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Towards a corpus of nineteenth-century Scottish correspondence

L'articolo presenta una panoramica metodologica sui temi che riguardano la compilazione di un corpus di corrispondenza del 19° secolo (19CSC). Questi temi sono discussi alla luce di alcuni risultati preliminari; viene infine delineato come si intende proseguire il lavoro sulla base delle considerazioni sin qui effettuate. Il corpus in questione intende integrare altri corpora già esistenti o in preparazione. Circa l'estrazione sociale degli scriventi, la quantità di materiale proveniente dalla nobiltà e dall'alta borghesia è maggiore rispetto ad altre classi sociali. Tuttavia, sono già state trascritte lettere di emigranti ed altri emittenti parzialmente scolarizzati, per il loro indiscutibile valore dialettologico. Le lettere che sono già state oggetto di edizioni critiche sono volutamente escluse; per contro, si includerà un ricco campione di corrispondenza d'affari, al fine di studiare lo sviluppo diacronico di questo linguaggio specialistico.

1. Methodological framework

The aim of this paper is to discuss an overview of the methodological issues relating to the compilation of a corpus of nineteenth-century correspondence, and some preliminary observations arising from this work. The corpus is expected to integrate itself with similar corpora already available or the compilation of which is in progress – in particular, the *Corpus of Scottish Correspondence*, currently being compiled by Anneli Meurman-Solin (CSC, see Meurman-Solin 1999 and 2001), and also, to some extent, the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC, see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996 and 2003), the *Innsbruck Corpus of Correspondence* (ICAMET, see Markus 2000), and the *Corpus of Nineteenth-Century English* (see Kytö / Rudanko / Smitterberg 2000).

The *Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Correspondence* (henceforth 19CSC) will therefore develop along similar methodological lines, en-

compassing both private and non-private letters, written by both men and women of varying ages. However, it will focus on a geo-historical variety (i.e., Scottish English) not included in any of the other projects that were mentioned above: ICAMET, Kytö's project and CEEC limit themselves to southern English, and although CSC aims to focus on Scots and Scottish English, at present it is expected to concentrate on the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In fact, the nineteenth century may be shown to have been a crucial time in the history of Scots and in the development of Scottish English. Following the eighteenth century, i.e. the grand age of prescriptivism, but also of the inception of the 'vernacular revival' in literature, in the nineteenth century the aim to 'improve' language by bringing it closer to southern models of usage was still forcefully pursued by Scottish speakers and writers. Although some commentators expressed concern at the loss of vernacular elements (for instance, see Cockburn 1856), many grammars were still published practically reporting lists of proscribed Scotticisms that had already appeared in the previous century (see Dossena 2004). Even collections of proverbs showed a distinct trend towards anglicization, although they were meant to preserve an important aspect of popular culture – see Dossena 1999/2000. In popular literature, however, usage of Scots was not totally infrequent, particularly in humorous or satirical contexts (see Donaldson 1986 and 1989).

In this context, it may thus prove especially interesting to investigate such an important genre as letters. First of all, private correspondence may be discussed in terms of its speech-relatedness (see Biber 1995: 283-300), thus shedding light on possible uses in spoken language. Indeed, Görlach (1999: 149-150) stresses that letters 'reflect the social and functional relations between sender and addressee to a very high degree – only spoken texts can equal this range.' In this respect, then, the possibility of identifying patterns in which Scots types of usage actually diverged from southern ones proves very appealing: this may clearly concern syntax, morphology, lexis and, in particular, spelling, which in turn may be very fruitful for the reconstruction of phonological realizations and their geographical and social distribution. As regards business correspondence, instead, important elements may be studied in relation to the history of specialized registers – in

particular, the development of business correspondence as a *sui generis* text type.¹

