PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

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The subject I wish to pursue in my Professional Project lies in the area of language. My particular interest in this is in the use of Scots in schools and the role of the English teacher in addressing the use of dialect in the English classroom. My initial thoughts on this subject sprang from an interest in the creative, expressive aspect of written English in cases where the children spoke Scots and wrote in English. This led me to look in more depth at the whole area of dialect in the English classroom and at the teachers dilemma in trying to balance the use of Scots and standard English for the benefit of the pupil. This is particularly important in the Secondary school. Attitudes towards the use of dialect can affect a student's confidence in using language which will be reflected in his or her work and can therefore have an effect on exam results. Equally important is the attitude of a marker towards use of dialect as this too can have an effect on a student's overall result.

In the following enquiry I would like, first of all, to look at the historical background surrounding the area of dialect in the school and its importance as part of a pupil's social and cultural identity. I would then like to examine the importance of general attitudes towards dialect and to look specifically at how teachers approach this area in the classroom. My analysis of this is derived from a questionnaire I put to teachers, my own observation, informal conversations with teachers and discussions with pupils arising out of lessons that I taught. The questions that I was interested in enquiring into were: what Scots literature did teachers teach at each level of the school? Was it ever considered appropriate to allow use of dialect in written work? Was use of dialect penalised in talk exercises? Do teachers ever discuss language issues with their classes and what resources might be used in heightening awareness of language and dialect?

My teaching practices were in Region where a large number of school pupils speak a variety of urban Scots dialect.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF SCOTS

In order to examine the present day attitudes towards Scots dialect in schools it is necessary to briefly look back at the changing place of Scots in society.

In The Scots Language in Education, published in 1974, D.J. Witherington, looking at Scots as part of a historical retrospective, points out that:

Scots, as a distinctive language was
at its strongest in the 16th and 17th
centuries...It was a widely written language; very much the language of the formal records of government in both church and state...the day to day schooling of the 16th and 17th centuries was conducted in Scots. (1)

Chambers and Trudgill in Chapter one of *Dialectology* also point out that Scots was 'an autonomous variety but has been regarded as a variety of English for the last two hundred years or so'. (2)

The change in status of Scots has much to do with the political and social changes of the 18th and 19th centuries. Political union with England in the 18th century, urbanisation in the 19th century, which resulted in mass movement of the population and therefore changing regional dialects, and, very importantly, the upsurge in mass circulation reading material printed in standard English, led to a gradual movement away from Scots as a written language. Schools were also affected, 'To the catechism and the Bible as earlier instances of standardising texts could be added...a torrent of school books printed in impeccable Standard English'. (3) England was now the dominant culture and, as Chambers and Trudgill note, 'standardising changes will always be towards the dominant culture'. (4)

As the status of standard English increased greater value was attached to it than to other dialects in Britain. Standard English came to be seen as 'correct'. In 1895 a school inspector's report is quoted as saying:

It is a pity that the influence of the well educated and well-cultivated teacher does not extend beyond this - namely to the scotching and eradicating of the horrible accent and vernacular in some parts of the North. If the accent were pleasing, like the melodic intonation of the Highlands, I should be sorry to recommend any such course...(5)

This quotation demonstrates that the movement towards standardisation in written language was not reflected in the speech of a large number of the population but spoken Scots was none the less 'devalued' with many people perceiving it as 'bad English', an attitude which still prevails today. The cultural dichotomy felt by those who spoke Scots and yet were surrounded by standard English as an ideal is expressed by Grassic Gibbon in 1934. Chris Guthrie in *Sunset Song* sees herself as "two Chrisses", the English Chris who goes to school and is expected to read and speak English and the Scottish Chris who speaks Scots and identifies herself with the life of home and family.(6)
The quotation also demonstrates the relative values attached to the differing rural and urban Scots dialects. Again, today, despite the upsurge in literature written in urban Scots dialect, many people value rural dialects above urban dialects, seeing them as more 'pure' than the Scots spoken in cities and towns. All language is, however, constantly changing and mass communication has resulted in the assimilation of both English and American into many Scots dialects.

In 1974 in a review of contemporary attitudes to Scots in education Lowe (7) found that many teachers were keen to teach Scottish material including poetry in urban dialects but that there was a dearth of material. Little provision was made for expression of cultural and language issues in the SEB Higher paper and passages for interpretation were mainly taken from English journals.

