

## DIALECT IN SCOTLAND

It might seem a waste of time to discuss in Colombia a dialect used by the country people in a faraway corner of the world like Scotland, but we can only say that where words are spoken, the philologist burrows like a gleeful gopher. The philologist who has never come across this dialect will establish immediate contacts between the significances, forms and phonetic developments of words in this dialect and those of other languages already known to him.

Dialect is generally considered to be a variety of a language, or in a wider sense, a branch of a parent language. However, as a result of the extraordinary history of English, a dialect of English has a relation to modern literary English that is at once more intimate and more detached than the relation of most dialects to their parent language. Jespersen says, "We see in English a phenomenon, which I think, is paralleled nowhere else to such an extent, namely the existence side by side for a long time, sometimes for centuries, of two slightly differing forms for the same word, one the original English form and the other Scandinavian". He gives such examples as *whole* ( $E^1$ ), *hale* ( $S^2$ ); *shirt*, *skirt*; *true*, *trigg*; *from*, *fro*. There is a further complication. When Jespersen refers here to original English and Scandinavian, he is considering the period after the Danish incursions, about 794-879, when Danish contrasted, one might say, with the language that had been developing in England during the centuries before. But that original English itself was composed of at least three branches of a Scandinavian language as spoken by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes who overran the eastern part of England after 449. These three branches had by no means welded themselves into one language when the Danes came, so the Danish element was itself thrown into a kind of melting-pot. What has happened in English, then, is that the descendant of all branches of the 'original English' together with some Danish, has predominated while traces of the component parts predominate in the dialects of outlying or tenaciously conservative districts.

The north-eastern corner of England was settled by the Angles who came from the small country of Angeln in Schleswig. Almost the entire people moved and made England their home, finally giving their name to the entire country. We do not know exactly when they first landed but we do know that they had founded a kingdom by 547 when a further contingent arrived, moved north and founded another kingdom, Bernicia. There followed a struggle lasting about 50 years

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<sup>1</sup> Scandinavian form

<sup>2</sup> English form.

between Deira (the first kingdom) and Bernicia, a struggle which ended in the uniting of the two kingdoms. This new kingdom was called Northumberland (land north of the River Humber) and stretched from the River Humber to the Firth of Forth. So the dialect now spoken in Scotland contains traces of the language of the Angles.

When we begin to investigate words peculiar to Scottish dialect, we frequently find that they are used exclusively by Scottish writers after about 1500. The reason probably is that the great writers (Robert Mannyn, William Langland, Mandeville and Chaucer) of that formative period of literary English from 1300 onwards, were men from the Midlands and the South. They used words familiar to them, and the words peculiar to the people of the North of England and the south of Scotland were left out of the literary language. The main current of English flowed by and left these words in what has come to be known as Scottish dialect.

When the expert ear listens first to Scottish dialect, it detects at once the close and sustained vowel, a long vowel that neither opens out nor dies away in the course of its utterance. Scots will talk of their 'clean' vowels when they compare their pronunciation with that of the English. What they mean is that the English vowel nearly always diphthongs at some point. Compare the English *no* (nou) with the Scottish *no* (no). There is even a tendency to eliminate the legitimately recognised diphthong in *town*, *out*, *brow*, *doubt*, reducing it to the single vowel *u* of the equivalent *broon*, *toon*, *oot*, *broo*, *doot*. In the effort to emphasise the vowel, we find that a loose, open vowel is often changed into a closed, tense vowel, preferably *i*, as in the following words:

<i>one</i>	<i>een</i>
<i>blood</i>	<i>bleed</i>
<i>moon</i>	<i>meen</i>
<i>stone</i>	<i>steen</i>
<i>head</i>	<i>heid</i>
<i>dead</i>	<i>deid</i>

The same tendency is seen in the change to the close *e* in

<i>card</i>	<i>caird</i>
<i>home</i>	<i>haim</i>
<i>toes</i>	<i>taes</i>
<i>both</i>	<i>baith</i>

So strong is the accentuation of the vowel that the semi-vowel (j) is often introduced before the vowel itself as a sort of jumbling-off place

for a more decided plunge into the vowel, as in

<i>ducks</i>	<i>duiks</i>
<i>books</i>	<i>buiks</i>
<i>nook</i>	<i>neuk</i>

The Scottish vowel insists on its full value and resonance to such an extent that the surrounding consonants, if not very strong, will be completely brushed off, leaving the word to be recognised by the bare vowel or vowels in an enlightening context. There is an oft-quoted Scottish anecdote which illustrates this point. An old woman is inspecting a woolen plaid hanging displayed at the door of the village-shop. The dialogue between her and the shopman goes as follows:

<i>'Oo?</i>	<i>Wool?</i>
<i>Ay, 'oo.</i>	<i>Yes, wool.</i>
<i>A' 'oo?</i>	<i>All Wool?</i>
<i>Ay, a' 'oo.</i>	<i>Yes, all wool.</i>
<i>A' ae 'oo?</i>	<i>All one wool.</i>
<i>Ay, a' ae 'oo.</i>	<i>Yes, all one wool.</i>

This happens mostly of course, with a semi-vowel sound like *w* or the lateral liquid *l* and often in the middle of a word as in

<i>called</i>	<i>ca'ed</i>
<i>salt</i>	<i>saut</i>
<i>of it</i>	<i>o't.</i>

This predilection for clear cut sound is not, however, confined to the vowel. Consonants, too, are enunciated with the decision and clearness of a shot. There is here little of the fluidity and melting of one sound into another that is so characteristic of English. The one sound which every caricaturist of the dialect (including Scottish comedians) picks out for comic effect is the rolled frontal *r*. In southern English that *r* no longer exists as an independent sound, but takes on the colour of its surroundings and when it does not receive sufficient encouragement from these surroundings, it tails off into a mere influence on the following or preceding vowel. But the Scottish *r* is a sturdy individual among sounds and is clearly vibrated even at the end of a word as in *river* from which position it has long since disappeared in modern English.

Another sound unknown in English is that back guttural *x* so common in German (*Buch. Kochen*) and in Spanish where it is written *j* as in *jadeante, lejos*, etc. The *gh* in English, usually silent

but influencing the preceding vowel, hardens into this decided consonant and the diphthong of the English gives place to a single vowel in such examples as bright, (bricht), night (nicht), right (richt). In words with the *gh* and no diphthong, the vowel opens slightly, as eight (acht), weight (wecht) freight (fracht). This is partly Scandinavian survival and partly the more consistent Scottish pronunciation of written sounds which English lost in the confusion caused by Norman French. The southern English softening down of the Scandinavian or German *k* to *ch* as in *church*, *chest*, *thatch*, *birch*, *breeches* has not developed (though it now appears by imitation) in Scotland where we say *kirk*, *thack*, *birk* and *breeks*. Robert Burns calls a sailor 'tarrybreeks' for obvious reasons. The last consonant shift, then, has not taken place or at least, has not taken place so completely as in English.

When we were considering the tendency to vocalisation, the tendency to sacrifice indefinite consonants and leave strong vowels, we saw that the most indefinite consonants and these most likely to drop out of a group of sounds were the half-vowel sounds witten *w* and *wh*. If these are to survive in the Scottish pronunciation of a word, they must become full-fledged consonants. This they do particularly in question words like *who*, *when* and *where*, that so often find themselves in an emphatic position at the beginning of a sentence. They become *fa?*, *fan?* and *faur?*

This tendency to clearcut sound puts the Scottish pronunciation in much the same relation to English as Spanish to Portuguese. The explanations are various and most have some basis of truth. The language of the North underwent much less of the softening influence of Norman French than the language of the South of England and retained that hard, glistening quality so characteristic of the Scandinavian languages. Also, the quality of a language, the general impression gathered from hearing it, perhaps without even understanding it, reflects fundamental elements in national character which in turn is deeply influenced by the surroundings, soil, climate etc. Scotland is a 'dourer' (Fr. Dur) country than England. The soil demands constant labour in return for scanty harvest. It is a hard land and the character it demands and has produced is tough, enduring and uncompromising. A softer character would be worn down by the constant struggle. In the same way the consonant sounds in the language either toughen into more decided, resisting consonants or tend to disappear.

Let us look now at the vocabulary of the dialect. There are German and French elements which, especially the French, are worthy of consideration. We use a number of German words with only local changes.

THOLE (Ger. dulden) to suffer, stand pain.

DOOL, the corresponding substantive which no longer applies to physical pain, but sorrow or the state brought about by an evil fate.

REEK (Ger. Rauch) smoke, as in the name Auld Reekie for our capital city Edinburgh.

MUCKLE (MHG michel or mihel) much.

SOUTAR (Ger. Schuster) shoemaker.

REIVE (Ger. rauben) to take by force as "the Border reiver" or thieves who used to make forays into England to steal the fat English cattle.

