**Higher English**

**Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation**

*Ruth Wishart, in an article in The Herald newspaper, reflects on the importance of encouraging people to use the Scots language.*

**LET WEANS SPEAK OOT IN OOR AIN GUID SCOTS LEID[[1]](#footnote-1)**

As well as deaths and taxes, a third certainty is that any attempt to reinvigorate indigenous languages will be variously condemned as a waste of money, a wrong-headed priority and an example of wanton political correctness. Cue outrage in parts of Wales this week when ministers in the Cardiff Assembly sought the right to guarantee equal status for Welsh and English. Cue girning in Scotland when the new audit of the Scots language recommended greater efforts to integrate it into schools and courtrooms.

The Welsh language has always had more political overtones than Scots. It has long been a potent symbol of identity, not least when the people of Wales felt particularly beleaguered. Early editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* infamously instructed readers: “For Wales – see England”, which tells you all you need to know about the balance of linguistic power. Yet three out of four Welsh people still spoke their own tongue from choice at the end of the nineteenth century, in contrast to the 10% or so speaking Gaelic in Scotland and Ireland.

Welsh fell victim to the same brans of ingrained snobbery that afflicted Scots: the imported notion, eagerly parroted by the gentry, that local languages and dialects denoted inferior social status. We are hopefully beyond that brand of cringe today, and the owner of the “pan loaf” accent is more likely to face ridicule than anyone conversing in the hybrid mix of Scots and English which is the stuff of common conversation. But we are not beyond the continuing fear that the richness of our language will disappear because of a failure to knit it more comprehensively through everyday transactions.

Why should we bother? Let me count the ways. Language reflects our cultural experiences and offers layers of particularly evocative meanings to our lives. (It is no accident that Scots has so many terms for rain and general climactic dreichness.) To understand and value this is not to enter into some kind of sterile argument about the linguistic hierarchy. This is not about Scots versus English, or Scots versus Gaelic; it is a celebration of our rich diversity which brings us vivid, though not interchangeable, versions of Scots from rural Aberdeenshire to Galloway and its many variations in our cities. But it doesn’t just weave colour into the national tapestry; according to the conclusion of the recent audit, an increased status for Scots also brings important economic consequences.

The questions, then, lie not in the “why” of embedding Scots more durably in everyday life, but the “how” of it. The Feis movement[[2]](#footnote-2) has made Gaelic a living breathing reality for thousands of children while, not at all incidentally, invigorating the traditional music scene. There are similar celebratory events for the Scots tongue, but nothing on the same scale or with the same level of coordinated enthusiasm.

Organisations such as Scottish Language Dictionaries, which gives *The Herald* its Scots ‘Word of the Week’ each Saturday, do heroic outreach work but are endlessly scrabbling for crumbs from the funding tables. The wondrous Itchy Coo publishing house brings Scots into bedtime reading and, in a nice piece of reverse cultural imperialism, has immortalised A Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* in Scots. But, as the audit noted, what the Scots tongue has is a patchwork quilt of champions rather than an agency charged with an overall vision. (And, being Scots, the individual champions are not above a daud of internecine sniping.)

Self-evidently, having a greater presence in the classroom and the media is important, but both ourselves and the Welsh could do worse than examine the lessons of Ireland, where attempted compulsion via immersion in schools, regional development policies, civil-service publications and standardisation of spelling and usage stubbornly failed to restore the primacy of Irish Gaelic.

The Irish Language Board’s 30-odd-year campaign to promote the language in everyday life has not had much impact on normal usage either – and, interestingly, one study blamed the compulsory element in the civil service for engendering hostility rather than acceptance. The lesson seems to be that people need to be enthused rather than compelled to rediscover the joys of heating themselves in their own voice.

Think of *Moliere and Medea* translated and transformed from Scots audiences by Liz Lochhead; French-Canadian Michel Tremblay’s *Les Belles-Soeurs* reinvented as *The Guid Sisters* or Lorimer’s *New Testament in Scots*, the success of which astonished nobody more than the publishers. Children especially need to know that they can express themselves in their writing with the playground terms they use naturally.

The bonus for them is that, unlike English, the spelling is of secondary importance to the meaning and how it sounds in their own heads. And, let’s face it, having to worry about spelling can be a right scunner.

