The Lexicography of Scots
at the Intersection of Monolingual
and Bilingual Dictionaries*

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Abstract
The representation of Scots in dictionaries has a long and fascinating history. This contribution aims to outline the ways in which it has crossed the border between monolingual and bilingual lexicography, while still failing to result in a dictionary in which both headwords and definitions are in Scots. To this end, I pay attention to the historical specificity of the variety under discussion, especially since Late Modern times. Within this framework, both normative attitudes and usage may help account for the ways in which – over time – entries have been selected and prefatory material has been compiled. Finally, some remarks are offered on the situation today and what developments might be expected.
Keywords: Scots, Scottish English, Late Modern English.

> He advised me to complete a Dictionary of words peculiar to Scotland, of which I shewed him a specimen. "Sir, (said he), Ray has made a collection of north-country words. By collecting those of your country, you will do a useful thing towards the history of the language."
>
> (James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 19th Oct. 1769)

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth century, the idea that Scots was dwindling was firmly established, and indeed it had been circulating for decades, if not centuries[1]. However, the attitude towards Scots was

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[1] While acknowledging that the linguistic situation in Scotland is complex, and

contradictory. While usage in literature continued to be supported and appreciated, Scots forms were systematically discouraged in the daily interactions of socially-aspiring speakers, and this ambivalence is clearly seen also in the ways in which Scots lexicography has developed, displaying both centrifugal and centripetal trends: on the one hand, users who wanted to 'improve' (i.e., anglicise) their language, so as to become part of a wider (Southern-)English-speaking network, were encouraged to avoid lexical items deemed to be provincial or quaint; on the other, lexical specificity was emphasised to stress its antiquity and supposedly greater purity. As a result, Scots dictionaries have typically been closer to bilingual reference works, in which one form (Scots) was juxtaposed to the other (English), though being meant for users who could command both varieties at (near-)native levels. In addition, not only are English-to-Scots dictionaries a very recent development, but they are often intended to entertain, which is indicative of which variety has always been expected to approximate the other, while fully monolingual Scots dictionaries have not appeared yet.

Within this very complex picture, the twenty-first century can now rely on state-of-the-art material: in 2002 Scottish Language Dictionaries (SLD)[2] was formed in Edinburgh following completion of editorial work for *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST – see Craigie *et al.* 1931-2002); intended to be a successor also to the *Scottish National Dictionary Association* (SNDA – see Grant and Murison 1931-1976), founded in 1929, it included the staff who had already collaborated on other major projects such as the *Concise Scots Dictionary* (CSD), first published in 1985, and the second edition of which was published in 2017 – see fn. 14. Following a praiseworthy digitisation initiative, in 2004 SLD presented the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL), which makes the contents of DOST, SND and their supplements available to the general public free of charge[3].

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usage may vary along a continuum, with greater or lesser density of Scots syntax and vocabulary or close approximation of Southern English at all levels, from phonology to morpho-syntactic features (see Dossena 2005: 1-17; 140-149), this paper aims to focus on Scots as a distinctive variety.

[2] See www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk/. All websites mentioned in this essay were last accessed on December 18, 2019, unless otherwise indicated.

[3] See www.dsl.ac.uk/. Considine (2016: 173) also draws attention to the significance of linking historical dictionaries through online resources.

These very valuable resources, however, should not overshadow the importance of earlier stages of Scots lexicography, such as Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808), or indeed the contribution given by James Murray with his *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, the future *Oxford English Dictionary*, publication of which began in 1884. These works, in turn, have their roots in earlier attempts to represent Scots vocabulary and stress its distance from (or indeed its proximity to) Southern English forms or other Germanic languages.

In this contribution I intend to outline the genealogy of Scots dictionaries, in order to discuss their collocation at the intersection of monolingual and bilingual lexicography, as they appear to have always given attention to the historical specificity of the variety under discussion, while describing it against the background of Southern Standard English. Within this framework, it is important to see how both the normative tradition and actual usage enable the interpretation of the ways in which – over time – entries have been selected and prefatory material has been compiled.

