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New Scots: the problems (1980)¹

Edited by Caroline Macafee, 2015

Editor's note: the approach that AJA advocates here – encouragement of the spoken language and acceptance of dialect variation – is the one adopted by Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Scots Language Centre, and increasingly in the Scottish education system.² Even the magazine *Lallans*, the organ of the Scots Language Society, has from the outset been hospitable to writers who preferred to use their own dialect rather than the standardised Scots promoted by the Society. Nevertheless, the debate to which this paper was a contribution is not a dead one. Alasdair Allan found, in the early years of the new Scottish Parliament, that the lack of an accepted written standard form was a brick wall that he commonly hit when arguing for official recognition for Scots (2000: 130). New voices continue to appear, for instance on online forums, calling for an officially recognised Standard Scots. See Corbett (2003) for an analytical discussion of status planning and corpus planning in the Scots context.

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[45] In a talk he gave at a conference on Scottish English in 1975,³ Tom McArthur described two alternative models of Scottish speech, one of which he called the 'little boxes' model. Like him I think this model rather inefficient and misleading, but it will suit my purpose to use it for the time being here. According to this model, there are several different kinds of language in use in Scotland: each of these, in principle at least, in competition for the adherence of Scottish people. Each is capable separately of development, of nourishment, of enrichment, and so on. These various sorts of language include, on the one hand, one called English or sometimes Scottish English, and, on the other hand, two main categories of Scots, both of these differing from English although to somewhat different degrees.

One of these sorts of Scots is labelled Good Scots or genuine Scots or the Doric or the true Doric or, without qualification, simply as Scots. This kind of Scots is on the whole admirable; and even if, admittedly, moribund and now limited in its spoken currency to some rural communities, it nonetheless displays continued vigour in the language of Scots verse and of some Scots drama.

¹ Editor's note: originally published in J. Derrick McClure ed., *The Scots Language. Planning for Modern Usage* (Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1980), 45–63.

The text has been edited for uniformity of style with other Aitken papers and some bibliographical references have been expanded or added. The original page and note numbers are shown in square brackets.

² Editor's note: for further references to Scots in education and language planning more widely, see notes to AJA's 'The Scots language and the teacher of English in Scotland' (1976, 2015) and 'The good old Scots tongue: does Scots have an identity?' (1981, 2015) in the present edition.

³ [1] That talk (McArthur, 1979), along with the rest of the proceedings of that conference, has now been published in Aitken and McArthur eds. (1979).

There is some doubt as to whether the other sort of Scots is really Scots at all. Some of its characteristics – namely, a tendency to prefer general English formal and lexical options (like *stone* and *kid*) to those regarded as criterial for Scots (like *stane* and *bairn*), and the fact of^[46] substituting certain innovations of pronunciation at the realisational level (like the ‘glottal stop’ feature) and of grammar (like the new plural-marked second person pronoun *youse*) for their more archaic alternants regarded as criterial for Scots, and some other pronunciations and idioms – are held to disqualify it from being called Scots. And yet it does employ, albeit irregularly and inconsistently, large numbers of items of word-form and vocabulary which indubitably derive from ancient Scottish tradition, along with some innovative usages, of which some are exclusively Scots, others general British. It seems fair to say that, though it is rather less conservative in its characteristics than ‘genuine’ Scots, it is nevertheless undoubtedly a variety of Scots. The labels it commonly attracts include Demotic Scots, urban Scots and working-class Scots; as well as, more pejoratively, corrupt Scots, debased Scots, slovenly Scots, so-called modern Scots, the Glasgow-Irish and Factory Scotch.

I propose to label these two sorts of Scots respectively as Good Scots and Demotic Scots. I shall ignore the noticeable lack of clear definition as to what constitutes either variety, which causes different people to differ on different occasions as to which of the two boxes should receive actual specimens. I shall assume we know roughly which is which and what are the discriminating characteristics of each.

