

Paper proposal for the 21st International Congress of Linguists

Focus Stream 1: Decolonising approaches to language diversity and reclamation

Title: The future of Scots through community lens: From "poor English" to official recognition

Keywords: Scots, community-driven language policy, emic perspectives, invisibility, decolonisation

Scots is the oldest indigenous Germanic language in Scotland (for a recent historical overview, see Millar 2023) and a minority language protected by the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, alongside Scottish Gaelic and other Celtic languages of the UK. Its long-term association with working class and rural areas, as well as a close relationship to English, have resulted in disparaging attitudes towards the language. In sociolinguistic terms, Scots is often placed on a register continuum with Scottish Standard English (Corbett et al. 2003). This fact contributes to the invisibility of Scots as a language in its own right, also among the speakers. Recently, Scots has been experiencing a boost thanks to grass-roots activism on social media, in primary and secondary education, and in the public and academic sphere. In November 2023, the Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Languages Bill, which for the first time could give legal recognition to Scots. The Bill is currently being scrutinised by the Scottish Parliament. This presentation draws on a project on community-driven language policy for Scots, which directly fed into the Bill. The following three questions will be addressed:

1. What are the most prominent themes for stakeholders and the Scots language community in relation to policy and planning efforts?
2. What are individual concerns and hopes in the community?
3. Is decolonisation an appropriate discourse framework for the revitalisation of Scots?

To answer the first question, I will extract the themes from (a) the transcripts of the workshops with 4 stakeholder groups: teachers, representatives of creative industries, representatives of various broadcasting media, and policy makers, and (b) the discussions held at a 1-day symposium involving a broader range of stakeholders, community members and academics working with various minority language contexts. The second question will be illuminated with reflections gathered from a public survey where self-selecting informants shared personal insights on Scots in education, in creative arts, media, and in policy. Finally, I will interrogate decolonisation as a discourse framework in the context of Scots. One of the challenges is certainly the colonial past of Scotland itself and its role in the British Empire. However, I will argue that Scotland is an example of self-colonisation, whereby its indigenous language was often consciously abandoned to promote the prestigious English standard. As a result, and as revealed by answers to questions (1) and (2), Scots speakers today lack the confidence in their own linguistic heritage.

References:

Corbett, J. et al. 2003. A Brief History of Scots, in J. Corbett et al. eds, *Edinburgh Companion to Scots*. Edinburgh: EUP. 1-16.

Millar, Robert McColl. 2023. *A history of the Scots language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Scottish Languages Bill: <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/scottish-languages-bill> (Accessed 30 January 2024)