2. Early days: hard words and glossaries

An analysis of early glossaries and lists of dialect words may help to shed light on the often divergent approach taken in England and in Scotland as regards geographically-specific vocabulary. In its earliest stages, Scottish lexicography appears to reflect a certain wish for the progressive convergence between Scots and Southern varieties, as in collections of Scottish lexical items these were singled out on account of their more restricted geographical distribution, and particular attention was given to 'hard words' – that is, lexical items occurring in specialised registers. Sir John Skene's *De verborum significatione* ([1597] 1681), "a compilation of glosses to legal terms found in the *Regiam Majestatem, Quoniam Attachiamenta* and the Acts of Parliament", printed in Edinburgh in 1597, appears to be the earliest example of Scottish lexicography (Williamson 1995/96: 128), while McClure (1981/1995: 47) also refers to Sir Thomas Kelly's *Pallas Armata*, of 1627, a bilingual glossary of military technical words.

South of the border, John Ray's *Collection of Words Not Generally Used* (1674, 1691) is probably the first attempt at a

systematic description of dialect vocabulary, though no distinction is made between Scots and Northern English, marking items like *bairn, flyte, ken, thole* and *bannock* as 'north country'. Ray identifies novelty, usefulness and entertainment as the main considerations that encouraged him to publish his collection (1674: Preface) and, as a matter of fact, neither Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604) nor John Bullokar's *An English Expositor* (1616) had included northern or Scottish entries. Peter Levins' *Manipulus Vocabulorum* had listed words that he described as "barbarous, straunge, or fallen out of vse" (1570: Notes for the vse of the booke)[4], but none of these were labelled as Scottish or Northern, although some were certainly so (as in the case of *brambles, to flyte, hoggates, to kenne, kirk, mirke, myckil, a nooke, to thole, yool*). In Elisha Coles' *An English Dictionary* (1676) we only find a few items that are explicitly marked as 'Scottish', such as *anent, kirk, Angus,* and *law* (= hill). In Ray's collection, instead, among the entries marked as Scottish we find *anent, to greit*, *a lown/ loon*, *to bourd*, *to breid/brade of* and *bleit/blate*.

Interestingly, the last three entries are illustrated with proverbs, and indeed collections of proverbs and maxims were often published with glossaries throughout Late Modern times – see for instance Kelly (1721). Such lists suggest a wish to collect curiosities, unusual forms that readers might find outlandish and entertaining; glossaries appended to literary works, instead, were meant to have a different function, as they attempted to clarify the semantic value of older items, believed to be less in use, and therefore more difficult to understand (see McClure 2012)[5]. In both cases, however, the approach appears to have had an antiquarian, descriptive interest in literary and/or old-fashioned language: quite a different approach from the numerous lists of proscribed Scotticisms that appeared in the so-called 'age of improvement'.

3. Prescription and proscription

Language never occurs in a vacuum, and neither do language

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[4] See Brewer (2016) and Mugglestone (2016: 558) on the role of ideology in the use of metalanguage and the choice of status labels.
[5] In this sense, such glossaries are comparable to reception-oriented (or 'passive') dictionaries (see Fontenelle 2016: 45).

policies, although they may not be labelled as such: they always relate to (and are influenced by) social and cultural undercurrents; these, in turn, are linked to the political situation in which speakers operate. In the case of eighteenth-century Scottish users, the Union of Parliaments in 1707 further contributed to the perception that Scotland was now part of a bigger picture, in which England had already been in the foreground since the Union of the Crowns little more than a century before, and where the centre of attention for social aspirers was obviously London.

A sense of cultural inferiority began to spread and target, first and foremost, linguistic features – not just phonology, but syntax and vocabulary as well. This resulted in what is perhaps the greatest paradox of the Scottish Enlightenment (McClure 1994: 40): while figures like David Hume and Adam Smith were making their crucial impression on European culture and beyond, Scotland was going through a kind of linguistic witch hunt, to the point that David Hume himself may have created the very first list of Scotticisms to avoid (Dossena 2005: 65-72). Strenuous attempts to overcome a 'provincial' accent and to free one's expression of 'Scotticisms' were made by anyone who wanted to reach a wider audience and/or climb the social ladder. Although the Union of 1707 had preserved the cultural specificity of the education system, of the law and of the kirk, thus safeguarding specialised lexis, Scots vocabulary was stigmatised in all non-literary registers – see Dossena (1997; 2004; 2005).

