f.; McClure, [1974]: 68–9; Aitken, 1976: 52–5; McClure, 1979b: 94). In this way Scots would be given the respectability due to its long independent history and that of a serious subject of academic study. Ignoring the circularity of this whole argument, one may agree with the great desirability of such a course of action, while continuing to doubt whether it can conceivably have more than the slightest effect on powerfully entrenched social attitudes. The same motivation seems to lie behind a proposal which appears to have been made more than once early in the present century for founding university chairs in Scots for its "preservation" (see p. [87] below). Though the details require qualification since attitudes vary among different social groups and since individuals hold apparently ambivalent of self-contradictory positions, it is of course true enough in broad terms that many Scotticisms are of generally low repute in spoken use, albeit some of these are perfectly acceptable in traditional literary environments (for amplification and any necessary correction of this point,

[31] In the present edition, see 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b, 2015: n. 10).

see the forthcoming studies by Sandred and Williamson briefly mentioned in Aitken, 1979b: 148).[32]

As we noted a moment ago, many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commentators on Scots appear to associate any kind of Scots indiscriminately with the lower orders. By the nineteenth century, some commentators are aware of more than one sort of Scots: one sort, it is hinted, is more vulgar? and so? less attractive? than another sort. In 1800 John Ramsay of Ochtertyre launched the myth of an "old court Scots" of the Scottish gentry at the time of the Union Parliament which "differed as much from the common dialect as the language of St. James's from that of Thames St." (Currie, 1800: I, 280–2).[33] In 1814 Walter Scott alludes to "broad Scots of the most vulgar description" (*Waverley*: ch. 39). In 1818 he took up Ochtertyre's myth, as the Duke of Argyll speaking (c. 1740) of Lady Staunton's Scots: "You must suppose it is not the broad coarse Scotch that is spoken in the Cowgate of Edinburgh, or in the Gorbals. This lady ... speaks that pure court-Scotch, which was common in my younger days; but it is so generally disused now, that it sounds like a different dialect, entirely distinct from our modern patois" (*Heart of Midlothian*: ch. 48). Then in 1827 he narrated an anecdote of his own, parallel to that on which Ramsay founded his myth (for this and other references, see Craig, 1961: 315).[34] This belief is occasionally revived (e.g. 'The Scots tongue', 1907: 540); I have heard it asserted more than once myself.[35]

In still more recent times many of the commentators who are given to lamenting the decline of Scots themselves decry certain varieties of current [85] Scots speech, in fact those

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[32] See Sandred (1983, 1985) and Williamson (1982–83).

[33] Currie quotes Ramsay of Ochtertyre, on whom he relied for his section on language:

> I am old enough to have conversed with Mr. Spittal of Leuchat, a scholar and a man of fashion, who survived all the members of the Union Parliament, in which he had a seat. His pronunciation and phraseology differed as much from the common dialect as the language of St. James's from that of Thames St.
>
> (quoted from the 1814 edn, p. 258)

AJA's original has "common language" in place of "common dialect".

[34]

> Many 18th-century writers claim that there was at one time a more civilised Scots than any now known; they must mean the speech of a sophisticated upper-class. E.g. Scott describes a Mrs Bethune Baliol, an old woman of 'good family' whose "juvenile recollections stretched backwards till before the eventful year 1745". "Her speech was Scottish – decidedly Scottish, often containing phrases and words little used in the present day", but – the typical qualification – it was as different from "ordinary Scotch *patois*" as the speech of St James's from Billingsgate"; it had no "disagreeable drawl", the vowels were no broader than Italian, and it was accompanied by a "lively manner and gestures", suggesting an origin in old Scottish court speech (*The Highland Widow* and *Chronicles of the Canongate*, Victoria ed., pp.379, 387; see also Ramsay of Ochtertyre ... and Lockhart on an aunt of Scott's, perhaps the model for Mrs Bethune Baliol: *Life of Scott*, I, p. 75).

