Scots in the Census: validity and reliability[1]

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This paper takes a preliminary look at the results of the Scots question in the 2011 Census, the first Census to include this question, and describes some broad patterns at the level of council areas. All data are from the official census data website ('Scotland's Census', n.d.).

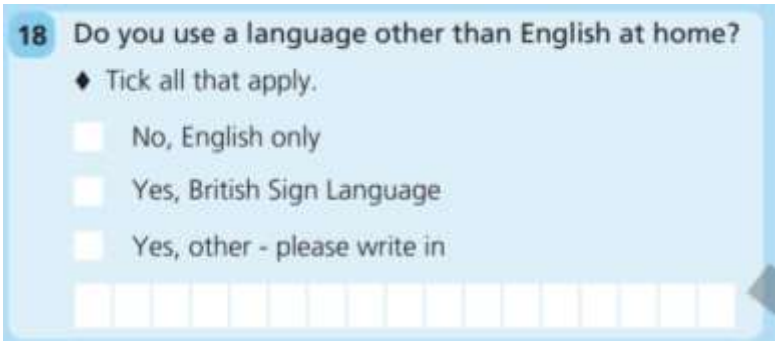
1. The question

Figure 1 shows the main question in the 2011 Census relating to the Scots language, question 16 ('Census questionaire (2011)', n.d.). Scots could also appear as a write-in answer to Question 18 (Figure 2).

Figure 1: 2011 Census, question 16

[1] Published on the Scots Language Centre website, http://www.scotslanguage.com/, 2016. A shorter version of this paper was read at the Triennial Conference of the Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, 12-14 August 2015. I would like to thank Michael Hance for suggesting the paper in the first instance and for reading it in my absence at the conference. Thanks are due also to Clive Young for comments on the draft.

Figure 2: 2011 Census, question 18



2. The data

NRS (National Records of Scotland) has already done some analysis before presenting the data, using the same headings as for Gaelic and English.[2] Table 1 shows the NRS data headings, together with the simpler labels used here.

Table 1: categories of response to Question 16

NRS data heading	**term used here**		
No skills in Scots	no skills	no skills	no skills
Understands but does not speak, read or write Scots	understanding only	passive participant	some skills
Reads but does not speak or write Scots	passive reader		
Speaks but does not read or write Scots	non-literate speaker	speaker	
Speaks and reads but does not write Scots	reading speaker		
Speaks, reads and writes Scots	all skills		
Other combination of skills in Scots	other	other	

In what follows, we shall mainly consider the broad category of those who have 'some skills'. An important distinction can also be made between those who have active and those who have passive skills, but we shall avoid the potentially confusing term 'passive speaker' (really a non-speaker who understands the language), and instead call people with passive competence 'passive participants'. Table 2 shows the percentages of each category.

[2] Unfortunately this means that simple statistics for the four categories of 'understand', 'speak', 'read', and 'write' are not all recoverable.

Table 2: Percentages of each category of response to Question 16

skill level			**% of Scottish total**
no skills			**62.3**
some skills	passive participant	understanding only	5.2
		passive reader	2.1
		total	**7.3**
	speaker	non-literate speaker	3.5
		reading speaker	2.6
		all skills	23.9
		total	**30.0**
	other		**0.3**

3. Validity

A question testing exercise was carried out before the 2001 Census and it was clear from this that there were issues of validity ([Máté], 1996; Macafee, 2000). A language is an assemblage of behaviours. In asking people to categorise their language, we are asking them to make a statement not only about their own behaviour but about that of others, i.e. does their language behaviour belong in the same category as that of certain other people? The criteria for identifying Scots are not taught, or anywhere laid down, so while superficially everyone was answering the same questions about 'Scots', in their own minds individuals would have been relating it to different concepts.

It was to address this problem and begin to establish a shared conception of Scots that the Scots Language Centre created the 'Aye Can Speak Scots' (2011) website before the 2011 Census. Nevertheless, there remain a number of validity issues that mean we have to interpret the Census results with caution. Some are specific to Scots; others apply to any language question:

a) language abilities are intangible and might not be correctly evaluated when one person is filling in the form for another;

b) the parts of the question that ask about reading and writing hardly apply to the very youngest age group. Nevertheless 4.7% of 3-4 year olds were said to be able to read and write Scots. In general, the majority (63.5%) of those who claim 'some skills' actually claim 'all skills', though we might wonder how many of the 1,225,622 people who say they can write Scots ever actually exercise that skill. The thought process behind the high figures might be similar to that adopted by the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, who regarded the traditional dialect forms as a 'potential', not necessarily as everyday usage (*The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*, I: 7);

c) there is no objective boundary between Scots and English, and no consensus about where the boundary should be placed. Respondents who would be judged by at least some listeners to be Scots speakers might identify their own speech as falling short of their conception of Scots. In other words, they might reserve the label 'Scots' for what Aitken (1981, 2015) called

'Ideal Scots', whether that is based on a rural dialect, the speech of an older generation, or a literary model such as the poetry and songs of Burns. Urban speakers, perhaps especially Glaswegians, tend to label their own speech as 'slang' (Menzies, 1991; Macafee, 1994; [Máté], 1996; Macafee, 2000), but this does not necessarily mean that they have a negative attitude towards it, or a positive attitude towards a more traditional form of Scots: there is a tendency in Glasgow to disparage language that is perceived as old-fashioned or 'couthie' (O'Donnell, 2003: 219). This might have resulted in under-reporting;

d) conversely, respondents who would be judged by at least some listeners to be Scottish English speakers might identify their own speech as Scots, whether from motives of solidarity with the language, or simply from a liberal view of where the boundary lies on the Scots-English continuum. This might help to explain the unexpectedly high figures in the Highlands and Islands (see below);

e) the 1996 question testing showed that response rates were rather sensitive to terminology. Respondents might not identify with the label 'Scots', regarding themselves instead as speakers of a local dialect, e.g. the Doric, or preferring the older term 'Scotch' (on which more below). 'Scots' can also be mistakenly understood to mean Gaelic ([Máté], 1996; Macafee, 2000), though the context of Question 16 – with Scots, English and Gaelic listed together – should have clarified this;

f) finally, there is another issue that was laboured by the NRS when the data were first announced ('Statistical Bulletin ... Release 2A', 2013), with the result that the figures for Scots were misunderstood and underplayed in the media (Hance, 2013; [Horsbroch], 2013; Young, 2013). Many people evidently see Scots as sub-set of English, since "a significant number" of respondents ticked all the boxes for 'Scots' but left 'English' blank in Question 16, and only 55,817 wrote 'Scots' for question 18, "Do you use a language other than English at home?" As others have pointed out, this issue of the interaction with the English questions does not in any way invalidate the figures for Scots.

4. Reliability

Perhaps surprisingly, given the many validity issues, the results appear reliable. They are internally consistent: for instance the age patterning is similar between the sexes. There are a small number of patterns by age that recur, and each traditional dialect area has a typical pattern or patterns, as we shall see. Also – and very importantly, as Hance (2013) and Horsbroch (2013) emphasise – the overall figure (30% speakers, rising to 37.6% when the 'passive participant' and 'other' groups are included) is close to the estimates from two market research surveys conducted as part of the 1996 question testing (31% and 33%) ([Máté], 1996: Table 4).[3]

[3] A third survey produced a figure of 17%, but the wording was incoherent (Macafee, 2000: 10).

5. Sex differences

At first glance, sex differences appear to be small. The percentage of females claiming some skill in Scots is very slightly larger in most age groups, but the position is reversed above age 65 (Table 3).