It is relevant that both Good Scots and Demotic Scots, as well as standard English, all appear in written as well as spoken form, albeit the literary representative of Demotic Scots is in the main a very recent arrival on the scene.

I am now going to look at some of the implications^[47] of assuming the establishment in the Lowland Scottish linguistic scene of a restored or recreated form of Good Scots; first as a written language, as Aasen did with Landsmål in Norway. Another way of putting this would be to say that we would replace transactional Standard English with transactional Scots, oratorical Standard English with oratorical Scots, and so on. This new written, utilitarian, prose-established Scots would become our new standard language. I propose to call it New Scots.

In due course we would become accustomed to speaking as well as writing a language approximating to this written general purpose Standard. So we would finish up New Scots-speaking as well as New Scots-writing.

I will not consider the prospects, fascinating as these are, for a rather different situation, namely that of purifying or completely restoring Good Scots at the spoken level, while retaining Standard English in writing and in general as a High language (in Ferguson’s 1959 terminology) so as to yield a classic diglossic situation like the one in German-speaking Switzerland. I see no way to achieve this without enlisting a corps of language-wardens to listen in to conversation and impose fines or palmies on those guilty of impurities or errors – that is, Demoticisms or anglicisms – in their speech.

But I am going a little too fast. I ought to say something about the ‘three languages of Scotland’ idea recently put forward by Professor Derick Thomson and others, with English, Gaelic and New Scots all enjoying equal status as High languages of an independent Scotland. Newspapers and other writings would then appear in all three, and all three would share media^[48] time. Such things as government documents, labels on nationally distributed products such as drugs, roadsigns, and so on, would have to appear in at least two out of the three – much as the same sorts of things appear in both English and French in Canada.

In this situation we would in effect be placing New Scots in open competition with Standard English for the allegiance of and practice by Scottish people outside of the Gaidhealtachd. Since Standard English, a great World Language, is already enthroned in this area and New Scots would come as an upstart, it seems to me that New Scots would be

severely handicapped from the outset. No doubt we could do our best to minimise this handicap by insisting that all children learn to read and write it, and heeding the injunctions of Mr McClure to use and value Scots more than now.⁴ But just as in Norway there are no *native* speakers of Nynorsk – it has always to be learned *after* childhood – whereas many grow up speaking Riksmål, so in Scotland there would at first be no native speakers of New Scots but many of English. English would thus be easier to learn by dialect speakers, because of this headstart and because of the fact that it would be heard and seen more often.⁵ If the advocates of New Scots campaigned vociferously for it, presumably on nationalist grounds, would not this provoke an equally strong reaction from those – one would guess the majority – who favoured English, which has many obvious practical advantages if no nationalist ones? Would we find ourselves involved in a prolonged and hugely energy-consuming language conflict, as happened in Norway, where enormous acrimony and public controversy arises on whether broadcasters should say [sne:] or [snø:], where one new ^[49] orthography succeeds another without ousting its predecessors and were the movement to assimilate the two languages is still a long way from a successful conclusion?

My own belief is that, since government intervention will be required anyway if New Scots is to make any headway, if we are really bent on establishing it we would have to go the whole hog and just abolish Standard English as our High language and convert exclusively to New Scots. The change-over would be a bit traumatic but we would in due course settle down to our new language. But if we try to *keep* Standard English as an alternative High language, as Derrick McClure suggests, at best we are in for a long period of acrimonious competition like that of Norway, and at worst New Scots will never get off the ground.

Anyway, whichever of these options we settle on, we also have to decide what form New Scots is to take. This itself is of course very far from a simple and straightforward question. Here are some of the problems this question raises.

First, how standardised and normative is New Scots to be? Is it necessary to have a single standard or may there be a plethora of local standards – a Shetland one, which many Shetlanders, I feel, might think they wanted (they already have their own literary Shetlandic), a Buchan one (ditto), and perhaps also an Angus, a Borders and a Galwegian one? Embryonically at least there now exists also a Glaswegian regional Demotic.