(The absence of an opening quotation mark for the one that closes after "Billingsgate" is original.)

[35] It is not inherently unlikely that there would have been sociolectal differences within Scots in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, the hints that we have, mentioned here by AJA, are so general that they could mean anything, at any level of linguistic structure, from subtle features of articulatory setting (such as the degree of nasality); to suprasegmental features (such as speed of talking), to peculiarities (or merely conservatism or novelty at a particular point in time) of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary or idiom; to habits of discourse such as the use of interjections, oaths, gibes, puns, witticisms, quotations (including proverbs, snatches of song, Biblical allusions, Latin tags, etc.). However, in the Older Scots period, when there was a Scottish court, such phenomena as the general currency of the ballads, the participation of court poets in flytings, and the antics of the Guid Man of Ballengeich, do not tend to suggest a highly stratified vernacular culture (or language?).

very varieties which the great majority of their compatriots actually speak. The model of Scots speech most commonly expressed in print (and in middle-class and educated spoken comment) in this century comprises three different varieties: Standard English, accepted by everyone (so long as pronounced in an acceptable, that is, not a fully urban working-class, accent); what I will call Good Scots, professedly approved (in the abstract) by many of those who discuss it, though perhaps less universally and wholeheartedly accepted when heard from speakers unprotected by a middle-class accent; and Bad Scots, which nearly all commentators between 1900 and very recently excommunicate.[36]

This model seems to have been the one favoured by Scottish educationists until recently and it appears in a number of mid-century Scottish Education Department reports (Aitken, 1979a: 98–9; 1979b: 139).[37] A number of adherents of the model locate Bad Scots in Glasgow, others equate it with urban working-class speech more generally. Several, including David Murison, refuse to dignify Bad Scots with the name of Scots at all: this is in print; in oral communication this attitude (that Bad Scots is no Scots) is very commonly expressed. One writer in 1901 (Trotter, pp. 23 f.) described Bad Scots as a "wonderful gibberish which now passes current for Scotch", spoken by the young in Glasgow and so likely to replace completely the Scotch (apparently Good Scots) of their parents in 30 years. In 1907 the editor of the *Scottish Review* ('The Scots tongue': p. 540) distinguishes between "the way in which most people in Scotland talk today" which is "in the main misspelt and mispronounced English" and "what we may call *classic* Scots – the speech full of racy idioms and felicitous words, a speech in which great literature has been produced, and which in certain landward parts is still spoken". In 1915 John Buchan (in his Preface to Violet Jacob's *Songs of Angus*) distinguishes Good and Bad Scots. Violet Jacob's Scots, he says, "is good Scots, quite free from misspelt English or that perverted slang which too often nowadays is vulgarising the old tongue" (cited in Young, 1946: 24). (The "old tongue", itself, is presumably Ideal Scots.) In 1971 Murison describes Bad Scots as a "debased industrial variety which, as we have seen, can hardly be described as Scots – we must guard against the all too frequent assumption that any form of speech used in Scotland that is not standard English is *ipso facto* Scots" (p. 178; compare also his description of current Scots cited on p. [80] above). (He has forgotten Gaelic, of course.)

This position, perhaps most explicitly expressed by Murison in the previous quotation, that Bad Scots is no Scots, evidently arises because Bad Scots fails to measure up to the requirements of Ideal Scots. It is a position which seems to approach very close to the 'popular misconception' already mentioned (p. [76] above), namely that there is no such thing as Scots, that Scots is merely bad English, a 'misconception' which Murison himself and others find it necessary to repudiate quite firmly. The latter misconception presumably arose because popular observers noted little that was distinctively Scots about actual Scots speech and noted at the same time that it [86] contravened the established prescriptive norms of 'correct English'. And these popular observers failed to bring into their reckoning Ideal Scots, which for them, after all, exists at best only as an ideal. Yet the two positions – that Bad Scots is no Scots, strongly asserted by some protagonists of (Good) Scots, and, on the other hand, that there is no such thing as Scots, equally strongly repudiated by the same

[36] AJA returned to this topic in 'Bad Scots: Some superstitions about Scots speech' (1982, 2015).
[37] The references are to *English in Secondary Schools* (1952), and *Primary Education in Scotland* (1946). The latter is possibly Advisory Council on Education in Scotland (Primary Education) (1946–47).

protagonists of Scots – do seem to come perilously close, and no doubt for many others they merge.

