

## Book Review

**Robert McColl Millar. 2020 (hardback). 2022 (paperback). *A Sociolinguistic History of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN: 9781474448543 (hardback), 9781474448550 (paperback), 9781474448574 (ePub), 9781474448567 (PDF), 260 pp. £19.99 paperback/ePub, £80.00 hardback/PDF.**

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Over the last decade, Scotland has taken centre stage in numerous debates. First of all, its historical and political specificity was highlighted on the occasion of the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and, even more remarkably, it was stressed on the occasion of the referendum held in 2016, which resulted in the UK leaving the European Union, while Scotland (like Northern Ireland, London and some other English cities as well as various areas in Wales) voted to remain. This led to a resurgence of the independence movement and a growing discussion of Scotland's role in the 21st century world. In addition, this combined with a popular interest in Scotland both as a tourist destination (which it had been since Late Modern times) and as an exotic, romantic setting of literary escapism. The most popular example of that is the success of the *Outlander* books authored by Diana Gabaldon and the TV series derived from them – a setting that has helped reinforce images that had been familiar also on account of reinventions produced in the Scottish diaspora and which were a continuation of similar narratives dating from the 18th and the 19th centuries.

On the other hand, the linguistic specificity of Scotland has often been understated among non-specialists and indeed even among specialists: many users are still happy to employ labels like 'British English' without great awareness of the political overtones that it may have. Within this framework, Robert McColl Millar's book is a very welcome addition to the materials available to both historical and synchronic linguists. Moreover, this book will also be of interest to readers who are relative newcomers to the topic, as an introductory section clarifies some basic concepts, such as language relationships and terminology.

The book comprises eight chapters and six maps, three of which concern the toponyms employed in the various chapters. At the end of the book, readers find an extensive and updated list of bibliographical references and an index, in which names, placenames and concepts are listed. Endnotes provide additional comments, and while footnotes are always more convenient for readers, matters of

editorial policy do not detract from their significance. In what follows, a brief outline of the chapters is provided before more general comments on the book itself are offered.

In Chapter 1, the author presents an introduction to “the sociology of language and the Scottish historical ecology”. Indeed, in this title “ecology” is a significant term, as it evokes the relevance and importance of diversity also in linguistic matters, as variation may persist or lead to language change on account of both internal and external factors, and in the case of Scotland the latter have been particularly significant throughout its history. Thus Chapter 2 focuses on “Diversity: The Early Historical Period” (i.e., going from prehistory to the Scandinavian settlement at the end of the first millennium) and outlines what autochthonous languages can be observed in Scotland in those centuries; it is the chapter in which labels that are often only superficially familiar (such as ‘Picts’, ‘Britons’, or ‘Angles’) get clarified and placed in their geo-historical framework.

Chapter 3 centres on Medieval Scotland and its “Incipient Linguistic Homogenisation”, drawing attention to the consequences of historical developments, especially as far as linguistic diversity is concerned; for example, it is at this point in time that Pictish and British disappear, and we witness the inception of *Inglis*, as Older Scots was labelled then. Moreover, the apparently lower degree of Norman infiltration in Scotland led later commentators to assume that ‘purer English’ was found in the North – one of those myths that persisted for centuries and (almost paradoxically) coexisted with a strictly proscribing attitude in relation to Scots throughout Late Modern times (Dossena 2006).

The rise of *Inglis* as the language of literature is discussed in Chapter 4, which focuses on “Social, Political and Cultural Metamorphosis” and asks whether the country was “in crisis” at the time of the first Reformation (1560) and later as a result of the Union of the Crowns (1603). Indeed, it is these two crucial historical events that scholarly investigations have often associated with an increasing anglicization of Scots (Dossena 2009; McClure 1995). At the same time, the author also discusses dialect birth, i.e., phenomena of increasing diversity within Scots, and the increasingly problematic relationship with Gaelic, then labelled *Erse* (i.e., Irish), while *Inglis* was re-identified as *Scottis*. Although it may seem that terminology is of minor importance, such changes are in fact indicative of crucial sociolinguistic attitudes, as in the Lowlands anti-Gaelic prejudices began to circulate which would persist for centuries. It was with the Statutes of Iona that in 1609 James VI, by then James I of England and Scotland, prescribed the education of Highland children in Lowland schools, in order to prevent unrest through the cultural assimilation of the land. Almost 150 years later, the linguistic dichotomy between Highlands and Lowlands contributed to a popular re-imagination of the Jacobite cause as antagonism between England and Scotland, where the latter was

assumed to consist almost exclusively of kilted clans, in a conflation of images of Highlanders and Lowlanders that had hardly any historical value, not least from the linguistic point of view.

Chapter 5 discusses “The Languages of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century” and centres on two key terms: “homogenisation” and “survival”. The two terms may at first appear to be in contrast with each other, but in actual fact they represent the complex linguistic reality in which Scotland found itself after the Union of Parliaments in 1707 and, to an even greater extent, after the defeat of the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. The Unionist ideology stressed the importance of increasing anglicization, which led to a plethora of normative texts being published and circulated, in order to enable speakers (and especially writers) to approximate a Southern standard in their usage (Jones 1995). At the same time, literary forms continued to thrive in Scots, which was found to be acceptable in poetry and in humorous contexts. Scotland thus appears to have laid the basis for the kind of linguistic ‘antiszygy’ that key literary figures of the early 20th century would identify as a specific cultural trait.

