A SOCIOLINGUISTIC HISTORY OF SCOTLAND

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OF SCOTLAND
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0.1 Introduction

In the following pages I will present a number of brief discussions of points which are important to the study as a whole, but which do not naturally fit within the flow of the book proper. Some readers will not need to read any of these sections; others may find some of them useful.

0.2 Linguistic Terminology and Representation

This book is intended to be read by an audience with a wide range of interests and specialisations. With that in mind, only a limited number of linguistics-centred terms and symbols have been employed. I have not shied away from using these when necessary, however.

Most of these are concerned with pronunciation and involve the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). A useful interactive version of the alphabet can be found at <http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/>. Spellings are represented by <p>, phonemic transcription by /p/ and phonetic by [pʰ]. The last is hardly ever used here and represents the minute transcription of pronunciation; phonemic implies the larger-scale building blocks which native speakers perceive their language is made up of. Thus, for native English speakers, the pronunciation difference between the first /p/ in <pulp> and the second is not meaningful (although it is in other languages, including Gaelic).
0.3 Language Relationship

All of the autochthonous languages of the Atlantic Archipelago are Indo-European in origin (as we will see this is also the case for those recorded languages no longer spoken, notwithstanding a small amount of debateable place-name evidence). Many – probably most – languages of recent immigration also derive from that family (exceptions include Chinese varieties and languages brought from Africa). All Indo-European languages are descended from an unrecorded *proto-language*, probably spoken by people living in the western Eurasian steppes some 6,000–7,000 years ago. We can make too much of this relationship, however. Celtic languages, such as Gaelic, are not close relatives of the Germanic languages, such as Scots. It would take a specialist, for instance, to recognise that the Gaelic word for ‘father’ (*athir*) and its Scots equivalent (*faither* or *fadder*, depending on the dialect) are actually, if you go back far enough, the same word.

The structures of modern Celtic languages are strikingly different from those of their Germanic equivalents, involving a Verb Subject Order word order (for example, Modern Gaelic *chunnaic mi Iain an dé*, literally ‘saw I John yesterday’ (Gillies 1993: 208); this is with the exception of Breton), rather than an essentially Subject Verb Object order (we think, in fact, that Indo-European originally had a Subject Object Verb order, as still found in, for instance, the modern Slavonic languages). The Celtic languages also have a striking feature which is practically unknown anywhere else in Europe: the use of initial consonant mutation to mark function (so that, for instance, in Modern Gaelic, the second future form of the verb *cluinn* ‘hear’ (with initial /kl/) is *chluinneadh*, with initial /xl/ (Gillies 1993: 192).

All of the languages for which we have written records in Scotland appear to have been members of one or the other of these sub-families.¹ They are not all from the same part of the sub-family, however. With the Celtic languages, the ancestor of Modern Gaelic, alternatively termed Old Irish or Old Gaelic, is analysed as a Q-Celtic (or Goidelic) language, while the British (or Cumbric) dialects of southern and central Scotland, along with Pictish, were P-Celtic (or Brittonic). A central distinction in this is a phonological difference between the use of /kl/ (historically /kʷl/) and /pl/. Welsh (a P-Celtic language) calls a ‘head’ *pen* (an earlier reflex can be found in *Penicuik* in Midlothian), while in Gaelic it is *ceann* (an earlier reflex of which being found in *Kincorth* in Aberdeen). It
is not immediately obvious, but the Gaelic male patronymic marker *mac(h)*- is actually the same root as Welsh *ap*, used for the same purposes. From the Middle Ages on, a change in Welsh meant that /m/ could not precede /a/; it can still be found, however, in *Lochmaben*, a small town in south-west Scotland. *Maben* here seems to represent the name of an early Celtic god, ‘great son’, late Roman and early medieval inscriptions to whom are regularly found in northern England (Mair 1997, s.v. *Maponus*); he also appears to have been revered in parts of Gaul.

