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The Politics of Language Policy in Scotland

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Abstract

The Scottish Parliament reconvened in 1999 after an absence of almost 300 years. While Scotland did not gain full political independence, the new Parliament gained responsibility for a broad range of domestic public policy. This paper investigates the impact of these historic constitutional changes on one particular area, language policy. Scotland has two indigenous languages, Gaelic and Scots. Historically, both were official languages of Scotland during different periods of time but the usage of each has declined dramatically due to the encroachment of English. This paper situates Gaelic and Scots within their historical contexts and analyses the cultural and political status of each language today. It is noted that while Gaelic remains in a precarious position, there is reason for greater optimism with regards to Scots. The latter has closer connections to Scottish identity and its promotion has become a political priority for the Scottish National Party.

Key Words:

Gaelic, Scots language, Scottish nationalism, Scottish identity, Scottish National Party, language policy, language endangerment, language rationalization

Introduction

On May 12, 1999 the Scottish Parliament assembled for the first time in almost 300 years. As prominent Scottish National Party politician and the oldest member of the new Parliament, Winnie Ewing, stated, "I want to start with words that I have always wanted to say or hear someone else say - the Scottish Parliament adjourned on the 25th day of March in the year 1707 is hereby reconvened."² Although the creation of the new Scottish Parliament fell short of full independence for Scotland, this constitutional change nevertheless granted significant

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² Video of this opening statement is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiottF-df3Y>

legislative competences to that body. The Scotland Act 1998 devolved power to Scotland and therefore allows the Scottish Parliament to legislate across a broad range of domestic policy areas that have not been specifically reserved to the U.K. Parliament. These policy competences include education and training, and therefore give the Scottish Parliament legislative control over most aspects of language policy, a prerogative which previously resided at Westminster. The purpose of this paper is to assess the state of language policy in Scotland in the wake of these far reaching constitutional changes. Changes which also coincided with an upsurge in Scottish identity and culture.

Background

It has been said that "one of the most consistent trends in modern British history has been the cultural and linguistic conflict between Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Britain" (Durkacz 1983, 1). The Celtic languages of Britain are today found primarily along the west coast; Cornish in Cornwall, Welsh in Wales, and Gaelic in Scotland. Gaelic was first brought to Scotland by Irish settlers in the fourth and fifth centuries and quickly spread to most of the country (Matheson and Matheson 2000). At its peak Gaelic was the official language of state spoken by kings and commoners alike. However, it is doubtful whether Scotland was ever monoglot in Gaelic. Rather, "Scotland has been multilingual since the dawn of time" [Matheson et.al. 2000, 211]. Gaelic, Scots, and English have all been the languages of state at given historical periods, but the dominance of one did not prevent the others from enduring alongside (Murdoch 1996).

Although the Gaelic language has persisted, its history is one of slow and steady decline since about the 13th century. The last King to speak Gaelic was probably James IV who died in 1513 (Grant and Docherty, 1992). Following the Union of the Crowns in 1606, when James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne, and the Acts of Union in 1707, when Scotland and England united under a single parliament, the Gaelic language faced increasing pressure. By the 18th century half of Scotland's population spoke Gaelic (Matheson et. al. 2000), but this number would decline precipitously in the following decades. The Education Act of 1872 made school attendance compulsory and established English as the medium of education. At the same time demographic changes that resulted from the Highland Clearances saw large numbers of Gaelic

speakers leave their homeland.³ The result was that between 1891 and 1991 the number of Gaelic speakers declined from 250,000 to 66,000 (Murdoch 1996), and Gaelic was pushed to the geographic and political periphery of Scotland.