On the other hand, whether or no it is *essential* to prescribe a single standard (and I do not feel it is), it will certainly be very *convenient* to have one – publishers ^[50] of books, periodicals and newspapers, the agencies of government and the broadcasting media, for example, would all find it much more convenient to operate a single standard: so much so, I would guess, that they are likely to insist on one.

In that case it seems natural to follow what I call the mainstream literary Scots tradition, what Grant and Dixon in their *Manual of Modern Scots* (1921) call Standard Scots, namely the somewhat archaistic and idealised variety of Central Scots used in much Scots literature from Allan Ramsay onwards, which also forms the main core of the Lallans of modern makars like Hugh MacDiarmid and Robert Garioch, and which is adopted without question or discussion by the magazine *Lallans*, and also by William Graham for his lessons on Scots published in that magazine (1974–77).⁶

This variety already has some recognition (as the facts I have just cited indicate) as a national literary standard. We will do well to capitalise on this, rather than court opposition

⁴ Editor's note: in the same volume (McClure, 1980), and elsewhere.

⁵ ^[2] Compare Haugen (1966: 291).

⁶ Editor's note: in a radical departure from this tradition, Wilson (2002, 2012) in his teach-yourself book and accompanying CD uses the speech of the North-East (Doric) as the teaching model.

by going for some more localised or exotic variety, such as the presently stigmatised Demotic. We are going to have enough opposition to overcome anyway!

But of course we are still presenting an enormous over-simplification. Even accepting the Grant-Dixon-Lallans-Graham norm as our starting point we have still to take innumerable detailed decisions for individual usages – in word-form, vocabulary and grammar.

The New Scots norm will no doubt prescribe the use of all historically derived and still current Scots word-forms – *mare*, *stane*, *hame*, *hoose* and *coo*, *guid*, *muin*, *puir*, *nicht* and *licht* etc. etc., as against *more*, *stone* and the other Standard English cognates. On inter-dialectal^[51] decisions we will presumably go for the mainstream *stane* rather than the North-Eastern *steen* and mainstream *guid* rather than the North-Eastern *gweed*. Or will we? But how about the choice between items like *ale*, *ane* (meaning ‘one’), *ae* (also ‘one’), *uis* n. and *uise* v., as against *yill*, *yin*, *yae*, *yis* and *yaize*, since here both options certainly belong to *Central Scots* and some are adopted by undoubted mainstream Scots authorities like Robert Burns and Mr William Graham? Or will we permit a *limited* number of optional doublets in these and the many similar cases, as Mr McClure suggested and as indeed the present mainstream Scots tradition does? Whatever we prescribe as the written forms, there will no doubt be greater variety when these are realised in *speech*, such as in speech-making, reading aloud, when, say, BBC Scotland’s news comes to be read in New Scots, and in recitation (as of course happens already). There will anyway be a large number of individual decisions to be made here.

And what about word-forms that are obsolete or obsolescent, such as *bait* (boat), *saip* (soap), *laif* (loaf), *luim* (loom), *tuil* (tool), *shae* (shoe), *loe* (love), or *liv* (love),⁷ *meeve* or *muive* (move), *shoo* (a shove), *gnyauve* (gnaw) – the number of these is quite large. By restoring them we will greatly enhance the distinctive Scottishness of New Scots, which I take to be our aim.

But we will presumably reject historically spurious forms which are established in only a few writings, like the verb *aipen* (open) of some Lallans makars.

