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# Scots Language Attitudes and Language Maintenance

Caroline Macafee and Briega McGarrity

## *Abstract*

This paper attempts to correlate language attitudes in Aberdeen with a range of social variables, and with a simple measure of language maintenance.

A random sample with non-locals eliminated was taken from three districts of Aberdeen. 75 individuals filled in a postal questionnaire on their attitudes towards the traditional dialect of the North-East of Scotland, and of these 62 agreed to an interview. This allowed their attitudes to be explored in more depth, and they also responded to a lexical questionnaire which tested their knowledge and asked about their use of 96 dialect terms to do with weather.

Attitudes were on the whole very positive, and question by question there were no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) by gender, and very few by age or class. The lexical scores, however, showed, as expected, a very steep age gradient, although knowledge was not high even in the oldest age group (41 out of 96 items). Regression showed an average loss from frequent use of one word (i.e. almost 1% of this small specimen of lexis) for every 6 years of age.

In order to test for a relationship between attitudes and language maintenance, factor analysis was used to extract three attitudinal factors from the questionnaire responses, and these were correlated with the lexical scores. The factors were interpreted as Defensiveness, Positiveness and Participation. Participation and Positiveness did correlate with some measures of claimed use of the vocabulary, but there was no correlation with measures of knowledge.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the possibility of measuring and quantifying the relationship between language attitudes and language maintenance. It also has a secondary aim of exploring differences in attitudes between the Central Belt of Scotland and the North-East.

Anyone acquainted with the literature on the present state of the Scots language will be familiar with the low status that it has in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and its strong links there with social class stratification. Scots has been absorbed into a continuum with English in the Central Belt, to the extent that it is possible to conduct Labovian sociolinguistic studies, treating the Scots element as merely variation within English. A number of recent studies (Menzies, 1991; Macafee, 1994; Máté, 1996) indicate that speakers of Scots dialects in the Central Belt (and the South-West) often perceive themselves as speaking a mixed language, or even a slang form of Scots or English.

As we move north, however, we escape the anglicising influence of Edinburgh and the proletarian influence of Glasgow and, by the time we reach the North-Eastern corner of Scotland, we find a self-sufficient, locally rooted, proudly Scottish bourgeoisie who set a quite different tone with regard to local and Scottish culture, including the Scots language. North-Eastern Scots (sometimes known by the journalistic term 'the Doric') is held in high esteem, and is universally understood and spoken at least on some occasions by individuals all the way up the social scale. More than in Central Scotland, Scots in the North-East is perceived to be a linguistic entity distinct from English, and is focused by code-switching, rather than the code-mixing characteristic of the Central Belt.

Two recent studies which asked members of the public to say whether they spoke Scots both showed considerable regional differences. (The local government regions have now been replaced by a country structure.) The larger study (Máté, 1996; Macafee, in progress) used three separate market research studies with approximately one thousand respondents in each. A selection of the results is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Proportion of Scots speakers in three regions of Scotland, based on Máté, 1996: Table 5. Figures from Survey 2 have been omitted as invalid (Macafee, in progress)

Region	First Survey Scots speakers			Second Survey Scots speakers		
		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Grampian	66	110	60	63	108	58
Lothian	41	178	23	46	136	34
Strathclyde	129	455	28	137	487	28

The earlier – and ground-breaking – study by Murdoch (1995) has higher figures overall (probably in part because the methodology involved face-to-face interviews rather than cold questioning as part of a routine market research survey, and also in part because of a high proportion of 'non-native speakers', apparently people with passive knowledge of the language). In both studies, however, the same disproportion between the Central Belt and the North-East is evident. Murdoch has separate figures by the region in which people were interviewed and by the region in which they received their schooling. The figures for schooling show a very high proportion of the Grampian sample identifying themselves as Scots speakers (97%). See Table 2.

Table 2: Scots spickers resident an Scots spickers skweelit be selectit regions  
(based on Murdoch and Gordon)

Place of schooling /residence	Scots speakers schooled			Resident Scots speakers		
		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Grampian	23	24	96	30	30	100
Aberdeen	33	34	97	24	30	80
<b>Total Grampian</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>90</b>
Lothian	12	21	57	-	-	-
Edinburgh	8	13	62	-	-	-
<b>Total Lothian</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>53</b>
Strathclyde	19	38	50	9	30	30
Glasgow	20	48	42	16	30	53
<b>Total Strathclyde</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>402*</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>57</b>

\*The nummers dinna add up tae 450 as fowk educatit ootside Scotlan hae been omittit

Given these background differences, we should not be surprised to find that language attitudes in the North-East are rather different from those described in the sociolinguistic literature for Glasgow and Edinburgh, having more in common with the language loyalty reported from Shetland (Melchers, 1985), but combined, as in

Shetland, with the internalised ideologies of 'correctness' and 'clarity' attributed to the super-imposed Standard English (cf. Graham, 1983 and Roberts, 1993).