The Germanic languages spoken in Scotland over the last 2,000 years are also sundered into different sub-families. Scots and Scottish Standard English are descended from somewhat different dialects of Old English, a West Germanic language (and therefore a close relative of Frisian, Low German and Dutch and a rather more distant relative of German, Luxembourgish and Yiddish), while Norn (and its relatives), spoken until the eighteenth century in Orkney and Shetland, was a North Germanic language (and therefore a close relative of modern Icelandic, Faeroese and western forms of Norwegian and a somewhat more distant relative of eastern varieties of Norwegian, along with Danish and Swedish). The present-day North Germanic and West Germanic languages are not as different from each other (at least not in terms of pronunciation) as the two branches of the Celtic languages are. There are some important divisions, however. The North Germanic languages possess what is sometimes termed a ‘medio-passive’ as well as a passive. The semantic distinction between the two categories is slight, but occasionally visible. Modern Norwegian *vi blir sett* means ‘we are being seen [by someone external]’; *vi ses* can mean ‘we are being seen [by each other]’ (and is a common valediction).

Possibly the most striking difference between West and North Germanic languages, however, is in the use of definers. In Modern English, *the* is a definite article and can only be used before a noun; in Modern German, the paradigm which includes *der*, and which can be used both to express demonstrative and article function, can also only be used before a noun. In Norwegian, however, a demonstrative pronoun is used before a noun, but definite meanings are carried by an enclitic definite particle, which forms a definite noun paradigm. Thus, *the man* is equivalent to *der Mann* in German, but *mennen* (from *mann* + *en*, the particle) in Norwegian.

Some of these distinctions developed earlier than others, so that the medio-passive may not have been used in Norse during the period before 1100 when
Viking Norse and Old English speakers were coming into often profound contact with each other in the north of England (a contact which eventually produced the transfer of a considerable amount of vocabulary from Norse into what became Scots) or with at least the earliest Norse speakers who settled in the Northern Isles and along the coast and islands of Scotland from Caithness down to Galloway; the structure would, however, have been present in Norn, the North Germanic dialects spoken in Orkney and Shetland until the early eighteenth century.

0.4 A Few Notes on Names and Terms

In general I have used the names for languages and varieties normally employed today. An exception to this is Scots, which I by preference only use as the name for the variety from the sixteenth century on; before this, I have normally used Inglis; prior to the twelfth century I have used (Northumbrian) Old English or Old Northumbrian, occasionally emphasising the Bernician nature of the Northumbrian spoken in what is now Scotland in the Early Historical period. I do not use Irish as my own term for Scottish Gaelic, but this term is employed occasionally when it is what contemporaries said or wrote. I sympathise with the use of Gàidhlig for Gaelic by some modern writers but have chosen to use the mainstream form because I believe that employing the Gaelic equivalent would itself become the debate rather than merely acting as signifier.

I have inevitably been eclectic in my representation of personal and group names. I have followed the practice by historians working within that era of giving historically ‘correct’ forms for people living in Scotland during the earliest recorded period, until at least the reigns of the sons of St Margaret, so that Malcolm III is represented as Mael Coluim. I have not done this with English kings of the period, or for Saints Columba and Margaret, instead using the names by which they are generally known. Unless an early place-name has no equivalent modern form, it is the latter form that is used, unless there is a particular reason for not doing so.

0.5 Translations

Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own (although I have gained a great deal from discussions with a number of people, including Sandra Weyland, and the ready resource of the Dictionary of the Scots Language).
0.6 And Finally

This book concerns the linguistic history of Scotland, a history of which I am myself a part. Naturally I have my own views about Scotland’s past, present and future; I also have strong (I hope informed) views on present and future language planning and policy in the country. Other people have different views; I hope I have treated these fairly.
1

INTRODUCTION:
THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE AND
THE SCOTTISH HISTORICAL ECOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

This book represents the first attempt to provide a sociolinguistic history of Scotland, an analysis based around what languages people have spoken and speak in this country, to whom and in what contexts. Were all linguistic varieties spoken at any one time given equal social status? Why have some varieties ceased to have native speakers, while others have thrived? Do social, economic and political forces cause or affect these circumstances? Before we engage with this set of themes and analysis, however, some introductory information is necessary in relation to the physical realities of the sociolinguistic apparatus which underlies this book. In addition, a brief description of the physical nature of Scotland will be given.