Parallel questions arise with vocabulary. A few pages of the letter G in the *Scottish National Dictionary* offer, ripe for resuscitation, the obsolete or obsolescent *glunimie* (a Teuchter), *glunder* (sulk), *glundie* (fool), *glunt*^[52] (look sour), *glutter* (gurgle), *glyde* (old, worn-out horse or person), *gnapper* (bite snappishly), *gneck* (a notch), *gnibbich* (a snappish fellow), and *goazle* (to clear the throat with a spit). It would not be too difficult to *make up* plausibly sounding others if we wanted! Some Lallans words, like *howdumbdeid* or *heichskeich* (both used by MacDiarmid) are virtually inventions of this sort. Certainly it would be open to extend the somewhat restricted range of current Lallans diction by a lot more dictionary-dredging than even the Lallans writers have allowed themselves. Of course the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* would provide a lot of other candidates which failed to survive the 17th century. What fun we could have, for instance, in re-enlisting the vocabulary of Dunbar’s ‘The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo’! In these ways we could, following on the example of Plastic Scots,⁸ but this time with official sanction, extend the semantic and connotational resources of New Scots from historically impeccable or at least defensible sources.

I have talked so far of taking in new items to enrich the vocabulary. But what about keeping our some potential candidates? Many modern Scotticisms have a sort of ambivalent status for most of us. They can be regarded as vulgarisms when they turn up among *other* markers of demotic or debased Scots, but quite acceptable when they appear in respectable

⁷ Editor’s note: where /v/ was not vocalised, the modern reflex would in fact be **lave* not **liv*, as indeed Aitken indicates in his pronunciation entry s.v. *luve* in *The Concise Scots Dictionary*.

⁸ Editor’s note: this term was used, in conscious repudiation of its pejorative overtones, by Douglas Young (1946).

Scottish poetry or ancient literature – this is true of items like *hame*, *hoose*, *coo* and *ken*. In other words, their status depends on the linguistic and social company they happen to be keeping at the time. These then could be accepted, for by definition their linguistic company in New Scots would be O.K.

^[53] But there are other modern Scotticisms which most Scots today regard as unequivocal vulgarisms. They are definitely of Demotic Scots: *awfie*, *to loss the heid*, *tumshie* for turnip (presumably New Scots itself would have the long-established *neep*), *styoomer*, *dozent*, the exclamation *here!* (meaning ‘look!’) and *jings!* and the interrogative tag *eh-no?* And there are lots of others which *many* Scots regard as vulgarisms and in the Demotic area. How élitist are we going to make our catchment of admissible Scotticisms? And if we *are* going to be élitist how do we define a vulgarism? On *frankly* élitist grounds? Or more dishonestly?

Similar problems of detail – on a much smaller scale – would exist for grammar. Presumably we would stick here to our guidelines of preferring uncontroversial traditional forms like *thoo* singular, *ye* plural for that pronoun, rather than the more recently arrived *you* singular, *youse* plural? And so with other questions of grammatical form: for example, we would prefer, I expect, present tense *gae* or *gang*, past tense *gaed*, past participle *gane*, rather than the more common and current but stigmatised present tense *gaun*, past tense *went*, past participle *went*. What, however, about the crazy idea, as it seems to me, of restoring the present participle/verbal noun distinction as the Scots Style Sheet did?⁹

It so happens that more of the distinctive features of Scots grammar are in matters of *form* (of morphology) than of *selection* and *arrangement* (of syntax). But for such of the latter as exist the same guidelines would, I presume, apply. As most of these can be shown to be respectably ancient, most would probably go in.

As for New Scots spelling, I am probably being far too optimistic when I say that I see little difficulty in producing ^[54] a satisfactory system. It seems to me preferable that this should capitalise on the presence of the existing mainstream literary Scots conventions,¹⁰ which already enjoy some degree of acceptance in a few literary registers, rather than break radically with this tradition by a reversion to the Older Scots system as Derrick McClure proposed.¹¹ But it would be an advantage to reduce or eliminate the continuing optionality of the existing system. So each word would have only one spelling and the number of representations applied to each sound or inflexion would be more limited than now; if only for pedagogic reasons. Teachers would probably insist on this – sensibly in my view.