Since this time there has been a movement towards recognising the importance of Scottish culture for the Scottish schoolchild. The Higher examination now makes provision for Scottish literature with several of the set texts being by Scottish writers. The recent English Language 5-14 document makes reference to the inclusion of Scottish cultural education at this stage and particular attention is given to the position of dialect. The document states that:

The speech of the Scottish people is often distinctive. It may display features of pronunciation and intonation which together constitute an accent. It may contain features of dialect, such as vocabulary, syntax, idiom and economies of expression. These reflect the histories of communities, and are part of the language children bring to school...The first tasks of the schools are therefore to enable pupils to be confident and creative in this language...This will involve teachers in valuing pupils' spoken language...From an awareness of the diversity of accents, dialects and languages in Scotland, pupils will develop an appreciation of the diversity of other languages and their importance for the communities that use them. Far from diminishing the significance of English, an understanding of the operations of dialects will enrich awareness if the need for a standard form of language which enables communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries.(8)

This document is not yet fully operational but points the way forward for the future. The secondary school teacher's
dilemma remains in the area of showing that they 'value' a pupil's language and the need to impose standardisation, particularly in written work, which may be externally examined. Teachers themselves may have linguistic prejudices borne out of the general social stigma attached to dialect speakers. and it is this area that I wish to look next.

SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF DIALECT

The 'value' attached to dialects can be seen as a social as well as a cultural phenomenon and the sociological implications of the use of dialect are important in assessing attitudes towards it. Sociolinguistics also contributes to an understanding of why dialect is important to the individual child and why it is important that teachers should not discredit its use.

In Trudgill's *Accent, Dialect and the School* he points out that implicit in our judgement of individual's speech is social class marking. The higher up the social scale one moves the less likely it is that one will speak in a regional dialect. Trudgill's contention is that the fact that standard English is a standard does not make it any more 'correct' than any other form of the language, it is another dialect and all dialects should have equal status; this extends to all aspects of dialect including grammatical constructions. The association of dialect with social class can be seen in this diagram:

![Diagram](image)

The association of dialect with social background has implications for education. The young person who has been brought up in a particular speech community identifies with those who belong to that community and changing their language will result in their alienation from the community that they identify with. Attempts to change their language will not succeed where it may be associated with loss of social identity. Confronted by the necessity to modify their language to a standard which is seen as 'correct' they may become insecure in their use of language and find difficulty in expressing themselves in case they are 'wrong'. By insisting
on a particular use of language school teachers may alienate the dialect speaker.

In examining teachers attitudes to language in school, Trudgill found that many teachers did value pupils language and quotes one teacher representing this view as saying, 'As long as people are articulate, as long as they know what they're trying to say, it doesn't matter what sort of accent they use.' (10) Equally many teachers did try to change children's language, considering their speech to be 'sloppy' and 'incorrect'. The pitfall for the student in this attitude, as Trudgill points out is that:

There is a danger that teachers who have unfavourable attitudes towards low-status varieties may come - unwittingly - to evaluate children who use standard English and high prestige accents more favourably than children who do not...This could be one factor in the promotion of under-achievement on the part of working class children, since teachers' expectation can be important in influencing a child's academic performance. (11)

Having examined the historical, cultural and social importance of Scots dialect and taken into account that with the 5-14 English Language document there is a clear direction for teachers, at least in the junior school, to move towards greater linguistic tolerance, it is important to look briefly at the arguments for the use of standard English.

As can be seen from Trudgill's work, language prejudice exists. Although sociolinguistics show that there is no language superiority the common perception remains that regional dialect is a less 'valuable' form of language than standard English. When this sort of prejudice can affect, for example, the possibility of future employment, it would be damaging not to offer the pupil the chance to develop their knowledge of language to include the standard.

Although standard English is not necessarily required for spoken communication, as context can also give meaning, in written language there can be problems of comprehension. Small errors of spelling, for example, within a standard system do not make a great deal of difference but no system at all would lead to written material being incomprehensible. In a world where great importance is attached to mass communication it is the duty of the English teacher to equip the pupil to cope with this to the best of their ability.
To examine current attitudes to Scots dialect in the English classroom I distributed a questionnaire on my second placement (see Appendix). The English department at this school was large; there were eleven full time teachers and of the questionnaires that I gave out I got results from over half the department, either by returned questionnaires or by informally interviewing teachers on the questions asked. All the teachers questioned were Scots who spoke standard English.

In order to examine the results of my questioning I will break this down into sections dealing with reading, writing, talking and general language issues as I did on the questionnaire.

READING

This section dealt with the amount of Scottish literature taught to pupils throughout the school. I was particularly interested in how much dialect material was used and how pupils responded to reading dialect. In order to pursue this I also gave some of Tom Leonard’s poetry to my third year General class to read. Although my interest was in dialect I was also interested in how much Scottish literature teachers taught as a general indication of their own interest in developing pupil’s knowledge of their own culture.