For this reason, 19CSC is expected to include a proportional quantity of both private and business letters, so that usage may be compared in both formal and informal registers. The aim is to have a total of at least 500,000 words – 250,000 from private correspondence and 250,000 from business correspondence. Wherever possible, the texts included in the corpus are to be diplomatically transcribed from original manuscripts (or typescripts, in the case of later business letters).² This means that all the letters are to be transcribed integrally, recording writers' self-corrections, amendments and details relating to paratextual features such as recipient's title(s) and address. Original (non-)capitalization is maintained throughout and original word and line division is signalled.³ In addition, 19CSC will employ the text level coding used in the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (Kytö 1996) with some minor alterations. The main codes for the text level concern the rendering of special characters and the partial inclusion of textual commentary, such as the following:

= = Superscript: e.g. w=ch= for w^{ch}
{...} Compiler's comment: e.g. {page torn}
(\...\) Foreign language: e.g. (\redacteur\){French}
(^...\^) Font other than italics e.g. (^Pembroke Lodge^){courier}.⁴

Each letter is preceded with essential source information: for instance,

¹ In this respect, this section of the corpus will contribute to an ongoing study of the language of business correspondence and its history, a national research project recently launched under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Education and led by Marina Bondi (Modena University). The Bergamo University Research Unit is led by Marina Dossena and includes Maurizio Gotti, Richard Dury, Davide Giannoni and Ullisse Belotti.

² A different case should be made for letters to newspapers and magazines, the manuscript or typescript source of which may be untraceable and which may in fact have been edited quite extensively before publication.

³ In the examples provided in this paper, however, line division is only indicated when it is deemed to be significant for the presentation of overall textual mapping.

⁴ This indication is important to preserve as much detail of the original as possible. It is also especially useful when letters are handwritten on printed headed paper, as is frequently the case in business correspondence.

NLS, MS 30010 – letters 1851-56.

LETTER 29. FANNY RUSSELL TO CATHERINE RUTHERFORD

When the year of the letter is known, it is given precisely. If it is conjectural, it is followed by a question mark. Writers with the same name are identified by numerals (e.g., William Blackwood 2). Women have one name throughout, regardless of name changes due to marriage. Manuscript and typescript texts are referred to by folio numbers, e.g. <P F69>. At a later stage, lexico-grammatical tags will be added, following methodological guidelines implemented at the Institute for Historical Dialectology of the University of Edinburgh (see Williamson 2000).

As regards the selection of texts, in the very first stages of corpus compilation samples have been selected from those available in the National Archives of Scotland or in the National Library of Scotland; at a later stage, the inclusion of privately-held documents is also envisaged. Individual letters for inclusion in the corpus have been chosen both randomly and on the basis of their being the response or follow-up to a previous text (whether a letter or a brief note). In the future a similar policy will be followed, though a constant attempt at creating a balanced set of samples of both male and female writers will be made. In the general plan for corpus compilation, previously edited letters by literary figures have been deliberately excluded.⁵ This choice derives first of all from the decision to rely on manuscript or typescript sources wherever possible, and secondly from the intention to investigate forms and types of usage as close as possible to everyday registers employed by non-professional writers. Although it could be argued that business letters were in fact a professional form of writing, the extent to which their recurrent stylistic traits were already codified will emerge from systematic investigation of the corpus itself.

2. Linguistic foci

As we mentioned above, “Private letters can contain valuable evidence on informal usage” (Görlach 1999: 150); however, the same au-

⁵ In fact, linguistic issues in some of these have been studied elsewhere – see, for instance, Dossena (1997 and 2002).

thor denies that they may have any significant value from the dialectologist's point of view, as "They rarely include dialect [...] Writing is so much connected with the school and standard language that composing a letter in dialect is a breach of sociolinguistic convention", and therefore "Most letters written in dialect are literary fabrications". At the same time, "Many non-standard features are found in letters by emigrants, who were forced to communicate in written form although not fully qualified for this". This is indeed a crucial issue, pointing to an area of study worth investigating. In these cases, relatively little may be known in relation to the social networks to which writers and recipients belonged, especially when the situation of gentry and businessmen is compared, where fairly detailed information may be gathered as to what connections existed both in terms of genealogy and of social proximity or distance (see Fitzmaurice 2002 and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999, 2002 and 2003). On the other hand, emigrants' letters were most normally written to family and neighbours, thus pertaining to a fairly close-knit social group. We may therefore expect instances of informal usage to occur, although geographical distance and the (often stressful) circumstances in which they were written may have dictated more formal uses. In addition, as Fairman (2003) points out, attempts to follow models associated with full-schooling often result in varying lexical usage and discourse structure.

