

**Legitimizing inaction:  
Differing identity constructions of the Scots language<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The Scots language plays a key role in the political and cultural landscape of contemporary Scotland. From a discourse-historical perspective (Wodak 2001), this paper explores how language ideologies about the Scots language are linguistically realized in a so-called 'languages strategy' drafted by the Scottish Executive, and also in focus groups consisting of Scottish people. This paper shows that although the decline of Scots is said to be a 'tragedy', focus group participants seem to reject the notion of Scots as a viable, contemporary language that can be used across a wide range of registers. The policy document also seem to construct Scots in very positive terms, but are shown to be unhelpful or potentially even damaging in the process of changing public attitudes to Scots.

## **Keywords**

Bourdieu, discourse-historical approach, discursive construction, language policy, Scottish national identity, Scots language

## **1. Introduction**

That language is an important component in the identity construction of individuals and groups has been shown in countless studies from different perspectives and disciplines (not least in the pages of this journal, see also e.g. Ricento 2005). However, the discursive identity construction of languages themselves has been subject to somewhat less scholarly interest: in other words, how people talk and write about a particular language or language variety. This has often been included as part of wider studies of discursive construction (e.g. Wodak et al. 1999, Ricento 2003). Nevertheless, I would argue that a more specific focus on how a language is constructed in discourse is an important step towards a better understanding of the political and cultural landscape of a region or nation, particularly as part of a process of what Keating (1997) calls 'stateless nation building'. The purpose of this article, then, is to examine identity constructions of the Scots language in different kinds of texts. Top-down texts such as educational guidelines and policy documents often deal with Scots in institutional contexts (the classroom, parliament, census forms), but also in the private sphere (the home, family settings). Bottom-up texts, such as those produced in focus groups consisting of Scots speakers, may also have Scots in these contexts as a topic. The top-down texts produce not permanent but relatively stable constructions, which eventually become hegemonic language ideologies (see Wodak and Meyer 2009:9), and are reproduced unquestioningly in the bottom-up texts.

I will begin by briefly giving some background to Scots and its role in Scottish society. I will then outline my theoretical and methodological approach, which draws on critical discourse analysis and the work of Pierre Bourdieu before giving some examples of top-down and bottom-up discursive construction in

action. In a necessarily brief journal article I cannot include lengthy text extracts, but a fuller account of my analysis is given in Unger (2009).

## 2. Scots, past and present

Scots, also called Lowland Scots or Lallans, is a West-Germanic language spoken principally in the Lowland areas of Scotland (the South, the 'Central Belt' between Edinburgh and Glasgow, the North East) in the Northern Isles, and in Northern Ireland (Corbett et al. 2003). It is closely related to, and indeed closely connected to English. For the past 30 years, scholars have tended to describe Scots as existing on a continuum with Scottish Standard English, i.e. English as spoken in Scotland in (most) formal contexts by middle class speakers (Aitken 1979, see also Douglas 2006). This continuum exists on multiple linguistic levels, with differences between Scots and Scottish Standard English in:

1. **Lexis:** Scots has a large body of distinctive lexis which is unrelated or only distantly related to commonly used words in present-day English (e.g. *keek* 'glance', *dreich* 'dreary', *speir* 'ask', etc.) A number of other lexemes are cognate with words in English, i.e. they are more closely related and often distinguished only by differing pronunciation or spelling (e.g. *lang* 'long', *baw* or *ba* 'ball', etc.). Finally, Scots lexis also overlaps with English lexis, so that some words are identical (in writing, at least), such as *information*, *first*, *time*, etc.
2. **Syntax & morphology:** Although many of the syntactic and morphological patterns found in Scots are identical or very similar to those found in English, there are a few differences, such as the negative marker *na* or *nae* (e.g. *canna* 'cannot') and the use of the ending *-s* for verbs with third-person plural subjects (e.g. *whit fowk speaks Scots* 'which people speak Scots').
3. **Orthography & phonology:** There is no commonly accepted standard form of Scots, whether spoken or written. Thus, writers of Scots may invent their own orthography or may use historically common or prestigious forms (e.g. spellings favoured by Robert Burns). Some contemporary writers prefer to use spellings which are clearly different from their English cognates, so that for example they may prefer <oot> to <out> even if many Scots speakers would pronounce the latter as /ʉt/ regardless of its spelling. Scots has many phonological differences when compared with (most varieties of) English, but because it shares many features with Scottish Standard English, these cannot be thought of as distinctive to Scots only. For example, both Scots and Scottish Standard English are rhotic and both typically realise the spelling <ch> as /x/ (e.g. in *loch*). Scots speakers may additionally realise the spelling <gh> as /x/, e.g. in *daughter* (also spelt <dochter> in Scots).