The Anglicization of Scotland and the concomitant encroachment of the English language was responsible for much of Gaelic's decline, but this was not the only reason. For centuries Gaelic competed with Scots for dominance. Scots is a Germanic language that can be traced to Anglo-Saxon settlers who settled in the north-east of present day England and south-east of present day Scotland around the sixth century (Unger 2008). The use of Scots reached its zenith during the period 1460-1560, as Scottish elites moved away from Gaelic into Scots. By the middle of the 16th century, Scots was used at all levels of the royal administration, and was undergoing a process of standardization (Millar 2006). However, like Gaelic, Scots could not ultimately withstand the encroachment of its close relative Standard English. By the end of the 18th century English had become the language of authority used in public life and Scots was regarded as a dialect and substandard form of English. In the terminology of linguist Heinz Kloss, Scots is an *Ausbau* rather than an *Abstand* language. *Abstand* languages are distinguished by intrinsic structural characteristics that make them unique. Whereas *Ausbau* languages gain their status by development, and have been "shaped or reshaped, molded or remolded." (Kloss 1967, 29). Today the Scots language has been so heavily influenced by English that it is lexically undifferentiated from English in critical respects (McLeod 1998). As Millar (2006, 63) describes it, the Scots *Ausbau* process has been "converted by social and political developments into a state of dialectalization." The history of Gaelic and Scots has also been one of language rationalization, defined as "a program of promotion convergence on a privileged public language (or set of languages) by limiting or denying official recognition of other languages in certain spheres of language use" (Patten 2001, 701). After the formation of the United Kingdom in 1707 the privileged language of public affairs in Scotland became English and the dominant position of that language has been consolidated since.

Language Policy: Gaelic

³ The Highland Clearances were forced evictions that took place during the 18th and 19th centuries. Much of the highland population was forced to relocate to make way for sheep farming. This led to large scale internal migration as well as emigration.

After centuries of neglect or outright government hostility towards Gaelic, the language experienced a modest renaissance in the latter half of the 20th century, especially with regards to education and media. Legislative activity included four major Acts: The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which provides for the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic speaking areas; The Grants for Gaelic Language Education (Scotland) Act 1986, which funds projects aimed at teaching Gaelic; The Standards in Scotland Schools Act 2000, which requires local authorities to give an annual account of the ways in which they are promoting Gaelic, and the Broadcasting Act 1990, which created the Gaelic Television Committee, given responsibility for financing Gaelic-medium programming. In addition, the Scottish Office established Comunn na Gàidhlig (CNAG) in 1984 to promote Gaelic language and culture and coordinate language policy.⁴

All of this activity has had some modest results. Gaelic medium primary education rose more than 15% between 1993/94 and 1997/98, and Gaelic radio and television programming has expanded rapidly (McLeod 2001). In 1985 there were two Gaelic medium primary schools, today there are 62, teaching more than 2000 pupils. However, these advances have been much too limited to secure the future of the language. The 2001 Census recorded 58,652 Gaelic speakers in Scotland, representing just 1.2% of the Scottish population, an all time low. The number of pupils enrolled in Gaelic medium education would have to grow six-fold simply to maintain the existing Gaelic speaking population (McLeod 2001).

None of the policy provisions outlined above were primary legislation, and therefore did not represent a comprehensive approach to protecting the Gaelic language. During the 1990s however, a campaign inspired by the Welsh Language Act 1993, was begun by CNAG to advocate for primary Gaelic language legislation. Without committing to legislation, the new Scottish Parliament during its first year in existence, commissioned a report to examine ways to support Gaelic organizations and advise Scottish Ministers on future arrangements. The resulting Macpherson Report⁵ concluded unsurprisingly that "Gaelic is in a precarious, even critical condition and that, without significant Government support it will not survive beyond the mid-point of the 21st century. In order to optimize the development of the language, future funding must be need-driven, project based, and community oriented" (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate

⁴ The Scottish Office was a branch of the U.K. government which exercised a broad range of policy functions in Scotland under the Secretary of State for Scotland. These functions were transferred to the Scottish Parliament at its founding in 1999.

⁵ Formally known as *Revitalising Gaelic: A National Asset : Report by the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic*.

Body 2002, 6). This report was followed by the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group in 2000, chaired by Professor D. Meek. The Meek Report⁶ was published in 2002 and contained two principal recommendations: establish a Gaelic Development Agency and create a Gaelic Language Act to secure the status of the language.