In general, the quantity of material available for gentry and the upper-middle classes seems to outweigh greatly the quantity of material available from lower orders of society. However, quantitative considerations need not be given primary relevance. In fact, in the case of Scotland, emigrants' letters are an extremely valuable source of information, especially when the crucial impact of the Highland Clearances on Scottish society is taken into consideration. In this framework, an important area of study will be the phenomena that can be related to contact between Gaelic and English, in line with the analyses conducted by Filpula (1999) on Irish English; the issue of (increasing) literacy in English as opposed to language maintenance in Gaelic could then be investigated in relation to greater or lesser maintenance of Scots in non-Gaelic speaking areas. Studies of comments in the Statistical Account of Scotland (McColl Millar 2000 and 2003) and in school inspectors' reports (Williamson 1982 and 1983) have already pointed to a widespread aim

to ‘improve’ usage, i.e. to anglicize it, although speakers could and did code-switch in different communicative contexts. In this sense, private correspondence might also prove a good source of information on language attitudes – in Robert Burns’ correspondence, for example, there are numerous references to recommended English usage (Dossena 1997). However, in the correspondence of ‘non-professional’ writers explicit comments on linguistic features and attitudes may be very infrequent – internal evidence of different types of usage is far more easily identifiable. It is thus possible to trace a certain number of main investigation lines that may be followed in 19CSC; they can be summarized in the following terms:

- themes relating to historical sociolinguistics and historical pragmatics;
- themes relating to the investigation of specialized discourse in a diachronic perspective;
- issues relating to language contact and language change both in formerly Gaelic-speaking and in Scots-speaking areas.

Below some preliminary findings will be presented, in order to exemplify the type of analyses outlined in this paragraph. To this end, a 35,000-word sampler has been employed, the structure of which is shown in Table 1.

			<i>Encoders</i>		
<i>Type</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>N. letters</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Tot.</i>
Business	11,907	58	34	6	40
Private	11,320	43	23	7	30
Emigrants	11,901	22	9	1	10
Total	35,128	123	66	14	80

Table 1: 19CSC sampler structure.

The sampler includes 123 letters written between 1809 and 1902⁶ by 80 informants (66 male and 14 female encoders) – 58 letters pertain to business correspondence, while 65 are private letters: of these, 22 were written by emigrants. As regards business letters, a fairly consistent sample pertains to those written by or addressed to members of the Blackwood family, on account of the importance they had on the Scottish cultural scene of the nineteenth century.⁷ Among the earliest letters are of course those of William Blackwood (1776-1834), founder of the publishing firm of William Blackwood and Sons, Ltd.; in the sampler discussed below, however, several letters by William Blackwood jr. will be discussed. Still concerning informants, it should also be pointed out that these include two children – Blackwood's godson Mandeville Blackwood Phillips and a Dumfries schoolboy at a boarding school on the Isle of Man.

Although in most cases the letters were written in Edinburgh or in the Lothians, letters sent from England by Scottish encoders have also been included, as this was frequently the case of prospective emigrants (for instance, when they were preparing to sail from Liverpool).⁸ In general, the place of origin of the encoder (when known)⁹ has been deemed to be a more relevant factor than the place of encoding. On the other hand, the length of permanence outside Scotland should also be taken into consideration when discussing anglicizing trends in discourse: the attempt to attain a 'standard' form of expression possibly being encour-

⁶ The latest letter, encoded by James Murray (the editor of the OED), may be said to place itself fully in the tradition of nineteenth-century letter-writing.