While they cannot be said to be related to Gaelic, both Scots and Scottish Standard English show a greater incidence of lexical borrowing from Gaelic than is found in other West-Germanic languages, apart from the English spoken in the formerly Gaelic-speaking Highlands (see McClure, 1994). Although there has

been no attempt to collect data on the number of Scots speakers in the national census to date, a study commissioned by the General Register Office for Scotland found that there were around 1.5 million speakers of Scots in some form towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Macafee 1996). If these figures are accurate, this makes Scots the most widely spoken indigenous minority language in the UK. Nevertheless, Scots is also the least recognisable indigenous minority language because it is so closely related to English, in comparison to Welsh or Gaelic, which has marked implications for its discursive construction.

As I describe in more detail in Unger (2008), Scots at one time held the status of a full national language, used in all domains of public and private life in the non-Gaelic speaking areas of Scotland, i.e. the Lowlands (see also Corbett et al. 2003). From this 'heyday of the Scots language' (Murison 1979:8) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the use and most notably also the status of Scots declined, so that today the use of spoken Scots is largely restricted to certain geographical areas (e.g. the North-East of Scotland), contexts (e.g. the home, TV comedy) and registers (informal, agricultural, etc.). Although many people still hold negative and prejudiced attitudes towards Scots (a typical description is 'bad English'), there has in recent years been a resurgence of interest in Scots both 'from above' (e.g. through various government initiatives and changes in educational policy) and 'from below', e.g. through increased activity by activist organisations (see Millar 2006). The decline in spoken Scots among the last remaining 'bastion' of working-class and rural speakers was matched by an increase in the use of Scots by (mainly) university-educated writers (e.g. in the work of James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, James Robertson, Janet Paisley, Matthew Fitt, Kathleen Jamie, and others). These writers may be seen as continuing the trend started in the 1920s (in a literary and cultural independence movement led by Hugh MacDiarmid and others). While some writers (e.g. Welsh) mainly use Scots in the speech of certain characters, others (e.g. Fitt) write in varieties that are closer to the Scots end of the continuum mentioned above (see also Unger 2004 for further discussion of how Scots can be used for characterisation in fiction, e.g. representing Scots speakers as uneducated, tough, etc.).

### **3. Theoretical background**

#### **3.1. Discourse-historical approach**

Although minority languages can be (and have been) approached from many different perspectives, my approach draws heavily on one particular version of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the discourse-historical approach (DHA) developed by Ruth Wodak (see Wodak 2001) and others. I follow Lemke (1995:7f) in defining *discourse* as 'the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting' (see also Wodak 2008:6). The DHA emphasizes the historical and present contextual dimensions of discourse, where context can be seen as the environment or surrounding conditions of discourse (see also van Dijk 2008). It also focuses on the linguistic aspects of texts, by drawing on 'linguistic theories, for example, theories of argumentation, of grammar, of rhetoric, [to] try to describe and explain the pattern specific to language systems and verbal communication' (Meyer 2001:20-21). An analysis from a DHA perspective will

thus include detailed examination of texts in their context, from the *macro* level comprising culture, society, history to the *micro* textual level.

### **3.1.1. Bourdieu**

The second main influence on my theoretical framework is the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his metaphoric use of the terms *market* and *capital* to describe elements of linguistic interactions. In Bourdieu's view, a linguistic market exists 'whenever someone produces an utterance for receivers capable of assessing it, evaluating it and setting a price on it' (Bourdieu 1993:78). The value of an utterance is highly dependent on the immediate context. Thus, someone who is highly competent at using a feature highly valued in that particular market could be said to hold capital in that market (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu points out that 'there is a very clear relation of dependence between the mechanisms of political domination and the mechanisms of linguistic price formation that characterize a given social situation' (Bourdieu 1993:80). Capital, as Bourdieu states, holds value only on a certain market, and mainly it is those who hold the most capital who also have the most control over the rules of price formation and even over the existence of the market itself.

Here, then, we come to the reason why Bourdieu's market metaphor is so relevant to the situation in Scotland. Like all language users, Scots speakers hold varying amounts of capital on different markets in their interactions. My hypothesis here is that Scots fetches the highest price in 'domestic' markets (in the home) and those centred around specific Scottish cultural events (e.g. Burns night). Scots is worth almost nothing (largely due to lack of comprehension by interlocutors, probably) outside Scotland, and in most 'official' contexts such as interactions within the fields of education, politics, and other formal situations. Even within these fields, however, there are times when Scots is valued more highly (e.g. by some teachers in English classes, by politicians in parliamentary debates on the languages of Scotland). A key factor, and one which I attempt to investigate in my data, is the value speakers themselves place on their own use of Scots, as shown by the discursive strategies they use to construct it.

## **4. Top-down constructions of Scots**

In this section I present an analysis of a text that is an example of elite social actors (politicians, bureaucrats) constructing Scots. It is a strategy document put out for consultation by the Scottish Executive in early 2007, entitled 'A Strategy for Scotland's Languages'. In some senses, it could be described as a 'failure', because it was quietly scrapped by the new (and renamed) Scottish Government later in 2007 after rampant criticism by activists and scholars in the course of the consultation. However, it represents an important step in the top-down discursive construction of Scots, as it was the first ever explicitly formulated languages strategy for Scotland.