The research reported here was carried out in Aberdeen by Briege McGarrity under the supervision of Caroline Macafee. It was an attempt to build on the 1994 Glasgow research of Macafee, in which qualitative methods were used to explore language attitudes, and the attitudes expressed by the people interviewed did go a long way towards explaining the low status of Glasgow dialect, and its apparent decline in terms of lexical richness. Macafee's lexical questionnaire of about one hundred words was not designed as a measure of decline (on the contrary, it included children's vocabulary and slang as well as traditional Scots words), but as a stimulus for conversation with the interviewees. The Glasgow research consequently lacked quantitative measures of vocabulary maintenance and language attitudes, and there was therefore no way of systematically relating the two. In the Aberdeen research, an attempt was made to put this relationship on a quantitative footing.

The 1991 Census statistics for the Aberdeen wards were used to choose three areas of the city that it was hoped would produce a representative sample by social class. In practice, differential response rates produced a sample rather skewed towards the middle classes. The voters' roll was used to take a random sample of the adult population. A profile of the sample is given in Tables 3a-3d.

Tables 3a-3d: Profile of samples randomly selected in 3 wards of Aberdeen (non-natives dropped). 75 individuals replied to a postal questionnaire on attitudes, of whom 62 were interviewed and completed a lexical proficiency test.

Table 3a: Respondents by age group

Age group	No of respondents: lexis	No of respondents: attitudes
20-33yrs	23	25
34-45yrs	21	25
46-59yrs	11	13
60+ yrs	7	11
All	62	74*

\* missing data for 1 individual

Table 3b: Respondents by educational level.

Educational level	No of respondents: lexis	No of respondents: attitudes
Minimum	22	25
Secondary	9	13
Tertiary	31	37
All	62	75

Table 3c: Respondents by gender.

Gender	No of respondents: lexis	No of respondents: attitudes
Males	26	34
Females	36	41
All	62	75

Table 3d: Respondents by manual versus non-manual occupation.

Occupation	No of respondents: lexis	No of respondents: attitudes
Non-manual	39	49
Manual	23	26
All	62	75

McGarrity (1998) gives a breakdown into five occupational classes, but unfortunately only two unskilled manual respondents were obtained, and many of the analyses by occupational class in the research become statistically significant only when the occupational groups are collapsed into the two broad categories given here.

The initial contact was made by post. An attitude questionnaire and a questionnaire asking for basic personal data were sent out. The people contacted were also asked if they would agree to an interview. Non-locals were eliminated when the postal questionnaires were returned, leaving 75 individuals, of whom 62 agreed to be interviewed. Macafee's experience in Glasgow had led us to attach a high value to qualitative interviews as a way of countering the reductive tendency of attitude questionnaires, and of getting to the complexity and internally contradictory nature of real people's responses to linguistic pressures. We do not have space to explore this aspect in the present paper, but see McGarrity (1998).

The interview also included the administration of the lexical questionnaire. This was, in effect, a very crude proficiency test. What we did was to select an area of vocabulary and establish what we hoped was a full word list for the North-Eastern Scots dialect. The area chosen was the weather, which then had to be considerably whittled down to precipitation only, in order to get a small enough word list. We considered using parts of the body, and in retrospect this would probably have been a better measure, but we were afraid that this was too intimate a topic. Initially, we thought that weather was something that was not likely to be affected by external factors (in the way that much dialect vocabulary is moribund because the referent is out of date), but of course, the vocabulary of the weather is affected by changes in lifestyle and working conditions – people simply do not have to pay so much attention to the vagaries of the climate, living as we do a more protected and indoors life than previous generations. The word list was compiled from *The Concise Scots Dictionary* and recently-published local word lists (Buchan and Toulmin, 1989; Wilson, 1993) to provide a baseline of vocabulary traditional to the area. The questionnaire was administered in two parts, first of all supplying the English word and asking for Doric equivalents, and then presenting the Doric words and asking if the person knew and used them. 'Use' was graded on a three-point scale from 'rarely' through 'occasionally' to 'frequently'. There were 96 weather terms, including words distinctive to Scots (e.g. onding ěa downpourĭ) or to the Doric (e.g. ondag ěa downpourĭ, goor ěslush in running waterĭ, drabblichy ědrizzlyĭ) and distinctive forms of words shared with Standard English (e.g. weetie ěwetĭ). The scoring system was as follows:

0 = no knowledge, 1 = passive knowledge, 2 = rare use, 3 = occasional use, 4 = frequent use.

