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Some Reflections on the Language of Contemporary Scottish Prose

Summary

A northern variety of Old English developed in Scotland into what has become known as Scots. This language of the Scottish court and literature prior to the Acts of Union was abandoned by both king and poets after the Union with England. English replaced Scots in public institutions, to schools and literature. The most fatal development was the change of attitude of the Scottish themselves, who came to regard Scots as an inferior variety of English. There have been repeated attempts by Scottish writers, to revive Scots as a national language of Scotland. Since the 1970s a number of projects have been launched to study the present state of Scots with the aim of initiating a language policy which would reintroduce Scots into public life as one of the national languages of Scotland. A number of Scottish authors have used Scots in their works. This paper will examine the language of some contemporary prose texts seeking to establish the density of Scots elements and estimate their place on the scale between Standard Scottish English and Scots, which may be one of the means of establishing an acceptable standard variety.

Key words: Scots, Scottish English, literature, standard Scots

Nekaj razmišljanj o jeziku sodobne škotske proze

Povzetek

Severna oblika stare angleščine se je razvila na Škotskem v škotščino (Scots). Po združitvi z Anglijo so kralj in pesniki zavrgli jezik, ki se je pred tem govoril na škotskem dvoru in rabil v književnosti. Angleščina je tako zamenjala škotščino v vseh javnih institucijah in književnosti. Največ škode pa je povzročil spremenjen odnos samih Škotov do škotščine, ki so ta jezik imeli za manjvredno varianto angleščine. Ves ta čas so se škotski književniki trudili, da bi škotščina spet postala nacionalni jezik Škotske. Od leta 1970 dalje je nastalo več projektov za preučevanje sodobne škotščine, vsi z namenom razviti jezikovno politiko, ki bi ponovno uvedla škotščino v javno življenje kot enega od nacionalnih jezikov Škotske. Številni škotski avtorji, so v svojih delih začeli uporabljati škotščino. Namen članka je s pomočjo analize nekaterih sodobnih proznih besedil ugotoviti pogostost škotskih jezikovnih elementov in določiti njihovo mesto na lestvici med standardno škotsko angleščino in škotščino. Na ta način bi se lahko vzpostavila sprejemljiva standardna varianta.

Ključne besede: škotščina, škotska angleščina, književnost, standardna škotščina

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1. Introduction

The language of literature has always naturally drawn on various forms such as vernaculars or other languages. In this fashion it both preserved less “literary” language forms and enriched the currently used standard variety. It could do so because literature, especially poetry, is regarded as a type of text where considerable freedom and experimentation with the language is allowed. Literary texts that deviate from a strict linguistic and socio-linguistic norm are at least tolerated if not actually admired. Literary texts in turn, could serve as a source for the development of the standard.

I shall first shortly review the causes of the discontinuation of Scots as a national standard in literary and public use in general. Next, I will mention its appearance in literature after the Union with England and then analyse several prose texts by contemporary Scottish authors of the latest *Scottish Renaissance*. I shall use the general idea of a model devised by McClure (1979) for the evaluation of Scottish poetry.

2. The demise of Scots

The establishment of the Union between England and Scotland in the 17th and 18th centuries coincided with the process of linguistic standardisation in England. The unifying role of the language and requirements of perfection and permanence favoured as a linguistic standard the usage that was near the centres of power, both geographically and socially, that is, London. Moreover, this process entailed that only this standard language had a high social status and all other regional and social idioms were considered vulgar and lacking validity.

The two Acts of Union¹ caused Scots, the language of the Scottish Court and administration as well as of literature, to suffer a serious demise. The King² and his Court, the legislature, the aristocracy and politicians, together with a number of literary men, moved to London. In Scotland under such conditions “King’s English had displaced King’s Scots” (Muirison, 1977/4) as the language of administration, the courts, and education. In fact, King’s English only extended the functions it already had, since it had gained a foothold in the church in Scotland a century earlier.³ The doom of Scots was thus brought about by the Scottish themselves.

Scots was largely reduced to a vernacular, and the attitude towards vernaculars was in the eighteenth century formed by “figures who commented frequently on language matters. One of

1 The Union of Crowns in 1603, and the Union of Parliaments in 1707.

2 James VI King of Scotland, became James I of England (1603) as the successor of Queen Elisabeth I.

3 At the introduction of the reformed church in Scotland in 1560 the English translation of the Bible was used and thus provided prestige for English.

them was Swift” who regarded Scots and Irish “as particularly low *dialects*” (Blake 1981;108ff). Pronunciation, spelling, and the use of words were particularly censured. Scots had both a specific orthography and a distinct vocabulary, which had developed through centuries in both literary and administrative usage, and it was based on northern Anglo-Saxon dialects (e.g. McArthur 2002, Murison 1977).