Although this is the only document in which the Scottish Executive explicitly laid out its goals with respect to Scots, the goals themselves are far from concrete, as I shall demonstrate below. The text further permits a close comparison of the Scottish Executive's construction of other languages with its construction of

Scots, although detailed analysis of how other languages are constructed is outwith the scope of this paper<sup>ii</sup>. Responses to the consultation were almost all very critical of the document, some in general terms and some with reference to specific items that were seen as insufficient and in need of amendment (the responses are available from <http://tinyurl.com/b6w9r3>). The main areas of contention were the statement that 'Scots is not an endangered language', the lack of information available about Scots on which to base the statements in the strategy, and the perceived inequality of the provisions for Scots and for other languages. Each of these points is taken up in further detail below an extract from the strategy, with added line numbers for ease of reference:

## 1 Scots

2 The Scots language is an important part of Scotland's cultural heritage.  
3 It is a living language and is still widely spoken across Scotland today in  
4 a variety of forms such as Scots, Doric and Lallans. Unlike Gaelic, Scots  
5 is not an endangered language and has considerable overlap with  
6 Scottish Standard English. However, it is important that we recognise,  
7 respect and celebrate the Scots language as an integral part of our  
8 cultural heritage. We must also ensure a familiarity with the language  
9 so that we continue to understand not only our literature and our  
10 historical record but also our contemporary arts as well.

11 We are aware that there are many people in Scotland who do not regard  
12 Scots as a separate language. Scots, however, was once recognised as a  
13 language of government, business, academia and everyday life in  
14 Scotland. Scots, like English, German, Dutch, Norwegian and Danish, is  
15 a Germanic language. It is important for the confidence of Scots  
16 speakers that we recognise and respect it as a distinct language. We  
17 should not assume that speaking Scots is an indication of poor  
18 competence in English. Instead, we should celebrate the contribution  
19 that Scots has made to the modern English vocabulary as well as the  
20 influence that Scots speakers have had on the modern world – in  
21 disciplines such as science, literature, economics, politics, philosophy  
22 and the arts.

23 People in Scotland who are not from Scots-speaking families or  
24 communities – should also be encouraged to celebrate Scots as an  
25 important part of our diverse cultural heritage. Familiarity with Scots  
26 allows us to enjoy not only the great literature of the past but  
27 contemporary arts and culture as well.

28 The Executive's National Guidelines on English Language 5-14 advocate  
29 the inclusion of Scots in the school curriculum where appropriate. The  
30 Guidelines advocate the inclusion of Scots literature in the curriculum,  
31 and Learning and Teaching Scotland produces teaching materials in  
32 support of this inclusive policy. This allows pupils to be confident and  
33 creative in language and to develop notions of language diversity,  
34 within which they can appreciate the range of accents, dialects and  
35 forms of expression they encounter. This helps children value the Scots  
36 they may use at home or with their peers.

37 In addition, there are a range of groups supporting and promoting  
38 Scots, including the Scots Language Society, the Scots Language  
39 Resource Centre, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Dictionary of the  
40 Scottish Tongue, and the Association for Scottish Literary Studies. These  
41 groups have made important contributions towards raising the profile  
42 of Scots and thus enriching Scotland's cultural life.

It is unclear why the Scottish Executive decided to issue a languages strategy in 2007 – perhaps they were keen to comply with demands placed on them by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (see e.g. Horsbroch 2001), or by the EU's common framework for modern language education. Perhaps the governing parties perceived the SNP's manifesto commitments to Scots speakers as a threat, and wanted to pre-empt them. It is rather more clear, however, that Scots had not been a priority for the Scottish Executive up to this point (Millar 2006).

The extract analysed in this section is part of a longer document comprising over 20 pages. In addition to providing a rationale for the strategy itself, it provided details of the Scottish Executive's policies relating to both indigenous (English, Gaelic, Scots) and other (e.g. British Sign Language, 'Other Minority/Community Languages') and also details of language provision and related initiatives. Consultation responses criticized the document for being vague and unfocused, at times conflicting, as well as treating different languages unequally. It is clear to me (and evidently to several other respondents to the consultation) that this document fails as a strategy with respect to Scots, for several key reasons:

- It proposes no new initiatives, but instead just describes existing initiatives (such as the 5-14 guidelines, which in any case are less than advantageous for Scots, as discussed above)
- There is a lack of concrete goals, i.e. any goals mentioned may sound good but are hard to implement: for instance, encouraging people to 'celebrate Scots' (18).<sup>iii</sup>
- A number of the statements are either not supported by what (little) research is available (e.g. 'Scots is not an endangered language' (4-5)), or are vague and thus not falsifiable (e.g. 'We are aware that there are many people in Scotland who do not regard Scots as a separate language.' (11-12) – without a clear definition of what a separate language is, this statement is next to meaningless).
- Although key stakeholders, such as activist organisations, are mentioned, their main concerns and campaigns, such as adding a question on Scots to the 2011 census, are not mentioned.