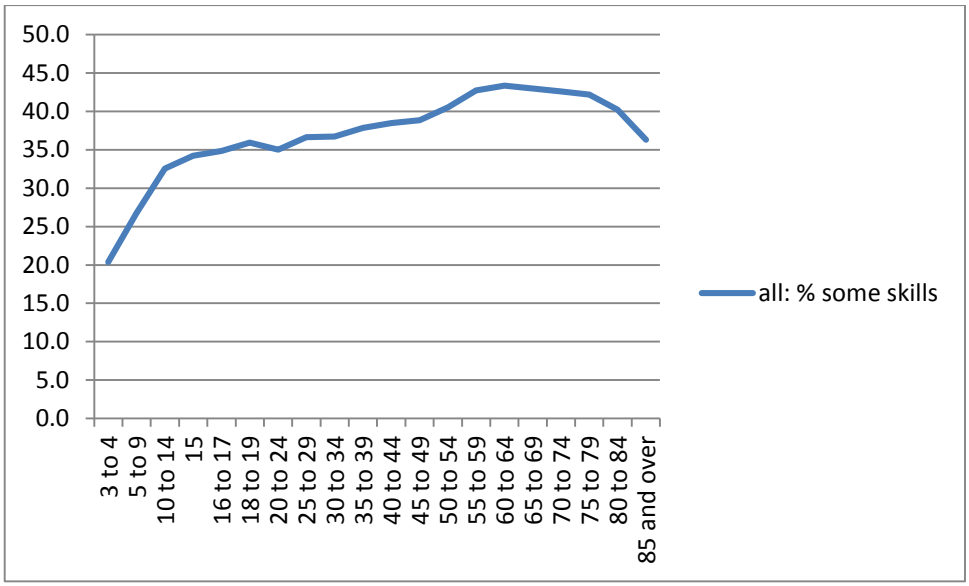
Table 3: 'Some skills' by age and sex

	All		Males		Females	
Age	**n**	***%***	**n**	***%***	**n**	***%***
Total	**5,118,223**	***37.7***	**2,477,211**	***37.5***	**2,641,012**	***37.9***
3 to 4	115,641	*20.4*	58,991	*20.3*	56,650	*20.4*
5 to 9	269,617	*26.8*	137,976	*26.7*	131,641	*26.9*
10 to 14	291,615	*32.5*	149,615	*32.3*	142,000	*32.8*
15	62,278	*34.2*	32,291	*34.1*	29,987	*34.4*
16 to 17	126,266	*34.9*	64,599	*34.8*	61,667	*35.0*
18 to 19	142,282	*35.9*	71,225	*35.9*	71,057	*36.0*
20 to 24	363,940	*35.0*	181,059	*35.4*	182,881	*34.6*
25 to 29	345,632	*36.6*	169,961	*36.7*	175,671	*36.6*
30 to 34	321,695	*36.7*	158,646	*36.6*	163,049	*36.9*
35 to 39	340,056	*37.9*	166,230	*37.4*	173,826	*38.3*
40 to 44	394,698	*38.5*	191,440	*38.1*	203,258	*38.8*
45 to 49	410,929	*38.9*	200,319	*38.4*	210,610	*39.3*
50 to 54	375,827	*40.5*	184,198	*39.8*	191,629	*41.2*
55 to 59	330,891	*42.7*	162,197	*42.0*	168,694	*43.4*
60 to 64	336,522	*43.4*	164,725	*43.3*	171,797	*43.4*
65 to 69	261,198	*43.0*	124,671	*43.1*	136,527	*42.9*
70 to 74	220,594	*42.6*	100,691	*42.8*	119,903	*42.5*
75 to 79	178,114	*42.2*	76,818	*42.7*	101,296	*41.8*
80 to 84	124,525	*40.2*	48,592	*41.3*	75,933	*39.5*
85+	105,903	*36.3*	32,967	*38.1*	72,936	*35.5*

6. Age differences

The overall distribution (i.e. the whole of Scotland, both sexes) of 'some skills' by age is shown in Figure 3.

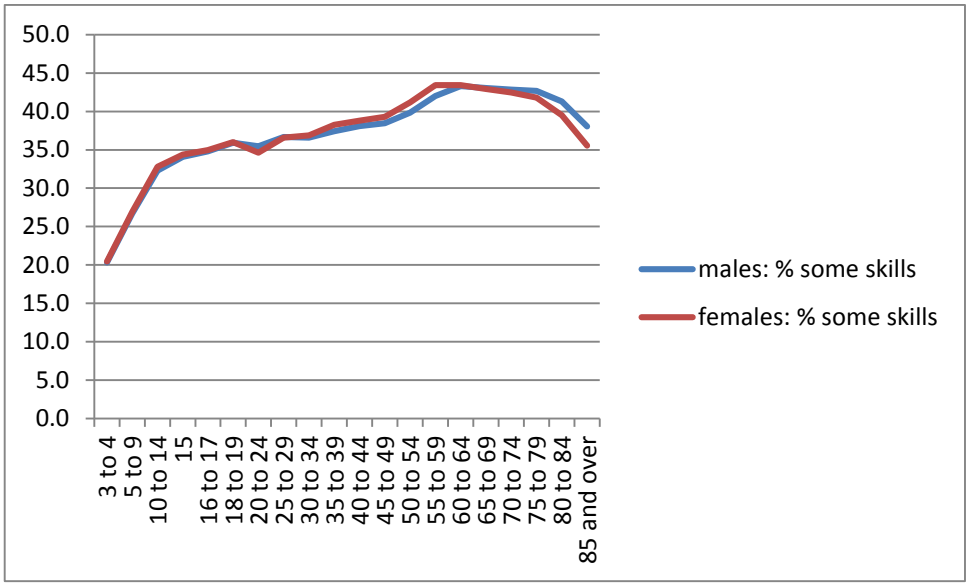
Figure 3: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming some skills in Scots by age, 2011 Census



The NRC's very fine age divisions at the younger end of the scale (i.e. below age 20) have been retained here, but this does mean that all of the graphs are more spread out at that end: the drop off to the left would look even steeper if five-year intervals had been used, as in the rest of the range. However, there is room for optimism about the youngest groups, as the drop-off may be a case of *age-grading*, i.e. as they get older more of the respondents may acquire Scots language skills, and appear in future Censuses as having 'some skills'.

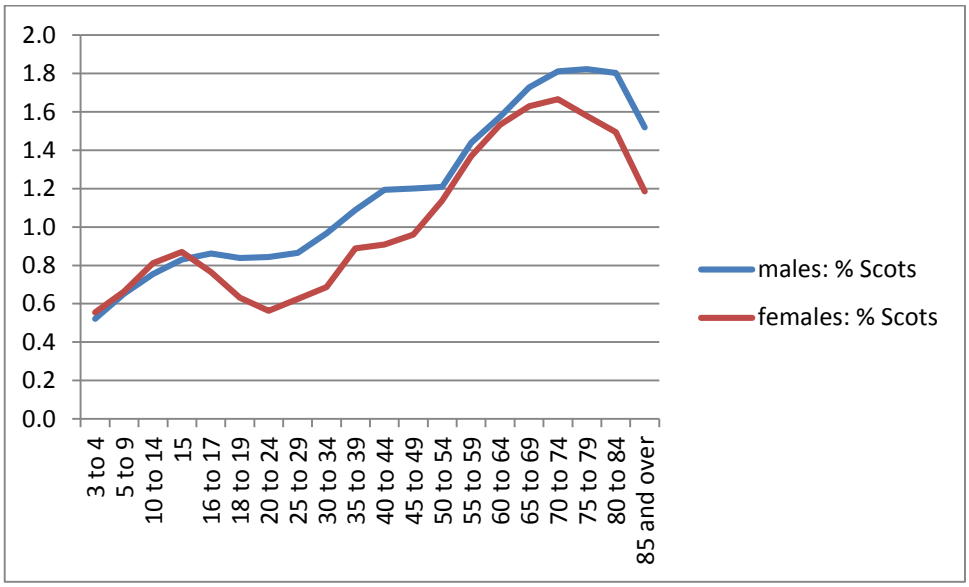
A puzzling feature is the drop-off to the right. This is evident for men, but even more so for women, and the overall effect is magnified by the fact that the oldest age groups are disproportionately female (cf. Table 3).

