The twilight of Standard Languages?
A glance at Scots

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Recent developments in the promotion of Scots as a standard language are reviewed. The progress is assessed that was made since the appeals that were made in the seventies for governmental provision to preserve the languages of Scotland. A outlook on future scenarios is attempted.

1. Standard languages and identity

Damir Kalogjera has recently pointed out (Kalogjera 2001, 2002) that for various reasons criticism has been voiced against the "alleged imposition" of the Croatian standard (Neo-Štokavian, which is shared with Serbian). One reason is its apparent inadequacy as an emblem of identity. Occasional questions have been raised whether a different dialectal basis could be equally suitable. The other major dialects (Čakavian and Kajkavian) once had a respectable literary history and are spoken in large urban centres. Nevertheless, the present norm has been functioning for too long that it could now be dismantled. The standard, however, often occurs in various regional variations, in spite of the philologists' insistence that a rigid norm be used. This is probably also the reason why there has been intensified interest in the preservation of local dialects. While the prestige of the standard variety is questionable in some areas, local varieties of the larger urban centres command considerable regional prestige. Kalogjera suggests (2002 : 153) that this might be the "small man's backlash." Some concerned individuals from my personal contacts even feel that language use may be heading towards a diglossic situation.

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Scots, a language suppressed for some three centuries, as a result of the imposition of Standard English after the Union of Parliaments (1707), springs immediately to mind. It has survived nevertheless, though only in its spoken forms, without a written standard. It now forms a continuum between Standard English and the local vernaculars. The latter, particularly the *urban demotic* ones, have a prominent place in the most recent of the Scottish literary revivals (e.g. Watson, 1996, Corbett, 2000, Macauley 1997). Standard English does not provide a standard of identification because, as James Kelman (2002) said to his Croatian interviewer, "People in Scotland see themselves as different from the English. The question of identity, Scottish national identity, has been part of the Scottish literature through centuries". But as yet, no standard Scots has been developed that would represent this identity.

2. Nationhood and languagehood

The European ideal has been a monolingual nation-state like England or France (Smolicz, 2002). But in both countries one language, or dialect, was imposed on large sections of society whose ethnic, cultural, and above all linguistic background was different. This seems to be a typical pattern throughout Europe and even globally.[1] In England this happened at the expense of Cymric, Gaelic, and Scots. The suppressed idioms are sometimes related to the imposed one (e.g. Scots and English, Serbian and Croatian, Danish and Icelandic or Norwegian) so that they are commonly considered to be dialects of the particular standard variety. In other socio-political conditions, they may developed into (or continue to be used as) standard languages in their own right.

The growth of the standard languages is connected with the growth of centralised states, where the monarch was the symbol of the state and nation as well as of the language. The linguistic norm was what he or she spoke. In English this is well reflected in the name *King's English.* George Puttneham's statement (1589, quoted in Haugen, 1966) that "After speech is fully fashioned to the common understanding, and accepted by consent of a whole country and nation, it is called a language," or in more modern terms a standard language, has died hard. Such beliefs are held also today, though even in democratic societies plebiscites on language are rarely held. It is the privilege of a few, who decide what language or dialect is to become the national standard. At best, a proposal by knowledgeable philologists becomes accepted in the national assembly (e.g. the two Norwegian norms[2]). The statement about the wide intelligibility of this language

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[1] Exceptions can be small and isolated nation-states such as for example, Iceland. Though in its history there too Danish was imposed on Icelandic.

[2] *Bokmal*, the urban variety a modified Danish standard, and *Nynorsk*, a "synthetic" norm created by Ivar Aasen on the basis of various rural dialects.

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form is also false, since by most speakers it is acquired through education, often like a foreign language and at the cost of the speaker's actual identity.