This gives a number of possible ways of scoring the lexical results. Taking the

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results as they stand, the possible score for any word is 0-4. It is also possible to produce a Knowledge score by keeping 0 as 0 and taking any other response (i.e. knowledge or any other degree of use) as 1. Similarly, a Use score can be constructed by taking knowledge without use as 0 and any use as 1. Scores were also calculated for Occasional/Frequent Use and for Frequent Use. In brief, the composite lexical scores were calculated as follows:

- Overall = average score
- Knowledge = recode 0 = 0, 1/2/3/4 = 1
- Use = recode 0/1 = 0, 2/3/4 = 1
- Occasional/Frequent use = recode 0/1/2 = 0, 3/4 = 1
- Frequent use = recode 0/1/2/3 = 0, 4 = 1.

A summary of the scores by age, gender, education and occupation is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Group scores, lexical questionnaire

Social Groups	Overall possible score = 384	Knowledge possible score = 96	Use possible score = 96	Occasional/ Frequent Use possible score = 96	Frequent Use possible score = 96
20-33	47	24	10	8	5
34-45	60	30	13	11	6
46-59	<b>82**</b>	<b>38*</b>	<b>17*</b>	<b>15*</b>	<b>11*</b>
60+	<b>93**</b>	<b>41*</b>	<b>23**</b>	<b>18**</b>	<b>11*</b>
Male	63	31	14	12	8
Female	62	30	13	12	7
Minimum	<b>74*</b>	33	<b>17*</b>	<b>15*</b>	<b>10*</b>
Secondary	57	26	13	12	7
Tertiary	55	30	11	10	5
Non- manual	56	29	12	10	5
Manual	<b>73*</b>	36	<b>16*</b>	<b>14*</b>	<b>10*</b>

The asterisks denote statistical significance at the 0.05 (\*\*) or the 0.1 (\*) level.



It will be seen that there is a relationship of both Knowledge and Use (in various degrees) – and therefore also the overall score – with education and with occupation. (Although not statistically significant, the difference between non-manual and manual occupations for Knowledge is in the expected direction.) There is no relationship with gender.

One of the difficulties in measuring language maintenance is the establishment of a realistic baseline. The main reference sources – the Scots dictionaries and *The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland* – are all at least partly antiquarian in intention and probably do not represent the typical Scots vocabulary of the average member of the public at the time the materials were collected. Various studies of vocabulary maintenance have found a very steep decline relative to these sources (for a summary of such studies, see Macafee, 1997; and add Hendry, 1997). In the present study, we found that even the oldest age group in the sample knew less than half of the vocabulary (see the column 'Knowledge' in Table 4). The number of words in Frequent Use was very small. For other age groups, the loss of vocabulary was considerable: a regression on age showed an average loss of one word (i.e. about 1% of this small specimen word list) from Frequent Use for every six years of age. However, this is not so steep as the decline in Knowledge. The figures for all four categories of Knowledge and Use are as follows:

Knowledge: coefficient = 0.38, i.e. approximately 1 word/ word form lost for each 2.5 years of age

Use: coefficient = 0.26, i.e. approximately 1 word/ word form lost for each 4 years of age

Occasional/Frequent use: coefficient = 0.20, i.e. approximately 1 word/ word form lost for each 5 years of age

Frequent use: coefficient = 0.16, i.e. approximately 1 word/ word form lost for each 6 years of age.

In general, the decreasing rate of loss through these categories suggests that Frequent Use may be bottoming out at the end of an S-curve, leaving a residuum of vocabulary with a good chance of indefinite survival.

The attitude questionnaire is given in Table 5 (see Appendix). It includes questions of belief (e.g. 'Women know and use more Doric words and phrases than men') as well as value judgements (e.g. 'The Doric is old-fashioned') and readiness for action (e.g. 'Schools in the North-East should encourage their pupils to become better acquainted with the Doric and Scots language in general'). There are also factual

questions about language (e.g. 'I can understand the Doric in its written form'). The respondents were presented with a five-point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'agree' to 'neutral' to 'disagree' to 'strongly disagree'. The presentation of the questions was varied so that respondents did not fall into a pattern of expecting always to agree or disagree. Most of the questions can be regarded as having positive or negative implications for the language, and the scores are adjusted in Table 5 so that a high score (above 3) is always a sign of positive rather than negative attitudes (if applicable). A quick glance at the mean scores in Table 5 will show that the attitudes expressed were generally very positive, despite this being a mostly middle class, urban sample. There tended to be agreement with some pessimistic statements (7, 26), giving low scores; and statements concerning participation (4, 15, 27) also produced some scores neutral or below. Statements 20 and 21, to which we will return, are also neutral or low.