Figure 4: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming some skills in Scots by age and sex, 2011 Census



The same pattern also appears amongst the small number of people who wrote 'Scots' in response to Question 18 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over listing 'Scots' as a language other than English used at home, by age and sex, 2011 Census



It seems unlikely that Scots language skills are really less prevalent amongst those born in the 1920s than amongst those born in the 1940s or 1950s, especially when we recall that the 'missing' respondents are saying that they do not even understand Scots. The tendency of women to favour prestige speech varieties (well documented in sociolinguistics from Trudgill,

1972, onwards) may be a factor, but it can only be part of the story, as men show the same pattern, albeit not quite so strongly. The figures may conceivably be skewed by class differences in longevity. It is also possible that they are under-reported, for some of the reasons listed above.

However, the fact that the phenomenon is age-related suggests that we should be looking for something that has changed over time. A candidate is the terminology used for the language. For the oldest age groups, the term 'Scots' may still be perceived as an affectation, in contrast to 'Scotch' (Aitken, 1972, 2015). Cf. the well-known quotation from Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song*:

> 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!
> (quoted from the Pan edn., 1973: 153)

Indeed, the term 'Scotch' was used spontaneously by some of the people interviewed in the 1996 Census question testing, mainly but not only by the elderly (Horburgh and Murdoch, [1997]; Macafee, 2000). Similarly, Macafee (1994) found in Glasgow that 'Scotch' was mainly used by people born before about 1940 (i.e., at the 2011 Census, the over-70s).

7. Geography

We turn now to examine geographical differences. The data used here are those for the council areas, which can be grouped to give a broad approximation to the traditional dialect areas[4] (as mapped in *The Scottish National Dictionary* (SND), and later somewhat simplified and modified in terminology in *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (CSD)). Table 4 shows the groupings and also the percentage of the Scottish population in each area. For Caithness and Nairn, 2007 electoral ward figures have been taken, in order not to lose these two (largely) Scots-speaking areas within Highland. The rest of Highland is referred to here as 'Highland remainder'. The analysis does not in any way depend on these groupings: they merely provide a linguistic-geographical context in which to compare patterns. West Central, which contains 40.3% of the Scottish population, has been further sub-divided into three groups on the basis that these show different age patterns. For the populations of the cities, see Table 5. (It should be borne in mind, however, that Glasgow is only part of a larger urban conglomeration.)

[4] Which themselves often follow the old (pre-1975) county boundaries.

Table 4: Traditional dialect areas in relation to Census areas

Dialect area (based on SND & CSD)		**Council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn)**	**% of Scottish population**
Insular		Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands	0.8
North-East and north Northern		Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Moray, Nairn, Caithness	11.2
south Northern		Angus, Dundee City	5.0
northern East Central		Fife, Clackmannanshire, Perth & Kinross, Stirling	12.4
southern East Central		Falkirk, Midlothian, West Lothian, East Lothian, City of Edinburgh	18.7
West Central	hinterland	East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Argyll & Bute	12.5
	affluent suburbs	East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire,	3.7
	urban core	Glasgow City, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	24.1
	total		**40.3**
South-West		South Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway	5.0
Southern		Scottish Borders	2.2
Highlands and Islands		Highland remainder (i.e. Highland minus Caithness and Nairn), Eilean Siar	4.5

Table 5: Cities: percentage of Scottish population

cities	**% of Scottish population**
Dundee	2.8
Aberdeen	4.2
Edinburgh	9.0
Glasgow	11.2
total	**27.2**

7.1 'Some skills'

In what follows percentage figures are used, but for absolute numbers see Table 6.

Table 6: Responses to Question 16 (2011 Census) by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn) (in descending order of percentage of 'some skills')

	population	**understanding only**	**passive reader**	**non-literate speaker**	**reading speaker**	**all skills**	**other**	**some skills**	
								n	*%*
Scotland	**5,118,223**	**267,412**	**107,025**	**179,295**	**132,709**	**1,225,622**	**17,381**	**1,929,444**	***37.7***
Shetland	22,326	1,514	728	1,362	1,080	8,421	120	13,225	*59.2*
Aberdeenshire	243,826	15,709	5,105	17,772	13,739	87,286	1,013	140,624	*57.7*
Moray	90,178	6,197	1,833	5,587	4,197	30,967	415	49,196	*54.6*
Orkney	20,704	1,214	669	1,024	819	6,560	104	10,390	*50.2*
Angus	112,447	6,566	2,397	4,997	4,314	33,808	432	52,514	*46.7*
East Ayrshire	118,660	5,120	1,498	5,193	3,348	38,620	423	54,202	*45.7*
Aberdeen	215,597	13,883	4,793	10,087	8,322	57,897	780	95,762	*44.4*
Fife	352,558	17,974	7,270	13,888	10,007	98,999	1,229	149,367	*42.4*
Borders	110,514	6,913	2,860	4,834	3,880	27,787	457	46,731	*42.3*
Dumfries & Galloway	146,765	8,640	2,950	6,351	4,675	38,302	653	61,571	*42.0*
Clackmannanshire	49,673	2,519	884	1,904	1,346	13,718	170	20,541	*41.4*
Falkirk	150,340	6,831	2,323	5,977	4,029	42,262	481	61,903	*41.2*
North Ayrshire	133,728	5,959	2,108	4,571	3,402	37,680	463	54,183	*40.5*
South Ayrshire	109,538	5,833	2,280	3,889	3,264	28,707	358	44,331	*40.5*
Perth & Kinross	142,277	9,687	4,251	4,886	4,828	33,124	526	57,302	*40.3*
Midlothian	80,280	4,025	1,571	3,119	2,080	21,162	252	32,209	*40.1*
East Lothian	96,200	5,634	2,363	3,494	2,755	22,657	329	37,232	*38.7*
West Lothian	168,242	7,581	2,717	6,240	3,860	43,880	533	64,811	*38.5*
Dundee	142,489	7,395	2,843	4,966	3,636	34,866	530	54,236	*38.1*
Caithness	10,377	650	253	367	309	2,241	56	3,876	*37.4*
Stirling	87,645	5,400	2,746	2,760	2,404	18,790	395	32,495	*37.1*
Nairn	11,695	754	349	284	251	2,371	43	4,052	*34.6*
South Lanarkshire	303,470	12,703	4,346	9,205	6,175	69,411	860	102,700	*33.8*
North Lanarkshire	325,465	11,403	2,869	9,628	5,136	78,389	871	108,296	*33.3*
West Dunbartonshire	87,590	3,436	930	2,409	1,443	20,644	228	29,090	*33.2*
Renfrewshire	169,077	6,940	2,530	4,427	3,102	36,943	491	54,433	*32.2*
Edinburgh	460,103	29,379	17,459	11,394	11,040	75,457	1,607	146,336	*31.8*
Inverclyde	78,995	2,991	1,023	2,127	1,152	17,353	243	24,889	*31.5*
Glasgow	572,633	26,331	10,137	15,575	8,647	117,487	1,842	180,019	*31.4*
Argyll & Bute	85,684	5,380	2,384	2,171	1,703	14,716	319	26,673	*31.1*
Highland remainder	202,534	12,539	5,570	4,606	3,905	34,117	701	61,438	*30.3*
East Dunbartonshire	101,999	4,955	2,465	2,227	2,058	16,733	226	28,664	*28.1*
East Renfrewshire	87,685	4,050	2,004	1,710	1,568	12,786	178	22,296	*25.4*
Eilean Siar	26,929	1,307	517	264	235	1,481	53	3,857	*14.3*