If Standard English were to remain as an official language alongside New Scots, this would impose a further requirement or at least desideratum: that the same symbol should represent the same sound in both languages. So, for example, for New Scots [ku] and [hus] the appropriate spellings would be *coo* and *hoose*, not *cou* and *hous*.¹² It so happens that mainstream Scots spelling is already largely an adaptation of Standard English spelling rules

⁹ Editor’s note: the 1947 ‘Scots Style Sheet’ was published in *Lines Review* in 1955 (with an introduction by Albert Mackie) and reprinted in various places, including *Lallans* in 1974. *Lallans* writers did often attempt to maintain the *-an(d)/-in(g)* distinction. It was dropped from the ‘Spelling recommendations’ published in *Lallans* in 1985.

¹⁰ Editor’s note: it was only in 1998 with the ‘Report o the Scots Spellin Comatee’ that a rapprochement was arrived at between the traditional spellings up till then advocated by Scottish Language Dictionaries (formerly the Scottish National Dictionary Association) on their website and the spellings recommended by the Scots Language Society and promulgated in *Lallans* (see n. 9 above): cf. ‘How to Spell Scots’ (n.d) , ‘Walit frae Report o the Scots Spellin Comatee’ (2000) and discussion of the report in *Lallans* 57 (Purves, 2000; Farrow, 2000; Macafee, 2000; Macleod, 2000; Tait, 2000). For further arguments against standardisation, see Macafee (2012). For a detailed analysis of the many proposed standard orthographies for Scots, see Eagle (2013).

¹¹ ^[3] [McClure’s suggestion was a system derived from that of Older Scots, rather than the Older Scots system itself – Ed.]

¹² Editor’s note: until the 1998 Report (see n. 10 above), the Scots Language Society agreed with the more radical spelling reformers in avoiding <oo>, regarding it as an anglicised innovation in Scots.

to Scots vocables except for a few native quirks like *ui*, and *ch* instead of *gh*. A modest regularisation does seem possible. The bairns will presumably have to learn to spell in both languages and we ought not to make the job more difficult for them than we can help.

This is how I see it. Yet I have to agree that there is still room for dispute both on general principles, like those just advanced, and in innumerable details. And we have the awesome example of Norwegian before us where constant hassle with and controversy over spelling has had to be endured for over a century. And the cold ^[55] shoulder which the Lallans establishment has presented to David Purves' orthography conceived on just such lines as the above,¹³ the first whiffs of controversy which have so far appeared in the magazine *Lallans*, and the radically different prescriptions offered by Derrick McClure and myself perhaps foreshadow prolonged disagreement over the orthography of New Scots.

In all of these cases the problems of detail seem to me numerous. But they can all be settled, if necessary – and in some cases this will be necessary – arbitrarily. There is, however, one rather *more* difficult general problem.

It has often been said of Scots, as of other non-standard dialects of English, and of course of non-standard dialects of other languages as well, when they have never or not for a prolonged period been employed in the discursive, administrative and rhetorical registers, that these dialects lack a suitable vocabulary for these purposes. What this means is that there exists virtually no distinctively Scottish vocabulary for such topics as these.

No doubt this is perfectly true, as a quick flick through Warrack's *Scots Dictionary*¹⁴ will soon convince you. One consequence of this is that when writers today attempt to compose literary or philosophical or philological discussions in prose which is distinctively Scottish, as in the magazine *Lallans*, so that they are constrained to choose their expressions not so much for their aptness as for their distinctive Scottishness, the effect is one of vocabulary impoverishment and the overworking of a very restricted repertory of vocabulary items – the suggestion is of using a special diction rather than the full resources of a language. So while a writer in English has a whole row of alternative synonyms to choose from,^[56] each with its differences of nuance and overtone, for the concept *work* – *work*, *labour*, *toil*, *activity*, *industry*, *assiduity*, *sedulity*, *diligence*, *perseverance*, *persistence*, *plodding*, *painstaking*, *busyness*, *indefatigability*, *swotting*, *fag*, *drudgery*, *handiwork* – the writer in Scots is constrained, I suppose, to choose between *wark*, *darg*, *eydenty* and *virr*.