All the teachers I questioned taught some Scottish literature although the amount was variable. One teacher taught only two books, Iain Crichton Smith’s Consider the Lilies at Standard Grade and Grassic Gibbon’s Sunset Song at Higher. In general most Scottish literature was taught at the upper end of the school, particularly at Higher, with the ‘set’ texts, MacCaig and Grassic Gibbon, being the most popular. Other texts taught at this level were Docherty by William McIlvanney, George Mackay Brown’s Greenvoe (a ‘set’ text used by only one teacher) and Edwin Morgan’s poetry. Only one teacher extended this to include Edwin Muir, Brian McCabe, Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard.

Further down the school two teachers taught no Scottish literature at first year level. One of these teachers taught Kidnapped and Treasure Island in second year and the other taught no Scottish literature at second year. Other teachers tended to use a little Scottish poetry at first and second year level including Stephen Mulrine’s The Wee Malkies and some poetry by Liz Lochhead. One teacher also used a book of short stories called The Carnferry Gang at first year. At Standard Grade Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan were generally taught.

Culturally, the experience of reading Scottish literature is important in the secondary school. At a stage where adolescents are establishing a personal identity the experience of their country’s literature gives them access to a shared
cultural identity. The range of literature taught at the upper end of the school reflects both the rural and urban cultures of Scotland. Further down the school, however, where texts taught are not exam orientated, teachers' personal choice is more evident and the amount of Scottish literature taught reflects this. At an important stage of development, in some cases, the pupil is offered very little material reflecting his own culture. This is also an important stage of secondary education as it introduces the pupil to literature in the secondary school and gives their first impression of what is valued by their teachers.

The teacher who taught the greatest amount of Scottish literature was the most recently qualified member of staff and this may reflect the greater predominance given to modern Scottish literature in Further Education in recent times. One of the problems of teaching Scottish material further down the school may be a lack of accessible literature in schools, while texts which are 'set' for examinations are more easily available.

Of the above literature, Morgan and McIlvanney use dialect and Stephen Mulrine's The Wee Malkies and Tom Leonard's poetry are entirely written in dialect. Although Grassic Gibbon writes in standard English he maintains the rhythm of North Eastern Scots in his writing and specifically raises the language issue within his novel.

It is difficult to assess how important it may be to dialect speakers to have dialect material to read. Trudgill's research shows that although dialect speakers may have initial difficulties in reading standard English, reading is a passive activity which does not require active command of the language and it is, in any case, important that people can read standard English.(12)

The difficulties that writing in dialect can cause for readers was demonstrated to me when I gave some of Tom Leonard's poetry to a third year class. This class was broadly a General class and had not encountered any dialect material before. Most of the class had difficulty in understanding the poems when left to read them by themselves and one boy made the comment that it would be a great deal easier if he came from Glasgow, pointing out the difficulty of genuinely providing reading material for dialect speakers when dialects are so strongly localised.

Another negative response I had in this class was from a boy who said that all his school life he had been taught to talk properly and write properly and now "you come along and gie us this", quite seriously raising the issue of what a pupil expects the teacher to be teaching him to do but also pointing to the need for more discussion of language issues in...
classroom which could lead to pupils' understanding of the
diversity of language. The majority of the class did enjoy
and understand the poetry when it was read out to them and
responded positively to the material as spoken language.
Several of the class said that they would like to read more
Scottish literature and dialect material and thought that it
was important that dialect should be represented in literature.

WRITING

As has already been pointed out, where reading is passive,
writing is active and in this area dialect speakers may have
more serious problems than standard English speakers. The
nature of writing is that it is artificial and often formal in
tone. It is a skilled activity requiring a great deal of
practice. Standard English grammar is rule-governed and these
rules may conflict with the grammatical constructions of the
dialect speaker. The pupil who speaks standard English will
move more easily into writing standard English as this is
closer to his own spoken language.

For children who speak Scots dialect, grammatical constructions
found in speech, like the levelling of irregular verbs to bring
them into line with regular verbs, for example 'I seen', are
commonly found in writing, similarly 'I had went' and 'I done'
are commonly used. Although many pupils have problems with
spelling, again, for the dialect speaker whose pronunciation is
far removed from standard English, greater difficulties may be
encountered.

My main area of interest in writing was in creative writing.
Certain formal, transactional pieces of writing must, for the
sake of communication, be written in standard English.
Creative, imaginative writing may be stultified by awareness of
the standard. The pupils desire to use language correctly may
be put before the creative aspect of writing. On the
questionnaire I asked teachers if they would ever consider it
appropriate to allow use of Scots vocabulary, grammar etc. in
written work.