Table 7: 'Some skills' in Scots (2011 Census): Rank order by percentage and by absolute number

'Some skill' in Scots	
rank by density (%)	**rank by absolute number**
Shetland	Glasgow
Aberdeenshire	Fife
Moray	Edinburgh
Orkney	Aberdeenshire
Angus	North Lanarkshire
East Ayrshire	South Lanarkshire
Aberdeen	Aberdeen
Fife	West Lothian
Borders	Falkirk
Dumfries & Galloway	Dumfries & Galloway
Clackmannanshire	Highland remainder
Falkirk	Perth & Kinross
North Ayrshire	Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire	Dundee
Perth & Kinross	East Ayrshire
Midlothian	North Ayrshire
East Lothian	Angus
West Lothian	Moray
Dundee	Borders
Caithness	South Ayrshire
Stirling	East Lothian
Nairn	Stirling
South Lanarkshire	Midlothian
North Lanarkshire	West Dunbartonshire
West Dunbartonshire	East Dunbartonshire
Renfrewshire	Argyll & Bute
Edinburgh	Inverclyde
Inverclyde	East Renfrewshire
Glasgow	Clackmannanshire
Argyll & Bute	Shetland
Highland remainder	Orkney
East Dunbartonshire	Nairn
East Renfrewshire	Caithness
Eilean Siar	Eilean Siar

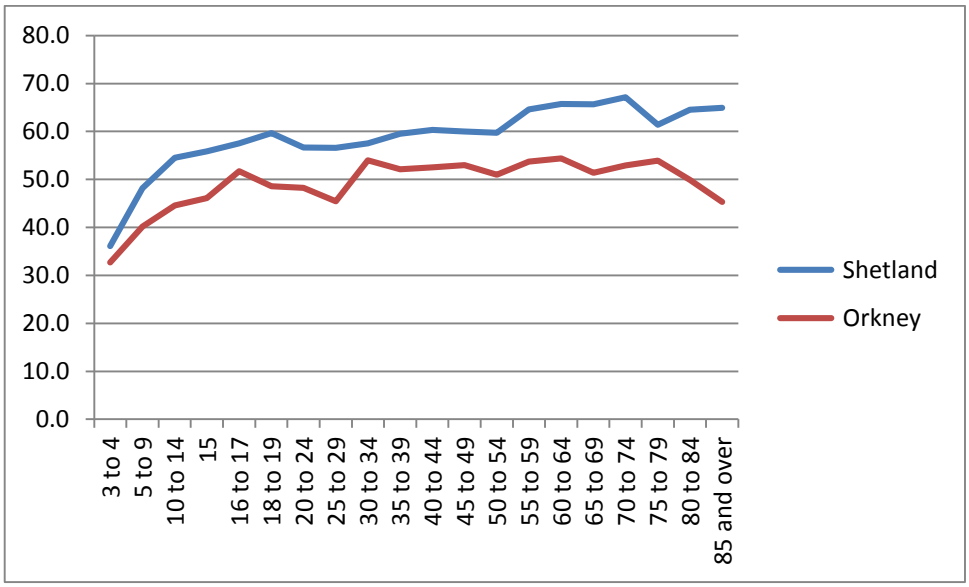
The council areas vary so widely in population size that the rank ordering by absolute numbers is very different from the rank ordering by percentages (Table 7). Glasgow and Edinburgh, unsurprisingly, rise into prominence when we consider absolute numbers rather than percentages. And it is worth noting that Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Fife and Dumfries &

Galloway are areas that rank high on both criteria, which perhaps gives them a special significance for the future of the language.

Apart from the very oldest age groups, discussed above, there is a general pattern of decline with decreasing age. The graphs for many of the dialect areas closely follow the overall Scottish graph (Figure 3): these include Southern Scots, the South-West and most of what CSD calls Central Scots. We shall focus on those that are in some way different.

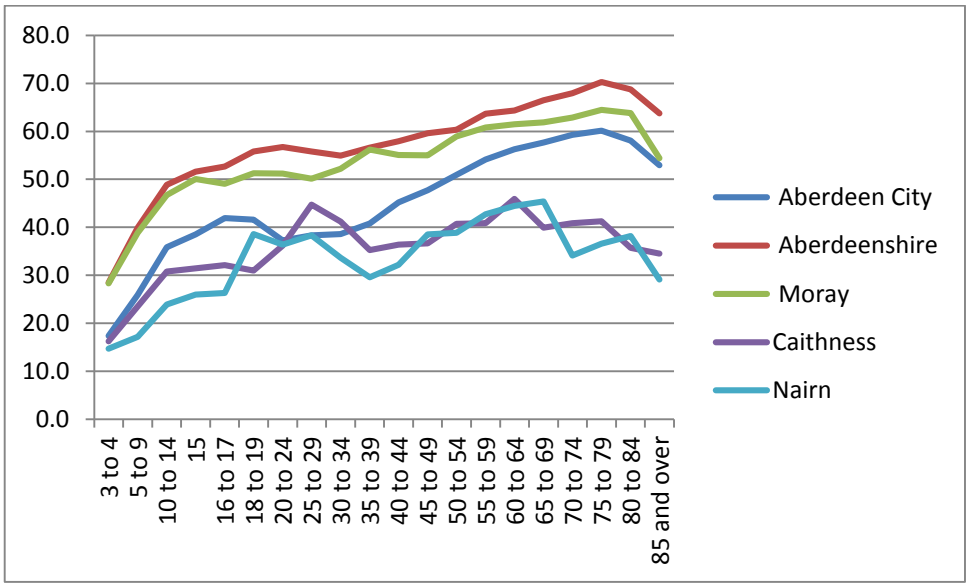
Shetland, and at a somewhat lower level Orkney, offer the best case scenario, with a high percentage claiming 'some skills' and a relatively flat distribution across the adult groups. The level of Scots skills might even be under-represented, given the historical lack of identification with Scotland and Scots in the Northern Isles.