Such jejune little English-into-Lallans word lists as now exist are totally inadequate to remedy this problem.¹⁵ It is no doubt true that as part of the New Scots venture we will want to acquire much more ambitious English-into-Scots lexicons and thesauruses, which will be based on the big dictionaries and draw copiously on their resources, including illustrative citations.¹⁶ But even these will be far from providing enough vocabulary to supply the need I am talking of. Try opening a page of *Chambers Dictionary of Science and Technology* and imagining a Lallans version of some of the definitions, say – “A sexual perversion, most frequently seen as a regressive symptom in men of advanced age” (*Exhibitionism*) or “An imaginary aperture for a telescope or microscope limiting the emergent beam of light where its cross-sectional area is least” (*Exit pupil*). Similarly, I would often find it difficult to create definitions in Lallans for the DOST.

¹³ Editor's note: the proposed orthography is described in Purves (1979).

¹⁴ Editor's note: until the publication of *The Concise Scots Dictionary* in 1985, the standard one-volume dictionary of Scots was *Chambers Scots Dictionary* (first published 1911).

¹⁵ Editor's note: the main such resource at the time was Graham (1977).

¹⁶ Editor's note: reference works of this kind have since been produced, on the basis of the multi-volume Scots dictionaries, though without citations, and also without neologisms of the kind that New Scots would have demanded. These include *The Concise English-Scots Dictionary* and *The Scots Thesaurus*.

The vocabulary enrichment from the dictionaries I spoke of just now will no doubt help to enlarge the range of options in concrete and material and workaday and sensuous conceptual areas, but little or not at all in the intellectual areas we are considering here.

One partial solution to this problem would be to have taken in hand by a committee or academy of philologists the task of *inventing* a terminology of this sort by ^[57] processes of coinage or word-formation from existing distinctively Scots words.¹⁷ For example, the Modern Icelandic word for *telephone* is *sími*, which was formed by reviving a rare and obsolete word for ‘cord or rope or string’. As we know, German forms its native word for *telephone* by compounding the adjective ‘distant’ and the noun ‘speaker’ – *Fernsprecher*. New Scots might then have, say *weer* in the one case and *langspeaker* or maybe *langbletherer* in the other.

To do this job in a hurry, we’d have to form a committee of philologists to work through some large dictionary of current English like *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* inventing terms for all the specialised words and expressions which lacked existing Scottish equivalents; and, I suppose, we would have to have sub-committees doing the same for the more specialised terms of each of the main scientific and cultural disciplines. Lallans prose is already venturing timidly along this road with items like *word-buik* for ‘dictionary’ and *hameart* for ‘local or domestic’, and one can see possibilities such as *mony-leidit* for ‘multinational’, *samin-kindit* for ‘homogeneous’ or ‘comparable’, *word-huird* for ‘vocabulary’, etc. etc. The possibility is there, no doubt.

Once our teams of philologists had invented the necessary vocabulary, how would we persuade all the scientists and technologists and philosophers and linguists and so on to learn and to use all this stuff? And would we not risk an armed revolt when all these douce folk saw themselves lexicographically cut off from their English and overseas colleagues? I think we may have to forget *weer* and *langbletherer* and settle for *telephone* after all.

^[58] This is a daunting problem, is it not? Not really! The only thing that makes it really difficult is the assumption I have been making that this new learned vocabulary must be distinctively Scots. If we drop our insistence on that, then there is no difficulty about our accepting holus-bolus into New Scots the entire technical-cultural-intellectual vocabulary of English, which is already fully current and to hand in the present Scots linguistic situation. Here Derrick McClure and I are in full agreement. Of course a New Scots prose dependent on these resources would be, in Mr McClure’s (1979) phrase, a very *thin* kind of Scots. In many sentences the anerly marker o Scottishness might be the spellins o a wheen function-words and inflexions, like this ane itsel. But thair wad no often be stretches o mare nor a short sentence athoot Scottish markers awaw.