Of particular concern to consultation respondents is the emphasis on 'celebrating', 'respecting', etc. without any real discussion of how Scots will be promoted or how the strategy will be implemented. This view of the *content* of this policy is supported by my analysis of the discursive strategies used to construct Scots in the document.

#### **4.1. Discursive strategies and their linguistic realisations**

Much of the CDA research since Wodak et al.'s seminal study on national identity (Wodak et al. 1998) has shown how particular social groups are the subject of specific discursive strategies in texts found in the public sphere (Blackledge 2002, Ricento 2003, Blackledge 2005, Baker et al. 2008). In this section I show how in my data these strategies are applied not only to the social groups who use Scots, but also in many instances to the language itself. Scots sometimes stands metonymically for its speakers, but at other times can be seen as a more abstract entity which is used as a *topos* in arguments about other issues (e.g. funding, education, etc.).

In using the term *Scots*, in assigning it particular qualities or attributes, and in making or refuting arguments surrounding Scots, the authors employ three main meta-strategies, which I regard as a loose grouping of discursive strategies which may lead eventually to a particular construction of Scots. These strategies are also found in other top-down texts (see Unger 2009):

- Scots as (a) language, (a) dialect, (an) accent
- Scots as the language children bring to school
- Scots as part of Scottish culture and heritage

The first meta-strategy concerns how Scots is categorized, or what cultural/political status it is given by the authors of the text. The second meta-strategy relates primarily to the role of Scots in the (or outside the) classroom. Finally, the third meta-strategy situates Scots within the broader cultural and political context.

#### **4.1.1. Scots as (a) language, (a) dialect, (an) accent**

The authors clearly recognize that *Scots* is potentially a contentious term for their audience. They explicitly raise the issues of the status of Scots, of language beliefs about Scots, and they also juxtapose Scots with English (and other Germanic languages) (11-19). The authors here draw on several *topoi* (argumentative short-cuts, see Kienpointner 1992) to position Scots relative to other languages: First, the topos of history; second, the topos of difference; and finally, the topos of similarity. Thus, Scots is given a historical pedigree (12-14), is distinguished from its 'competitors' English (12, 16) and Gaelic (4), and is listed alongside 'full' languages (14). Scots is further subdivided into individual varieties (4), although it is not entirely clear why Scots is listed as a variety of itself. In all these positioning statements about Scots, there is a lack of overt epistemic modality markers (such as modal verbs like *might* or adverbs like *possibly*). Thus, the authors indicate that they are confident in the truth of their statements, and avoid constructing a dialectic relationship with the audience (although in practice this makes them more vulnerable to counter-argument, as the consultation responses show).

Scots is generally positioned as a (distinct) language, but there is one passage that is reminiscent of the more ambivalent constructions in earlier top-down texts (34-35). Reference to *the range of accents, dialects and forms of expression* rather confuses the picture and it is not clear whether these are intended to be ways of referring to Scots. Nevertheless, the positioning of Scots in this text is markedly different from previous top-down texts about Scots, such as the *5-14 guidelines for education*, Scotland's school curriculum used from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. In the guidelines, the term *Scots* appears only twice, and in neither case is Scots positioned as a language (see Unger 2009).

#### **4.1.2. Scots as the language children bring to school**

The authors of the *languages strategy* recontextualize the content of the *5-14 guidelines* (28-31). However, a close analysis of the original guidelines shows that they certainly do not (unambiguously) *advocate the inclusion of Scots in the school curriculum*, unless the teacher and school in question are positively inclined towards the idea in the first place. Even the guideline that *Scots literature* should be included is actually phrased as *Scottish writing and writing about Scotland* in the guidelines. Thus, the authors draw on the topos of authority (the authority of the guidelines) to strengthen their claims. In their

recontextualized form, the guidelines take on a new meaning which is not present (or at least not obvious) in their original context.

Although most of the text has few modality markers, there are two in lines (34-36). In this section, the modal verbs *can* and *may* indicate uncertainty as to the validity of the statements about the language practices of the children. Given the aforementioned lack of sociolinguistic information about Scots (particularly among children), this is not surprising (and perhaps even refreshingly honest). Nevertheless, the use of an economic metaphor (see also Unger 2009) here is interesting: it is not the teachers, the school, or the parents who are supposed to *value* Scots, but the children themselves. Economic metaphors are used in top-down texts as part of all three meta-strategies, including the third, which concerns culture and heritage.

#### 4.1.3. Scots as part of Scottish culture and heritage

Although the positioning of Scots has changed compared to earlier top-down texts (see Unger 2009), it is noticeable how little has changed with respect to the third meta-strategy. Like documents presenting educational curricula, strategy documents can be essentially argumentative, in that they set out intended actions for the future and give reasons for these actions, and for how they will be implemented. The *languages strategy* is no exception, and may thus be seen as an attempt to persuade readers of something. This text is trying to persuade readers that Scots is important. It attempts to do this by drawing on several key topoi: the topos of history/heritage (i.e. the historical importance of Scots and its role in the 'cultural heritage' of Scotland), the topos of authority (the *5-14 guidelines*), and the topos of diversity (1). Unlike texts produced by Scots activists or scholars, it does not make use of the topos of human/linguistic rights.