Figure 6: Insular dialect area: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



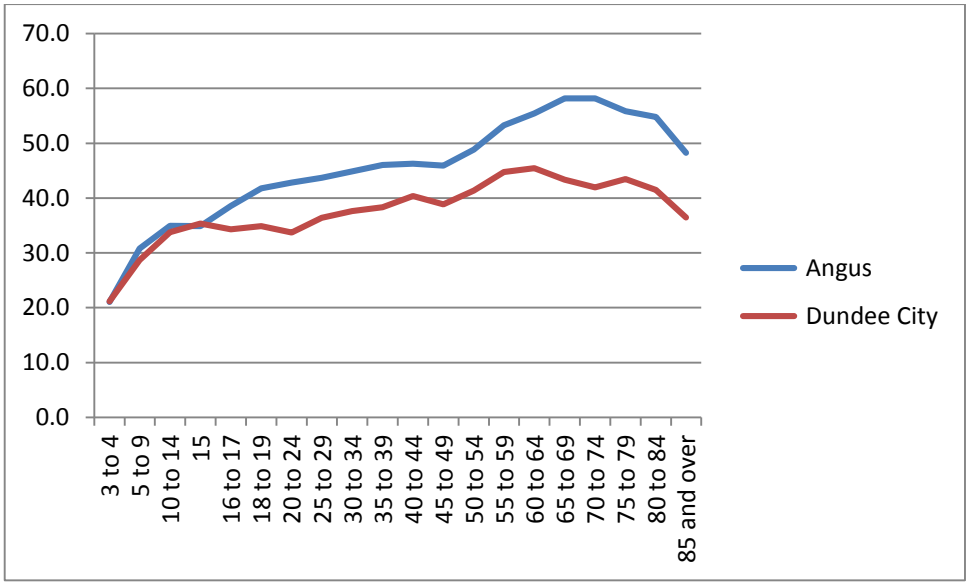
For Northern Scots from Aberdeenshire northwards to Caithness (Figure 7), there are two patterns. Aberdeen city, Aberdeenshire and Moray all show a steady decline, and Aberdeen falls particularly steeply from a high starting point. Its figures are lower than the surrounding area, a pattern seen also with the other cities (below). Caithness and Nairn have a more erratic graph that perhaps reflects inward migration associated with Dounreay nuclear reactor and with RAF Kinloss respectively.

Figure 7: North-East and north Northern dialect areas: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



In the southern part of Northern Scots (Figure 8), it is noticeable that, for a non-urban area, Angus shows a particularly steep decline. The influx of migrant workers in the agricultural sector in Angus may not be irrelevant (*Angus Migrant Workers Study and Strategy*, 2007).

Figure 8: south Northern dialect area: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



The group of counties that roughly correspond to West Central Scots can be broken down into smaller groups according to their patterns by age. What might be called the 'hinterland' (Figure

9) follows the overall Scottish pattern, but the graphs are mostly rather flatter. What might be called the 'urban core' (Figure 11 below) is also rather flat by age, but at a lower numerical level.

Figure 9: West Central dialect area, 'hinterland': percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census

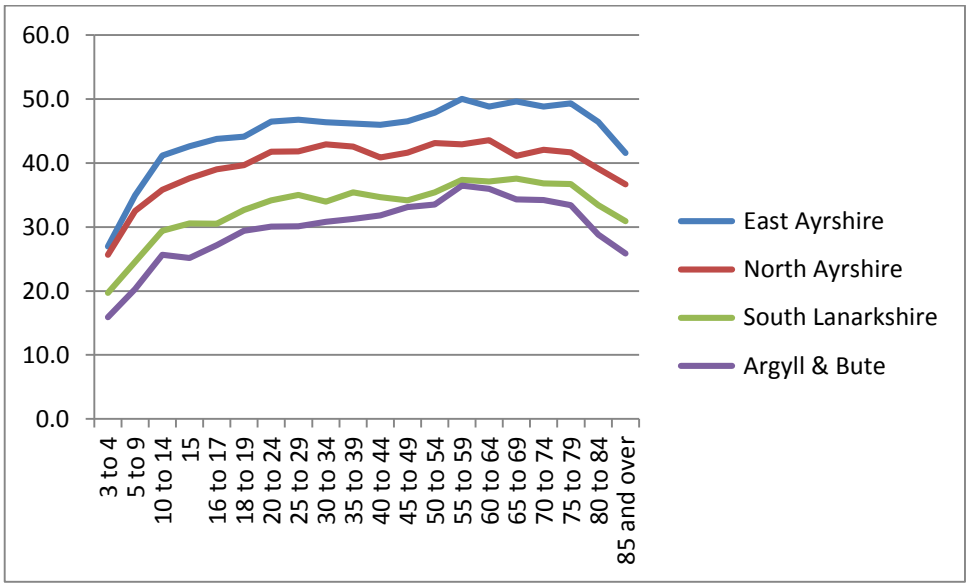
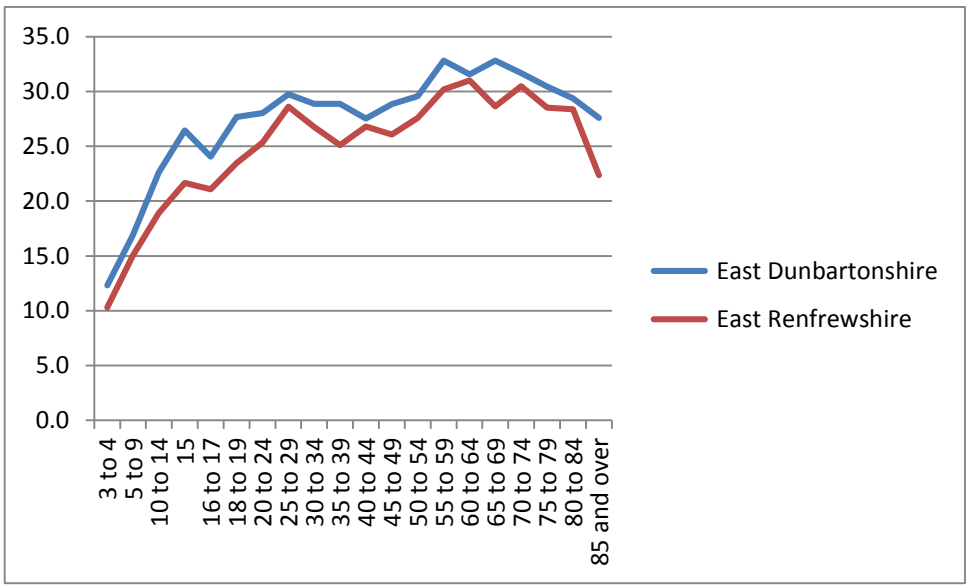


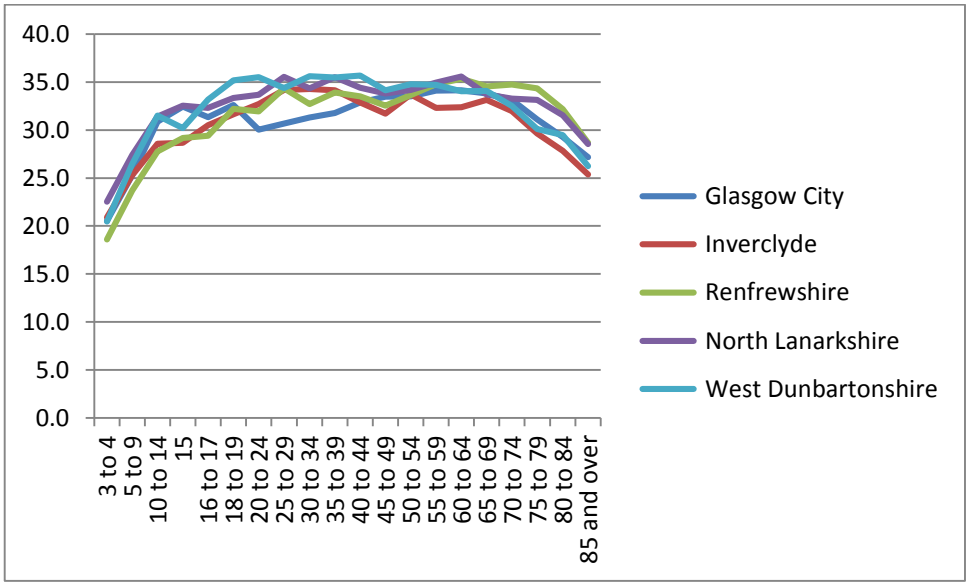
Figure 10: West Central dialect area, 'affluent suburbs': percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



The pattern in what we might call the ‘affluent suburbs’ of West Central (Figure 10), with a marked dip in the thirties to early fifties, is reminiscent of Caithness and Nairn.