After an extended period of consultation, the Scottish Parliament adopted Meek's recommendations and approved the Gaelic Language Act on April 21, 2005, without any votes against. One of the key components of the Act was the establishment of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, a non-departmental public body which was given three main responsibilities: to increase the number of persons who are able to use and understand the Gaelic language; to encourage the use and understanding of the Gaelic language; and to facilitate access, in Scotland and elsewhere, to the Gaelic language. The Bòrd na Gàidhlig is also mandated to prepare a National Gaelic Language Plan "with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language" (Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, 1) This provision proved controversial during the Bill's consultation period. While many sought an unequivocal declaration of Gaelic's official status, the Scottish Executive was concerned that this might allow claims for exclusive Gaelic use in all circumstances. So while the Act makes reference to Gaelic as an official language of Scotland, it does not confer any such status since it makes no provision for Bòrd enforcement (Dunbar 2005).

Domestic legislation to protect Gaelic is supplemented by international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. Article 27 of the ICCPR states, "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language." The apparent weakness of this provision however is that it does not impose a language promotion obligation on State Parties. States are required to tolerate minority languages, but not promote them. More comprehensive is the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1998), which sets out clear expectations of State action. For the purposes of the Charter, regional and minority languages are those "traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the a State's population; and

⁶ Formally known as *A Fresh Start for Gaelic*.

different from the official language(s) of that State." Article 7 of the Charter sets out general principles that apply to minority languages, without specifying implementation measures. These include requirements to respect minority languages and encourage their use in speech and writing, in public and private life. Part III of the Charter contains a series of specific obligations in seven areas: education, judicial authorities, administrative authorities and public services, media, cultural activities and facilities, and economic and social life, and transfrontier exchanges.

Despite containing a number of detailed responsibilities, the Charter allows for a considerable degree of flexibility in its application. First, the Charter does not specify which languages are to be protected and promoted, it is left to member states to select provisions "according to the situation of each language" (Article 7). Second, State Parties are not required to implement all of the provisions contained in the Charter. From a total of 68 obligations, States must implement a minimum of thirty-five. At least three of which should be selected from the Education section, three from the Cultural Activities and Facilities section, and one each from the Judicial Authorities, and Administrative Authorities and Public Services sections. The Charter was opened for signatures during November 1992 and was ratified by the U.K. government in March 2001. In doing so the government designated Gaelic in Scotland, Welsh in Wales, and Irish in Northern Ireland as minority languages and committed to thirty-nine specific policy measures.

Language Policy: Scots

Although the Gaelic language in Scotland is in a precarious position it has a major advantage over Scots, namely it is easily identifiable as a distinct language. By contrast, there has been considerable debate over whether Scots can be classified in the same way. Although historically Scots was a distinct and official language of Scotland, it has been so extensively molded and re-shaped over time by its close association with English that it is often regarded simply as a dialect. The question of dialect vs. language is not easily resolved. As McClure (1988) notes, "There is in fact no single criterion which can be applied in all cases to decide whether a given speech form may be classed as a language; and of the various factors which can be considered, not one provides an unambiguous answer in the case of Scots." Part of the problem is the lack of standardization of Scots as it has no generally accepted spelling or codified grammar and it lacks words for modern life (McClure 1995). Indeed, it has been argued

that it is more accurate to describe Scots as a collection of dialects because of its lack of uniformity and local variation (McClure 1988). Unger (2010, 100) however finds that Scots has a large body of distinctive lexis "unrelated or only distantly related to commonly used words in present-day English." Haidinger (2008) suggest that greater clarity may be achieved by viewing Scots as part of a language continuum. At one end lies Standard English, at the other Broad Scots, and in the middle lies Scottish Standard English. Broad Scots contains much of the distinct lexis described by Unger, while Scottish Standard English is defined as English with a Scottish accent.

However it is defined, it is clear that the encroachment of English into Scotland relegated Scots to second class status. From its heyday during the 15th and 16th centuries through a long decline to the late 20th century Scots became increasingly stigmatized as 'bad' English, a corrupted form of English that was associated with the less educated. This view was clearly embedded in a 1952 government report "It is not the language of educated people anywhere, and could not be described as a suitable medium of education and culture (His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education, 1946, quoted in Niven 1998, 60). The same report called upon schools to wage an unrelenting campaign against Scots.