1.1 Language and Society: Some Introductory Concepts

The theme of this book stands at the interchange between the study of history and the study of language in society – both well-established fields, the first rather better-known outside its scholarly heartland than the latter. Because of this relatively circumscribed knowledge base, some of the central concepts of (macro-)sociolinguistics (otherwise, the Sociology of Language) will be discussed here. Despite the distinction made here, however, I hope that it will quickly become apparent that the two fields, of history and sociolinguistics, are, in fact, connected in a range of ways; the latter in particular
cannot really function without at least some degree of knowledge of the former.

A central caveat needs to be established before we begin our discussion, however. While human beings have not changed much since ancient times either physiologically or (we assume) psychologically, their societies and societal norms and mores have. Their access to technology (and, perhaps more importantly, what technology this was and is) and the economic structures and limitations of the societies in which they live have also changed immensely over time. In ninth-century Argyll, for instance, the ancestor of Modern Gaelic was spoken by people who were only one harvest away from dearth and two away from famine. A hierarchical social structure existed (so that, to be blunt, some would have taken longer to starve than others) with a king at its summit, but a king whose authority was normally highly localised. The Church in theory acted as a check on the potential tyranny of royal power, but in practice its more elevated members would have come from the same backgrounds as (and indeed were often relatives of) the ruling class. The kingdoms which surrounded this little kingdom might share a strong sense of common language and culture (and often had a High King exercising a notional or sometimes real overlordship); this common culture and language did not stop regular skirmishes between and within the territories, however, often involving alliances with speakers of other languages. This is, inevitably, very different from the social, political and economic situation of the same part of contemporary Scotland, where locals can engage in the political decision-making system at a range of governmental levels based on (at least notional) equality, but personal and community wealth are used and channelled by global economic forces over which local people have at best highly limited control.

It needs to be recognised, nevertheless, that, as I have demonstrated from a more general perspective in my 2010a book, the social aspect of language use is a human universal, no matter the time period. Simplifying somewhat, those with capital have linguistic (as well as economic and political) advantages over those without. Almost inevitably, a highly aspirational middle class of some sort will exist. Its linguistic behaviour will often involve the copying of the linguistic behaviour of their ‘betters’. In the following sections we will consider a range of different of different features analysts have recognised across space and time.
1.1.1 Societal multilingualism

In September 2018, I took part in the University of Aberdeen’s open day for potential undergraduate students and, often, their parents. While inevitably (albeit a bit depressingly) the majority of the visitors were white and middle-class residents of Scotland and other parts of the Atlantic Archipelago, a wide range of people from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, speaking a range of languages, which included Polish, Igbo, Panjabi and at least two Chinese dialects (one of which was Putonghua, otherwise known as Mandarin), also attended. After taking part in the open day, I walked from Old Aberdeen into the city centre. Even greater linguistic diversity was evident. This everyday experience of multilingualism is the norm for many of us, even if some of us choose to ignore it because most of that particular type of diversity is caused, from our point of view, by recent immigration. Past and present experience suggests that the diversity will not survive more than two to three generations for most, if not all, of the minority communities, as these minorities are absorbed into the majority.

This misses the point somewhat, however. It is actually quite difficult to think of a territory anywhere in the world which has not exhibited, or does not exhibit, a degree of multilingualism within its boundaries. Not all of this is due to recent immigration. While only rarely can elements of the linguistic diversity be analysed as aboriginal, its historical basis is regularly so deep that it can be described as autochthonous, of the soil. Even in an apparently monolingual country like Iceland, in fact, there is a Danish-speaking minority who have lived there, often for centuries.