**QUESTIONS ON PASSAGE ONE**

1. Read lines 1 – 3.

Through close reference to any relevant features of language, analyse fully how the writer makes clear her disapproval of the ‘third certainty’. (6)

1. Read lines 7 – 10.

Explain the point being made by the writer in her reference to early editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Use your own words in your answer. (2)

1. Read lines 17 – 18.

By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the writer uses language to make her point clear. You should also explain fully the point that she is making. (4)

1. Read line 19.

Explain the function of this line in the development of the writer’s argument. You should make close reference to both this line and other sections of the passage in your answer. (2)

1. Read lines 39 – 42.

Analyse how sentence structure is used in these lines to convey the writer’s support of her point that compulsion via immersion in the classroom does not work. (3)

1. Read lines 43 – 47.

In your own words, summarise the point the writer makes in these lines. (4)

1. Read lines 48 – 52.

Comment on the writer’s use of sentence structure. (1)

1. Read lines 48 – 55.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the final two paragraphs as a conclusion to the writer’s support of Scots and other languages. (3)

**TOTAL (25 marks)**

**PASSAGE 2**

*Muriel Gray, in an article in the Sunday Herald, argues that Scots is a highly poetic language.*

**YOU DON’T HAVE TO USE SCOTS EVERY DAY TO RECOGNISE ITS POETRY**

We’re learning a lot of Burns in our house right now. That our youngest is being tasked to recite various of the Bard’s poems by heart delights me, since I hold fast to the horribly unfashionable view that learning by rote is extremely beneficial for children. Naturally, everyone despised being made to learn and recite huge tracts Tennyson, Burns, Chaucer, Coleridge and Shakespeare at school, but I’ve come to appreciate it in adulthood. Being able to trot out yawning sections of *The Lady of Shallot* by memory may not afford pleasure to someone forced to listen, but its oddly comforting that it will always be there. Similarly, most of my generation take for granted that we probably have at least a dozen long Burns poems permanently stored, ready to quote, mull over, or simply recite to blinking, uncomprehending non-Scots should the occasion demand.

But memorising text is only part of the process. Comprehension is considerably more important. This is why one would imagine that the Scottish Government’s pledged support for more resources to teach Scots language in schools would be welcomed by all. How can anyone hope to enjoy the beauty, mischief and grace of Burns without having a working knowledge of the vocabulary, syntax and grammar that he employed to fashion his great works? Curiously, however, the reports in the press of the government’s support for a relatively ordinary piece of legislative cultural maintenance were accompanied online by screeds of unpalatable bile by furious bloggers.

But, of course, the government doesn’t intend that the Scots tongue is rebooted as a toll for commerce and international communication. At least one hopes not. Instead, they merely recognise that the language used by Burns, selected part of which are still currently employed in various dialects across the country, should be recognised, studied, understood and preserved. What the hell is wrong with that? Much of it is beautiful. When translating *Tae A Moose* into English for our son it sounded faintly ridiculous. “Small, silky, timorous creature, oh what a panic’s in your breast. You needn’t run away do quickly, with all that fuss and noise. I don’t want to run and chase you with my murdering plough.” Bit limp really. Helping children wrap their tongues and minds round wonderful old Scots words will surely bring them, more rapidly, and with pleasure, to the meaning of Burn’s work.

Scholars insist that Scots has never been an entirely separate language, hence critics of civic spending on its teaching argue it doesn’t require the same emergency preservation that was essential to keep Gaelic with us. But what harm can it possibly do to cherish something that’s part of our heritage, and leaves behind words and phrases still engrained in everyday speech of so many of us? I fully recognise that when earnest men write cross letters to the press in perfect Scots tongue it can end up being unintentionally comedic and slightly pompous. Equally, who can admit to having never had an occasional guilty giggle at the lovely Billy Kay, who tirelessly campaigns for the language’s preservation and use, when he conducts interviews entirely in Scots. One can only imagine this shameful involuntary reaction is triggered by the anachronism, since we only hear the language used in great poetry and literature, and not as a tool to discuss climate change or the closure of Woolworths.

**QUESTIONS ON BOTH PASSAGES**

1. Both passages agree on / speak favourably / affectionately about Scots language.

Identify, by close reference to both passages, key areas on which they agree.

You may write in continuous prose or in a series of developed bullet points. (5)

**TOTAL (5 marks)**

**OVERALL TOTAL (30 marks)**

**[END OF QUESTION PAPER]**

1. Let children speak out in our own good Scots language. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Feis movement is a movement to revive Gaelic culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)