The lack of clarity in defining Scots, and its second class status, undoubtedly undermined the recognition and promotion of the language. However, beginning in the 1970s a number of organizations emerged, and written works produced, that were aimed at improving the image and use of Scots. In 1972 the Scots Language Society was formed (originally called The Lallans Society). In 1983 the New Testament was translated into Scots, and two years later the first *Concise Scots Dictionary* was published. Official recognition came later, offered through the Scottish Office Education Department in 1991, which advocated the inclusion of the Scots language in the curriculum for children aged 5-14 (Murdoch 1996). Finally, international recognition was forthcoming in 1993 when the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages recognized Scots as a minority European Language.

Despite efforts of language activists and international recognition, legislation related to Scots has been slow to emerge. Political parties in Scotland were unhurried in publishing policies related to Scots; the first one to do so was the Scottish National Party in 1996. Even the founding of the Scottish Parliament did not bring a sense of urgency to the issue of the Scots language. While the precarious situation of Gaelic was immediately recognized, Scots did not

receive the same consideration (Unger 2010). The most obvious public manifestation of this distinction can be seen in the Scottish Parliament itself, where the signage is in Gaelic and English but not Scots. Neither is Scots afforded the same stature as Gaelic under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. When the U.K. government ratified the Charter in 2001 it chose to apply only part of that document to Scots. Part II of the Charter consists of general principles and automatically applies to all minority languages within the member state, so Scots was included under that provision. However, it is Part III that contains specific policy obligations aimed at preserving and promoting minority languages. Under the terms of the Charter member states select the languages to be covered, and the U.K. government did not select Scots.

Another issue that highlights the relative standing of Scots and Gaelic is the Census. Although a question about Scotland's Gaelic speaking population has been asked since 1881, an equivalent question about Scots has never been included. During the 1990s an alliance of Scots language organizations strongly advocated for a question on Scots to be included in the 2001 Census. However, their case was rejected by the Scottish Office, and then by the Scottish Executive, on the grounds that the definition of terms would be too difficult. Following a trial of the question before the 2001 Census, the General Register Office of Scotland concluded that a "more precise estimate of genuine Scots language ability would require a more in-depth interview survey and may involve asking various questions about the language used in different situations. Such an approach would be inappropriate for a Census" (Mate 1996).

Notwithstanding these setbacks, the profile of the Scots language and demands for specific policies to promote it have increased. In 2001 the Cross Party Group on the Scots Language was formed in Parliament in order to promote the cause of Scots and highlight the need for action to support Scots. Its membership includes members of the Scottish Parliament as well as Scots language activists and organizations. In 2007 the Scottish Executive published a consultation document titled, *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*, "to celebrate and promote the rich diversity of languages spoken in Scotland." The document notes that since Scots is a distinct language, a valid means of communication, and an important part of Scotland's cultural heritage, it should be included in the school curriculum where appropriate (Scottish Executive 2007). Although the *Strategy* represented a first attempt to formulate a comprehensive approach for all languages in Scotland it was heavily criticized during the consultation phase for being too vague

and contradictory, and was quietly withdrawn a few months later (Unger 2010). Part of the rationale for the publication of this document was likely the perceived threat, on the part of the Labour Government, of commitments made by the Scottish National Party (SNP) to Scots speakers in its pre-election manifesto. The SNP promised to "actively encourage the use of Scots in education, broadcasting and the arts," and ensure that "European obligations to develop the language are honoured" (SNP Manifesto 2007, 57). Whatever the reason, the promotion of Scots in the *Strategy* nevertheless signaled a commitment to the language by the new Scottish Executive that was previously lacking.