Meanwhile, contrary to the popular belief that language and ethnicity (nationality) are linked by nature and that dialects can be equally easily assigned to one language or another, linguistic relationships are not easily defined. The linguistic science has thus "been only moderately successful" (Haugen, 1966) in clarifying the relationship between language and dialect and, in the view of some sociolinguists, the standard form of a language is just one of its dialects. The term *standard language* is thus no gauge for languagehood, but rather adds to the confusion (Macauley, 1997/21ff). Katičić (1972) has argued rather convincingly that language identity can often be determined with respect to the *axiological* principle, which says that a language is "a depository" of common values of the speakers. So in a very complex pattern of relationships two idioms can be defined as two languages, even if they are descriptively and genetically closely related but differ axiologically.[3]

The question of Scots languagehood has been repeatedly contested (McArthur, 1998), because the Scottish are a "stateless nation" (Watson, 1996), and because of the similarities between Scots and English, of which only English has a written norm. In defence of Scots examples have been drawn from other similar linguistic relationships, amongst them the languages of Scandinavia and former Yugoslavia. And indeed it is difficult not to find many parallels between them. In Britain, Scandinavia, and former Yugoslavia linguistic continua have been arbitrarily cut at points determined by history or politics. Those who could decide on matters of language have both in Scotland and in Croatia decided to embrace a linguistic "union" for political purposes that at the time were favourable for such decisions. Later, Scots and Croatian were felt to be suppressed languages. This idea too is embraced by educated proponents of nationalism (see Macafee 1985 in connection with Scots), whereas the less educated, dialectal, speakers hardly notice that this is the case. For them, what is suppressed is their dialects, whatever standard is in force. And yet, the standard is held, even by those who do not command it, to be more respectable than their vernacular idioms.

With the emergence of sociolinguistic studies in the seventies[4] and the new interest in language variety, language policy, and attitudes towards language, Gaelic and Scots, the languages of Scotland, came into focus among leading Gaelic and Scots scholars (McIntosh, 1979). At an important conference the opinion was voiced that "there ought to be a much profounder realisation at various governmental levels of the basic problems and needs, so that financial and other provision can – as a measure of plain common sense and of the highest survival-value – be made for our languages and their history

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[3] He had Croatian and Serbian in mind, but used Dutch and Low German, and Helladic and Pontic Greek as examples. Scots would have fitted his argument perfectly.

[4] Primarily Labov, 1966, and a number of British studies, e.g. Trudgill, 1974, Romaine, 1975.

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and background and for the treasures, old and new, oral and written, which are *treasured* at all levels from primary schools to the graduate departments of our universities." (McIntosh, ibid.)

The eighties and nineties were marked by intensified research projects (e.g. The Linguistic Surveys of Scotland, The Scottish Place-Name Survey, The Scottish Place--Name Database Project), publication of dictionaries and linguistic atlases, studies i language and literature, and most of all a powerful literary revival. Both prose and poetry (Watson, 1996) was written in *all Scotland's voices*. And now it seems that the question of Scots languagehood, which bedevilled so many discussions, is being settled. As McArthur (1998) demonstrated, Scots is increasingly being presented as a distinct language. Finally, when the UK ratified The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 2001, it was deemed that Scots met the Charter's definition of a regional or minority language, i.e. that

·it is traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population;

·it is different from the official language(s) of the State;

·it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants.

Nevertheless, as articles on the linguistic situation in Scotland of that time show (e.g. Macafee 1985, McClure, 1985), Scots did not reclaim its autonomy, nor the status of a national standard in Scotland. Moreover, a debate on the standard orthography was still not settled, nor were there any advantageous political developments in sight (Mcafee, 1985).

3. Scots after Devolution.

The Union of Parliaments of 1707 is held responsible for the steady decline of Scots, and in some opinion of its death. Has the devolution brought about its revival?[5]

a) The authorities and specialists

The new Scottish Parliament was reinstated in 2000, almost three hundred years after its demise. It seems interesting to investigate what was being done to restore Scots as the national language in Scotland, and whether any of the requirements of the 1979 conference (McIntosh 1979) were met by the government.

In order to access the most recent information I resorted to the Scottish Government's web pages on the Internet.

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[5] It does seem that statehood is most important for an idiom to be recognised as a distinct language. After Croatia gained independence in 1991, the separation of Croatian and Serbian as two distinct languages seems to have been reluctantly accepted by most Slavicists. Perhaps even more reluctantly, Bosnian is being accepted as an independent language too.

The most interesting and relevant is the latest bilingual publication with the title *1st Report 2003 on Inquiry into the role of educational and cultural policy in supporting and developing Gaelic, Scots and minority languages in Scotland, by the Education, Culture and Sports Committee* of the Scottish Parliament (in Scots: *The Scots Pairlament – Education, Culture and Sport Comatee* (www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/ cttee/educ.htm) The Parliament had previously (on 13 June 2002) passed a resolution whereby the Committee's remit was to "consider and report on matters relating to school and pre-school education." Moreover, the question of Scotland's languages had been addressed already in 2000, as part of the National Cultural Strategy.