These arrangements are inevitably complex. Let us take the territory of what is now Belgium as an example (for a recent treatment of some of these issues, see Blommaert 2011). From the outside the country appears to be multilingual. The federal government, as expressed through, for instance, defence and border control, is bilingual in Dutch and French. The present state is highly regionalised, however. In fact, only the federal capital, Brussels, is officially bilingual, despite French being dominant there. The territory in the north, Flanders, is officially monolingually Dutch-speaking, while, to the south, Wallonia is monolingually French-speaking and -using. Both territories offer some degree of (sometimes rather grudging) support and recognition to speakers of the other ‘national’ variety, but only when those speakers live on the border between regions (in other
words, French speakers living just on the Flemish side of the Flanders-Wallonia border might have some linguistic rights; a French speaker in Ghent or Antwerp would not). Wallonia exhibits one exception to this rule: in some cantons in the east of the territory, the majority language is German (the result of a series of frontier changes at the end of the Great War). German speakers have significant linguistic rights in these areas; these are severely limited at either a Wallonia or federal level, however.¹ Most of Belgium is therefore officially monolingual.

If we go back in time, however, the situation is less clear-cut (for a discussion, see Joris 1966). Towards the end of Roman rule in the southern Low Countries, speakers of Germanic dialects that would later be classified as Dutch became dominant in the flatlands to the west and south of the River Rhine. Speakers of Romance dialects which would eventually become Wallon (the regional language of the territory, now dialectalised under French but retaining some degree of written expression; the edges of Wallonia contain speakers of other Romance varieties, including Picard and Lorrain). These boundaries were neither policed nor absolute, however. Pockets of Germanic speech would have been found in Romance territory; the same would have been true of Romance speech in the north. Latin would have survived longest in urban and ecclesiastical centres, evidence for which can be found in the fact that these centres – and those in the southern parts of today’s Netherlands – historically had Romance and Germanic names (this is particularly, but not exclusively, the case in the Germanic territory). This situation would have been perpetuated by the fact that large parts of Flanders formed a (sometimes semi-detached) part of the French kingdom in the later Middle Ages (indeed, some of Flanders is still part of France), while much of Wallonia was part of the (ostensibly German) Holy Roman Empire and was later ruled by first Spanish and then Austrian viceroys. Bilingualism was likely to have been the norm, in particular along the ‘border’. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was particularly prevalent for sociolinguistic reasons related to the status of that language at the time for the Flemish urban middle classes to use French in both their public and, to a considerable degree, private lives. Much of this diversity has now, if not disappeared, at least retreated to the boundaries of a new monolingual orthodoxy.

The modern age has not been kind to the inherent multilingualism of territories. Sometimes, as I discussed in my 2005 book, the reasons for this are dramatic, whether these be (largely) natural disasters, such as the effects of the Irish potato famine of the 1840s on the number of Irish speakers in the follow-
ing generations, or engineered catastrophes, such as the death of Tasmanian in the nineteenth century and the contemporary attrition of linguistic diversity in Amazonia, in both cases due to the need on the part of the expanding centre for profit-based agricultural territory at the expense of traditional territorial ecologies.

These may be less obvious when played out across a considerable period. Early Modern Poland (as part of the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania) was strikingly multilingual (and multicultural). Speakers of Polish rubbed shoulders with speakers of German, Ukrainian, Belarusyn, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Czech and Romanian (this listing does not recognise the many smaller linguistic communities, including speakers of Old Prussian, Armenian and Karaite). Modern Poland is as strikingly monolingual. With the exception of essentially insignificant speaker numbers for many of the languages mentioned above, the only real diversity stems from the Slavonic varieties Kashubian and Silesian, spoken within the boundaries of the state, whose status as languages is controversial. Changes of border have played their part in this alteration. Primarily, however, the Holocaust and massive movements of population in the period after the Second World War have erased Poland’s diverse linguistic past (see Millar 2005: 22–4).