The dichotomy between literary and non-literary usage would continue into the 19th century, which forms the object of Chapter 6. The title of the chapter refers to “Expansion within Union” and draws attention to the ambivalent relationship that Scotland had with England and indeed with what would become the British Empire at a time of increasing industrialization and urbanization. In this section the author also usefully discusses some important issues concerning literacy and education in 19-century Scotland, highlighting how some myths about the level of schooling among the lower classes should actually be seen in a more encompassing cultural context – a context in which the role of the Church of Scotland and of other churches is taken into consideration and a more nuanced approach is taken to patterns of school attendance in different areas and among different subjects. The chapter also discusses the increasing divergence between rural and urban usage, which is observed especially in literary representations that restrict Scots to dialogue among older, rural characters (thus associating Scots with the past), while in popular literature and indeed in the local press Scots is seen to be a constantly viable language (Donaldson 1986, 1989).

The discussion of literary usage continues in Chapter 7, which deals with “Contraction and Dissipation” in the 20th century. In this part of the book the author also takes into consideration the impact that the economy, emigration, and immigration, have on language use and indeed on identity. It is undoubted that Scotland’s linguistic history has always been one of multilingualism, as we saw in previous chapters, but the 20th century appears to have shed a different light on the topic, not least on account of how over time Scottish history has witnessed

significant changes in the country's place and role in the Western world (Devine 1999; Smout 2007).

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses “Contemporary Scotland and its Languages” from 1999 to the present day. The late 20th century and the onset of the 21st century have been significant times for a re-discovery of Scots, not only in literature, but also on an academic level. In addition to increase in scholarly work pertaining to historical linguistics (as shown by numerous references in the book under review here), newly-compiled corpora have been launched, such as the *Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech* (Kay et al. 2004), which includes material from the Miller-Brown Corpus of Scottish English, the very first corpus to have ever been compiled of this variety, and the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing (1700–1945)* (Corbett 2013). Moreover, important lexicographical resources have been made freely available, such as the online *Dictionaries of the Scots Language*, where both the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the *Scottish National Dictionary* are combined, and innovative materials have been created for schools (for instance, the *Scots Dictionary for Schools* app – see (DSL)). Finally, the recognition of Scots in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (which the UK ratified in 2001) has brought about important political initiatives for the promotion of Scots, even though it is not acknowledged in the same section and therefore to the same extent as Gaelic. Scots received recognition under Part II of the Charter, which states objectives and principles, but does not require action; Gaelic, instead, was ratified under both Part II and Part III, which mandates “concrete measures to be taken in order to fulfil the objectives and principles listed under Part II” (SLC 2022).

In this chapter perspectives on future developments are also outlined, which is of particular interest at this point in time, as the 2022 Census is about to gather fresh data through a question that asks citizens aged three or over if they can “understand, speak, read and write Scottish Gaelic or Scots” (see Scotland's Census 2022) – a question that was not included until 2001. Such data will be indicative of what progress the various languages are making in terms of their viability in everyday usage and will inform significant steps in language policy both at the national and the local levels.

These observations make Robert McColl Millar's monograph all the more valuable. While previous research was generally aimed at more specialized audiences and focused on specific linguistic traits or the history of the often-difficult relationship between English and Scots over the centuries, here we have a book on language history in a broader sense. Thorough, well-edited and accurately proof-read, it unravels historical threads, guiding readers along often complex paths where external events intertwine with systemic change, such as in the case of dialect birth at turning points in the history of the country. In addition, the book includes very useful references to other language ecologies in Europe, where

multilingualism has been in existence for centuries (such as in the case of Luxembourg), so that readers who are more familiar with other contexts may find links with the Scottish case and understand it better.

On the other hand, more references could have been made to the Scottish diaspora, an intriguing source of information on Scots beyond Scotland. Similarly, greater attention might have been paid to important scholarly contexts in which the study of Scots was both prominent on an academic level and significant in terms of the outreach activities that were promoted. In Edinburgh, for example, the School of Scottish Studies, established in 1951, was a key player in the collection of oral histories, narratives, songs, and folk tales both in Scots and in Gaelic. *Tobar an Dualchais*, an online resource for the presentation and promotion of audio recordings collected since the 1930s, which constitutes a useful source of diachronic material from a range of geographical areas and social contexts, could have been mentioned too (Tobar 2022).

Also at the University of Edinburgh, the Institute for Historical Dialectology (now the Angus McIntosh Centre for Historical Linguistics) was home to ground-breaking initiatives in the mapping of Older Scots features, resulting in the very first *Linguistic Atlas of Older Scots* (Williamson 2006). Moreover, scholarly investigations of Scottish sources appear to be endlessly fruitful: it is only a few years ago that Susan Rennie rediscovered the lost manuscript of James Boswell's dictionary of Scots among the papers of John Jamieson, the compiler of the *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, published in 1808 (Rennie 2011, 2012a, 2012b).

In the present monograph these sources are not discussed, which may disappoint readers with specific interest also in how Scots has been codified, mapped and preserved. However, this is perhaps relatively marginal in the general economy of the book, the focus of which is on sociolinguistics. As the second decade of the third millennium unfolds, this book will provide a useful basis for the study of how variation and change in the languages of Scotland will be affected by the times in which we live.

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