Access to advantageous positions in society also meant access to education and thus to the prestigious form of speech. This in turn created prejudice and stigma for other varieties.⁴ In the meantime, in Britain the Scots language lost some of the stigma because of the Scottish literary revival in the 18th and 19th centuries, which was brought about by such widely popular authors as Robert Burns and Walter Scott (Blake, *ibid.* 136ff). There was, however, no general follow up or development of a language standard and ironically enough, even after the recent devolution of Parliaments,⁵ Scots is by many, particularly in Scotland, thought to be an inferior type of English. There is still “an abysm of ignorance on both popular and administrative levels” and its “status as a national language of Scotland” has not yet been secured (Submission by McClure to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, 2003/11; also Corbett 2003; see Maček, 2002–2003).

3. Scottish literature and Scots

Literature has in many cultures been an important repository of the language, which is, in the Humboldtian manner, considered to be one of the tokens of identity of a people (nation). This is very true of Scottish literature too. The golden age of literature in Scots, from the middle of the 14th to the middle of the 16th century, produced a number of important authors, particularly a poetry of “considerable bulk and distinction” (Muirison 1977, 4). From the 17th century on, Scottish authors, including the King himself, had abandoned Scots for English. But there were repeated revivals of Scottish literature in which Scots was an important aspect. Thus the Scots of Robert Burns became well established in poetry, and it emerged in the literary prose of Walter Scott and other authors. Here it was restricted to the dialogue of those social classes who normally spoke it. Narratives, however, continued to be written in English. Exceptions are lengthy monologues by some characters whose natural idiom is Scots, such as in Stevenson’s short story “Thrawn Janet” (Dunn 1995). The entire story is told by an older man in the “moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale o Dule”, except for a short introductory passage in English. As Tulloch (1985) points out, the Scots “voice” is often, as in this novel, an older and less educated speaker, sometimes a woman, who would, like Scots be “associated in people’s minds with the home” (*ibid.*, 170).

In its more recent history, Scottish literature, particularly its language, became a political statement (Macaffee 1985). Thus in the Scots Renaissance of the first half of the 20th century, Hugh MacDiarmid’s nationalist programme (Dunn 2000) was based on a Scots which had its roots in the Lowlands dialect, but was enriched with words from older Scots usage, and from other dialects. Hence it is often known as Synthetic Scots (McArthur 2002). MacDiarmid wrote

4 It is interesting how this attitude has persisted to the present day, and not only in English speaking societies.

5 In 1999 a new Scottish Parliament was elected after votes for devolution of the parliamentary union with England carried the day.

his most important poetry in it, and his example was followed by a number of authors. The experiment, which never actually succeeded, was not so much linked to a general Romantic sentiment that was common in the earlier centuries, but to a Scottish political nationalism, which found its expression in literature (McAfee 1985). In spite of the general failure, Scots, no matter whether synthetic or dialectal, was now well established in poetry. In prose the situation did not change much from the previous practices: narrative was written in Standard English, dialogue in Scots, or elements of Scots. But as Tulloch (1985) shows, the distinction between dialogue and narrative was broken down by the authors in various, often intricate ways. Notwithstanding the plans to create a Standard Scots, no non-literary prose had succeeded; there had been no break-through yet.

4. Renewed interest in Scots

In the second half of the 20th century an interest in minority languages and vernaculars was encouraged by the renewal of sociolinguistic thought. Following these new developments Scottish scholars planned programmes for the study and affirmation of Scots as well as Gaelic (McIntosh 1979). At the same time the Scottish literature of the eighties and nineties experienced another Renaissance (Watson 1997), both in poetry and prose, and this time often in an urban setting. The Scots that emerged in this “urban demotic” literature is mostly the urban vernacular of Glasgow or Edinburgh, stigmatised among the middle classes in Scotland (Macaulay 1997, 45ff), as urban vernaculars generally tend to be.

The linguistic situation in Scotland today is even more complex than in previous centuries. The reason is that apart from the indigenous languages (Scots, Gaelic and English) a number of immigrant languages (e.g. Urdu or Polish) are spoken by such large numbers of speakers that they have to be recognised as minority languages by the standards of the European Union. These languages have begun to be integrated into the overall Scottish culture, and the literature written by authors with an immigrant background shows the same urban demotic characteristics found in Scottish writers (Corbett 2000).

