

The History o Scots

In order tae unnerstaund the linguistic position in Scotland the day, it is appropriate tae trace its linguistic history. The principal languages spoken in Scotland are derived frae Indo-European (IE). This common ancestor was spoken by fowk wha bided in a land-locked temperate place – we are no exactly sure whaur. Maist current thinkin pits the place o origin in the South Russian Steppes, subsequently spreadin intae the Danube region and ayont. The kind o clues we hae are that the Indo-Europeans had words for rain and snaw and beech trees but no a word for palm trees. And they had nae maritime words – nae words for sea or ocean.

Migrations frae the IE hameland began sometime afore 2000BC. Those wha were tae gie rise tae the Indic languages migratit tae the east, the European ancestors tae the west. As ilka wave o migrations muiivit on, the wey they spak began tae chyng and tak on individual characteristics and sae the main language groups stertit tae diverge.

Luikin at the faimly tree, you will find the Celtic group o languages. The language, frae whilk Irish Gaelic and, hence, Scots Gaelic are descendit is said by some authorities tae hae reached Ireland as early as the 10th century BCE. Brythonic is thocht tae hae reached South Britain about the 4th Century BCE. This ancestor o modren Welsh was spoken a ower sooth Britain up tae the Lothians. North o that we had Pictish, o whilk we hae anely a bit knowledge, derived frae placenames, but it was a Celtic language as weel.

Sae, whan the Romans arrived, there were Brythonic speaking people in sooth Britain, Picts frae the Pentland hills to the Pentland Firth and early Gaelic speakers in Ireland. The Romans biggit Antonine's wall frae the Forth tae the Clyde and ventured north. There is a Roman Camp at Braco in Perthshire and anither jist ootside Callendar. But their record in Scotland was less nor glorious and the heiland line merkit the limits o their empire. (Whitiver happened tae the ninth legion?) Rome itsel was threatened and the Romans withdrew frae Britain early in the fifth century.

Luik at the IE faimly tree tae see whit English and Scots are descended frae. Sae whit wey was there nae influence on Scots or Scottish English frae the Roman occupation o Britain? Simply because the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had no got here yet. They were still sittin in the North-west o mainland Europe. (There are a puckle Latin loans in Auld English datin frae thon time but the contact was no made in Britain. Whan the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were fechtin and tradin on the fringes o the Roman empire in Europe they borraed words like *cheese*). Towards the end o the Roman period in Britain, a few Anglo-Saxon mercenaries began tae arrive but, as suin as the Romans gaed hame, they saw thair opportunity and invaded in force.

The Jutes settled in Kent and the Saxons foondit their kingdom in the Sooth o England. Sae we can more or less forget about them for the moment. The Anglians pushed North, foondin the great kingdoms o Mercia and Northumbria and breengin on intae Southern Scotland within a few generations. Hooever, in 685, their northward advance was stappit by the Picts at the Battle o Nechtansmere (near Forfar).

Meanwhile, ower in Ireland, the Scots, durin the fifth century, were bringin their Gaelic intil Argyll and Sooth West Scotland and establishin linguistic dominance ower the Picts.

By the time we get tae the ninth century, the language situation in Scotland was extremely complex. The Norwegians had been makkin their presence felt in the Northern Isles frae the aucht century but

since the contact was wi Pictish and Gaelic in the Western Isles, their incursions didnae influence the development o Scots.

Muckle mair significant in the development o Scots were the Viking Raids on the North East of England, leadin tae the establishment o the seat o a Danish Kingdom at York. As ye can see from the faimly tree, the Auld Norse o the Danes was a close cousin o Auld English. The twa languages had a lot o relatit words and it widnae hae been ower difficult for the Vikings and the Auld English tae mak thirsels understood tae each ither. The naitur o the contacts atween the twa peoples seems tae hae been intimate. They were tradin thegither, warkin and farmin alangside each ither and intermairryin. The very profoond wey that ON influenced Northern Auld English reflects this intimate and everday contact.

Noo, although Auld English had been extensively spoken in Lothian and the Borders since the seventh century, the dominant language o Scotland was, in the 10th and 11th centuries, Gaelic, and the Gaelic speaking kings noo held sway ower the suthren coonties. Sae whit chynged? The effects o the Norman Conquest were profoond, een in Scotland. It was no jist that there were refugees frae the conquest muivin intae Scotland but there were substantial grants o land made in Scotland tae Normans like the Bruce's and the Comyns as weel. It didnae tak a genius to spot that the Norman Feudal system was a guid thing for kings to keep control and frae the time o David I (1124-53), the system o government in Scotland became increasinly Normanised. There was also a huge incomin o Norman monks. The social situation wi the Normans was very different frae that wi the Vikings. The Normans were numerically quite few, oot o a proportion tae thair influence. They moved in contact wi the upper echelons o society. The kings and their coortiers became French speakin but, strangely, it was English in Scotland that got a boost frae the Norman Conquest. The Normans in Scotland brocht wi them English servants. Mair significant, burghs were set up and incomers frae the north o England settled, bringin wi them the ON influences on thair speech. Immigration frae the low countries was bein encouraged forbye and immigrants were attractit tae the safe and prosperous tradin environment providit by the burghs. English, or *Inglis* as they thairsels caed it, was the lingua franca o the burghs. At this point *Scottis* was yaised tae refer tae Gaelic.