During 2008 the Scottish National Party government (which won the 2007 election) commissioned an audit of the Scots language with two primary objectives: (1) Provide the necessary baseline data in order to identify where provision currently exists; and (2) Determine what opportunities may exist to expand provision within the context of the categories of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Specifically, the audit analysed current Scots language according the seven categories defined by the Charter. The audit revealed that the current provision of Scots the language was strongest in the categories of education as well as cultural activities, and less apparent in the judicial and public service categories. The report concluded on an optimistic but cautionary note,

In the absence of a formal overarching government language policy for Scots, Scotland appears to have an active, highly engaged and highly skilled, yet fragile community engaged in delivering Scots language provision. It depends to a large extent on voluntary activity, which was described in interviews as a strength in terms of the drive and enthusiasm this engenders, and as a concern in terms of stability and the ability to plan for future provision (Scottish Government 2009, part 7).

A similar sentiment was expressed by the chair of the follow-up Ministerial Working Group in 2010, "in the absence of established policy structures instituted at national level, support for Scots in all fields is piecemeal, uncoordinated and excessively reliant on individual initiatives" (McClure 2010).

Language, Nationalism, and Identity

Language is more than simply a means of communication, it can also be a powerful expression of a nation's culture and identity. Therefore it is not coincidental that interest in Gaelic and Scots increased at the same time as demands for greater political autonomy for Scotland was also building. The rise of cultural nationalism and political nationalism went hand in hand, and was often mirrored in support for the Scottish National Party. While certainly not everyone who sought greater support for Scotland's indigenous languages backed the SNP, increased support for the nationalist party was representative of a change in the underlying political milieu that would ultimately influence language policy in the years to come.

The initial breakthrough for the SNP came in 1967 with the election of the first Scottish National Party candidate to be elected to the British Parliament in over 20 years, and only the second in history. This was followed by greater success a few years later when the SNP returned eleven MPs to Westminster in 1974. Much of the support for the party can be attributed to economic factors. In 1970 extensive oil fields were discovered in the North Sea, much of which would have been located in Scotland's territorial waters had it been an independent state. The SNP quickly took advantage of this discovery in their new slogan "Its Scotland's Oil," which brought them significant electoral success.

During the 1980s and 1990s economic factors combined with political factors, which together served to highlight Scottish distinctiveness and strengthen support for greater autonomy. In particular, the policies pursued by Margaret Thatcher, and her successor John Major, were bitterly opposed in Scotland. The Conservative Government not only rejected the idea of devolving power, it also began to test unpopular free-market policies in Scotland (McMillan 1996). Even though the Conservative party was widely opposed in Scotland, the Scottish electorate had little impact on election outcomes at the U.K. level as a result of vast population differences.⁷ With limited options, pro-autonomy frustrations found a voice in a document titled the *Claim of Right for Scotland*. Formulated by a non-party group of prominent Scots, it was unequivocal in its call for political change, "The Union has always been, and remains, a threat to the survival of a distinctive culture in Scotland" and "the U.K. has been an anomaly from its inception and is a glaring anomaly now."⁸

While there is a clear association between increased demands for political autonomy and

⁷ England's population is approximately ten times larger than Scotland's population.

⁸ Available at <http://www.alba.org.uk/devolution/claimofright.html>

increased interest in Gaelic and Scots, the picture gets a bit more complicated in relation to national identity. With respect to Gaelic, the predominant view expressed in official documentation is that it is a vital part of Scottish identity. This view was summed up by one government minister during the debate on the Gaelic Language Bill (GLB), "Gaelic is a precious part of our national life. It is not just a language; it is the gateway to an entire culture."⁹ That this view is not universally shared however was evident during the consultation phase of the Bill. Several local governments and other organizations expressed the opinion that Gaelic is important for only some geographic locations in Scotland, therefore the GLB should be confined to those areas alone. Other respondents were concerned about the financial implications of the GLB, seen as "time-consuming and wasteful"¹⁰, as well as the possible negative implications for Scotland's other languages. Glasgow City Council articulated this concern in asking "whether it is acceptable to promote Gaelic at the expense or neglect of the Scots language and its various dialects..." (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2002, 14).¹¹ Despite official statements in support of Gaelic, the language is clearly not viewed as an essential and integral part of Scottish identity by many. This is perhaps not surprising when one considers that 98.8% of Scots do not speak Gaelic. The continuing marginality of the language in social and political life as well in geographic terms, means that Gaelic should not be regarded as a talisman of Scottish national identity (McLeod 2001).