It is evident from the Report that the linguistic situation in Scotland is recognised as more complex than ever in its history. It is repeatedly stressed that Scotland has a multicultural and multilingual heritage (Pictish, Gaelic, Scots, Norse, French, Dutch, Latin), and that today, beside the two indigenous heritage languages – Gaelic and Scots – there are several community languages such as Urdu, Cantonese, Bengali, Polish, Arabic, Italian and Japanese (Report, p.7). Moreover, the language that is used publicly, in schools, institutions, and the media is by default English, or rather one of its varieties, Scottish Standard English[6]. This variety differs from English Standard English mostly in pronunciation, but also in some vocabulary and grammatical preferences (e.g. McArthur 2002). Thus the requirement is expressed that in keeping with the recommendations of the European Union, the rights of all speakers have to be considered and provided for.

The Committee received a number of submissions by experts and members of various organisations and institutions concerned with language, culture, and education.

The general conclusions of the report were "that the many questions and concerns surrounding the languages of Scotland and their place in education and culture can only be properly addressed by creating an inclusive, cohesive Languages Policy" and that "substantive research, consultation and reporting needs to be carried out to gather much more information than is currently available on the specific needs of each language."(p.20)

To sum up the discussion on Scots:

i. A specific language policy is needed, which would aim at the conservation and revitalisation of the existing Scots heritage and integrate it with public priorities. The policy relates to "education, the judiciary, administration and public service, the media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life and transfrontier exchanges"

To date no coherent policy has been developed "designed to encourage the language and secure its status as a national language of Scotland"

ii. What appears to be the greatest problem in education are the attitudes of many teachers and parents that clearly see Scots as inferior to English. It is branded as "slang" and students are discouraged from using it. It is felt that if Scots continues not to be

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[6] Scottish English is now treated as a specific type of English also in textbooks for foreign learners (e.g. Headway, 2000), along with such varieties as American and Australian English.

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recognised in schools writers might be unable to communicate in it in future. Therefore reading and writing of Scots ought to be encouraged from Primary School onwards. Teachers need to receive in-service training with an emphasis on Scots through continuous Professional Development. Materials in Scots for schools need to be developed.

Scots is taught in some schools and examples of practices and methods are described by some submissions to the Inquiry. A number of materials have already been provided for both Primary and Secondary schools, as well as teachers' resources (Corbett, 2001).

Extensive undergraduate teaching of Scots is done in the English Language Departments at Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities, and post-graduate research takes place at a number of institutions.
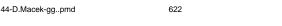
iii. The Scottish Parliament convened a Corporate Body who decided that English and Gaelic will continue to be the official languages of the Parliament, and a Cross Party Group on the Scots Language in the Parliament was to launch "Scots – A statement o Principles" early in 2003.

In contrast to Gaelic, there is as yet no legislation to secure the legal recognition (*secure status*) for Scots.

iv. Efforts have to be continued toward the establishment of a Scots National Theatre, and the introduction of radio and television programmes in Scots.

v. As a consequence of the lack of recognition, Scots was not included in the 2001 census and thus an opportunity was missed to find out about its usage (as it was done for Gaelic).

vi. The possibility of introducing a standardised orthography ought to be investigated. – already in 1985 (q.v.) McClure gave reasons for why a standardised orthography would be necessary.

vii. Some discussion centred on the question of *what is Scots*.

viii. The funding for Scots (which is even lower than for Gaelic) is crucial. This is also attributed to its low esteem (McClure, 2001).

b) Projects and publications

A visit to the Internet demonstrates the range of actions and actors involved in the study and promotion of Scots. In addition to the Report, the following seem most significant.

i. A number of leading academics, research and educational institutions, as well as some governmental bodies, have expressed support for an investigation among "teachers, actors, academic researchers and local history enthusiasts" to find out whether there is demand for a language centre, which would serve to widen the knowledge of the languages and dialects of Scotland. The centre is provisionally named The Institute for the Languages of Scotland (ILS). The Institute would provide access to information on all languages used in Scotland. The Carnegie Trust funded a Feasibility Study for the Universities of Scotland, and it was to be completed by December 2002.[7] The ILS proposes

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[7] At the moment when this paper was being written, the report had not yet appeared on the Internet.