⁷ In 1817 William Blackwood founded the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, later called *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and from 1905 called *Blackwood's Magazine*. Although at first it was meant to be a Tory counterweight to the Whiggish *Edinburgh Review*, it also gained circulation by publishing stories, poems, and serialized novels, including works by Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg, George Eliot and Thomas De Quincey. Blackwood was succeeded by his sons Alexander (1806-45), Robert (1808-52), and John (1818-79). They added a London office to the business in 1840 and an Edinburgh printing office in 1847. After them the conduct of the firm passed, in turn, to William Blackwood (1836-1912), George Blackwood (1876-1942), James Blackwood (1878-1951), and George Douglas Blackwood (b. 1909), great-great-grandson of the founder (see also Finkelstein 2002).

⁸ This type of letters could be discussed in relation to pamphlets and other nineteenth-century publications encouraging emigration. For example, *The Scotsman* of 21st September 1888 published two letters in which the excellent quality of Manitoba land is described (see NAS 1994: 76).

⁹ When the letter is addressed to close friends or relatives, the encoder's place of origin may be deduced from the recipient's address.

aged by the sociolinguistic contexts in which the encoders found themselves. As regards letters from emigrants, the place of encoding varies greatly: from North and South America to Australia. In the future it is expected that a much broader range of places of origin will be included, especially as far as Scotland is concerned.

2.1. Preliminary findings

At this stage, given the limited number of words in the sampler, no statistical data may be offered yet in relation to linguistic findings. Instead, we will discuss instances that may point towards potentially interesting methodological developments; for instance, from the point of view of historical pragmatics, qualitative observations on formality and politeness markers may already prove of a certain interest. A case in point is age as a variable dictating different levels of formality.

If we focus on two of the letters written by a child, we see that formality and spontaneity are carefully blended. In his first letter, of June 25th 1852, Mandeville Blackwood Phillips informs his “Dear God Papa” that “the poor dog is dead” and then adds: “I should so like to have another dog, and if you could spare one Mr Fletcher would bring it with him from Scotland” to Kent, where the child resides. Less than two months later, on August 21st, the child thanks his godpapa “for the nice new dog you were kind enough to send”. In the first letter the child not only informs his godfather of his dog’s death – he actually ‘asks’ for a new dog, and signals that he has already made arrangements with Mr Fletcher to collect it, relying on his godfather’s positive answer even before posting his request. The presence of adults behind the child’s letters, however, does emerge: in the first letter “Papa sends his kind regards”, while in the second “Papa & Mamma send kind regards to you and are very much obliged to you for ‘Rough’ [the name of both dogs]”. The formality of the child’s tone may thus be attributed to guidance in writing, though from the pragmatic point of view it is certainly one of the most spontaneous and effective letters in the collection.

Other instances in which age (in addition to topic) influences the encoder’s tone are to be found in two letters by the same encoder, to the same recipient, but with almost a 60-year gap between them. In the first, one girl invites the other to spend time together during the holidays:

- (1) Minto – Sept. 29. Thurs [1825?]
Dearest Kit, # Are not we odd people? Make haste & come, we
have only one little week – come to-day if possible – fly, fly, fly –
The man is wait^g for an answer # Ever most affect^{ly}

In the other, condolences are expressed for the friend's husband's death. Nicknames and imperatives, repetitions and abbreviations are no longer employed (or at least not so frequently, as far as abbreviations are concerned), but reference to the places of youth and shared memories establish a strong link both between the two correspondents and the two letters:

- (2) March 24 # 1884 # My dear Catherine
I have received the sad announcement of yr husband's death [...] you were probably prepared, as far as one ever can be so, to lose him_ # But this does not prevent me from feeling deeply for you, [...] This event has called vividly back to me the Minto days of old – in which you bore so large a share - & which must for ever be sacred & beloved memories – If you are able to write I should like much to hear about you & your sons – At all events believe me ever ys affec.