The German faculty of forming diminutives either of endearment or derision, flourishes in Scotland to an extent that borders on the ludicrous. Not only do we say *mannie* for a little man but we are capable of piling up diminutives until we reach *a wee bit mannikie* where the man has diminished into insignificance. Such diminutives as *toonie*, *quinie* (little girl), *fishie*, *wifie*, *loonie* (little boy), *bairnie* small child - from *born* *lummie* (small chimney), *briggie* (little bridge) are heard all over Scotland.

Now for the French element. During the 16th century the contact, political and cultural, between France and Scotland was very close.

Mary Stuart who afterwards became Mary, Queen of Scots, was educated and married in France and returned to Scotland a widow whose heart was in France. French guests, courtiers, soldiers and scholars left a number of French words in the common currency of Scottish expression, words which have remained in use ever since. Here are a few:

CORBIE (Fr. corbeau) as in the old ballad 'The Twa Corbies'.

ASHET (Fr. assiette) now means a large serving plate.

FASHED (Fr. fache) is still used in the original sense of annoyed, as in 'dinna fash yersel'

COWP (Fr. coup) has gone through numerous vicissitudes until it no longer means a blow, but the result of a blow, a capsizing or turning over. In 1823 Galt says 'Dear me, but ye hae gotten (notice the older form of got, surviving in the United States) an unco coup. I hope nae beens (bones) are broken?'. In less sanitary days the thrifty Scots appreciated a "freecoup" or place where they could throw out their rubbish free of charge. In some parts of the country such a place was called a "freetoom" (ON tom, emptiness). We commonly use the simile 'as toom as an eggshell'.

TASS or TASSIE (Fr. tasse) appears about 1580 in 'we toom a tass of wine' and Burns talks of a 'pint of wine in a silver tassie'.

GEEN or GEANS (Fr. guigne - related to the Spanish guinda) in the north of Scotland describes small wild cherries that grow on tall trees in sheltered valleys. In 1653 the word appears in a Scottish translation of Rabelais by Urquhart 'in the season of cherries and guinds'.

I do not claim here to give anything approaching exhaustive information about any aspect of Scottish dialect, but now, in a cursory way, I propose to look at a few of the words which have died out in English and have remained in Scottish dialect. This is the little game with words which is so popular with all those who love language. All the words which I mention here are in common use and have the strong flavour of the vernacular.

RAX, act of stretching. The intransitive verb means to stretch oneself after sleep. It appears in Langland's *Vision of Willian concerning Piers the Plowman* about 1377 - 'he roxed and roared', and then is seen no more in English, but in 1715 it is used by Allan Ramsay in *Christ's Kirk*:

Carles wha heard the cock had crawn  
Began to rax and rift.

Again in the modern dialect poem *It wasna his wyte* by Charles Murray, the small boy wakes to the cold Scottish morning:

'Och hay an' och hum he wis raxin 'himsel'  
An 'rubbin' his e'en fan he raes.

Notice here also the *n* plural of *e'e* (eye) instead of the general English *s*.

RIFT. In the quotation above from Allan Ramsay, we find the word 'rift' which describes a process considered impolite in these squeamish days. The word derives from the Norwegian meaning a cleft or chink and is defined as the act of belching or eructation. In 1725 Wyntoun in his *Chronicle* criticises a king who "thochte to ordane

Be statute qwhen men sulde lat ga  
Out of thar bodeis riftis of wynde."

Such interference appears to have been bitterly resented.

TYNE, from a Swedish dialect word meaning to destroy, lose or perish. Allan Ramsay once refers to wine being kept in "barrels ticht

that sall nae liquor tine" and again " she grasps the shadow but the substance tines" This is a favourite word of Robert Burns who says of one of his heroes, Tam o' Shanter (1790) "Tam tint (past tense) his reason a' thegither "(altogether).

Long could we continue to wander among these rich dialect words which bring to every Scotsman the very smell of his own country, so close are they to the earth. It is one of the most rewarding perquisites of the philologist's work that through words, solemn words, clownish words, children's words, working words and idling words, he is vouchsafed glimpses into the life of human beings in all times and all parts. He knows them in their humour, their work, their family mood as they sit round the fireside of a winter's evening. This intimacy is even closer when we look deeply into the words of such a people as the Scots, a people largely of farmers and fishermen who use words sparingly but richly.

RONA EARLE

Escuela Normal Superior, Bogotá.