Mair and mair, the language o Lalland Scotland divairgit frae that o England. The Northumbrians sooth o the border began tae luik til the sooth o England for leadership in politics, culture and language. The Scots luikit tae thair ain King and coort. The Wars o Independence added tae this polarisation. The faither of Scots literature, John Barbour, wrote the epic poem *Brus* in 1375 and wi the return of James I from captivity in England the heyday o Scots dawed.

Scots was weel on the wey tae becomin a standard language. It was yaised by the maist influential members o society, and on state occasions. It was yaised for state documents. Although Gavin Douglas apologised for yaisin:

Sum bastard Latyn French and Inglis where scant was Scottis,

in his translation o the Aeneid, this was nae sae muckle a reflection on the inadequacy o Scots as a formulaic introduction tae a translation frae the respectit classical Latin. English authors made similar comments the whilk implied that thair vernacular was in some wey inferior tae Latin. Scots culd be and was yaised for any and aw yisses tae whilk a language culd be pit.

William Dunbar demonstrates the heichs and depths o register and ony student o Scots wad weel avised tae read his wark. Henryson, tae, scribed in a range o registers, although he is perhaps best kent for his fables and his *Testament of Cresseid*.

So whit gaed wrang? Een in early Scots literature, English spellin culd occasionally be fund. Authors and the scribes wha copied their wark were exposed tae English texts. Whan prentin came in, mony o the typesetters werenae Scots and there wad hae been commercial pressure tae get rid o the mair extreme Scots forms tae encourage sales sooth o the border.

Ae development that is frequently seen as a nail in the coffin o Scots was the decree in 1579, that ilka hoosehauder worth 300 merks had tae possess ‘a bible and psalme buke in vulgare language’. There was nae prentit bible in Scots available and the maist accessible ane was the Geneva Bible o 1561. The catechism and Calvin’s form o prayers was also in English. You micht like to discuss hoo suddenly or hoo insidiously God became an English speaker.

The next dunt was the Union of the Crowns in 1603. No jist God was speakin English, but the king had sterted daein it tae. We can see frae his early scrivins that James VI spak Scots. Hooever, een afore he muivit sooth, prentit editions o his warks wis bein anglicised and this process intensified.

The Union o the Pairliaments in 1707 was a low point economically, socially and politically and een as we muive intil the period kent as the Scottish Enlightenment, in ae area at least there was utter derkness. People like David Hume the philosopher and Adam Smith, the economist, went to great lengths to get rid o ilka Scotticism frae thair writins. It is said o Hume that he deed confessin no his sins but his Scotticisms. Societies like the ‘Society for Promoting the Reading and Speaking of the English Tongue’ were set up and elocutionists were hired tae get rid o Scots accents.

Fortunately, a large pairt o the population were, ootside the school and the kirk, maistly unaffected by thir chynge in fortune and fashion and Scots remained their everyday speech. But for a that, those with ony thochts o upward social mobility wad have greed wi Lewis Grassic Gibbon:

Tae get out of the pleiter, you have to speak the English, orra though it be.

The attributes of a standard language that Scots was weel on the way to haein in the fifteenth an sixteenth centuries were nae langer apparent. It wasnae the language o the state, it wasnae the prestige language o the pooerfu clesses and its yiss in literature had become severely restrictit. The writers o the Scottish Renaissance and the Scots Language Society hae worked energetically tae restore the status o Scots frae a collection o local dialects tae ane o the national languages. The production o presteegious and authoritative dictionaries like SND, DOST and CSD in recent years has made a very significant contribution, but there is still a lack o self confidence amang speakers thirsels. Mony aulder speakers describe thirsels as ‘speaking really bad English’ whan whit they really speak is perfectly respectable Scots.

Sae in present day Scotland, the Germanic languages are representit by a few speakers of Sooth British English (SBrE), and a lairger nummer o Scottish Standard English and Highland English speakers whase language is descendit frae SBrE but wi merked differences in pronunciation, and a few vocabulary and grammatical differences. And then there are mony, mony speakers o Scots, whether they yaise it a the time or wee bit noo and again, whilk is descended from Northern Auld English but influenced by the historical influences which were peculiar to Scotland .

Gaelic suffered even mair as a proscribed language whase yiss was forbidden by law. But the biggest threat to baith Scots and English cam frae thae speakers wha turned their backs on thair ain native tongues as bein a social handicap. It is no sae lang syne that the teaching o Scots and Gaelic at university level wad hae been unthinkable. This means that there is still a lot of research to be done and

this is an excitin time tae be studyin the languages o Scotland

Further Reading:

The Concise Scots Dictionary Introduction.