So we have on the one hand Good Scots spoken, according to Murison (1977: 62) "*diminuendo* in familiar circles, especially in the outlying areas", and Bad Scots spoken in the industrial areas, "but one may question how far it is Scots at all and not merely a kind of broken English", says Murison (1977: 56). According to this view, it seems, we have Good or Ideal Scots spoken if at all only in remote parts in a diminished way, and Bad Scots – really non-Scots, according to Murison and the others – which is the Scots that the majority of Scots actually speak.

The shibboleths of Bad Scots are itemised and exemplified in a number of sources, most fully in Trotter (1901), also in Murison (1977: 56–7). They turn out to be the well-known stereotypes of urban working-class Scots speech, which do indeed include some distinctively Scottish features of vocabulary, word-form and grammar as well of course as others common to non-standard English generally (currently the fullest single description of the features of working-class as against middle-class Scots speech is in Aitken, 1979a: 102–4, 108–10, and notes on p. 118).[38] And of course Good Scots is just Ideal Scots under another name or the nearest we get to Ideal Scots in this imperfect world. It has or should have a fairly high token frequency of Scotticisms – it will not be the "watered down version of Trongate Glesca" deplored by Murison (1971: 177), it will contain few or none of the Scots and general non-standard vulgarisms of lexicon or grammar which exist in working-class non-standard dialects of English, and it will display a low incidence of the pronunciation features which are amongst the shibboleths of Bad Scots.

Now I must have deeply disappointed you by failing to prove that Scots has an identity. One crucial lack is that of autonomy from Standard English. This applies to actual Scots, of course. Ideal Scots is by definition autonomous, since it is homogeneous or pure. But as for actual Scots, many of its attributes and the phenomena surrounding it differ not much in kind from those of provincial regional dialects of England, as the denigrators of Scots have always said.

Yet the Scots linguistic situation does contain one unusual? extraordinary? attribute, in both degree and kind, in the elaborate and copious mythology we have been considering, which has grown up around the good old Scots tongue since it ceased to be a national language and which appears to have as many or more enthusiastic adherents today than it ever had. The fundamental tenet of this mythology is that there really exists a distinctive and noble national Scots language, however diminished or debased this may [87] be today, and that this once existed in its full glory, let us day before the diaspora.

Since this is "the national tongue" (Craigie, 1924: 16 f. *passim*) and "has a national value" (p. 11), and its effacement will imply "a denationalization of the Scottish people" (p. 20), and since its use is "an assertion of Scottish identity" (McClure, 1980a: 18) it should be restored to spoken use and given official status. That it can be so restored we may see if we look at the examples of Norwegian, Frisian, Catalan and various other language which have had reputedly successful revival movements. If this restoration is not carried out, the Scots will end in the humiliating position of being unable to read their national literature without a glossary – a fear that has haunted us for a century and a half now (e.g. 1844 in Cockburn, 1874: II, 88–9; 'The Scots Tongue', 1907: 540) – the lexical riches of a "rich, euphonious and expressive tongue" (Craigie, 1924: 25) will have perished, and the Scots will have been still further divorced from their native linguistic and cultural roots. The people whose idea I

[38] In the present edition, see 'Scottish accents and dialects' (1984a, 2015).

am travestying are three distinguished colleagues: William Craigie in 1921 (Craigie, 1924), David Murison in 1971 and 1977, Derrick McClure in 1978 (McClure, 1980a) and 1979 (1979b).