As we will see, Scotland has gone through periods of considerable bilingualism (if not multilingualism). Considering the records which survive from the early Middle Ages, it soon becomes apparent that the royal families (and, indeed, the elite groups that fed their power but also derived their own power base from the elite construct) were culturally (and presumably linguistically) mixed. Given that elite marriages were often constructed as part of an alliance or a peace deal, this is unsurprising. Because of the fissiparous nature of society and the country’s polities at the time, it is unsurprising that these ‘peace weaving’ alliances should have regularly happened. Let us envisage an eighth-century Pictish prince. His father was likely to speak Pictish as his native language as well – although this does not necessarily follow. His mother might well have been a Gaelic speaker from Dál Riata; his late wife an Anglian-speaking Bernician; he was shortly to marry a British speaker from Strathclyde. He would have had relatives who spoke all of these languages (and others) fluently. None of these, moreover, would have been likely to come from a household or court where only one language was spoken. While not everyone would have been able to speak all these languages, passive comprehension at least must have been the norm. If this
sounds far-fetched, bear in mind that two centuries later the Gaelic-speaking King of Scots, Mael Coluim III, had a Norse-speaking Orcadian as his first wife and an English-speaking West Saxon princess as his second. This description does not even bring into consideration Latin, which was both omnipresent in society and unknown by almost everyone. Naturally this level of complex diversity would not have been so common among the peasantry. Monolingualism would not, however, have been the societal norm.

1.1.2 Language and dialect

The great sociolinguist of Yiddish Max Weinreich (1894–1969) is said to have quipped that ‘a language is a dialect with an army and a navy’. Behind the jest, however, lies a profound (near-) truth. Social, political and economic factors influence our perception of the status of a language variety. Scots (for instance) is, at least in an idealised form, less like English than Norwegian is like Swedish. Practically no one would claim that Norwegian was not a language, however, while that status is often contested for the Scottish vernacular. The long-term political autonomy of Norway in the modern age cannot have harmed the national language’s prestige. Other sociolinguistic – and linguistic – factors come into play in assigning status, however.

There is a considerable literature on this subject, summarised in my 2005 book. The approach I wish to take here is, in my view, the most straightforward; however, it is also less well-known in the English-speaking world than it should be, largely because it is mainly available only in German. In a career lasting more than thirty years, Heinz Kloss (see, in particular, (1978); a brief restatement of his views in English can be found in his (1967) article) developed a conceptual typology by which different kinds of language varieties can be distinguished.

In the first instance, he distinguishes two ways by which varieties can be considered languages. The first of these is Abstand, German for ‘distance’; the criteria underlying it are essentially linguistic. Although hardly anything was written in the variety until the nineteenth century, no one could ever have claimed before this that Basque was anything other than a language. It is in a situation of absolute distance with all the neighbouring varieties (and, being a language isolate, all other languages). Most languages do not have that level of distance from their neighbours; it is still a considerable factor in distinguishing different varieties, however. A German speaker travelling east from Berlin would eventually find her-/himself crossing the River Oder/Odra and entering Poland. The
'language world' would alter immediately; perhaps jarringly. German and Polish *are* related, but the similarities have largely been rendered opaque by thousands of years of divergence; only an historical linguist specialised in these languages would notice them. While not notionally absolute in its nature, an experience of complete linguistic distance would be the norm for speakers of either language when coming into contact with the other variety. More interesting, perhaps, would be the experience the Berliner would have if s/he travelled west into the Netherlands. German and Dutch are close relatives. Speakers of one language can, with difficulty, read straightforward texts in the other language if they know something about its orthographic conventions. With the exception of people who come from close to the mutual border or have actively learned their neighbours’ language, however, comprehension of the spoken variety would be limited to the point of near incomprehensibility. Thus, experience of distance, while less pronounced than in the Polish scenario, would be very real.

*Abstand* need not always be a criterion for assigning language status, however. Czech and Slovak, for instance, *are* different from each other, but the possibility of mutual intelligibility is very high for most speakers. If the Czech lands had not spent a millennium as a part of the German-dominant Holy Roman Empire and its successor states, while what is now Slovakia was considered by most to be an integral part of the kingdom of Hungary, if the post-1918 political marriage between the two groups had not been a fundamentally unhappy one, it is difficult to imagine the two language varieties being treated as discrete entities. The desire for distance, in fact, was satisfied, in particular on the Slovak side, by the linguistic development of the written language away from its sister language. Slovak can be considered a language not through linguistic distance but rather through sociolinguistic planning and development: *Ausbau*, in Kloss’s terms.