However, prescriptivism does not always have success stories to tell, as speakers may have contrasting feelings about their own stigmatised variety. While overt prestige encourages the adoption of more widely accepted forms, covert prestige helps preserve locally and/or socially marked ones. Besides, speakers may not be aware of the peculiarities of their usage: in Beattie's *Scoticisms* ([1779] 1787) we find one of the earliest distinctions between covert and overt Scotticisms when the author refers to "those Scotch idioms, which, in this country, are liable to be mistaken for English" (Preface). As Johnson himself had remarked (1755: Preface), language change simply cannot be stopped by a dictionary. Users, however, both in Late Modern times and today, often feel that dictionaries can be the benchmark against which their linguistic choices are measured, and strive to adopt the models of those speakers they wish to emulate,

though such models can be contrasting, and even inconsistent with each other[6].

Divided loyalties in language are known to have affected James Boswell, who attended Sheridan's elocution lessons in Edinburgh, but who had plans for "a periodical paper in the Scots dialect" (Pottle, Abbott and Pottle 1993: 106), to be named *The Sutiman*, and – even more significantly – for a Scots dictionary[7]. Johnson's suggestion that Boswell should compile "a Dictionary of words peculiar to Scotland" could be seen in the same antiquarian context of his other recommendation to compile "a work on the antiquities of Scotland" (Boswell 1791: 19th October 1769). Indeed, it was probably an antiquarian interest that had led Johnson himself to include ca. 200 Scottish items in his *Dictionary* (see Dossena 2004).

4. Antiquarians and lexicographers

Almost a century after the Union of Parliaments, the status of Scots was still quite controversial. Though a distinct Scottish accent was increasingly perceived to be 'provincial, vulgar, uncouth, conspicuous' (to name but a few of the adjectives that were used to describe it), a fairly unobtrusive presence of Scots phonological features was the mark of an accepted variety used by the upper and professional classes of Scottish society (see Dossena 2005: 63). Thus, by the end of the century, James Adams could even claim that a "tempered medium", "the manly eloquence of the Scotch bar", actually "affords a singular pleasure to the candid English hearer, and gives merit and dignity to the noble speakers who retain so much of their own dialect" (1799: 160).

Adams's *The Pronunciation of the English Language Vindicated* (1799), from which these remarks are taken, is possibly the most powerful defence of Scottish forms, but the

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[6] On the co-existence of description and prescription in lexicography see, most recently, Mugglestone (2016).

[7] See Pottle (1952: 103-104). Although the manuscript was mentioned in the *Catalogue of the Papers of James Boswell at Yale University* (Pottle, Abbott and Pottle 1993), no copy was traced until 2011, when it was re-discovered in the Bodleian Library (see Rennie 2011 and 2012a).

perceived antiquity of the language also drew the attention of many other commentators. Eighteenth-century antiquarians like John Pinkerton and James Sibbald had argued that the Scandinavian influence had been paramount in the development of Scots. This theory was then taken up by one of the leading figures in Scottish lexicography, John Jamieson, who claimed that the Picts had Scandinavian origins, and presented his views in an extensive study of etymologies of names and place-names in the 'Introduction' to his *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, which appeared in two volumes in 1808 (see Dossena 2006; 2008; Rennie 2012b)[8].

At first, this early instance of modern Scottish lexicography on historical principles was perceived to be an antiquarian effort (Brown 1980). However, it was more than that, not least because Jamieson did not only identify the specificity of Scottish vocabulary in the legal register, but he also showed awareness of what we now call sociolinguistic variation. In his Preface, in terms that today would sound judgemental, but which were current at the time, he stated that his work would "serve to mark the difference between words which may be called classical, and others merely colloquial; and between both of these, as far as they are proper, and such as belong to a still lower class, being mere corruptions, cant terms, or puerilities" (1808: ii).