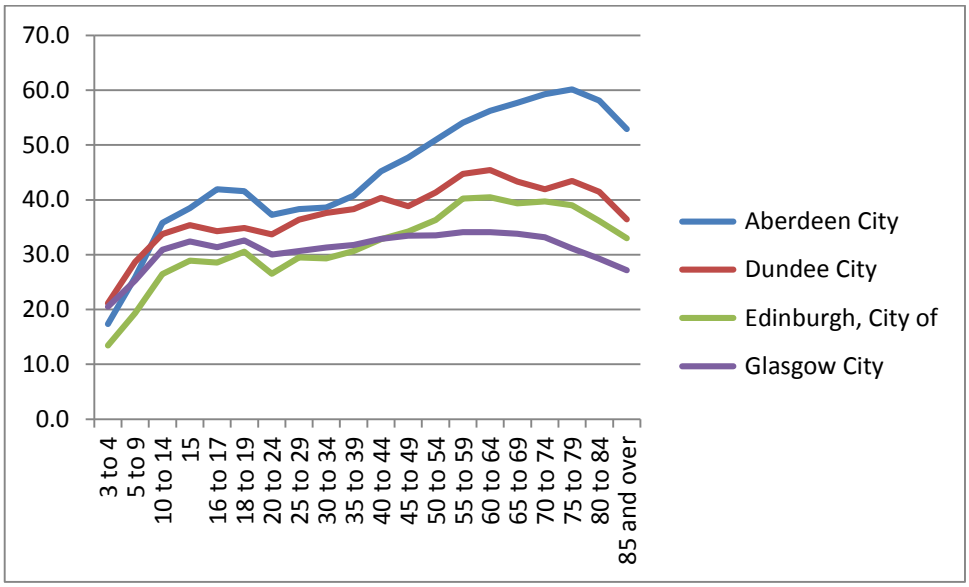
The ‘urban core’ of West Central (Figure 11) shows a rather flat pattern across the central area of the graphs. As we’ve seen, there are issues about the definition of the thin urban dialect as ‘Scots’, and the figures may well be under-reported.

Figure 11: West Central dialect area, ‘urban core’: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming ‘some skills’ in Scots by age, 2011 Census



A pattern that the cities have in common is that they are all at lower levels than their surrounding areas. When we compare them with each other (Figure 12), the steep decline in Aberdeen and the relative flatness of the Glasgow graph are particularly evident.

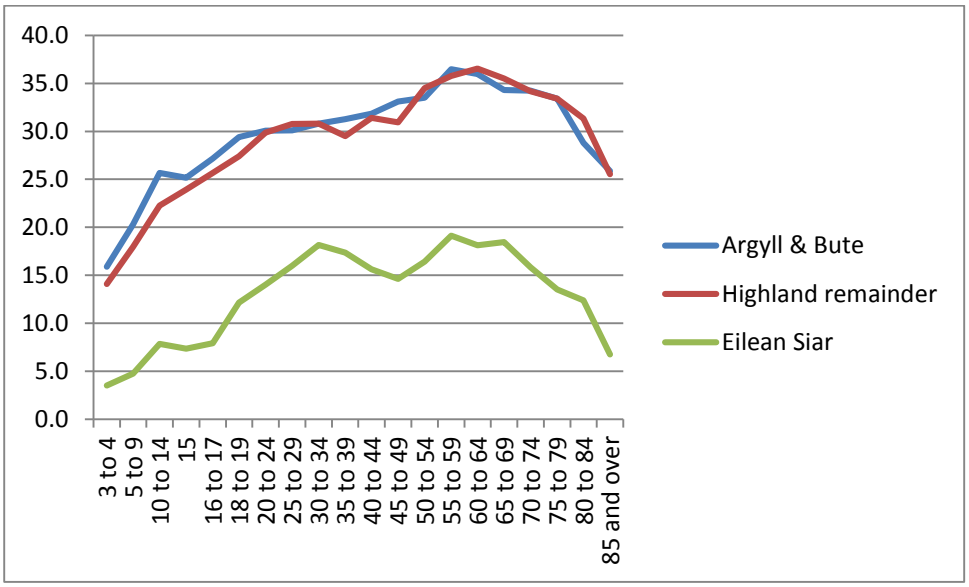
Figure 12: cities: percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



The cities mostly show a slight rise at age 18-19. A similar reversal of the downward trend is also seen in a number of other areas, but often in the twenties age group. The size of the effect varies, and it demands further breakdown into different skill categories, together with statistical testing, which has not been undertaken here. However, in some graphs, including Figure 12, there is unmistakeably something of interest going on. It may reflect a more positive attitude towards Scots in education, but it is not clear why it should manifest in slightly different age cohorts in different places.

Finally, there is the part of the country outside the core Scots-speaking area (Figure 13). Highland council (minus Caithness and Nairn), which we are calling 'Highland remainder', is at a surprisingly high level: Argyll & Bute (whose main population centres are traditionally considered to be within the Scots-speaking area) is included for comparison in Figure 13. Even the Western Isles have a substantial percentage of people claiming skills in Scots.

Figure 13: areas not traditionally considered Scots-speaking (with Argyll & Bute for comparison): percentage of respondents aged 3 and over claiming 'some skills' in Scots by age, 2011 Census



8. More detailed analyses

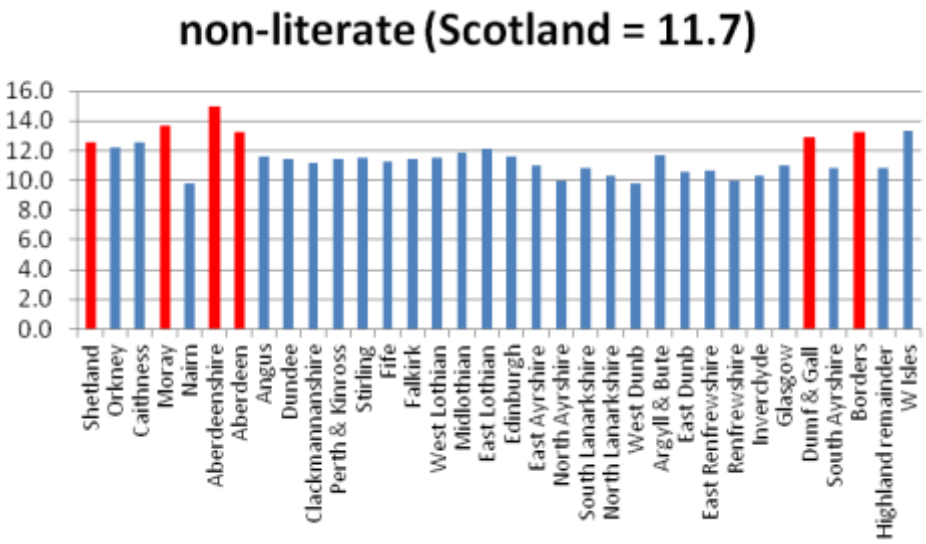
If we can assume, then, from the regularity of the patterning at a broad level, that the results are reliable, it is worth drilling down a little further to see what they can tell us about the state of the language around the country. We shall look below at a few more details.