to serve in a number of ways, e.g. supply teaching materials for Scotland's languages, facilitate links to registers of interpreters to assist in legal matters, or to help refugees; it offers assistance to Local Government in the choice of street names, access to research collections, proposes to advise actors on pronunciation of languages and dialects and the like. A Questionnaire has been published to collect data on needs and interests of the targeted groups. There is an interesting and symptomatic remark (ILS Feasibility Study www.art.ed.ac.uk/celtscot/instituelanguagesscotland p1) which says "owing to limited time and resources available for this study it has been decided to use English as the language of communication in (the) questionnaire." This shows the difficulty, which is repeatedly mentioned, that the lack of funds hinders the use of Scots. Sponsors, like the Carnegie Trust, are often mentioned, since governmental funds are obviously insufficient or lacking.
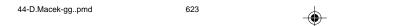
ii. There are several web-sites with important information on the various research projects, such as The Scottish Place-Name survey, A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English, The Scottish Language dictionaries etc.

iii. Some publishers have web-sites, which they use to describe the materials they publish. For example Merlin Press provides a description of the language teaching materials (books and cassettes) and also samples of the materials.

iv. There are Scots courses, and a considerably complete outline of Scots is provided under the title *Wir Ain Leid* (www.scots-online.org). It includes a description of "general" Scots orthography, pronunciation, grammar, and idiomatic phrases, dialects of Scots and Scottish Standard English. It is interesting that it provides a model for a standard, which is eclectic "based on frequently used non-regional Traditional Scots." For this purpose an analysis of the existing conventions was done and historical practice and etymology was taken into consideration. The proposed rules are then applied consistently.

c) *The Scotsman* and its readers

The Edinburgh daily paper *The Scotsman* can offer insight into some current opinions on language. But the language question does not occur among topical first page news, nor does serious commentary and discussion. While occasionally an article in Gaelic appears, none are ever written in Scots. References to Scottishness, i.e. Scottish identity can be found, but they are not concerned with the language. What seems to be the concern of the contributors is the need of celebrating a "national day" possibly St Andrew's Day. One article advocated closer links with the Nordic countries, with which Scotland could compare in both topography and demography, and with whom it had historical links, not least visible in the Scots vocabulary (the examples given were *bairn*, *kirk, flitting* and *gangin oot*). This vocabulary, however, is the one, which has a very low social rating (Sandred, 1982).

One opinion does regard language as one of the symbols of Scottishness and complains about the ignorance of Lowland Scots among the population, because generations have been brought up to think that using it is "speaking improper". Another exalts in the "lyrical rhythm and cadence" of the Orcadian dialect. In an article (of 22

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November) the usage of Scots words by the SMPs (Scottish MPs) in Parliament the day before was put to ridicule, while the "declining standards" of RP on BBC provoke the same reaction. In short, there is no serious debate in the papers, but the opinions voiced by both journalists and readers are in agreement with the Report's concern about Scots.

4. A Dawn or Twilight of Standard Scots?

As it transpires from the Report and both specialist and public opinion, the task of restoring Scots to its lost status is most laborious. On the one hand, the early requirements of the seventies, that on all levels, from government to other interested institutions the cause of Scots should be addressed, seems to have been met. On the other, the complaint about the "abysm of ignorance on both popular and administrative levels" (McClure, 2001) was voiced already in the eighties, and nothing seems to have changed, even after some prerequisites on the governmental level have been established. The esteem of Scots continues to be low, it is not used in such public functions as the Parliament, the media, the education etc. It is not even recognised as one of Scotland's official languages, in distinction, to the otherwise equally declining Gaelic. Moreover, in the modern Scottish society, it is not possible to "establish and promote one language variety that will 'speak' for the nation" (Corbett, 2000). Multilingualism has to be recognised, and Scots can be promoted only via the European provisions for traditional regional and minority languages. The process of providing adequate legislation and official introduction into all schools cannot be performed without careful language planning based on previous research in linguistic practices and attitudes.