For this reason, in addition to printed and manuscript texts, Jamieson also employed songs and ballads (Rennie 2012b: 134-137) and oral evidence (Rennie 2012b: 141-143). In this sense, then, Jamieson's attitude to lexicography proves radically distant from Johnson's: while Johnson had aimed to exclude 'cant' and 'low' terms, identifying his sources among the literary figures of a very specific time frame, Jamieson actually stated that he relied on "the authority of the nation at large" (Jamieson 1808: vi). As a result, his work marked a turning point in the history of lexicography, and made Jamieson a ground-breaker in what nowadays is called 'language history from below'.

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[8] On Jamieson's pioneering role in historical lexicography see also Considine (2016: 167, 169).

5. Late Modern lexicography reaching out to the present

Towards the end of the century Jamieson's apparent lack of systematicity was criticised by J. B. Montgomerie Fleming (1899) in a letter to the editor of the *Glasgow Herald*; in this he also compared Jamieson's dictionary with a newer one, Murray's *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (which had reached letter 'H'), about which Fleming stated that he had found it "a remarkably good *Scotch* dictionary" (1899: iv). The *New English Dictionary* would subsequently become world famous as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and it is intriguing to follow Murray's career both as a lexicographer and as "the founder of the modern study of Scots, both historical and descriptive" (Aitken 1995/96: 14). His new approach to the historical perspective went beyond the previous debates on the Pictish or Saxon origins of Scots and directed its research to the mutual roots of Scots and Northern English. Even so, the link with Jamieson is remarkable. The OED we access today includes 1,852 quotations from Jamieson's *Dictionary*, as opposed to 1,180 from Johnson's *Dictionary* (though Johnson's other works account for another 3,866 quotations)[9].

An ambivalent attitude towards Scots, which could be seen as a language (and dictionaries of which would therefore be bilingual) or as a dialect (hence dictionaries would be monolingual, merely illustrating a socio-geographical variety), was to persist well into the twentieth century. Prescriptive works continued to be published with significant titles that stressed their 'sociolinguistic' approach: see for instance *The Vulgarities of Speech Corrected: with Elegant Expressions for Provincial and Vulgar English, Scots and Irish; for the use of those who are unacquainted with grammar* (Anon. 1829); *Scotticisms Corrected* (Anon. 1855); Alexander Mackie's *Scotticisms Arranged and Corrected* (1881); and David Masson's *Use and Abuse of English: A Handbook of Composition* (1896; revised by Rosaline

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[9] As editorial policies have changed over time, it would be beyond the scope of this contribution to discuss the OED's approach to its sources; on this point, however, see Mugglestone (2003). Also, it should be noted that the OED is ambiguous in its treatment of Scottish sources, as the abbreviation "Sc." may refer to Scots or Scottish English – see Dossena (2019: 97). A final caveat in this respect is that the figures presented here are valid at the time of writing (June 2019), and may vary as entries are updated.

Masson in 1929). The aim of these small and inexpensive books, which often reproduced previous lists almost verbatim, was not, however, lexicographic: the structure of their contents clearly emphasised their function as usage guides, and in some cases the authors actually referred to other "Dictionaries and works on Grammar" (Anon. 1855: 64).

In many cases, geographical variation continued to be associated with literary and/or jocular registers. In 1888 Charles Mackay published *A Dictionary of Lowland Scotch with an introductory chapter on the poetry, humour, and literary history of the Scottish language and an Appendix of Scottish Proverbs*; and as late as the beginning of the twentieth century collections were published in which "the homely pithy speech of the village folk" (Wilson 1915: 4) was presented together with vocabulary lists, notes on the grammar and phonology of the dialect, riddles, rhymes and songs (e.g., Wilson 1915; 1923; and 1926). Similarly, Watson (1923) circumscribed his investigation, both in terms of geographical distribution and in terms of methodological selectivity, in the subtitle of his work: *The Roxburghshire Word-Book, Being a Record of the Special Vernacular Vocabulary of the County of Roxburgh, with an Appendix of Specimens.*

On the other hand, the specificity of Scottish vocabulary would play an important part in the identification of American English. In 1781 John Witherspoon (himself a graduate of the University of Edinburgh) had modelled his definition of 'Americanism' on that of 'Scotticism' (see OED, s.v. *Americanism*); and forty years later, Noah Webster's patriotic intentions in promoting spelling reforms, publishing a grammar and a reader, and finally compiling *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806), were made explicit in the title of the expanded edition, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, which appeared in 1828.

