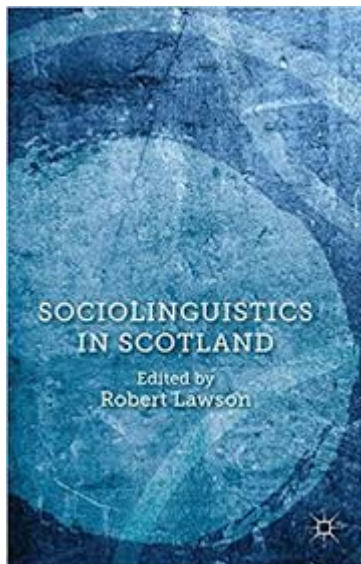


'Sociolinguistics in Scotland' edited by Robert Lawson

Review by Maggie Scott



In this edited volume, Robert Lawson brings together scholars with diverse specialisms including phonology, syntax, lexicology and onomastics. Jennifer Smith's *Foreword* sets the scene by drawing attention to the many varieties of language encountered in twenty-first century Scotland. The complex interplay of Scottish English, Scots, Gaelic and other languages presents scholars with a sometimes bewildering array of linguistic and social variables and communication styles. As many of the studies discussed in this book demonstrate, untangling both the 'what' and the 'why' of language use and change is not always straightforward, but sociolinguists have a wide array of tools for the job. Scotland can be both a fascinating place to study and a proving ground for new methodologies.

In the opening chapter, Lawson provides 'An Overview of Language in Scotland', introducing the historical and political factors that have shaped the country and its attitudes to its own languages. The current dominant position, that Scotland has at least three languages: Scottish English, Scots and Gaelic, is contextualised and explained, as are recent developments for Scots and Gaelic which have seen both languages gaining national respect and support. In chapter two, Ronald Macaulay outlines 'A Short History of Sociolinguistics in Scotland', focussing most particularly on developments over the past forty years, from the Labovian analyses of the 1970s to the 'Third Wave' studies of the early twenty-first century and the introduction of ethnographic approaches.

Thorsten Brato looks at 'Accent Variation and Change in North-East Scotland' in chapter 3, specifically considering the different pronunciations of *wh* as evidenced by the sociolinguistic interviews he conducted with a group of multi-generational Aberdonians. He concludes that the traditional [f]

pronunciation—found for example in Aberdonian *fit* ‘what’—is ‘now lexically restricted and socially marginalised’ (p.48), with older speakers preferring [ʌ]—as in Scots *whit* ‘what’—while children from the middle-class and working-class areas using the more anglicised pronunciation [w]. Interestingly, he also observed that adolescents from the working-class area are perhaps asserting a teenage group-identity by using [f]. In chapter four, Eleanor Lawson, James M. Scobbie and Jane Stuart-Smith report on ‘A Socio-Articulatory Study of Scottish Rhoticity’ which employed ultrasound tongue imaging to produce very detailed results often undetectable by other techniques. This research revealed new evidence for ‘variants which are socially stratified, but apparently covert’ (p.75), acting as subtle markers of social identity and group allegiance.

Chapter five, ‘Sociolinguistic Variation on the Scottish-English Border’ by Dominic Watt, Carmen Llamas and Daniel Ezra Johnson, focuses on phonetic evidence gathered from Carlisle, Gretna, Eyemouth and Berwick-upon-Tweed as part of the research project, *Accent and Identity on the Scottish/English Border*. Close examination of pronunciations of *r* amongst the test groups produced mixed results, some coinciding with the geographical border, others patterning in quite different ways, and so the findings ultimately both ‘support and confound the predictions made by researchers who have previously investigated language variation and change in the border area’ (p.98). In chapter six, ‘Hitting an Edinburgh Target: Immigrant Adolescents’ Acquisition of Variation in Edinburgh English’, Miriam Meyerhoff and Erik Schleeff examine the speech of two groups of teenagers, one group being born in the city, the other having emigrated from Poland in 2004. Although previous studies indicate that non-native speakers are less likely to use informal pronunciations of English words, Meyerhoff and Schleeff found that the Polish immigrants were quite likely to use the same informal pronunciations as the Edinburgh teenagers, both groups evidencing glottal stops for *t*, and *-in* for words with standard spellings in *-ing* (p.111). Perhaps this indicates greater social integration, or says something about how English is learned in this context, where the speech of locals appears to be more influential than an abstract model of English with more artificial ‘standards’. This study is significant both because of its contribution to the understanding of variation in comparable groups of native and non-native teenagers living in the same city, and because of its intention to reinvigorate sociolinguistic research on Edinburgh English, which has seen limited activity since the 1980s.