There is no space here to discuss the scores for the individual attitude questions (see McGarrity, 1998). The most notable findings were that the elderly were more likely to agree that the Doric was old-fashioned (statement 17), but never agreed that they used Doric words only in jest (statement 28). The professional and managerial class mostly disagreed that they spoke the Doric (statement 4). (Surprisingly, the two unskilled manual respondents were also divided between disagreement and neutrality.) Skilled non-manual workers were particularly likely to disagree that lack of contact between grandparents and grandchildren was killing the Doric (statement 26). They were more neutral than other occupational classes on whether the Doric forms part of the North-East identity (statement 29) and on whether North-Easterners should make efforts to preserve Doric words and phrases (statement 30) (compare Labov's classic findings concerning the linguistic aspirations and insecurity of the second-highest class). Dividing the sample into two occupational groups, as here, non-manual respondents were more likely to use Doric words in jest (statement 28). Those with tertiary education were less likely to say that they spoke the Doric, but were more likely to speak the Doric only in jest. Unlike those with minimum or tertiary education, those with secondary education showed no agreement at all with the statement that the Doric is mostly spoken by uneducated people (statement 11). Again, there were no significant differences by gender.

In order to test for a correlation between attitude scores and lexical proficiency (or language maintenance), we attempted to summarise the 30 questions in terms of broad, underlying attitudinal dispositions. These composite attitude scores were constructed using a Principal Components Analysis. This is a way of comparing the results for the 30 attitude questions in order to group together those questions that are,

in some sense, measuring the same thing. In this analysis, one statement (5) was dropped, as the interviews had revealed the responses to be unreliable. Four others (2, 10, 20 and 27) were dropped for low sampling adequacy as revealed by an anti-image correlation matrix (they did not differentiate amongst individuals – in other words there was a large measure of agreement in the responses). The analysis produced 8 factors with an Eigen value of 1.00 or more, cumulatively explaining 72.1% of the variance. The first 3 factors were selected for discussion, as showing meaningful groupings of the statements, and these 3 factors cumulatively explain 47.8% of the variance. The statements that make up each factor are noted in the first column of Table 5 (in abbreviated form). Notice that a particular statement can contribute to more than one factor. The first factor was termed Defensiveness. Its Eigen value was 5.53, and it explained 22.1% of the variance. The strength of this factor, however, may be due to the similarity amongst some of the constituent questions. The second factor was termed Positiveness, with an Eigen value of 4.48, explaining 18.0% of the variance. The third factor was termed Participation, with an Eigen value of 1.92, explaining 7.7% of the variance. There was only one significant relationship between these scores and social variables, namely Participation with occupation. Recall that we also found only a few significant relationships between the individual attitude questions and the pre-determined social factors. This suggests that there are unidentified extra-linguistic factors at work. The three components together explain about half of the variance in the data, but they are measuring some unknown aspects of life experience that do not coincide neatly with age, education or occupation.

One of the main goals of the research was to relate attitudes to language maintenance. This was done by giving each individual a score on each of the three attitudinal factors and correlating these scores with scores for lexical knowledge and use. There were only three significant correlations, all of them positive. The factor Positiveness correlated with one of the measures of lexical use. The factor Participation correlated with two of the measures of use, as one would hope, since it includes statements about language use. The figures were as follows:

Use correlates positively with Positiveness (+0.333, \*)

Use correlates positively with Participation (+0.509, \*\*)

Occasional/Frequent Use correlates positively with Participation  
(+0.440, \*\*)

(\* = significance, \*\* = strong significance)

In general, however, the usual social variables do not go a long way towards

explaining language attitudes in this community, and language attitudes do not go very far in explaining lexical decline. The attitudes are largely positive and this is shared by the middle as well as the working classes, and yet the traditional vocabulary seems to be rapidly disappearing from use (and thereafter, of course, from knowledge).