As regards the general typology of letters included, a fairly wide range is observed. In private correspondence, for instance, we find a 1893 printed Christmas card, a funeral announcement, general comments on events in the neighbourhood and letters of thanks for charitable donations. The quotations below provide a few examples from these:

- (3) Greeting! # What shall I wish thee? What would'st thou? # A laurel wreath around thy brow? [...] # [...] if the choice be left to me, # Then hearken what I wish for thee: # Be thine amid the world's wild strife # The comfort of a quiet life.
- (4) Sir, # The favour of your Company at the funeral of [...], my brother, from his house here, to the Warriston Cemetery, on Wednesday the 20th inst, at 2 o'clock p.m., will oblige, # Sir, # Your obedient Servant,
- (5) I have seen very few Berwickshire people since I came here, except at Hallow-fair when I saw two or three whom I knew. [...] I

have been at the theatre once [...] # Be so kind as tell Mr Mc Gilchrist that we have heard Mr Henderson every Sabbath almost, since we came here, & we all like him so much, that my Brother has taken seats in his Chapel,

- (6) My Dear Sir, # I have to thank you & your sisters for your very generous donation to the Gogar Church Fund. [...] # Thanking you & the Misses Blackwood for your kindly in-#terest in the Mission, # I remain, # Yours sincerely, # A. Bisset.

On the other hand, business correspondence includes contract conditions, letters of reference and job applications – examples from these are listed below:

- (7) Dear Sir # We beg to submit the following as the terms on which we publish your proposed work on Ancient Geography, # The publishers take upon themselves all the risk & ex-#penses attending the publication, in consideration of which, they are to be joint proprietors of the copyright of the work with the Author. # The selling price of the work to be two shillings & six pence, (2/6) and it is understood that its extent will not be such as to require a higher price_ # After deducting expenses attending publication, the profits to be equally divided betwixt author & publishers, # All copies of the work sold to be accounted for at trade price, twenty-five copies as twenty-four, and a commission of Five per cent on the gross amount of sales charged;
- (8) Dear Sir, # I consider David Thomson an excellent Coachman & during the time he has been with my late Father & sister has given entire satisfaction. # He is a very tidy servant both in the stable & in his person. seems to have a good knowledge of the care of horses _ and is honest _ sober & attentive. # I remain # Yr.s truly
- (9) Gentlemen # As I am in want of a situation as Tutor and as you are sometimes applied to procure such may I take the liberty of asking you to keep me in view. I have had much experience & in teaching as Tutor in Families of high respectability. [...] I am # Gentlemen # Your very Obed^t Serv^t

Indeed, the form and contents of job applications are seen to vary quite clearly in relation to sociological variables. When the interlocutor

is a ‘stranger’, such as in (9), the tone is definitely much more detached than in those cases in which the addressee is an acquaintance, to whom more details may be offered, as in (10):

- (10) Dear Mr Blackwood # I hope you will excuse my troubling you, but I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind my writing to you. I thought you might be in the way of knowing of some secretary work, or copying that one could do_ [...] I may remark that I have not said anything to Father & Mother about it, though I have often said I should seriously like to get some secretary work; however I am sure that if it was anything you had to do with they wouldn’t in the least mind my doing it_ [...] I did write to you once before on the subject, but I do not think you ever got the note, & I did not like to write again then_ # I fear this note is not particularly legible but I have a horrid pen and very little ink # Believe me # Yours sincerely # Annette K. M. White

The fact that the encoder’s family are acquainted with the recipient emerges from the reference to the fact that “Father and Mother” would not object to their daughter’s getting a job through the recipient. In addition, the fact that the encoder is a woman does not only prove important in relation to the politeness markers in her letter – it is also an important indicator of the ways in which (towards the end of the nineteenth century) the job market was changing and indeed becoming more dependent on such technical skills as typewriting. In (11) the same encoder clearly replies to an untraceable letter in which the recipient had advised her to learn short-hand and typing:

- (11) Dear Mr Blackwood # Very many thanks for your most kind note, it is very good of you to promise to bear me in mind_ I feel rather ashamed to have troubled you like that, when you were so busy, and hope you will forgive me_ # I am afraid I don’t see much chance of learning typewriting at present, but short-hand I may have an opportunity of learning about, and if I do shall certainly take the opportunity_ # With kind regards # Yours sincerely # Annette K.M. White

Business and personal comments may also merge when authors and publishers express their views on events that may affect their work. An

interesting, though perhaps somewhat cynical, instance is the following, in which continuation of the Crimean war may lead to that ‘kindness of fortune’ that is maintained interest in a certain topic on the part of the reading public:

- (12) As the additional expense of an impression of 1000 over that of 750 is so small we should propose to print the former number as affording the best chance of a good return, if by that kindness of fortune the interest of the subject is kept up by the continuance of the war, of which there seems every prospect now.

In other cases, forcefully political and (meta)historical comments may emerge, as in (13):

- (13) Dear Sir # [...] The press, on the whole, has received the book very well, & although the sale has not been great as yet, we feel very confident that it must do well soon. [...] People in this country can think of nothing but the war, which is against publications gener-ally. I know myself that my thoughts are almost continually fixed on the Crimea. Your Emperor¹⁰ seems to have managed admirably & the condition of your army is a most striking contrast to that of our poor fellows, Public indignation is roused to a pitch against our ministers for their hesitating, blundering, & gross mismanagement. They will be very roughly handled at the meeting of Parliament tomorrow night. – I hope turned out of Power ere long. In time of war there should always be a sort of dictatorship & it is utterly impossible that men so divided in council, as our ministers, can do what is required.

In this sense, then, the assumption of the distinction between business and private correspondence as an a priori dichotomy would appear to be somewhat artificial. Instead, the distinction should be discussed in terms of how specific linguistic traits characterize one typology or the other, and the extent to which such traits can co-occur.

In this respect, for instance, an investigation of forms of address occurring in different types of letters proves extremely interesting. The way in which the salutation appears to be ‘neutral’ (as in *Dear...*) or ap-

¹⁰ The recipient, Guilhaud de Lavergne, is French.

pears to be intensified by superlative forms and/or possessive adjectives (as in *(My) Dearest...*) sets the tone of the letter itself: more affectionate, less formal expressions are more likely to occur throughout the text in the latter case. Indeed, in private correspondence the salutation may actually be included in the text of the letter itself, as a real vocative – see (14) below:

- (14) Tho' I wrote to you yesterday dearest Mary it was in a hurry & I did not ¹/₂ answer your kind letter,

Closing greetings may also vary and be more or less emphatic, depending on the degree of social or psychological distance that the encoders wish to signal. In formal letters (both private and business), the signature is preceded by phrases like “Yours Most Sincerely” or “I am # Gentlemen # Your very Obedt Servt”; closeness and familiarity, instead, are signalled by formulas like “believe me to be ever most Affectionately Yours”, “believe me ever & ever Your Most Affectionate” or “I remain your most sincere Friend”. Indeed, in these cases the type of relationship existing between encoder and recipient is made explicit, as in “Your ever faithful & affectionate Husband”, or “your Affectionate Nephew”. Even in these instances, however, signatures normally include both name and surname, thus showing that as late as in the nineteenth century intimacy was seldom conveyed by use of first names only.¹¹

In addition to social distance between interlocutors, variation could also be dictated by topic – the least ‘involved’ documents are those in which legal action is announced or summarized, whereas offers of contracts and statements relating editions or re-prints are more ‘personalized’, as shown in examples from (15) to (18) below:

- (15) Dear Sirs, # I am to raise an action against the Representatives and Creditors of the late George Robinson Esquire Advocate in your name for the purpose of getting from the Court of Session a Discharge and Exoneration for the money you hold belonging to mr Robinson,

- (16) Dear Sir, # Mr & Mrs David Langs M.J. # In connection with the

¹¹ On eighteenth-century usage see Tieken Boon-van Ostade (2003).

late Alexander Morrison's Trust, the interest in which belonging to the late Mr. David Lang was assigned to his marriage Trustees in security of the annuity to Mrs. Lang, we some time ago, as acting for Mrs. Lang, and the representatives of the late Dr A. M. Lang raised a question under the Seventh purpose of the late Mr. Alexander Morrison's settlement whether the Trustees and their agents had not, proceeding on a wrong interpretation of the destination to surviving children, and their issue, erroneously divided the capital of the Trust estate.