Chapter seven, by Ole Schützler, investigates 'Vowel Variation in Scottish English: Accent-Internal Differentiation or Anglicisation?' and finds no evidence, at least amongst the test group, that speakers of Scottish Standard English 'aspire' to sound like speakers of Southern Standard British English (also known as Received Pronunciation). In chapter eight, Lynn Clark examines 'Phonological Repetition Effects in Natural Conversation: Evidence from TH-fronting in Fife'. The key issue is 'how and why speakers repeat linguistic material in quick succession' (p.154), so if the speaker pronounces < th > as [f], are they more likely to do so on subsequent occasions? Clark's answer to this question is yes, suggesting that repetition effects, so far chiefly noted in syntactic analyses, are also observable for phonological features.

Jane Stuart-Smith and Claire Timmins discuss the findings of several extensive research projects in chapter nine, 'Language and the Influence of the Media: A Scottish Perspective'. Glaswegian teenagers were noted for pronunciations shared with Cockney, including TH-fronting (*fink* for *think*), and the London-based television programme *EastEnders* was investigated as a possible catalyst. Although the authors 'do not have evidence that engaging with the media results in Glaswegian adolescents wanting to be or talk like an EastEnder', they argue that the teenagers 'may be presenting personae of Glasgow kids which relate to some of the drama's matey, gregarious, slightly edgy personalities' (p.190-191). If so, this raises further questions, since *EastEnders* has had more than its fair share of Glaswegian 'bogey men'.¹ The authors conclude: 'If these [phonological] features were ever "new", it is likely they arrived by thoroughly conventional forms of diffusion, by people from London interacting with Glaswegians. But we suggest that their explosion since the 1980s has been fuelled by more factors than direct contact alone, one of which is the influence of the broadcast media' (p.192).

The editor provides another contribution in the form of chapter ten, 'What Can Ethnography Tell us about Sociolinguistic Variation over Time? Some Insights from Glasgow'. Here, Lawson reports on a research project carried out at Banister Academy in Glasgow which sought to relate the 'social movements' of three male speakers to their habitual usage of particular vowel phonemes (p.204). As relatively little ethnographic research has been conducted on Scottish speech to date, he explores the history of discipline and outlines the main reasons for its applicability in linguistic fieldwork, as demonstrated through his own case study. While some findings were not straightforward to interpret, there was clear

evidence of correlations between specific pronunciations and social identities.

In chapter eleven, 'From Speech to Naming in a Scottish Pakistani Community: The Interplay between Language, Ethnicity and Identity', Farhana Alam and Ellen Bramwell report on two studies of the linguistic practices of Glaswegian Pakistanis. One was a sociophonetic investigation which revealed evidence of an emerging 'local ethnic accent [...] what we might call "Glaswasian", incorporating features which are both classically Glaswegian and Asian together' (p.230). A different form of cultural hybridity was identified by the second study, a socio-onomastic analysis of Glaswegian Pakistani naming practices, which showed that the most significant change was the enforced adoption of hereditary surnames, which do not exist in Islamic tradition. In chapter twelve, 'Change in the Fisher Dialects of the Scottish East Coast: Peterhead as a Case Study', Robert McColl Millar, Lisa Bonnici and William Barras discuss the loss of traditional lexis in the context of economic change. They conclude that 'the situation now, with gender- and age-mates knowing different parts of the original lexico-semantic "mosaic", suggests fragmentation of a central part of the dialect (p.255).

John Corbett considers 'Syntactic Variation: Evidence from the Scottish Corpus of Text and Speech' (SCOTS), in chapter thirteen. Corbett intends this discussion to provide 'an introduction for students and researchers who wish to use corpora to explore syntactic variation in Scottish speech' (p. 258), and it will also perhaps remind readers that the national collection of data found in SCOTS has much to offer to the wider academic community, being 'richly illustrative of writing and speech in the country' (p. 262).² Corbett demonstrates some of the ways SCOTS can be used to explore negation, modality, tense and aspect, looking for—and generally finding—supporting evidence for features discussed in Miller (2003). While showing what may be achieved through corpus analysis, this chapter also warns that much more data is needed if robust, generalisable conclusions are to be reached, and that the corpus analyst must always be alert to the limitations of his or her tools.