Most contemporary written languages are standardised. A particular dialect of a language has become the prestigious norm, its structural, phonological and lexical features considered inherently ‘better’, often more ‘genuine’, than are those of other varieties of the same language. The room for variability within the standard is normally fairly limited – the differences between written British and American English are in truth very minor. The fact that they are very striking to readers schooled in one tradition from within this English whole demonstrates how homogenous Standard English actually is: if greater distinctions existed, those which do would not have been fetishised.

In a sense *Abstand* and *Ausbau* are polar states. But almost all standardised
languages possess aspects of both. With the exception of languages like, as we have seen, Czech and Slovak or, to a lesser extent, Swedish and Norwegian, all of these varieties are sufficiently distant from other standardised varieties to be seen as discrete (even if a dialect continuum exists between them). On the other hand, their very status as standardised varieties means that they have been developed, *acculturated*, whether that be in a *circumstantial* way, where the language of the ‘best people’, of the elite, becomes the written and spoken norm without anyone deciding to carry out this process consciously, or by *engineered* means, where an individual or a group take the conscious decision to develop the ‘best’ or ‘most genuine’ form of the language (these terms are derived from Joseph (1987)).

Kloss also turns his analysis towards the concept of *dialect*, an analysis he bases primarily on how a variety is used. He explicitly rejects the concept of ‘mere dialect’ for dialects (along with the idea that dialects are linguistically subservient to the standard, even when they are according to a social analysis), while also recognising, through his term *Normaldialet*, that most varieties of a language are essentially spoken; if there is any written representation of these varieties, this tends to be through the production of short comic or sentimental pieces published in local newspapers or, nowadays, online fora. An *Ausbaudialekt*, on the other hand, is regularly seen in contexts normally associated with a language. You may see novels written in the variety; minutes of local and regional meetings may be published in it. On the other hand, it does not possess all of a language’s functions: it would be very rare indeed to have official government material with everyday importance, such as tax forms, published in that variety. Bavarian is a good example of a variety of this type: a written dialect, possessing profound associations with regional identity, but not sharing any of the official associations of Standard High German, to which it is in a sense subservient. This is not a static state, however: in the nineteenth century the local dialects of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg were perceived by most people as highly distinctive forms of German. Due to the country’s new reality of full autonomy and the problematical recent history of the region, the dialects have developed a growing association with national identity that has increasingly been expressed through the written form, however. Luxembourgish is now one of the three official languages of the country.

Nor is the *language* state static. It is quite possible for a language to be *dialectalised* under another, particularly if the two varieties are close relatives,
or *kin tongues*, as Kloss (1984) termed them. Low German is a good example of this process. A language of considerable status across the Baltic and North Sea worlds in the late medieval and Early Modern periods, influential upon all of the languages spoken where its speakers lived and worked, it is now spoken only (with a limited number of exceptions, such as among small-scale religious minorities in north America) in territories where High German is the official variety. Low German retains a written presence (as well as some representation in other media), however, even if its speaker numbers are gradually dropping. It is possible, although not common, to reverse this process, as has happened with Catalan in relation to Castilian Spanish in the period since the end of the Franco dictatorship in the mid-1970s.

It is difficult to transpose these relationships from a time of near universal literacy, mass communication and pervasive state power to one where literacy was rare, long-range communication of any sort was at best challenging and the ruler’s power, no matter how arbitrary, violent and sometimes vindictive, could not run far. But analogues remain. Issues of language-based ethnic identity have been present since our ancestors first began to record views of this type (which is, in fact, quite early in the trajectory of the development of writing; spoken norms are also apparent). Inevitably sociolinguistic as well as linguistic criteria have always been employed to define distinctions (and power relationships) between varieties and their speakers. These distinctions have always had an arbitrary element to them, an element which must have been even more prevalent in periods where the coherence of political and economic power was somewhat friable and certainly not convincing in its longevity.