- (17) My Dear Sir Archibald # Along with this I enclose our offer for the first edition of your new His-tory, which will I hope prove agreeable to you
- (18) My Dear Sir, # I enclose a statement showing the exact position of both editions of the History

Also in this case, however, it is interesting to see how 'business' letters may become more personalized after the recipients' (favourable) reply; in (19) and (20) the encoder switches from "Dear Sir" (in the request for a donation) to "My Dear Sir" (in the grateful acknowledgement of a donation).

- (19) Dear Sir, # I am at present trying to raise £ 10 as the Ratho contribution towards the expenses incurred for the Gogar Church Mission:
- (20) My Dear Sir, # I have to thank you & your sisters for your very generous donation to the Gogar Church Fund.

As we can see, the recipient's compliance with the encoder's request has brought them closer – the strategies of positive and negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) are thus employed consistently throughout, not just in relation to the interlocutor, but also in relation to the development of the connection between participants.

2.2. Microlinguistic choices: the dialectological interest

Given the sociolinguistic profiles of the encoders whose letters are found in the sampler so far, it is easy to predict that very few distinctive-

ly Scottish features may emerge. Indeed, only in one case have we come across what looks like Scots phonetic spelling in a private letter by James Blackwood:

- (21) Tell [...] I am jist gone to try M^{er} Roy & Robertson and if I hear any-#thing worth writing him in time I will do so

In fact, phonetic spellings occur much more frequently in emigrants' letters – examples are provided in (22) and (23). Whether these reflect 'standard' pronunciation or may be indexical of the encoder's own phonological renditions will deserve in-depth study beyond the scope of this paper.

- (22) Dear Brother it gives Both me + your sister great pleasher in hear-
ing stil that you intend Coming to this Country we are all well of
us in good health + in a tolarible prospres way + it ads a good dale
to our hopeness to so see you in the Spring it is a common talk
with the Children that there Uncels will be hear soon

- (23) it is my intention to purchish som property and that will be a grait
help to me although I would ben better pleased without that help
but since it is the ceas I may as well have it for money makes mon-
ey hear as well as aney other whear and rather mor so

As regards geographically-marked morphology, in (23) we observe a past conditional in which the perfect marker 'have' is omitted ("I would ben better pleased without that help"): a construction that was certainly not uncommon in Older Scots.¹² In private correspondence very interesting occurrences of dialectal syntax also occur. In the following two instances we find a subordinating use of 'and' in (24) and a double modal in (25):

¹² See DOST: "The same North Berwick Law This carling *wald* away *carreit*"; Gyre-carling 31. (b); "The bischops *wold* gladlie *passed* by the said petitions"; Rothes Affairs Kirk 7. (2). Although Visser (1963-73) provides no instances of this type of construction, Molencki (1999: 162) quotes two 15th-century occurrences. Grant and Dixon (1921: 120) also illustrate this omission of *have* after *should* and *would*, especially in negative clauses, with a quotation from Burns: "'Have' (*hae*, 'a) is constantly dropped after the auxiliaries 'would', 'should', etc. especially when followed by *-na*: [...] "O, Tibbie, I *hae* seen the day Ye *wad na been sae shy*." Burns (Song).