In the languages strategy, evaluation (of Scots) occurs in two main forms in this extract: first, in the use of evaluative words and phrases such as *living* (2) which refer directly to Scots; and second through the employment of words that refer to users or promoters of Scots or their actions, and by extension are evaluative towards Scots itself (e.g. 15-16). The adjectives *important*, *integral*, *distinct*, and positively connoted nouns and verbs (e.g. *contribution*, *recognise*, *respect*, *celebrate*, *enjoy*) suggest a positive construction of Scots. However, most of the positively evaluative terms are from quite a narrow lexical field, in that they are all related to what might be called 'celebrating diversity', and indeed argumentation strategies in all four texts draw on the topos of diversity. The second group is somewhat more varied, including evaluations that draw on the topos of number (e.g. *widely spoken*) and those that draw on the topos of history/heritage (*was once recognised as a language of government, business, academia and everyday life*).

#### 4.2. Summary of discursive strategies

To conclude, the last two meta-strategies, which construct Scots as '*the language children bring to school*' and '*part of Scottish culture and heritage*' often come into conflict with the quasi-sociolinguistic definitions I have identified with respect to the first meta-strategy (Scots as '(a) dialect, (a) language, (an) accent'). This is

consistent with the notion of the infamous 'Scottish cringe' (see Niven 1998:57), a catch-all term for the feelings of low self-worth and embarrassment felt by Scottish people in response to overt (in this case, linguistic) expressions of Scottish cultural identity. In contrast to the predominantly positive linguistic evaluation of Scots, this passage shows signs of (de)valuation in a Bourdieuan sense. An obvious place to start is the choice of language for the document itself. This is available in English and Gaelic, but not in Scots (nor any of the other languages it deals with). This indicates that Scots, despite being *widely spoken* and *enriching Scotland's cultural life*, is not valuable enough on the linguistic market in which this document is being 'sold' to warrant its use. A further indication of this low valuation is the lack of mention of Scots as a written language, or as a possible choice for *today's* government, business, etc. It appears that the text makes only vague suggestions that Scots in the classroom should be more highly valued by teachers and pupils, while providing no practical means by which this greater 'value-allocation' might be achieved. Scots should be valued only on certain markets, for example those that involve 'celebrating' national identity. Based on the analysis above, I have to conclude that this document constructs Scots as no more than cultural and heritage resource. Its (possible) use as a viable functional and communicative medium is backgrounded. As a result, it seems unlikely that it could have effected increased use or recognition of Scots, nor was it likely to have improved public attitudes towards Scots. These constructions may not be unique to Scots – further research from a discursive perspective into attitudes towards other minority language would be needed to confirm this.

## **5. Bottom-up constructions of Scots**

The highly ambivalent attitudes to Scots from official bodies are matched by ambivalent attitudes among Scots speakers themselves. In focus group data collected in rural Fife, Scotland and amongst emigrants in Lancaster, England (see Unger 2009), the Scots language is associated with previous generations and with Robert Burns, and is constructed as the language of the playground and of comedy. Participants report how physical violence was used against them when they spoke Scots in the classroom, and how young people no longer use Scots.

The participants in the Lancaster focus group comprised five females and two males of varying ages (range: 21-58) and professions (three students (Clara, Laura and Susan), two academic staff (Allan and Jim), and two academic-related staff (Agnes and Bjorg)). Although they all self-identified as Scottish, two participants (Laura and Bjorg) have one non-Scottish parent and three (Jim, Laura and Bjorg) had spent significant parts of their childhood living outside Scotland. While some of the participants knew each other, others had never met before, and seemed quite enthusiastic about meeting fellow Scottish people at the university.

There was noticeable conflict within the group at certain points when discussing Scots – in particular, Jim tended to disagree with the other participants, and

Bjorg expressed a critical view of attitudes (within the group and in general) towards the decline of Scots. Presumably because of the location of the focus group, the participants often discussed the differences between England and Scotland, and in particular the perceived lack of understanding of Scottish language varieties in England. Robert Burns was also a frequent topic, as were other more contemporary cultural references. The idea that certain groups (e.g. politicians, educated people) do or should 'speak properly' was expressed several times, and this was contrasted with how other social groups speak.

The Fife focus group consisted of three males and three females aged between 46 and 77. All the participants have spent the majority of their lives living in Fife; Carol and David in Newburgh (North Fife) and the rest in or near St Andrews (North East Fife). They are/were involved in farming, gardening or manual work as their main occupation. There were two married couples who knew each other (Lily/John and May/Tom) and a brother and sister (Carol/David) who did not know the other participants prior to the focus group. I recruited the participants through personal contacts in the area.