Some might feel this acceptance of thin Scots a betrayal of the cause, an acceptance of something which was to all intents and purposes mere English thinly disguised as Scots. Indeed, this complaint is often made already of Lallans prose. On the other hand there will be the advantage that this register will be easily comprehensible to users of the international language, English, while still retaining some badge of Scottishness. And after all the same was true of a lot of discursive and polemic Scottish prose of the 16th century, when Scots enjoyed its first spell as a national High language.

As a swatch o linguistic engineering, than, there’s nae doot the job can be duin. Gin we set about the various deeficulties and problems we hae been examin in we *can* constitute a perfectly viable New Scots, albeit, as ane can hear, a gey thin Scots kind o a ane. The whilk

¹⁷ Editor’s note: in the event, it has been Ulster Scots that has seen this kind of development, with government funding provided to give parity with Irish under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and renewed under the St Andrews Agreement of 2006. An Ulster Scots translator was appointed to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1999 and Ulster Scots has been rapidly (and controversially) elaborated to enable official translations in the language (see relevant papers in Kirk and Ó Baoill eds., 2000, 2001; and Falconer, 2007).

could begin, gien the necessar cloot frae the government, as ^[59] an offeecial and transactional literary language and, thairefter, gin eneuch fowk felt committit tae it, as a leid for public speakin and eventually for dayly converse. A thin kinna Scots, richt eneuch, but evidently Scots for aw that.

In the last paragraph I was deliberately not subjecting myself to the constraints on word-choice which would be implied by an attempt to thicken the Scottishness of what I said or wrote. If what I did say or write sounded or read as odd or artificial,¹⁸ that is of course simply because we are unaccustomed to Scots at all in the formal register. But custom would soon remove the feeling of quaintness. Indeed, assiduous readers of *Lallans*, like myself, may already have lost it.

So at the linguistic level the task can be done all right. But at some cost.

Even if we restrain ourselves from the wholesale introduction of absurdities like *lang-bletherer* or *lang-speaker*, it is clear that the change in habit required of the people who convert to the New Scots ways of reading and writing from the present ones will involve fairly severe withdrawal symptoms and a lot of effort. This seems unlikely to be undertaken without strong government backing and, indeed, I have little doubt, government compulsion. The change will have to be accomplished under Big Brother.

Since there are a large number of decisions of larger policy and particular detail to be taken (as I have suggested), Big Brother will have to appoint some body to examine and recommend on these matters and produce guidance documents, to be followed by the required detailed text-books and word-lists. At last there will be a positive *use* for the expertise of lexicographers and ^[60] philologists. Some protection from the worst excesses likely to be perpetrated by such people could come from the inclusion on the committee of writers and others, as indeed Derrick McClure suggested.

Once the philological Big Brother has set out the rules, we will I suppose have to go back to school. Fortunately the greatest difficulties which confront foreign learners of a new language will not worry us. We will be able to continue to pronounce our sounds exactly as we do now. Since New Scots grammar is, as suggested, fairly similar to that of Standard English, all we will have to learn here is a few special syntactic rules and a modest list of archaistic forms like the past tense *gaed* and past participle *gane*, the demonstrative plurals *thir* and *thae*, and the like. The real fag will be the constant need, for us adults, already set in our linguistic ways, to keep checking our usages against spelling lists, thesauruses and dictionaries.

For the bairns it may be easier, for they will not be set in the bad old Standard English habits. But I feel we ought to continue to let them read *Treasure Island* and Kenneth Graham and of course C. S. Lewis in the original, rather than in New Scots translations. Here I appear to disagree with Mr McClure, who would have these classics (Scottish and other) rendered into New Scots. But I agree with Mr McClure that we should encourage the reading of more Scots, Old and New, than we are accustomed to offer them now. That would be a good thing, under any circumstances.