- (24) i have quiet made up my mind to take a home of my own and to serve my brothers no longer first serving one and then the other and getting nothing and me at the age that I am [i.e., despite the fact that I've now reached an age when I ought not to be expected to do so]
- (25) Tomorrow the monthly exam begins so I will not can write you a long letter

In fact, the stigma that eighteenth-century prescriptivism had placed on Scots usage in non-literary contexts was still unchallenged. Apart from these occasional, unintentional uses, Scots could only be employed deliberately in such jocular contexts as the Thompson/Johnson letters exchanged between Robert Louis Stevenson and his closest friend, Charles Baxter (see Dossena 2002) – these are the only cases in which Scots is used as an overall medium for expression, as in the following quotations:

- (26) A gentleman, to my thinkin' o't, 's a guid, plain, straucht, fine, canty, honest body, aye ready for a dram an' to be jölly wi' a freen; [...] I've kennt mony a leery - aye an ne'er saw'm sober forbye - 'at wad hae scunnered at the thocht. (Booth / Mehew 1995 – Letter 777, RLS to Charles Baxter)
- (27) Dear Thomson, # I feel I maun tak up ma pen to say Hoo's a wi' ye this last day o' the year [...] Could ye no spare a trifle till an auld freend Thōmson. Ye'll mind yin or twa o' thae auld stories a ken aboot ye. Ye're still inside hangin distance, ye ken, but it's no likely that Peter Thōmson wad betray a freen excep under the pressure o' an awaukened conscience. # A five pun note wad see me on for a whilie. # Yours, # Jōhnson (Ferguson / Waingrow 1956: 155-156 Charles Baxter to RLS)

In all other cases, Scots could only be employed in literary quotations (as in Stevenson's letter to his mother, in which he quotes Burns – letter 783 in the Booth/Mehew 1995 edition). However, discourse vividness could be enhanced by foreign expressions supplying *les mots justes* – for instance, we come across participant-oriented cases of intra- and intersentential code-switching when French and German are employed to focus the recipient's attention on a certain element in the text. In (28)

the encoder, addressing a French recipient, employs the word ‘redacteur’ to convey meaning in as transparent a way as possible, while bringing it closer to the recipient’s world:

- (28) Much interest is felt here about the state of feeling in France & it would be a good subject for a paper in the Magazine, of which I should explain that I am the redacteur. I hope to number you among my contributors as there must be many subjects connected with England on which you could write with great effect.

In (29), instead, the foreign language is employed as a kind of ‘we’-code that stresses the participants mutual bonds of friendship; in a way, it is consistent with the use of surnames in the salutation and the signature, typical of the sociolinguistic context in which the participants address each other:

- (29) Dear Simpson, # Many thanks for your kind note [...] Hoping, then, to see you, jetzt will ich nur sagen – Auf wiedersehen.

3. *Concluding remarks*

As we have shown with this preliminary overview of a sampler of nineteenth-century Scottish correspondence, the project concerning the compilation of a full-scale corpus of this genre appears to be very promising. This is both in terms of its potential for further in-depth linguistic and sociolinguistic investigation (especially as far as pragmatics is concerned), and in terms of the light it may shed on the history of real usage (more or less anglicized) in all those registers that were not meant for printing or for widespread circulation.

While these are arguably the vast majority of written texts normally produced, whether in a totally ‘standardized’ code or employing (to a greater or lesser extent) non-standard forms, the systematic study of usage patterns concerning lexis, syntax and discourse structure may contribute significantly to the development of our knowledge of varieties of English in a diachronic, diatopic and diastratic perspective. Especially from the social point of view, we should consider the fact that, in some nineteenth-century contexts, private correspondence was not so ‘private’

as we normally assume it to be today – indeed, letters could be or were even expected to be read in public, and this, from the linguistic point of view, might make our data subject to a certain kind of ‘observer’s paradox’. However, this is probably less important than the fact that crucial data are in fact available for the study of a range of uses in different areas at different points in time, and to assess their degree of distinctiveness. Within this framework, our overall aim is to offer an additional tool for the dialectological investigation of Scots and Scottish English in the Late Modern period.

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