Modern language planners have thus a much more complex task than those that took part in such activities in the 19th century (e.g. in Norway or Croatia), let alone the earliest normativists in the 17th and 18th centuries (e.g. in France, England, Sweden, Denmark). There are some new developments in society that cannot be evaded and that influence any language policy and its success. First is the right of every individual to his or her first language, which equally applies to minority and majority languages. This is to say, that Scots cannot be imposed on users of English and other languages used in Scotland by substantial groups of speakers, as English was imposed on Scots speakers in the 18th century. Second, contrary to what would be reasonable to assume i.e. that the greater knowledge about the forms and functions of language today would facilitate the development of a linguistic standard, this task has become more difficult than it was for the naive linguists of former ages. It is well known, and well borne out in Scotland, that some linguistic habits cannot be eradicated or changed. Third, the implementation of any linguistic policy is nowadays coupled with material expenses primarily because of the educational system, which covers the entire population and therefore demands large financial support for qualified teachers and teaching materials. The limitation applies for the introduction of any other public function of the language, as some of the sections above show.

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It is also not certain that the new standard would be generally accepted as the symbol of Scottishness. Efforts to promote Lallans (the literary variety of Scots) to Standard Scots have not been successful so far, since the local dialects of Buchan, Shetland and Glasgow have their own literary varieties. In the opinion of Macafee (1985/11) it is in addition limited by its links with nationalism. The first limitation was, however, questioned by McClure (1985/208), who rightly points out that other languages have dialectal literatures with their own specific linguistic characteristics and usage, in spite of a common standard form. The second may, indeed, depend on the political success of the Scottish Nationalist Party.

If or when all the difficulties are resolved through the obvious efforts of many institutions and individuals, and Scots evolves as a public standard, the artificial Scots, as all standards are bound to be, may not appeal to the speaker in the street. From developments in some other languages, the following scenario is imaginable:

Scots is introduced as one of the official written norms of Scotland, alongside (Standard Scottish) English and Gaelic. As in Norway, everybody has the right to use whichever written norm they prefer. Their children will be taught this norm in school, and use public forms, documents, newspapers, books, and other written texts issued in this norm. This means, that every public text will have to be available in all three norms (languages). Besides that, everybody has to be taught the basics of the other two norms, or more realistically, Standard (Scottish) English. The cost and trouble is immediately recognisable, and with English already functioning in all the public spheres, the chances for Scots to acquire equal status are indeed slight. Another aggravating fact is that Scottish Standard English is one of the global varieties of English and thus has a communicative value of international range, unlike the locally restricted Scots.

Should this scenario win over, which is not impossible, it is quite likely that eventually the two non-Gaelic varieties would drift towards one another, the Scots becoming more English and the English more Scots, as it has been happening with the two Norwegian norms. There would be ground then for a completely new Scottish Standard to develop out of these two.

Whatever turn the development of a standard Scots may take, it is the spoken varieties and the literary dialects that are likely to retain their remarkable vitality (Watson 1997, Macafee, 1985). And although the urban varieties seem to have prestige only among the working classes (Sandred, 1983), they have nevertheless been accepted in literature through widely popular prose (for example by James Kelman and Irwin Welsh). Possibly, as Corbett (2000/6) believes, Scots has a future as a non-regional written literary language, but the symbol of identity for most Scots will remain the regional vernaculars.

The continuum, which is now formed between Standard Scottish English and the vernacular dialects, would be double headed with the two standard varieties at the formal end. A more rigid standard Scots norm, as standards on the defensive tend to be, may turn to out the be more formal of the two, and thus more restricted in use.

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Finally, there is no certain answer to the question in the title of this paper. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the fact that English has become an international *lingua franca* is a matter of concern in communities with the *lesser-used languages* (e.g. in Scandinavia, Simonsen 1996). There is apprehension that these languages may experience a shrinking range of domains (Venàs, 1993) in which they are used, and become, like Scots today, only spoken, private languages. The apparatus developed through centuries to qualify them for general national usage may be rendered useless, because international English will take their place in science, business, entertainment etc. So if standard languages lose ground because of a globalised English, what will remain as tokens of identity, will be the vernaculars. In the circumstances of widespread urbanisation, it is the urban vernaculars that are likely to survive.

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POGLED NA ŠKOTSKI JEZIK NAKON DEVOLUCIJE PARLAMENATA

U članku se razmatra sadašnje stanje jezika u Škotskoj i procjenjuje koliko je učinjeno od sedamdesetih godina kad se prvi puta javljaju zahtjevi da se na razini vlade poduzmu koraci za očuvanje jezika u Škotskoj. Također se pokušava sagledati mogući budući razvoj i rezultati sadašnjih napora.

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