5. Scots in the linguistic continuum

It has been pointed out (McClure 1979) that Scots and English are used by Scottish speakers in two ways. Speakers in the north-east switch between Scots and English, as bilingual speakers do, depending on the situation. In other areas however, there is usually a continuum between the two, where the focus can shift towards the English or Scots end respectively, depending not only on the situation, but also on the usage of each particular speaker or group of speakers. This makes it sometimes difficult to say whether English with Scots elements is used or Scots with English elements. In other words, the boundary between the two is blurred. As McClure maintains (1979), urban dialects are particularly difficult to define, since the distinctive Scots vocabulary has largely disappeared from these varieties, and sometimes even the Scots phonological features have been replaced by English ones.

This situation is mirrored in the poetry of the latest Scottish literary revival as well (Watson 1997). McClure (1979) discussed the problem on the basis of a number of contemporary poems. He devised a chart with two axes: one with a range of styles between literary and colloquial, and the other with a range between “dense” and “thin” Scots (McClure 1979, 29). He has thus shown that there is a continuum in literary expression rather than a form of language that could unambiguously be called Scots. This situation may be said to exist, in literary prose as well, as Tulloch (1985) has shown, using the same terminology, in 20th century Scottish literary prose.

Prose fiction falls between the well established usage of Scots in poetry and the practically non-existent non-literary prose with significant Scots elements. I shall look at some late twentieth century prose literary texts observing how Scots is used in them. Attention will be paid to the specific distribution and characteristics of Scots elements in the prose style in comparison with descriptions of earlier literary practices.

6. Scots in contemporary prose

Whereas poems are usually compact texts with the same type of linguistic expression throughout, prose fiction, such as novels and short stories, frequently contains two kinds of discourse – narrative and dialogue. The general pattern has remained the same from the 19th century onwards, as described in Tulloch (1985). It consists of a narrative in Standard English and dialogues in a range from Standard English to rural Scots. The narrative can compare with the “formal” style in poetry, whereas the dialogue is mostly informal. As in poetry there is in prose also a “more or less” relation along the range, where even the narrative can have Scots elements. The dialogues, on the other hand, display a much wider range of “thin” and “dense” Scots. This Scots is accordingly, colloquial. Monologues that have the function of a narrative, follow the linguistic mode of dialogues if the narrator is a speaker of the vernacular (as in “Thrawn Janet”, above and Tulloch 1985).

A corpus of short stories and two novels by the “third generation” of writers of the Scottish Renaissance (Watson 1997) has been chosen for the present analysis. The authors are the new “realists” (Watson 1997, 300ff), which is a qualification that determines their use of language amongst other features. As in the previous realistic prose the language of the dialogue aims at expressing the speaker’s idiom. Texts by several authors⁶ will be examined in order to establish the degree of density of Scots in contemporary literary prose without actually placing the texts on the two axes proposed by McClure.

By studying the linguistic expression only, without considering other characteristics that mark the prose as contemporary “Scottish”, we see that 7 of the 12 short stories are written entirely

6 Alasdair Gray “Prometheus”, William McIlvanney “Performance”, Eric McCormack “The One-Legged Men”, Shena Mackay “Violets and Strawberries in the Snow”, James Kelman “Home for a Couple of Days”, *A Chancer*, Alan Spence “Its Colours They are Fine”, Margaret Elphinstone “An Apple from a Tree”, Ronald Frame “Merlewood”, Dilys Rose “Street of the Three Terraces”, Janice Galloway “Blood”, Duncan McLean, “Doubled up with Pain”, Irvine Welsh, *Jutland Bound*, *Trainspotting*.

in Standard (Scottish) English.⁷ Some of them are not particularly set in the Scottish scene, but others have an obvious, even explicit, Scottish setting (Kennedy, McCormack, Frame), and refer to typical Scottish groups of people, e.g. an upper middle class family in the west of Scotland or working class victims of a mining disaster.

6.1 Thin Scots.

In the “thinnest” Scots of the texts, even in some that are written entirely in Standard (Scottish) English, such stereotypical Scottish words as *lad*, *lass* and *wee* appear and thus add a grain of local flavour to the text. The pattern which is characteristic for the other texts consists, as already mentioned, of narrative parts in Standard (Scottish) English and dialogues in a more or less “dense” Scots. The Scots elements are expressed by the following features or a combination of them, i.e. a) non-standard (English) or traditional Scots spelling, b) vocabulary, and c) occasionally grammar.