8.1. Speakers

If we focus on the *speakers* of the language, one thing we can notice is that there is a regional dimension to literacy. In Figure 14, the council areas are arranged very roughly from north to south. Outside of the Central dialect area – on which literary Scots is based – some other areas have slightly higher levels of non-literacy[5] (though this response is still very much outnumbered by those who say they have all skills). It is probably relevant that some of these areas – Shetland and the North-East in particular – have traditions of local literature in very broad dialect, so the bar is high.

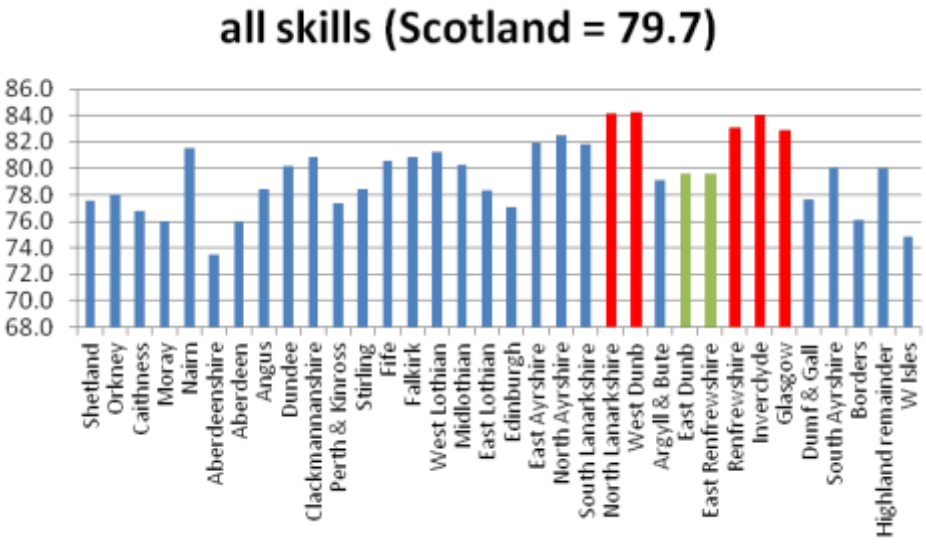
[5] And likewise of of reading without writing.

Figure 14: percentage of Scots speakers who are non-literate in Scots, by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn), 2011 Census



By contrast, in large parts of West Central (though not so much in the affluent suburbs), speaking Scots is particularly likely to bring with it the ability to write as well: this is implied by 'all skills' (Figure 15). Literacy in Scots is not, apparently, seen as particularly difficult in this part of the country.

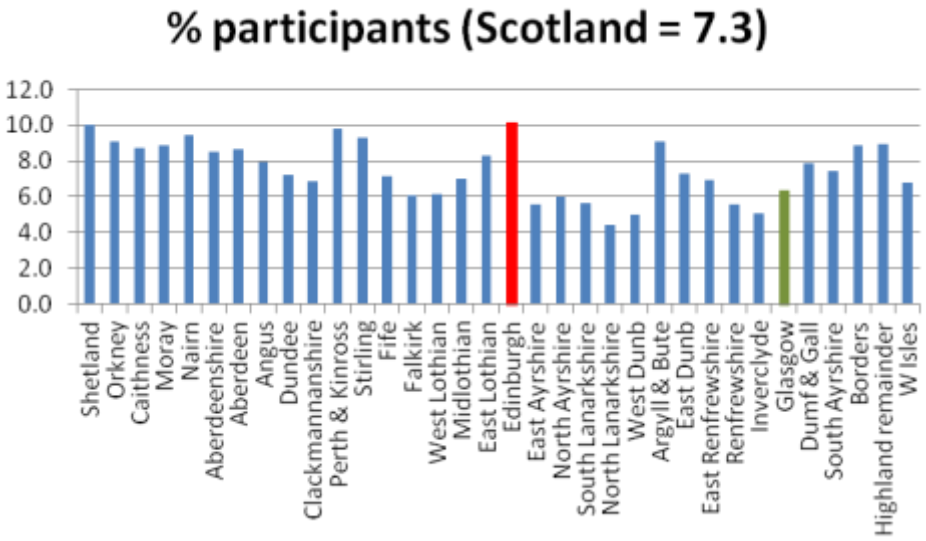
Figure 15: percentage of Scots speakers who claim all skills in Scots, by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn), 2011 Census



8.2. Participants

Individuals with passive skills, our 'passive participants', comprise 7.3% of the Scottish total. Some regional variation is visible in Figure 16.

Figure 15: percentage of passive participants in Scots, by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn), 2011 Census



Edinburgh is one place that stands out, with a particularly high percentage, while parts of West Central, including Glasgow itself, are below average. The ethnic mix of the population may be relevant to this difference between the two cities. As far as the use of a non-indigenous language in the home is concerned, Glasgow, at 12.2%, is on the same level as Edinburgh and Aberdeen (Table 8), but if we consider the 'African' and 'Middle Eastern & Asian' population – as being groups at both a linguistic and cultural distance from the indigenous population – Glasgow has both high absolute numbers, and a very high percentage of its non-UK population coming from these sources (Table 9).

Table 8: Cities: language other than English/Scots/Gaelic/British Sign Language used in the home, 2011 Census

	all (age 3 or over)	**non-indigenous home language**	***% non-indigenous home language***
Dundee	142,489	10,657	*7.5*
Aberdeen	215,597	26,116	*12.1*
Edinburgh	460,103	56,315	*12.2*
Glasgow	572,633	69,758	*12.2*
Scotland	**5,118,223**	**284,352**	***5.6***

Table 9: Cities: origin of population, 2011 Census

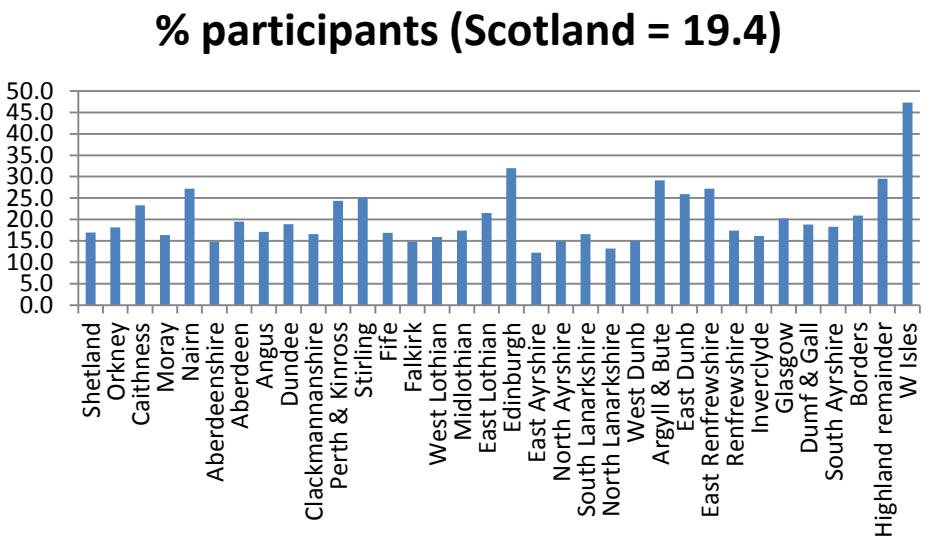
	all	**other UK origin**	***% other UK***	**non-UK origin**	***% non-UK***	**African/ Middle Eastern/ Asian**	***% African/ Middle Eastern/ Asian***	***African/ Middle Eastern/ Asian as % of non-UK***
Dundee	**147,268**	10,773	*7.3*	13,253	*9.0*	6,272	*4.3*	*47.3*
Aberdeen	**222,793**	20,177	*9.1*	35,436	*15.9*	14,593	*6.6*	*41.2*
Edinburgh	**476,626**	66,302	*13.9*	75,698	*15.9*	29,430	*6.2*	*38.9*
Glasgow	**593,245**	34,395	*5.8*	72,607	*12.2*	43,418	*7.3*	*59.8*
Scotland	**5,295,403**	**514,235**	***9.7***	**369,284**	***7.0***	**151,272**	***2.9***	***41.0***

The figures discussed above are for passive participants as a proportion of the whole population. Focussing only on those who claim 'some skills', 'passive participants' comprise 19.4% of the Scottish total (Table 10 and Figure 16).