As with Jamieson, geographical distribution and cultural specificity were seen to be sides of the same coin (see Dossena 2012a and 2012b). However, Scots lexicography would be greatly enhanced by the work of William Craigie, the third editor of the OED[10] who would subsequently become one of the main editors of DOST and SND. His investigation certainly benefited from the co-operation

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[10] The abbreviation OED is being used to cover all editions of the dictionary, even before the word 'Oxford' was officially incorporated into the title in 1933.

with Murray, and this also ensured that the standards of the OED and of the Scots dictionaries would be comparable (see Craigie 1925; Aitken 1964; Dareau 2005; 2012).

6. Present-day resources

All the Late Modern lexicographic enterprises provided a fruitful background for a series of other collections aimed at the preservation of vernacular forms. One of the earliest instances was the *Scots Dialect Dictionary*, compiled by Alexander Warrack in 1911, with an introductory chapter by William Grant. Both authors acknowledged the relevance that Jamieson's, Murray's and Craigie's studies had had in the preparation of this work, which – although allegedly "a popular Dictionary" (1911: vi) – showed an interesting awareness of variation across space within the same area, and referred to the Scottish Dialect Committee, whose collections of lexical items and their usage would form the basis of SND. Valuable material was also acquired through the work that produced the *Survey of Scottish Dialects* (McIntosh 1952).

In more recent times, booklets continued to appear which were often less scholarly, but which testified to unrelenting interest in vernacular forms. Among these we may refer to Mackinnon (1966), whose *Lowland Scots Glossary* is organised thematically, includes a few idioms and proverbs, and even presents a short table of irregular verbs, "some adjectives […], a few adverbs […] [and] a few regular verbs". Although spelling and pronunciation are also discussed very briefly in the Preface, the overall impression is of a rather haphazard collection of relatively familiar items. As a matter of fact, another "Selection of Scots Words arranged as an English-Scots Dictionary" actually stated that the author wished "more to entertain than to educate" (Jarvie 1947: 5), while two decades later a "handy guide to Scots" listed vocabulary, place-names, "strange matters" and even included a "mixtie-maxtie quiz [i.e., on random lexical items]" (Graham 1968: ToC).

Attempts to revive interest in Scottish vocabulary thus appeared to range from the very seriously academic to the popular, and even included humorous lists of words or phrases supposed to be emblematic of local varieties, such as the 'Glasgow patter'[11],

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[11] On this variety see Munro (1985), a pioneering publication in that it was both celebratory and well-informed.

which are meant to entertain, but nonetheless may function as tools of enregisterment[12]. The publication of the New Testament in Lorimer's translation (1983) without a glossary provided an opportunity to rediscover the linguistic flexibility of Scots; on the other hand, the 1987 reprint of Waddell's translation of the Psalms, which dated back to 1871, provided a glossary and appeared to be a scholarly achievement, rather than an effective means to restore Scots as a religious language. A few years later, the launch of enterprises like SLD and the Scots Language Centre (SLC)[13] enabled lexicographers to reach a much wider audience thanks to the use of new technologies and the integration of multimedia platforms. This meant, for instance, the creation of a specific set of resources for schools[14], but also the creation of mini-dictionaries listing the items pertaining to specific semantic fields, published by SLD in the 'Say it in Scots' series. Moreover, private enterprises have been quick to create the kind of merchandising found in museum and library bookshops, such as coasters on which eye-catching items of Scots vocabulary (like *blether*, *braw*, *scunner*, or *fitba*) are printed.