This disconnect from the broader Scottish culture has been further exacerbated by the top-down strategies favored by Gaelic language activists whose approaches have focused heavily on obtaining government funding for Gaelic, especially in education (McLeod 2001). Though they have been successful at increasing financial support and Gaelic language awareness, this has come at the expense of grassroots initiatives that could ultimately prove to be more effective at preserving the language in the long term. Successful language revitalization requires more than top-down rehabilitation, it must be grounded in social transformation that includes strong intergenerational transmission. This will be difficult to secure if the language is confined to the classroom.

⁹ Stated by Peter Peacock, The Minister for Education and Young People, at a meeting of the Scottish Parliament, Wednesday, February 2, 2005. Available at

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialreports/meetingsparliament/or-05/sor0202-02.htm>

¹⁰ Stated in the response given by National Health Service, Borders.

¹¹ Additional responses are contained in *Scottish Parliament Research Briefings: SB 02-137 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill*. Available at <http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/corpus/search/document.php?documentid=1260>

In contrast to the top-down approaches of Gaelic language activists, Scots language promotion has been decidedly bottom-up. Organizations such as the Scots Language Society, the Scots Resource Center, and Itchy Coo, which publishes children's books in Scots, are all grassroots based. Given that Scots is more widely spoken and geographically dispersed than Gaelic, it might be expected that the Scots language and Scottish identity are closely tied. However, after centuries of decline and hostile government policy, much of the Scottish population holds somewhat ambivalent views towards the Scots language. In reviewing previous studies, Haidinger (2008) found that while Scots is perceived positively in terms of cultural identity, it is viewed negatively in terms of prestige. These views were largely confirmed in an extensive study of the Scots language conducted during 2010. The *Public Attitudes Towards the Scots Language* survey was commissioned by the Scottish Government to explore public perceptions of, and attitudes towards, Scots. The survey also represented the partial fulfilment of a pre-election pledge made by Scottish National Party to promote the awareness and use of Scots.

As previous studies suggested, the *Public Attitudes Towards the Scots Language* survey revealed that the Scottish population places high value on the cultural and historical aspects of Scots, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Scots Language and Identity

Survey Statement	% Agreeing
Scots is a valuable part of our culture and identity	88%
Scots is a valuable part of our history and heritage	86%
Scots is an important aspect of our identity in my part of Scotland	81%
Learning the Scots language can contribute to a sense of national cultural identity	73%

Data compiled from Public Attitudes Towards Scots survey, 2010

The cultural importance of Scots is also apparent in support for Scots in the arts, with 69% of respondents supporting the use of Scots in literature, drama, and music. By contrast, only 38% considered the Scots language to be important in business. This informal/formal dichotomy was also clearly evident in other responses. While 82% indicate that Scots is employed most frequently to communicate with friends and family, only 10% said that they use it most at work.

The survey also revealed that Scots is used predominantly for speaking; 43% of respondents said that they speak Scots a lot or fairly often, whereas the figures for reading and writing Scots was 9% and 6% respectively.

With regards to the status of Scots, large numbers expressed doubts as to whether Scots is in fact a language. Table 2 indicates that while the Scots language is widely employed, it is often used subconsciously and is viewed simply as a way of speaking by most.

Table 2: Scots Usage and Status

Survey Statement	% Agreeing
I don't really think of Scots as a language, it's more just a way of speaking	64%
Scots is spoken a lot in the area of Scotland where I live	67%
I probably do use Scots when speaking but I'm not really aware of it	67%

Data compiled from Public Attitudes Towards Scots survey, 2010

A similar lack of confidence in the language was expressed with regards to education. While a majority (55%) indicated they would like see Scots taught in schools, a significant minority (31%) believed that children should not be encouraged to speak Scots. When asked why, many responses reflected the time-honoured view that Scots is not as good as English, with 34% stating that children should "speak properly" and "be taught proper English." A further 11% equated Scots with slang. So although most of the population uses Scots to communicate on a regular basis, the informal nature of that usage means that it is afforded little prestige as a language. Scots is the language of communication in the private not the public sphere, and opinion remains divided regarding its continued relevance, especially in the area of education.