Some, perhaps many, will resent the government compulsion necessary to implement these proposals, and may regard it as tyranny.

What will we get in return for all this?

^[61] Now it is not of course sufficient to answer that we will have 'revived' Scots, kept the language 'alive', 'rescued' it from its current neglect and so on. A language is not an organism which can be crushed or battered or resuscitated. It is an abstract system of rules and habits. There is little point in extending oneself for the sake of a complete abstraction, or

¹⁸ Editor's note: *the whilk* is an archaism, but AJA may have overlooked this, immersed as he was in Older Scots.

for the sake of a set of habits as such. If we are to justify action on these lines it is because the people who employ this system and have these habits will be happier or healthier or wealthier or something as a result of changing their system and habits.

In this case what we will give them is their own national tongue, and so presumably we *may* assist or enhance their national pride. If we believe they will thus be better off than now, if we thereby increase their liberty, at the cost of whatever compulsion it takes to force the adoption of New Scots, then it may be worth it.

This new national tongue of ours will remain visibly a close relative of English, sharing with English the great bulk of its intellectual vocabulary, but still uniquely our own. Readers of New Scots will continue to read English with ease, though writing idiomatic English may become increasingly difficult for writers of New Scots as the two national norms in the course of time develop on diverging lines. So those of us who opt for New Scots (if option is permitted) will eventually opt out of active participation in the literature of World English. We will finish up in the Dutch, rather than the Austrian or Swiss, situation, *vis-à-vis* German.

Are there any other gains? I am afraid that New Scots, as I envisage it, will not help in the democratisation of the Scottish speech-situation, in breaking down the ^[62] present arrangement whereby dialect and accent differences enhance class-divisions. On the contrary, if New Scots adopts Good Scots rather than Demotic Scots as its basis, as I have assumed, the distinction between good traditional speech-habits and vulgar Demotic ones will be little if any reduced and class-divisions on linguistic lines will persist. For it will be the intellectuals and the educated and the establishment who will appropriate the new High language in place of the old one they now enjoy. It is they, after all, who are acquainted with traditional literary Scots already.

It is true that if we reverse everything that Derrick McClure and I said and take Demotic Scots not Good Scots as the basis of New Scots, facing out the outrage and mockery this would doubtless provoke, a levelling of class-associated speech distinctions *would* result – a levelling *down*, many would say. This would mean adopting as the basis of New Scots such Demotic lexical and grammatical forms as we meet in, let us say, the Southside edition of Bill Bryden's *Benny Lynch*.

What is the alternative to all this? The alternative is to let the current situation develop *without* the kind of interference I have been postulating. It seems to me very likely that in the only political circumstances in which New Scots could be contemplated – namely the establishment of a strongly nationalist independent Scottish state – a linguistic drift in what I would regard as a democratic or egalitarian direction would occur spontaneously. People would want to speak and write more Scottishly of their own volition. The form this might take would be for everyone, including members of the establishment, to turn more often to the Scottish ^[63] options which already exist in the present system, in their speech and even in their writing. Since we would want to cultivate the national shibboleths of pronunciation, such as strongly articulated *r*'s and our own realisations of vowels, there would be some tendency for the social classes to converge in habits of pronunciation also. We already have in Scotland at present a variety of middle-class Standard English and a general situation which is very specially and markedly Scots. The trend I am postulating would quite naturally increase the distinctive Scottishness of this situation with no intervention from on high needed at all.

So where we should be directing our energies is not towards creating a New Scots to be imposed by Big Brother. It is to continue to encourage a liberalisation of attitudes to *all* the varieties of Scots we now have and to learn and to teach more about the real actual Scots of the present and its long and interesting history. What we need is an educational programme, not a language-engineering one. Our provisions for this are still very inadequate. But in my view it is in these directions that our energies and resources should be deployed.

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