1.1.3 *Diglossia*

Speakers of any or all languages, whether written or not, have a highly developed sense of linguistic appropriateness. Certain words and phrases are, for all of us, acceptable (perhaps even necessary) for some contexts but often completely unacceptable for others. Many years ago I had a student who spoke in an almost aggressively formal way to everyone, referring to all of his contemporaries by title and last name, for instance. While, of itself, there was nothing wrong with this type of behaviour, I was aware that the other students found it deeply unsettling. Sadly, it meant that he was, if not exactly ostracised, to an extent treated with a considerable degree of distance. Students are, at least in my institution, expected to treat each other in an informal and friendly manner unless a specific
reason—such as profound dislike—makes formality a preferable option. In some societies, such as those in parts of Indonesia (Jenson 1988), these distinctions are highly codified linguistically, to the extent that we can talk about specific registers associated with particular social contexts, often predicated upon the social standing and gender of both speaker and listener. While the rules of these relationships change over time, transgression is still at the very least a major social faux pas and may lead to very serious consequences indeed.

In many societies, relationships of this type are expressed through the near absolute expectation of the use of particular linguistic varieties under certain defined circumstances. As Ferguson (1959) points out, in German-speaking Switzerland, for instance, a complex set of linguistic relationships prevail between different varieties. Although thought of as a German-speaking area, the local dialects—which are normally quite different from each other—are highly distinctive. At most limited intelligibility is possible between them and most other German varieties. Under other historical circumstances, it would have been quite possible for Swiss to be considered, like Dutch, a close relative to, but discrete from, Standard German, to have developed as a full blown Ausbau language with strong Abstand traits. This did not happen, however, perhaps because of a tradition of common literacy shared across the German-speaking world, coupled with the high levels of literacy through the use of the German Bible, associated with the radical Protestantism many parts of the region espoused in the sixteenth century. Standard High German is the prevalent written variety (although various forms of Swiss German are employed under certain circumstances); it is also used regularly by Swiss German speakers, when speaking to people from elsewhere in the German-speaking world, as well as, under certain social circumstances, with other Swiss German speakers.

Let us imagine someone from a Swiss German-speaking background who is a deputy in the Swiss federal parliament. When giving speeches in parliament, she will almost exclusively use Standard High German. Partly this is because her native dialect may not be easy for all other Swiss German speakers to understand; partly this is due to her awareness that speakers of one of the country’s other languages will, if they have learned German at all, only have learned the Standard variety; partly—perhaps particularly—her use of Standard German feels, to her, the only right and proper variety to choose. Using her native dialect under these circumstances would be inappropriate, perhaps even offensive or comic.
On the other hand, if she were taking part in an election campaign in her home area, she would speak to voters and at meetings almost wholly in her native dialect. Doing otherwise would seem particularly unnatural; it might also be electoral suicide. Potential supporters would be dissuaded from voting for her because she would appear stand-offish, apparently expressing the view that she was different from, perhaps that she considered herself socially superior to, them. At home, using the local variety would be an absolute requirement, unless under highly marked circumstances.

Conversely, most productions of at least the traditional media would be in Standard High German – even in a local context. Many readers would react badly to their local dialect being employed to discuss a ‘serious’ story in a newspaper. It might be used occasionally as ‘colour’ in editorials, particularly in lighter pieces, as well as in cartoons and comic pieces. The same would mostly be true on radio and television, with the same provisos. Matters might be different in various online situations, possibly because social media, for instance, may be considered considerably closer to oral practices than to written.