Scholarly efforts have also resulted in the publication of numerous other important resources: a *Thesaurus*, in addition to an *Essential*, a *Concise* and a *Pocket Scots Dictionary*; interestingly, however, only the *Essential Scots Dictionary* is presented as "a modern and accessible bilingual dictionary of English and Scots […] convenient for straightforward translation from English to Scots or from Scots to English"[15].

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[12] On the concept of enregisterment see Adams (2009), Coupland (2014: 292) and Johnstone (2016).

[13] The SLC was first established in 1994, whereas SLD was in fact a merger between the staff of DOST and SNDA which occurred in 2002 – see www.scotslanguage.com/ and www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk/About/index.html

[14] As materials in this domain are constantly expanding, it may be useful to follow updates through websites like www.scotslanguage.com/pages/view/id/9 and www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/554.

[15] See www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk/Publications/index.html. Among these, the *Concise Scots Dictionary* ([1985] 2017) was a major undertaking, as it aimed to condense the key findings of the 22 volumes of DOST and SND into one compact book; even so, the definitions it offers are not in Scots, but in English, which – despite its richness – places it among bilingual dictionaries, and not monolingual ones (see Section 1 above).

As regards diachronic investigations, however, DOST and SND, which are combined in the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, remain invaluable. Their bibliographies include Ruddiman, Boswell, Johnson, and of course Jamieson. This, together with the availability of new online materials, such as the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing* (CMSW, 1700-1945), the *Scots Corpus* (1945-)[16] and the *Linguistic Atlas of Older Scots* (LAOS, 1380-1500)[17] indicates how academic interest in Scots has expanded in recent times.

7. Concluding remarks

Scottish vocabulary appears to have elicited varying attitudes over the centuries. Twenty-five years after Murison's overview (1987), scholars are taking stock of the ways in which Scottish lexicography has reflected these changing approaches: Dareau and Macleod (2009) and Macleod and McClure (2012), for instance, provide an account of the main stages in this field, summarising the shift from descriptive to prescriptive and then back to descriptive approaches. However, academic investigation still does not seem to have given sufficient attention to the fact that, to this day, no fully monolingual Scots dictionary exists.

Considine (2012: 1051) refers to Zgusta's 1989 typology according to which dictionaries may aim to create a written standard, make it more modern, prevent change in it, or actually describe it; while the first three approaches are typically prescriptive, the fourth is descriptive by definition. Scots dictionaries appear to have combined the first and the fourth approach, leaving the third one aside and actually contrasting the second, trying instead to stress the antiquity of certain lexical items. As with genre conventions, then, we see that lexicographic approaches are a function of thought styles in certain social circles at certain points in time: editorial policies and (more or less indirect) political choices reflect each other.

Since Early Modern times and until recently, the status of Scots had never been such that a monolingual dictionary could be compiled, probably because the union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, while being constantly questioned,

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[16] Both corpora are available at www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/.
[17] See www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/laos1/laos1.html and Williamson (2005).

had never really been in a situation where it might actually be about to be dissolved. Over the last six years, however, there have been significant events that may bring about change on various levels[18]. Although the referendum on Scottish independence of 18th September 2014 (narrowly) confirmed the continuation of the union, the nation-wide referendum held on 23rd June 2016 on the so-called 'Brexit', i.e. the UK leaving the European Union, may soon lead to another referendum on Scottish independence, because Scotland's overwhelming majority voted to remain in the EU[19], and dissolving the union would enable Scotland to re-apply for EU membership.

Should Scotland become an independent country again (and – most importantly – re-join the EU), language policies would be very likely to reflect this historical upheaval, as they have in the past[20]. Within this framework, lexicography would certainly play a key role in recording new approaches to a language whose status would change very significantly.

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[18] It is of course beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history of Scottish politics in relation to independence over the twentieth century; the relatively short time frame selected here concerns years when changes appear to have been both momentous and very close to one another.

[19] See www.gov.scot/brexit/.

[20] For an overview of what political action has recently been taken in different contexts in order to promote Scots, see www.scotslanguage.com/pages/view/id/8.

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