All the teachers I questioned said that they would consider
Scots dialect to be appropriate in written work only when using
dialogue or writing drama scripts. This response reflects the
view that Scots dialect is generally acceptable in representing
speech realistically in the course of a piece of writing but is
not seen as an acceptable form of written presentation in
general.

Many pupils have writing difficulties which may not be
connected in any way with the fact that they are dialect
speakers. It may be, however, that some pupils might benefit
from being relieved of coping with translating from dialect
into standard English when doing creative writing. Reluctance to write may stem from feelings of linguistic inferiority because they undervalue their own spoken language and therefore have difficulty in moving from speech to writing. I noticed that in the Standard Grade classes pupils did take advantage of the fact that work was to be re-drafted and were capable of a substantial amount of self-correction. At all levels of the school I found that most pupils could put Scots grammatical constructions into English when these were pointed out to them. Pupils in first and second year did not usually re-draft material and this may put pressure on them to produce 'correct' work.

In response to my question about setting work to be written in dialect only two teachers said that they did this. One of these teachers uses Stephen Mulrine's poem 'The Coming of the Wee Malkies' (which asks 'the missus', 'Whit'll ye dae when the wee Malkies come, /If they drap doon affy the wash-oose dyke, / an pit the hems oan the sternheid light, / etc.) and asks the pupil to write as the 'missus' telling them 'whit she'll dae' to the Malkies when she catches them. The teacher said that this exercise got a very good response from her second year class and that they had greatly enjoyed doing it. The other teacher used Tom Leonard's poetry with her Fifth year class as part of an introduction to writing poetry, using this as a model that they may wish to copy.

While I was teaching my third year General class Romeo and Juliet, I gave them an option to re-write Tybalt's fight with Romeo as a short story, using their own dialect to write the dialogue. Very few of the class took up this option although those who did (interestingly, all boys) enjoyed the exercise thoroughly. I thought that perhaps at this stage most of the class were reluctant to use dialect in writing as these were assessed pieces going into their folios and they wished to conform to what they felt was required of them by the class teacher.

TALKING

I was interested in asking about talk assessment as, from the research I had read, this is the area where prejudice against dialect users is most obvious. Talk assessment is now an important part of the Standard Grade exam and there is therefore greater emphasis put on this than there used to be. Individual and group talk are encouraged from first year. Whereas in written language there was little scope for use of dialect, in talk assessment all the teachers questioned said that they would not penalise a pupil for using Scots grammar and vocabulary as long as what was said could be understood. Only one teacher made any reference to the context of the talk by adding the proviso that assessment would depend on what
audience the talk was aimed at. The principal teacher also commented that the talk exercises could be helpful to pupils who had difficulty with writing as they could often improve their overall mark through talk.

Talk is internally assessed and the teachers are regularly moderated. This is probably to the advantage of the dialect speaker as the person assessing the talk is used to hearing this pupil speak. They are not, therefore, prejudiced by a first impression where they may need time to adjust to the speaker's language. Writing, on the other hand, particularly in the exam situation, is externally assessed and deviation from the standard could cause loss of marks. Teachers have to be aware of the expectations of external examiners when assessing written exercises. From my own observation of individual talks I noticed that although some pupils were unselconscious in their use of language others did strive to use standard English as I think they felt that this was expected of them and this sometimes resulted in a loss of fluency.

GENERAL LANGUAGE ISSUES

All the teachers said that they did discuss issues of language, dialect and accent with classes although one or two said that this was only very occasionally or briefly. Most discussion arose out of texts being taught where dialect was relevant. The principal teacher said that she did not particularly dwell on Scots but used material where different dialects were used to introduce language diversity. None of the teachers introduced any exploration of language into their curriculum as a separate issue to heighten awareness of Scots. None of the teachers used any videos or audio visual resources which dealt with issues of language to stimulate thought on the subject although there are such resources available.

GENERAL COMMENTS

From my work on this subject, both through my questionnaire and general observations, I feel that the position of Scots dialect should be an important issue for teachers dealing with language and literature. The issue of language has cultural importance. The evolution of the language is bound up with the political and social history of the country. It is also important for the pupils' confidence in their identity and their social position that they may express themselves freely without feeling inferior to others.

From observations made in the area of reading I felt that the first and second year were generally under used for this. At a time when the classes are not exam orientated, exploration of
Scottish material at this stage would establish its importance as part of the pupils' general education.

For older pupils there is little Scottish literature taught that is not part of the set texts and more diversity, particularly in the most modern literature being written in Scotland at the moment, would establish it as not just historically and culturally important but very much at the forefront of literature in general today.