Compared to the Lancaster focus group, there was not much conflict in this group. The participants told many personal stories about their own and their parents' and children's use of Scots in different contexts. The main cultural references were Burns again, as well as a Scots version of the Bible that was known to most of the participants. However, in the Fife focus group the participants were less easily 'distracted' by secondary discourse topics they themselves had introduced, and tended to give fairly direct answers to my questions, with less discussion than in the Lancaster group. All the participants seemed to have an interest in Scots preceding the focus group, but especially Carol, May and Tom. Carol in particular said she liked looking in the Scots dictionary, and discussed Scots words and expressions with neighbours and friends. Tom, having roots in Ayrshire, also felt he had a personal connection with the Scots of Robert Burns, while May said she was particularly interested in the influences of different languages (including Scots) on place names. John did not speak very much compared to the other participants, while Carol, Lily and Tom spoke the most frequently.

In the first extract, from the focus group held in Fife, the participants discuss Scots in the classroom. Carol overtly articulates the reasons Scots was discouraged in class, which gives an insight into her view of some of the power relationships in the educational field (English translations of Scots words are given in brackets. The participants were mainly speaking varieties closer to the Scottish Standard English end of the continuum rather than the Scots end, perhaps because they were assimilating to my own – not very Scottish – English):

(1)

Lily: I would I would said our the teachers ... # eh at n primary certainly . and of course by the time you got to secondary school it never occurred to you to say .. [Carol: mmh] to use Scot . ish . Scottish words #1 and it was knock- #

Carol: #2 and were there local teachers that were teaching you and that I mean [Lily: oh yes] were they fowk ['people'] ye knew . so it wasnae ['wasn't'] like they hadnae ['hadn't'] been brought up tae ['to'] it either # #1 they must have been their system was tellin them #

Tom: #2 they knew . they knew .. they knew the Scots language perfectly well but we were [unclear] #

Carol: aye [Lily: mhm] so they were told . dae ['don't'] encourage it sort o . the like the system was even then dinnae ['didn't'] encourage them tae

Tom: biased against Scots

Carol: so why's that

Tom: #1 just the way it was #

Carol: #2 why have we allowed that #

David: [laughs]

Carol: doesnae ['doesn't'] seem right . does it

Lily: because we werenae ['weren't'] really paying attention [Others: unclear] were we

For Carol, even though the teachers, as Tom put it, 'knew the Scots language perfectly well', 'the system' was not permitting teachers to encourage the use of Scots in class. Although Scotland has never had a statutory national curriculum, its past (and perhaps current) educational guidelines can certainly be seen to be 'biased against Scots'. An extract from a 1946 Report by His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education, around the time the older participants entered primary school, sharply underlines this point in a statement about Scots:

It is not the language of educated people anywhere, and could not be described as a suitable medium of education and culture (HMI 1946, quoted in Niven 1998)

It goes so far as to suggest that 'schools should wage a planned and unrelenting campaign' against Scots (ibid.). Unlike Tom, who sees this as 'just the way it was', Carol constructs a sort of collective responsibility by asking 'Why have we allowed that?'. It seems likely she is using *we* to refer to the whole of Scottish society rather than just the participants present, and her use of the present tense perfect aspect may suggest that she considers the problem to be unresolved, or at least to have some bearing on the present. This is similar to a statement in the Lancaster group that it is sad and insulting that there should be so much pressure to speak English:

(2)

Bjorg: don't you think it's really sad that you feel under so much . pressure to .. speak English and even when you're at school .. to lose your Scottish accents and stuff don't you think it's really insulting and sad as well

Another participant, Jim, immediately responds to this attempt to construct ways of using language by answering her question in the negative:

(3)

Jim: no I don't think that //it depends no  
Bjorg: //do you not [louder] do you not

Jim: because when you're an eight year old .. pe human beings I think wanna conform . I think usually . so if you've got fifty people in the classr eh in the playground all speaking the in a particular way it's very strong as an eight year old to resist that and not . conform as a so I don't think it's particularly bad because that's the way it is

What Jim seems to be suggesting here is that peer pressure would encourage children to assimilate to a particular way of speaking. This is certainly borne out by sociolinguistic research (see e.g. Labov 1978) but in the context of Scottish education, it seems that less standard varieties are more likely to carry prestige on school playgrounds, particularly in rural and deprived urban areas. Jim moved to England when he was nine, so will no doubt have had to undergo rapid assimilation, and it seems his argument draws more on his own personal circumstances than on the question raised by Bjorg.