In chapter fourteen, 'Code-Switching in the "Flannan Isles": A Micro-Interactional Approach to a Bilingual Narrative', Cassie Smith-Christmas focuses on code-switching as one of the 'contextualisation clues'—'the resources, both linguistic and extralinguistic, which speakers use to signal, essentially, "what is going on" in the conversation' (p. 277). She analyses the discourse of one particular speaker

from the Isle of Skye, who is bilingual in Scottish Gaelic and English, and uses code-switching as a narrative technique in telling the story of the 'Flannan Isles', often shifting from one language to another to highlight a change in the direction of the tale or underline the end of a particular episode. The volume concludes with chapter fifteen, by Mercedes Durham, 'Thirty Years Later: Real-Time Change and Stability in Attitudes towards the Dialect in Shetland'. Here, Durham compares the results of attitudinal studies carried out amongst schoolchildren in Shetland in 1983 and 2010. Many of the children born in Shetland who took part in the 2010 study 'do not have local roots' (p. 314), and overall, fewer children identified themselves as dialect speakers. However, evidence from email, text-messaging and social media revealed that in these contexts, 'dialect use is robust and able to fulfil social functions for most of the children, be they local or not' (p. 314).

While this volume provides an excellent sampling of work currently being conducted on Scottish material, it reinforces the need for small-scale studies with few participants to be followed up with additional, complementary projects that help make sense of initial findings. Brato, for example, notes that the middle-class children in his study are taught in an independent school where 'their fellow pupils and many of the teachers are non-Scottish', perhaps reinforcing their use of [w] for < wh >, as in *wat* 'what', observed in the interviews, 'in order to avoid sounding "too Scottish"' (p. 49). It would therefore be unwise to consider their evidence as indicative of any wider trends, and it would be useful to know if these same children sound 'more Scottish' in other environments. As Brato underlines, researchers must treat their findings with care regarding issues of 'national alignment and identity' (p. 49) which may be masked or influenced in complex ways by the speakers' contexts.

The book addresses many issues, and several of the chapters discuss major research projects of national and international significance. Importantly, Alam and Bramwell break new ground in chapter eleven, revealing hitherto unstudied aspects of Scottish identities, and it is very useful to see ethnographic and attitudinal studies represented here (chapters 10 and 15), as well as the issue of code-switching (chapter 14). There is, however, a very strong focus on phonology (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, half of chapter 11) at the expense of lexis (chapter 12) and grammar (chapter 13), and Scottish English dominates the majority of the chapters (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, half of chapter 11), at the expense of Scots

(chapters 12 and 13) and Scottish Gaelic (chapter 14). While this is a weakness in any book ostensibly about the languages of Scotland, it is nevertheless reflective of wider issues regarding research into Scottish culture. As Corbett points out, Miller's *cri de coeur* for a 'small army of researchers' to study Scots syntax and discourse remains largely unanswered (pp.259-260).³ Many aspects of Gaelic similarly require investigation, and, for both languages, there are several related areas of social and linguistic research that remain largely untouched. Who is reading the Scots translations of English classics such as Roald Dahl's *The Twits*, and are the children who grow up reading them gaining a new or different appreciation of Scots as a result? It would be fascinating to find out what impact these publications may have on family idiolects, perceptions of Scots, and the conversations they undoubtedly provoke across cultures and generations. What is the outcome of including Gaelic names in the signage at railway stations, and how much does the linguistic landscape tell us about Scotland's official and unofficial relationships with its languages? There is much to do.

It is also noteworthy that a significant number of extant research projects and questions—probably inadvertently—concentrate on evidence for anglicisation and the loss of traditional Scottish linguistic features. These questions are important, and produce interesting results, sometimes finding no evidence (Schützler), or revealing more complex paradigms (Lawson, Scobbie and Stuart-Smith), or only finding such evidence in heavily anglicised socio-political environments where such results are unsurprising (Brato), or where industries are changing and traditional terms are no longer of special cultural significance (Millar). However, an emphasis on attrition can suggest that Scotland's linguistic dram is half empty rather than half full. Given that languages change, some attrition of traditional features is utterly normal, but conversely, there is a very great need for more research on linguistic *innovation* (a good illustration being Durham's investigation of Shetlandic in social media). What this volume emphasises, vitally, is that current changes in Scotland's languages in no way equate to 'cultural erosion', or loss of a narrowly defined 'Scottishness'. As Lawson states in his introductory discussion, issues concerning Scots and Gaelic: 'gain further relevance in the context of the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014' (p. 10). This is an important year for Scotland, both politically and culturally, and the current period of reflection presents a useful opportunity for renewed academic participation in wider national debates. Diverse, modern, multi-lingual and multi-cultural Scotland deserves to keep researchers busy for many a long year to come, and the

collection of papers under discussion here represents a tantalising tip of a much larger iceberg.

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