In the areas of writing and talking, Scots dialect is definitely seen more as spoken language than written language. In general, as spoken language, it is tolerated and teachers do not discriminate against it as long as it is comprehensible, which all language must be. This would seem to be an improvement on past attitudes where speaking Scots dialect was not permitted when addressing a teacher.

Written work in dialect is generally not supported largely due to the need for pupils to learn the written standard. More positive encouragement could, however, be given to explore the possibilities of written language. Greater knowledge of linguistic diversity could improve written work. Scottish vocabulary, for example, can be very expressive and descriptive and may enrich creative writing but pupils may feel inhibited in using these words. Writing poetry is one area in particular where overall effect depends on sound and pattern and the vocabulary and rhythm of natural speech can be used to good effect.

Again, first and second year could be a time to build up the pupils' confidence in creative writing and re-drafting can be helpful here. Trudgill suggests a 'bi-dialectal' approach where the differences between the pupils' own dialect and the standard are pointed out and the pupil can then change his own dialect when this is necessary. This is referred to as 'conversion' rather than 'correction' and the advantage of this is that 'it respects the child's dialect and feelings about it, and does not try to eradicate or even alter it. It attempts to give the child competence in another dialect - standard English - in addition to the one he already has'. (13) This approach increases language skills rather than sacrificing one dialect to another and seems to address the problem of how to make the child creative and confident in his language use.

In the area of general language issues there does not seem to be very much discussion. Through discussion and learning about language diversity we can discover the worth of different languages. Knowledge of the past and the place of language in society can strengthen the importance of dialect and give confidence to those using dialect.
Although I saw very little teaching about language, on my first placement the first year took part in a skills rota, part of which was library work where pupils had to find out where to get information. The library work involved finding out information about Scotland and part of this dealt with language. The pupils watched Billy Kay's video 'The Mither Tongue' where he compared speech in Coldstream with speech in Cornhill. Pupils were asked to list the words in the broadcast that they used themselves and add to this list other Scots words that they used and give the English equivalent. Most of the class enjoyed this as the programme showed Scots in a positive light and they seemed to be pleased to identify with the Scottish children on the video. This kind of activity, particularly through the use of television and video which are influential medium, heightens the awareness of language use.

FURTHER RESEARCH THAT COULD BE UNDERTAKEN

This was a very small survey and although I would say that there was broad agreement about the use of language in both the schools I was in on placement the amount of emphasis given to language and dialect is at the discretion of the individual teacher. One or two teachers I met in both schools were enthusiastic about Scots language issues and the Scottish Studies element of the skills rota on my first placement was a positive move to introduce all aspects of Scotland's culture to first year pupils.

To make the research more meaningful it would be necessary to include a far greater number of teachers and from different areas of Scotland. In some areas of Scotland there are strong feelings about local speech and it would be interesting to contrast views of teachers in these areas with those in areas where language does not have such a high profile. A comparison in attitudes to Scots and Gaelic would also be interesting.

Further research would have to include pupils' opinions to a greater degree. One aspect of this could include what the pupil expects and desires to be taught in area of written and spoken language.

Equally important could be studies done across the curriculum. Language is fundamental to learning and teachers of all subjects are involved in language development when pupils are asked to write and speak about their experiences. It would be interesting to know how teachers outside the English department feel about the use of dialect.

CONCLUSION/
CONCLUSION

When I began this project I had a general interest in attitudes to the use of dialects in the classroom. Language is fundamental to education and to creating our perception of the world. As the medium through which we communicate it has enormous importance and understanding the need for confident communication must be fundamental to the teaching of English. Through reading the available material and making my own observations this has become an important issue for me and one that I hope I will have the opportunity to develop in my own teaching.
APPENDIX

SCOTS LANGUAGE

QUESTIONNAIRE

READING

What Scottish texts do you use at each level of the school?

1st year

2nd year

Standard Grade

Higher

WRITING PLEASE CIRCLE YES OR NO.

Do you ever consider it appropriate to allow use of Scots vocabulary, grammar etc. in written work? YES / NO

If yes, when might you consider this appropriate?

Are pupils ever set written exercises where use of Scots dialect is positively encouraged? YES / NO

If yes, what might the nature of these kind of exercises be?
TALKING

During talk assessment would use of Scots grammar and vocabulary be penalised? YES / NO

Do you ever discuss the issues of language, dialect and accent with your classes? YES / NO

RESOURCES

Do you use any media resources, videos, or broadcasts which deal with the issues of language and dialect? YES / NO

If yes, what resources do you use?


3. Donald J. Witherington, Ibid. p.11.


10. Ibid. p.61.

11. Ibid. p.63.