These ideas for the restoration of Scots belong to the present century. Before then the decline of spoken Scots seems always to have been regarded as natural and inevitable, albeit, from some time in the nineteenth century, also sad. In 1853 Lord Cockburn, commenting on the formation of a new "National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights", stated that "the gradual disappearance of the Scottish accent and dialect is a national calamity which not even this magniloquent association can arrest" (Cockburn, 1874: II, 296). Later in the same year, with reference to the Association's first meeting, he asks: "how can we retain our language respectably after it has become vulgar in the ear of our native gentility?"; but adds resignedly, "This is all very bad, but it is the natural course" (II, 302).

But in 1901 (McNaught, 1901: 20) and 1907 (Hugh Haliburton in Skeat *et al.*, p. 522[39]) we hear of suggestions for establishing university chairs for the preservation of Scots, still not quite dead, it was agreed, and a suggestion for concocting a 'classical vernacular' out of the dialects: neither of these, needless to say, came to anything. Somewhat later Hugh MacDiarmid (e.g. Grieve, 1926: 315–6; MacDiarmid, 1934: 185–6) and Douglas Young (1946, 1949) put forward equally vague suggestions for strengthening literary Scots ('Synthetic Scots' or 'Lallans') by enriching its vocabulary and employing it in narrative prose as well as verse.

The proposals of the philologists whom I mentioned first – Craigie, Murison and McClure – are rather more far-reaching. The first two give us at least one of their leading motives for wishing to 'restore' Scots that of halting the decline of the spoken language, but in fact the prescriptions of all three are directed primarily to the written language and various forms of pedagogy. So are their expedients for giving back social respectability to Scots (p. [84]).

[88] McClure hopes to persuade the Scots to extend the range of Scots prose into general purpose and utilitarian prose and urges further prescriptive codification of Scots. But he feels that we will need to exert unremitting pressure to see that progress is continued. One step in this direction has already been taken in the shape of the magazine *Lallans*, the journal of the Scots Language Society, dating from 1973. This is written almost entirely in Scots, and mostly Good Scots or Ideal Scots at that, including prefaces, reviews and notices of meetings and competitions. As McClure says, the resistance met by this sort of thing now – and there are many people who find all this preposterous and unnecessary – would quickly disappear as people accustomed themselves to it. I would not like to deny value to this, both as an interesting development in the Scottish literary tradition and as helping a little to counter existing prejudice against any native Scots spoken forms.

But it does seem to me a round-about, laborious and in the end unrealistic way of tackling what I see as the real linguistic ills of the Scottish people, which are those of other socially disfavoured non-standard varieties, namely linguistic intolerance. (Apart from the many writings on this for English in general by social dialectologists such as William Labov and Peter Trudgill, see for comments on this subject in the Scottish setting Trudgill, [1974]; Macaulay, [1974], 1975, 1976, 1977; Aitken, 1976, 2015; 1979a[40]). I find it impossible to believe that what McClure hopes for could possibly happen either without compulsion or in continued competition with Standard English, as he claims.

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[39] In the original, the reference is wrongly given as p. 22.

[40] In the present edition, see 'Scots and English in Scotland' (1984b, 2015: n. 23).

But anyway, Murison says all this is up to the Scots themselves (1979b: 62): "[Scots] cannot be restored until the Scots know what it is and want it so" (1977: 62). Does this mean: until they know the rules of Ideal Scots and want their Scots to be Ideal Scots?

McClure, it appears, has a gradualist plan for restoring Ideal Scots to the people by unremittingly extending its range (and, one hopes, popularity) in the written medium, presumably with a spin-off one day to the spoken tongue. Murison appears to await the day when the Scots will undergo a spontaneous conversion to Ideal Scots by a kind of Pauline revelation.

And yet if, by some chance, such as political independence for Scotland, we did achieve political conditions which favoured a revival of Ideal Scots, we still possess at least one useful prerequisite of this – the mythology of an imaginary Ideal Scots, passionately believed in by some, more vaguely and inconsistently entertained by many.

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