In both focus groups, then, there is a certain amount of tension between participants who see the language situation of Scots as just 'the way it is' and those who regret their own experience of being discouraged to use Scots. What is striking in the Fife focus group is the extent to which participants associated the use of Scots in the classroom with physical violence against them. This is hinted at in the first extract, above, and is also taken up in other parts of the discussion (the participants are discussing a grammar textbook for teaching Scots in schools):

(4)

May: #1 find interesting this bit ... #  
Tom: #2 [unclear] familiar #  
May: yeah . the bit about . you just add esses at the end of leaf . wife and shelf I had never really sort of ..  
Lily: #1 I hadn't noticed that one #  
May: #2 realized that before #  
Lily: I hadn't noticed that one either . May ... or whether it was knocked out of us at school ..  
May: yes . that's one of the things that . Scots is becoming more acceptable [Mod: mhm] ... ehh #1 perhaps it's because of devolution #  
Lily: #2 certainly than when we were at school #

The Fife focus group participants make numerous other references and allusions to corporal punishment in relation to using Scots. These include metaphors, e.g. *knocked out of*, or *drummed intae us*; metonymy, e.g. *the belt* and *strokes*, and even complete or partial omission of any description of the act of punishment, as in (1), above. Lily here suggests that something the primary teachers did meant using Scots in secondary school 'never occurred to you'. She gives the agent (*the teachers*), but omits the action itself, which was presumably some kind of punishment. The omission of agents or actions is a common feature in the discourse of groups against whom real or symbolic violence has been perpetrated (see, for instance, Etter-Lewis 1991).

The use of corporal punishment was outlawed in all state-supported schools in 1987, and this was only extended to private schools in the year 2000 (endcorporalpunishment.org 2007). This means, despite the shift in official attitudes towards Scots in the 1980s (see Unger 2009), it would have been quite conceivable for individual teachers to punish their pupils through physical violence for the use of Scots well into the 1980s in public sector schools and face no official sanction for doing so. Violence thus forms an important part of the participants' self-construction as Scots speakers, but this is not the only lens through which they see themselves.

In (4) above, Lily and May suggest that their confidence in their own knowledge of and about Scots was 'knocked out of' them. However, immediately afterwards, May speaks of her approach to the use of Scots by her own children:

(5)

May: I don't know why but ... eh . I always .. mah ['my'] .. idea with my children was ... that I liked them to use Scots words .. but at the same time . I felt that they had to be able to .. express themselves properly in English ... but you encourage them to [2 second pause] mm use both

May here touches on several common themes in public discourse about Scots: first, that Scots lexis is a good thing (but not Scots grammar); second, the combination of 'proper' and English. However, although May at first creates the typical opposition between Scots and 'proper English' through the use of the contrastive co-ordinator *but*, she later uses *but* again to distance herself from this view. It is notable that she *liked them* to use Scots, whereas they *had to be able to* use English.

Tom then presents an interesting and, among non-linguists, unusual assessment of the role of Scots during his school days. He constructs himself and his schoolmates as bilingual speakers who used different languages for different purposes, in other words who were in a classic state of diglossia:

(6)

Tom: no I was just gonnae ['going to'] that it certainly wisnae ['wasn't']. encouraged at school [Mod: mhm] yu you spoke with different language outside in the playground than you did inside .. you had two different languages . [Mod: mhm] we were bilingual . in that sense . [Mod: mhm] . and it was whiles ['sometimes'] difficult to .. do your lessons or answer teacher's questions you had to translate it into your ain ['own'] language and then back again to .. to tell the teachers ... it was difficult

Tom also comments on the difficulty he faced, because in school he was not operating in his 'ain ['own'] language'. The idea of diglossia is not immediately taken up by the other participants, who continue to focus on what was 'allowed' in school:

(7)

- Carol: we just spoke [Male?: unclear] English . well I didnae  
[‘didn’t’] think you were encouraged to speak any Scots in  
[John: oh no] . never [Others: yeah, that's right]  
David: but could . could you say . an answer . could you say aye  
... even just the simplest #1 aye [unclear] #  
Carol: #2 I don't #  
Lily: #1 oh I ah . definitely not .. definitely not #  
Tom: #2 no .. that wasn't # #1 allowed #  
May: #2 we had to say yes #  
Lily: #1 as eh when I was . #  
Carol: #2 I cannae [‘can’t’] remember that # but most probably you  
said yes and no I would think  
Lily: I think it came naturally #1 it was in strokes .. [laughs]  
#

Carol later comes back to the idea of different languages, expanding the use of Scots from the playground to the home and family, but again this topic is closed down (this time by Lily):

(8)

- Carol: #2 aye I think it's right as soon as you left school and  
went home you spoke another language [laughs] #  
Lily: yes .. but you did certainly didn't answer in .. eh . other  
than English at school ..

The next topic, introduced by Carol, is the Scots of older and then the Scots of younger generations. Here the participants describe the typical language attrition/shift situation, with the older generation having a command of a rich lexis, while, according to Carol, ‘there’s no the fowk [‘people’] noo [‘now’] keeping it going’.