Examples of this pattern appear in Dilys Rose’s “Street of the Three Terraces”, a story from a working class area. The linguistic markers are only occasionally elided final consonants, e.g. *wi his pals*, the form of the pronoun *ye* the Scottish negation in *I’m no saying he was an angel or nothing* and *that’s no the way it was*, also with the modal verb “can” *ye cannae help thinking*. The only Scots word is *bairn*. The text also has the historical but now vernacular non-standard double negation. This text would appear to have been written in thin Scots.

Rather thin is also Duncan McLean’s “Doubled Up With Pain” with an Edinburgh background. The dialogue in this short story contains some vocabulary and grammatical features, but not consistently, which can be said of most other texts too, e.g. *laddie* (but also *boy*), *ken*, *wee*, *lassies*, *bevy*, *breeks*, *hytering about* (stumbling about). This could perhaps also be attributed to the continuum mentioned earlier. Some examples are:

And if I’d had a drink the night before as well, ken, that would bring it on...

I was in a wee world of my own...

There are also some discourse elements such as *eh? ach, aye*.

Scots grammar is represented by the following features:

a) the continuous form with “stative verbs of inert perception and cognition” (Quirk et al. 1972) also termed “state verbs of perceiving” (Leech & Svartvik 1975)

I wasn’t hearing the traffic

b) the definite article with the determiner *both*

I saw the both of them looking over the shoulders at the Central, ken...

c) the general English non-standard present tense marker -s

and I thinks to myself

7 “Prometheus”, “The One-Legged Men”, “Violets and Strawberries in the Snow”, “An Apple from a Tree”, “Merlewood”, “Blood”, “Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains”.

d) the possessive prepositional phrase with *on*, a Gaelic element common also in Irish English

you had a sharp tongue on you that day

Pronunciation is reproduced in such spellings as *ach* [aχ].

6.2. Intermediate

A range of intermediate texts with a greater variety and incidence of Scots forms are William McIlvanney's "Performance", where the speakers are petty criminals so their speech is characterised by common features of a colloquial pronunciation represented in spelling, for example with the apostrophe for a <g> that is omitted in pronunciation. This convention in English literature indicates the widespread colloquial (including RP) pronunciation [in] instead of [iŋ] - *been doin' a wee job, checkin' out, ye kiddin'*? (Maček & Stanojević 2002) In the Scots Style Sheet of 1947 (Macafee 1985, 14) the apostrophe for omitted consonants was to be eliminated as "unnecessary concessions to the non-Scottish reader" but also "to the basic Standard English literacy of the Scots reader himself" (ibid.) The apostrophe also marks other elisions characteristic of colloquial ("allegro") speech, such as [ɪ] in *where's ma sunglasses*.

The other, also overall, characteristic of colloquial speech, but traditionally spelled in Scots as *ye, yer*, is the reduced pronunciation of *you, your* to [ɪ - ə],

Ye want a death on yer conscience?

More salient Scottish pronunciations represented in traditional Scots spellings can be seen in such examples as *wi', ma, Ah, Ah'd, whit, tae, intae, windae* (for English *with, my, I, I'd, what, what's, to, into, window*).

Don't waste ma time.

If Ah could, Ah'd cancel ma christenin' retrospectively ...

Whit's a windae for ...

But even here such spellings are not consistent and Standard English forms are used as well, e.g. *it gets translated intae what they want ye tae see* (i.e. *what* not *whit*).

James Kelman in "Home for a Couple of Days" and in the novel *A Chancer* (the first with a rural and second with an urban-Glasgow setting) uses a range of items, some of them generally urban vernacular (discourse elements such as *ta* "thank you", *like*, or other vocabulary such as *daft, skint*).

More specifically Scots spellings that also represent the pronunciation are e.g. *aw* and *naw* [ɔ:], *ya, auld, thet, polis, closeby, dont, wasnt, hadn't*.

If thet's what you're thinking, John was saying:

There are the same discourse elements as mentioned earlier: *eh? aye, ach, aw, naw*, and final *but*
You were worried hen, no me. Eh? Just as well I never called in the

polis.

*You're back, eh- ,
Ach, nothing bad if that's what your're thinking
I'm no kidding but*

Apart from the almost stereotypical *aye, wee, lassie*, the texts contain more Scots vocabulary, i.e. *heavy beer* (stout), *ben* (in), *mind* (remember), *wee*.

I just got a wee turn.