Reaction to the survey's findings illustrate how language policy in Scotland has become increasingly politicized. The Scottish National Party portrays the results as evidence that Scots is a "living language, playing an important role in the majority of Scots' daily lives."¹² It is perhaps not surprising that the nationalist party makes such an argument. Raising the profile of Scotland's

¹² Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop, quoted in *Herald Scotland*, January 15, 2010. Available at <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/most-scots-want-the-mither-tung-taught-in-schools-1.998834>

indigenous languages could be a useful political tool to emphasize Scotland's history and culture and reinforce Scotland's distinctiveness from England. Indeed commissioning a survey of this sort can itself be viewed as an overtly political act. It is highly unlikely that any other Scottish political party would have done so had they been in power. Not surprisingly, opposition parties (all favour maintaining the U.K. union) have been less enthusiastic about the survey results. One Conservative Party spokesman stated unequivocally, "The Scots language that the SNP Government continues to try to promote is not a separate language but a collection of regional dialects of the English language" and he called upon the SNP to "stop peddling the myth of a separate Scots language."¹³ Nevertheless, the SNP Government is pressing ahead with its pro-Gaelic and pro-Scots policies, which for the first time include the addition of a Scots language question to the 2011 census.

Conclusion

Over the centuries, the Scots and Gaelic languages have been subjected to political neglect as well as more overt policies of language rationalization aimed at their eradication. Despite such challenges, these languages survived to witness an uptick in interest and support at the end of the 20th century. Not coincidentally, this renewed interest corresponded with increased demands for greater political autonomy in Scotland, which culminated in the restoration of a Scottish Parliament for the first time in almost 300 years. These sweeping constitutional changes shifted control over most aspects of language policy from London to Scotland and provided an historic opportunity to initiate the necessary policy steps to protect Scotland's beleaguered indigenous languages.

At the parliamentary level, the politics of language promotion have proven to be less controversial for Gaelic than Scots. Gaelic is regarded as a distinct language with deep historical roots and all major political parties recognize its extreme vulnerability. Discussion of Gaelic is often couched in quixotic terms that link today's Scotland to a distant and cherished past. Nonetheless, Gaelic's continued relevance for the 21st century does not go unquestioned. The cost and effort to promote Gaelic will be significant and the argument in favor of doing so has not been won at all levels of government, nor among the population at large. The weak association between Gaelic and national identity continues to undermine its position. Protecting

¹³ Quoted in *Herald Scotland*, *ibid.*

Gaelic may have important symbolic significance in Scotland, but if the language ceased to exist its loss would have little practical impact on the lives of most Scots. Language policy as it relates to the Scots language faces a different set of problems. Scots continues to have low status and is paradoxically not even viewed as a language by the majority of people who claim to speak it. On the other hand, Scots has a number of advantages over Gaelic. It is more widely spoken, it is geographically dispersed, and it has a closer connection to national identity. This latter point has not been lost on the Scottish National Party, which has pursued a vigorous campaign to raise the profile of the Scots language.

The founding of the Scottish Parliament clearly had an impact on language policy in Scotland. For the first time, primary legislation was enacted to protect the Gaelic language and the political profile of the Scots language has also been raised significantly. It remains to be seen however whether recent language policy initiatives will achieve their desired results. The outlook for Gaelic remains precarious and undeniably bleak, but there are reasons for greater optimism with respect to Scots. The 2011 Census will provide much needed data on the breadth and depth of Scots language coverage across the country, but current data suggest that the number of speakers is in the millions. No matter the results, it is likely that language policy in Scotland will remain politically controversial in the years to come, especially with regards to Scots. Scotland's unionist political parties will continue to press the idea that Scots is merely a dialect of English. While the SNP will endeavor to raise the status of Scots as a language, for it may yet become a valuable symbol that can be mobilized in the task of building an independent nation state.

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