Table 10: 'Some skills' in Scots: percentage of each skill category, 2011 Census

Some skills (Scotland = 1,929,444)	
	%
understanding only	13.9
passive reader	5.5
total passive participants	**19.4**
non-literate speaker	9.3
reading speaker	6.9
all skills	63.5
total speakers	**79.7**
other	0.9

Figure 16: percentage of 'passive participants' in Scots as a proportion of those with 'some skills', by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn), 2011 Census



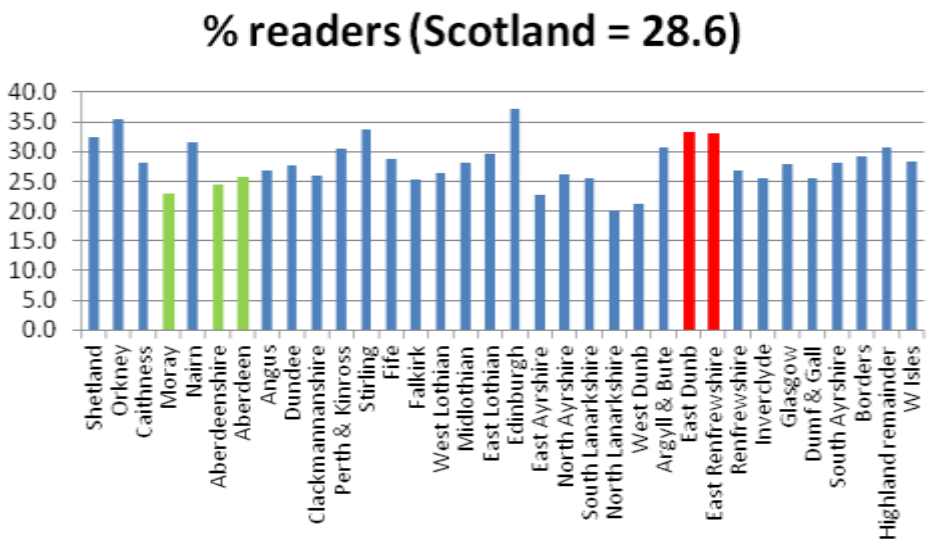
Again Edinburgh stands out: rather than being about a fifth, passive participants – i.e. non-speakers who understand and/or read Scots – comprise about a third of those with 'some skills'. Again this is in marked contrast to Glasgow, and this probably reflects the different social class make-up of the two cities (Table 11), as well, perhaps, as Edinburgh's high proportion of migrants from elsewhere in the UK (Table 9).

Table 11: Cities: Approximated social grade, 2011 Census

	all working-age	AB	*% AB*	C1	*% C1*	C2	*% C2*	DE	*% DE*
Dundee	94,911	13,780	*14.5*	34,001	*35.8*	18,324	*19.3*	28,806	*30.4*
Aberdeen	151,830	35,720	*23.5*	51,566	*34.0*	33,193	*21.9*	31,351	*20.6*
Edinburgh	325,351	97,768	*30.1*	119,095	*36.6*	44,816	*13.8*	63,672	*19.6*
Glasgow	404,739	67,683	*16.7*	131,340	*32.5*	70,879	*17.5*	134,837	*33.3*
Scotland	**3,429,061**	**653,800**	***19.1***	**1,072,071**	***31.3***	**805,846**	***23.5***	**897,344**	***26.2***

The percentage of 'passive participants' who are readers of Scots is surprisingly low in the North-East (Figure 17), given the strength of the local dialect literature. But it is noticeable that the affluent suburban areas of West Central, and also Edinburgh, have a high percentage of 'passive readers'. This is consistent with an observation made in the 1970s and 1980s that middle-class Scots knew more traditional Scots vocabulary, as a result of an acquaintance with Scottish literature (Aitken, 1979: 108, commenting on findings of Macaulay, 1977: 55, which were also confirmed later by Pollner, 1985).

Figure 17: ‘Passive readers’ as a percentage of ‘passive participants’ by council area or 2007 electoral ward (Caithness, Nairn), 2011 Census



9. Conclusion

Given the issues of validity, we cannot be entirely sure what the figures on Scots language skills produced by the Census question are telling us. Obviously there is a real linguistic basis, but there is also an overlay of perception. The slight rise that is often seen amongst people in their late teens or twenties is perhaps more indicative of a raised awareness of the language (perhaps as a result of changes in education) than of higher levels of skills. We might suspect that there is under-reporting in the urban West of Scotland, where two factors – a strong local dialect identity and a disconnection from Ideal Scots – both come into play. But identification with the local dialect might also conceivably have led to under-reporting in Shetland, for instance, high though the figures are there.

Nevertheless, and perhaps surprisingly, the figures appear to be reliable. The issues of interpretation may be different in different places, but within the traditional dialect areas there is a reassuring similarity between the figures from different councils. So as long as we are alert to the validity issues, we have here an extremely valuable set of data. Already with this first look we can begin to see where there are danger signs for the language, and where there are signs of positive educational impacts.

The patterns in the data are more to be relied upon than the absolute figures, and once we have a series of data from successive Censuses it will be possible to talk more confidently about trends. It will also become clear whether the steep drop-off amongst younger age groups is a matter of age grading, with more individuals in these age cohorts perhaps acquiring Scots skills as they get older.

In the meantime there is a great deal of analysis still to be done on this first baseline set of figures, following the data down to finer levels of detail, correlating the language data with socioeconomic and demographic variables, and testing for statistical significance.

Below are some questions that could be the starting points for further research.

● How does the geographical distribution of Scots speakers relate to the mapping of the Scots-speaking area by Murray in 1873 (modified by Grant in his Introduction to SND), and to Speitel's much more contracted mapping of the Highland Line, based on the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, where he sets a high bar for the definition of Scots?

● Why do the oldest groups, especially the women, report lower levels of Scots skills, even of understanding, than those somewhat younger? (In the nature of things, this generation will not be around much longer to ask.)

● Why is there a rise in reported Scots skills amongst young adults and teenagers, and why does this vary from place to place?

● Why is the level of Scots so high in the Highlands? Are the individuals who contribute to these figures Lowlanders living in the Highlands, or are they Highlanders? If the latter, what is their conception of Scots, and are they setting the bar lower than people do elsewhere?

● How much writing in Scots actually goes on, and in what media and genres?

● What factors create a climate in which non-speakers become passive participants in Scots?

● Against what models, criteria, or prototypes did people answering the Census question measure their own language to assess whether it qualified as 'Scots'?

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