Grammatical features are

a) the Scots negation:

*no bad, And why'll no get it back either
she's no daft
she's no your mother
We've no seen you since Friday at tea-time
No mind I was telling you before? (don't you remember...?)
I'll no force you etc.*

b) the use of the preposition *out*, where Standard English has *out of* in

*I'm out the habit
with Sweeney being out the game.
He stared out the window*

c) article usage in the adverbial *the night* (Engl. *tonight*)

Hey Shuggie, fucking freezing the night, eh?

d) singular for English plural nouns (*up the stairs*):

auld yin up the stair in case it got her out her bed

e) interrogative or relative pronoun

what like (what sort of)

f) forms of the second person personal pronoun

ya, ye, yer; and particularly the plural: *yous*

6.3 Dense Scots

The following texts can be classified as “dense”:

Alan Spence in his short story “Its Colours They Are Fine”, uses urban demotic Glaswegian as spoken by members of the Orange Order and supporters of the Glasgow Rangers. Besides the usual *Ah, ye, ye* forms of the pronouns

Ah'm wrapping up yer things.

there are also the more typically Scots pronunciation-spellings: *kin, pit, oan, wrang, wid, ain, wumman, wu'v, tae, whit, ach* (Engl. *can, put, on, would, own, we've, to, what, oh*).

*Ye kin pit them oan when ye get tae Lorne School
... whit wid he say...*

as well as such overall vernacular forms as *at's the stuff*.

Irvine Welsh in *Jutland Bound* and the novel *Trainspotting* employs a different approach, reminiscent of the narrative type as in Stevenson's "Thrawn Janet". The narrator in these two texts is a Scots speaker. In distinction to Stevenson's it is a young urban speaker, whose Scots voice covers almost the entire text. The voices of other characters belong to the same type.

a) Pronunciation and spelling:

polis, perr (poor), *oaf* (of), *oafay, oan, shoap, kin* (can), *pit* (put), *wis, fir jist, gitting, jykits* (jackets), *nivir, fitba* (football), *another yin, tryin, tae, mooth, doon, oot, about, toon, broon, yir, ye, Ah, ma, masel* (myself), *hissel, thegither, auld, haud* (on), *cauld, ault, aw, awnigh, baws, heid* (head), (they call) *um, eywis* (always), *ower, wisnae, dinnae, fae* (frae-from), *windae, taewards, maist* (most), *hame, nae mair, hair* (here), *thair, sais, claites* (clothes), *wee brar* (brother), *shite* (shit), *went n scored, drizzlin, sittin, tryin, blazin, screamin, wi* (with), *yir gaunny be, bein, dug* (dog), *cahsies, eftir, glesses* (glasses), *brek* (break)

C'moan ault time's sek

Ah sees Davie Creed comin doon

whae'd been standin thair

Ah wis determined no tae, a hud pills tae shift

fae one minute tae the next

b) Grammar:

i. negation:

no tae notice, wisnae, didnae, no feart

naebody, havnae, nae wonder

No seen you oot for a while, eh says tae me

ii. regularisation of the present tense paradigm, which is typical of English vernaculars too:

Ah sais, ah sees Davie Creed comin doon

iii. pronouns: second person personal pronoun, particularly the plural *youse, yis*
demonstrative pronouns *yon*, reflexive *hissel, masel*

iv. interchangeability of the nominative and oblique cases in pronouns: *us* (for: I)

v. past tense regularised: *since ah'd went*

gie, gied, yis, gieing

how ah would huv liked tae huv gied them a pill

c) Discourse elements: *aye* (yes)

d) Vocabulary:

ay (always), *ken, without* (outside), *swedgin* (making a hole), *deek at* (look at), *bairn, poxy* (spoiled), *plukey-faced* (pimple-faced) *wee, hing oot* (hang out), *radge* (mad, furious), *chuffed* (rude), *doss* (stupid, silly), *pish, ken, shan* (shabby), *gaff* (babble, chatter), *skag* (/become/ rotten, wrinkled), *voddy* (vodka), *dour* (stubborn), *pad* (footpath; depart), *gyp* (gype: stare foolishly), *todd* (euphemistic exclamation for God), *tak up the sticks* (exert oneself, "enter the fray") etc.

In the text of *Trainspotting* there is a relatively short section of a narrative in Standard English, where the voice of the main narrator is not heard. Since this is an exception to the narrator's Scots the text classifies as very dense Scots. Interestingly, even so it is not entirely in Scots as the short narrative text shows.