We conclude that attitudes, as we have been able to measure them, may to some extent guide the use of the traditional dialect, particularly a readiness to participate and the assignment of a high value to the dialect (elements of the factor we have named Participation); but that the continuing decline in the corpus of vocabulary remains to be explained by other factors, such as change in material culture (in this case less exposure to and dependence on the vagaries of the elements). There were, nevertheless, clearly internal conflicts in speaker attitudes. It should also be noted that the Aberdeen dialect is perceived as degraded relative to the traditional rural dialect, and that in stating their attitudes towards 'the Doric', respondents may have had the idealised rural dialect in mind. Two of the few questions on which speakers were not on average positive (see Table 5) were statement 20, 'Standard English speakers have more success in the modern world than dialect speakers' (i.e. there tended to be agreement with this), and statement 21, 'Standard English should be spoken to children' (neutral). The face-to-face interviews also brought out this old, familiar story of a tension between loyalty to the traditional dialect and a belief that it is a material handicap. To some extent, previous studies of attitudes (as suggested in Macafee, 1994) may have unintentionally focused the respondents' attention on issues of 'inferiority' relative to Standard English, but the regional figures for Scots speaking, cited at the beginning of this paper, suggest that language loyalty may indeed be particularly strong in the North-East of Scotland.

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APPENDIX

Table 5: Average scores for 30 attitudinal statements

	Statements 1-30	Score					Mean Score
		1	2	3	4	5	
1 Pa	The Doric is a dialect of Scots	1.3	5.3	6.7	52	34.7	4.1
2	The Doric is peculiar to the North-East of Scotland	4.0	9.3	5.3	46.7	34.7	3.9
3	The Doric still in current use in the North-East of Scotland	0	2.7	10.7	62.7	24	4.0
4 Pa	I speak the Doric	13.3	20	26.7	26.7	13.3	3.0
5	I understand the Doric but I do not speak it	12	24	13.3	42.7	8	3.1
6 Pa	I understand the Doric in its written form	2.7	14.7	20	52	10.7	3.5
7 D	The Doric is being successfully passed down to the younger generation	10.7	50.7	21.3	16	1.3	2.5
8 Po	* The Doric is sub-standard English	40	32	21.3	5.3	1.3	4.0
9 D	The influx of incomers from outside of the North-East has adversely affected the survival of the Doric	2.7	20	20	45.3	12	3.4
10	The Doric is more commonly spoken in rural areas	1.3	8.0	2.7	64	24	4.0
11	* The Doric is mostly spoken by uneducated people	33.3	40	16	8	2.7	3.9
12	Women know and use more Doric words and phrases than men	12.0	33.3	49.3	5.3	0	3.9
13 Pa	There should be more entertaining programmes on television and radio in the Doric	0	24	36	34.7	5.3	3.2
14 Pa	There should be more serious, high quality programmes on television and radio in the Doric	1.3	18.7	44	32	4	3.1
15	I participate in activities involving the Doric, e.g. singing, poetry reciting,	29.3	42.7	18.7	5.3	4.0	2.1

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	storytelling, party pieces, festivals, attending Doric classes						
16 Po	Schools in the North-East should encourage their pupils to become better acquainted with the Doric and Scots language in general	2.7	9.3	17.3	49.3	21.3	3.7
17 Po	The Doric is old-fashioned	22.7	41.3	18.7	16	1.3	3.7
18	* The Doric is mostly spoken by working-class people	17.3	29.3	17.3	34.7	1.3	3.3
19 D	City people do not speak the traditional Doric	4.0	25.3	20	45.3	5.3	3.2
20	* Speakers of Standard English are more successful in the modern world than dialect speakers	6.7	18.7	17.3	48	9.3	2.7
21 Po	* You should speak Standard English to children	8.0	24	29.3	37.3	1.3	3.0
22 D	Television is killing the Doric	1.3	20	30.7	32.0	16	3.4
23 D	Newspapers are killing the Doric	1.3	32	26.7	37.3	2.7	3.0
24 D	Radio is killing the Doric	1.3	16	20	52	10.7	3.5
25 D	Formal education is killing the Doric	1.3	18.7	30.7	42.7	6.7	3.3
26 D	Lack of contact between grandparents and grandchildren is killing the Doric	12	53.3	14.7	16	4	2.5
27	* I confine the Doric to informal situations, i.e. speaking to family, friends and neighbours	4.0	16	14.7	53.3	12	2.5
28	* I only use Doric words in jest	14.7	41.3	25.3	17.3	1.3	3.5
29 Po Pa	The Doric forms an important part of our North-East identity	1.3	1.3	14.7	37.3	45.3	4.2
30 Po Pa	The people of the North-East should make every effort to preserve the wealth of Doric words and phrases	1.3	4.0	13.3	40	41.3	4.2

Scores run from 1-5 (3 = neutral, poles are (dis)agreement and strong (dis)agreement), adjusted so that the higher the score, the more positive the response. Items marked with an asterisk have been reversed in the scoring system.

D= Defensiveness, Po = Positiveness, Pa = Participation (Principal Components)