(9)

- Carol: and I think . cos we were aroond [‘around’] our granny and  
great-gran a lot . the older generation ye heard more words  
May: yes  
Carol: I think I know more words than some o . my friends at my  
age but [Lily: mhm] that's cos I spend a lot of time wi  
[‘with’] ma granny an my great gran an they were words that  
the they were everyday words to them [Lily: mhm]  
May: yes  
Carol: an so you heard them  
May: that's one of the things about today that ... your father  
and mother both used words that we would never use now ...  
Carol: so you know it . y you canna [‘can’t’] say what's  
encouraged by I hink [‘think’] we're losing it because  
there's no the fowk noo [‘there aren’t enough people now’]  
keeping it goin [Others: unclear]  
Tom: there's no the need for it  
May: #1 we are losin .. the diversity [unclear] #  
Carol: #2 .. I know ye dinnae [‘didn’t’].. cos .. eh # ye you try  
and say it noo [‘now’] and again cos ye think ah an I know

. young neighbours kids say what's that [Others: mhm] eh an I said what's that it's a dreich ['grim'] day an I says you'll say that . mind and say it cos . it'll be lost forever . an I hink ['think'] that'd be terrible .. be a tragedy #1 to lose #

In the Lancaster group, Agnes and later Bjorg also bring in the issue of generational differences, although in Agnes's case she seems to be arguing that after her childhood there was a shift from 'aspiring to be English' to greater pride in Scottish identity:

(10)

Agnes: but equally it it's a generational thing as well because when I was growing up [intake of breath] em . you aspired to be English . where I was you you didn't you felt as if you were a second class citizen and then there was the rise of the Scottish National Party . and the rise of Nationalism and that was when I was leaving Scotland and I couldn't believe re returning to Scotland that there were programmes that were Gaelic .. because that was never heard of you know it was wasn't a language that was encouraged . and then all of a sudden this rise in Nationalism pe people became proud to be Scottish and therefore you held on to your identity more so than . when I was growing up then I'm sure that yo know that [gestures at Laura, Clara and Susan] your generation of . a kind of . //different

Laura: //uh I was actually speaking to somebody about that the other day but it was with reference to Wales and um he was saying cos he he's not Welsh but he lives in Wales . he has done for many years .. and he said well isn't it interesting that you know about I can't remember the timescale twenty thirty some years ago the whole notion was to to cast off all these sort of . dialects and everything because it was a barrier to communication and . you know people didn't speak Welsh and they didn't teach Welsh and all the rest and . then he said you know . it . the motion was progress you know we should move forward and leave all these old things behind . he says and now it's turned around and everybody's saying but we must hold on to our culture and they're putting up Welsh road signs and teaching Welsh in schools again and I think to some extent it's the same with Scotland .. because you know / as you were saying it was Sco Scottish people were second class citizens you had to be able to speak properly go to school and speak properly but it didn't quite work [laughs] in some cases anyway .. and then uh they had this shift ... possibly just to get the tourists to come back I don't know

Agnes: Well I think that they did look at the economy, they did need to bring in tourists but I think that it was more fundamental than that that people actually . um wanted to

ha be a country that was separate and was as good as if not better than Scotland.

Here the Lancaster participants describe an increase in interest in Scottish identity and pride. This is not explicitly linked with an increase in the use of Scots, but is very different from the consensus reached by the Fife participants. Despite the Fife participants' self-identification as Scots speakers, and their desire for the language to survive, they are pessimistic about its prospects, or at least are not successfully passing it on to the next generation. In describing the decline of Scots in (9), May draws on the topos of diversity, a topos also found in much of the discourse on Scots from the political and educational fields.

## 6. Conclusions

As the analysis above has shown, both top-down and bottom-up texts about Scots suggest an underlying language ideology: Scots is an important part of identity, but this contrasts with the 'need to get out to get on'. Any positive feelings towards Scots are mitigated by the 'Scottish cringe', and have to be seen in the context of the construction of Scots as part of cultural heritage, not as a functional communicative medium. Although the decline of Scots is said to be a 'tragedy', focus group participants seem to reject the notion of Scots as a viable, contemporary language that can be used across a wide range of registers. 'Top-down' documents also seem to construct Scots in very positive terms, but are shown to be unhelpful or potentially even damaging in the process of changing public attitudes to Scots. This highlights the tension between positive *evaluation* (through lexicalisation, argumentation and other discursive strategies) and negative *valuation* (in the Bourdieuan sense) through a refusal to expand the registers in which Scots is used or even to comment on such an expansion. While these findings might not necessarily be generalisable to all or even the majority of texts about Scots, the common use of discursive strategies in the top-down and bottom-up texts suggests relatively stable constructions. Discourse-historical analysis has allowed me to position the texts within their respective contexts, and to examine intertextual links between and recontextualisations within them. Nevertheless, the difficulty in examining how something is constructed when it is not often talked about as a part of 'normal' life is a challenging aspect of research into Scots, and no doubt of research into other minority languages and their related cultures.

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<sup>ii</sup> A simple comparison of the summary sentences for English, Gaelic and Scots respectively is indicative of the different ways in which each language is constructed in the text:

- As many people in Scotland as possible will be equipped with fluent English language skills.
- The Gaelic language will be protected and promoted
- The Scots language will be treated with respect and pride.

<sup>iii</sup> Numbers in parentheses refer to line numbers in the extract.

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