This simple analysis suggests that the Scots voice of contemporary Scottish prose is throughout a lower middle to working class one, which has its parallel in, for example, Tom Leonard's, poetry. For this reason it does not correspond to an ideal model for a national written standard because it is too obviously a (stigmatised) class variety. On the other hand, according to Corbett (2000, 6), Lallans has failed to substitute Standard English because of the English global dominance and because of the likelihood that it would come to be a marker of the same social exclusion that English represents. Standard varieties, however, including English in England, characteristically are markers of social exclusion.

On the other hand, Corbett (2000) quotes a passage from Matthew Fitt's science fiction novel *But n Ben a Go Go* (ibid.), which he uses to point out that there is room for an eclectic Scots of no particular regional or class groups. With such qualities it would be appropriate as a general Standard Scots. It seems to me that McClure deems it most important to have a distinct Scots vocabulary for the language to qualify as Scots. The quoted text Scots pronunciation and spelling such as *flair, alang, wis, singil, oot, doon, drapped aff, itsel, glessheid, intae, bleeze* (blaze), *owre, awa, caur* (car), etc. and vocabulary such as *stoor* (dust), *glower* (stare), *forenoon* (morning), *clatty* (gossipy), *intormittit* (interfered), *shoogle* (wobble), *jink* (turn quickly), *dichtin up* (dress up), *clart* (mud), *wersh* (unpalatable, dull), *keek* (peep), *skellied* (screamed), *puggie* (monkey), *heelstergowdie* (head-over-heels), *skite* (dart, slip, strike), *cleuk* (claw), *skitter* (slip), *vennel* (narrow alley), *toomness* (emptiness), *biel* (protection), *oorie* (dismal, gloomy, strange), *eerie* (ghostly, strange) etc. and such new formations as *indie-pouered germsooker* (rubber +powered – germ+sucker) or *lacra-leggit*. The grammar is entirely Standard English, except for the preterit and past participle in –it (intormittit).

7. Conclusion

The language of contemporary literature certainly shows a continuum from Standard (Scottish) English to the vernacular Scots. It also shows a continuum in the application of the latter form in dialogue, ranging from thin to dense, with a dense monologue of the narrator at the far end of the vernacular. With such varying practices some traditional Scots spellings are retained (e.g. *mair, dichtin, cauld*), and some phonetic spellings preferred (e.g. *oaf, polis, comin*, without the apostrophe). There is a scale of Scots vocabulary, some of it typical of urban colloquial styles outside Scotland as well, and a range of grammatical features. With a consensus on a standard spelling a standard Scots text would be clearly distinct from a non-standard Scots text, and a major distinction from English. The high number of English words in Scots is likely to diminish with the regular use of Scots words, and that goes for grammar as well. A problem with the influence of English vocabulary is not specific to Scotland, as it is flooding other languages, particularly in certain specific domains. The struggle against them is of varying success as can be witnessed from discussions of this problem.⁸

8 For instance an entire issue of the Norwegian periodical *Spr k nytt* (2004) is devoted to the problem of "replacement words" for English terms and colloquial usage, and the theme occurs practically in every issue. A similarly problem can be seen in the Croatian periodical *Ježik*.

But at present, as with earlier writers, Scots is not the voice of the third person narrator, and it is thus marked by the first person narrator's group, class or regional membership. In this manner it follows the tradition of non-standard language use in (European) literature in general. It would appear then that Scots is trapped in the compartment allotted to vernaculars with no standard that would be distinct enough from English to warrant the name *Scots* and the national symbolism that would be attached to it. And yet, it seems that what is needed most is an increase in prestige of Scots words and forms.

The fact that the language in contemporary literature is socially and regionally marked reflects the focus of interest in the 1980s, in which typical urban social and cultural scenes are supported by specific linguistic elements. So much so that it has been embraced by writers of the new minorities as their linguistic expression; in this way it does express a consensus on a widely spoken language, which is characteristic of Scotland. This is corroborated by the many features that are shared on all linguistic levels by the above analysed texts.

Historical and social conditions have drastically changed since the 18th or 19th centuries when one (prestigious) variety could be imposed on practically all domains of usage. In an age where multiculturalism and multilingualism has become a recognised social fact, and literary expression in minority languages or dialects is being encouraged (e.g. Gröndahl 2001), it is possible to imagine that two or various literary "languages" would develop. In fact a continuum, not unlike the one in contemporary Scottish literature, seems a likely development in a number of cultures, and it could become the norm rather than an exception. The middle of the continuum, in our analysis the "intermediary Scots", could in that case be expected to dominate the scene. In Scottish literature this would be the Scots that is not English.

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