Basing his commentary in part upon previous French scholarship, Ferguson defined relationships of this type as *diglossia*, considering them inherently stable and self-perpetuating. Ferguson generally considered them to be confined to one language, so that in many Arabic-speaking countries a diglossic relationship pertains between the local dialect varieties (Low or L) and Modern Standard Arabic/Qur’anic Arabic (High or H). Fishman (1967), however, suggested that relationships of this type were available across languages, so that, for instance, England after the Norman Conquest of 1066–7 witnessed a diglossic relationship between French as the High variety and English as the Low, particularly since, from an early period, most Norman settlers would have had to speak at least some English in order to maintain themselves in their new country (and also form meaningful and useful relationships). This relationship existed even though a large part of the native population never learned much French. They would essentially never have had access to the High contexts in any event. The same could be said of the elite use of French in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

At least in the modern world, diglossia need not be permanent. In its purest sense, in fact, it need not exist. Until around the middle of the twentieth century, a diglossic relationship existed for many Scots speakers: Scots, as the Low variety, and Scottish Standard English, as the High, were kept separate, being used in different linguistic domains based upon ideas of appropriateness. In
contemporary Scotland, however, this distinction has broken down, with usages competing, particularly in oral contexts, and the influence of colloquial forms of English becoming increasingly dominant (Millar 2005: chapter 2).

Can we extrapolate ideas of this type further back in time? The answer, inevitably, is that this is possible to some extent, depending on the records we have; moreover, the lower levels of literacy must also have affected the developments involved. In large parts of medieval western and central Europe, for instance, Latin was undoubtedly the High variety, with various vernaculars performing the role of Low variety, even if, as we might expect, very few of the people who lived in those regions could read, write or speak Latin. Relationships between these varieties inevitably differed from place to place and time to time. French, for instance, remained the Low variety more obviously and for longer in France than English did in England (although the latter is complicated by the fact that French was, as we have seen, also a High variety in the latter kingdom). In early Scotland, Latin certainly held the High position, but, at least in certain areas north of the Forth and Clyde, Gaelic also appears to have been in a higher position socially than Pictish; this relationship is complicated by the fact that, over time, this last relationship also represents one of language shift.

1.1.4 Language maintenance and language shift

From very early times we must assume that language varieties have, whether suddenly or gradually, ceased to have native speakers. When, as most of us assume, speakers of Indo-European dialects began to move away from where the language was originally spoken, their influence was sufficient for the local languages to come under threat, because their original native speakers were switching over to the new, possibly prestigious, variety. In Europe, some languages, such as Basque, survived (albeit in a rather more circumscribed area); others, such as Etruscan, succumbed. Still others can now only be traced in possible substratal influences on surviving languages, such as, perhaps, in the historically rigid Germanic word stress pattern, not normal in Indo-European varieties.

Some ‘dead’ languages recorded in early history, such as Sumerian, were once highly prestigious but still ceased, over time, to have native speakers. Language shift is often particularly concentrated on varieties with limited social prestige, however. Speakers of the less prestigious variety may be compelled to speak a more prestigious one, although some speakers will persevere in their use of ‘their’ language. This does happen, but the social and economic advantages
associated with the prestigious variety inevitably attract aspirational members of the less prestigious language to it. This will mean that the declining variety will become even less prestigious because it is now associated with ‘lower-class’ people. Even if it is not, however, and the variety is an admired identity symbol, it may still be abandoned because its speakers cannot see its economic value (or even functional point). A particularly good example of this can be found in the ‘death’ of Norn in eighteenth-century Shetland, a point to which we will return in Chapter 5.

While language shift (the movement by speakers away from one language in favour of another) and language death (where a variety, due to language shift or other often more traumatic processes, ceases to have any native speakers) have always happened, the modern age has, it appears, witnessed a considerable increase in the level to which the phenomena are occurring and recurring. A primary reason for this shift in gear is the increasing economic and communicative connectivity of the modern world, along with growing levels of literacy, primarily in the state language, and the increasing dominance at a world level of the speakers of a number of major languages, including, but not only, English. In 1500 it was quite possible for language communities in the heart of Europe to be essentially overlooked by larger-scale authority (the speakers of Sorbian, a West Slavonic language spoken in what is now eastern Germany, are a good surviving example of this former reality). The state, such as it was, generally ignored the language and its speakers unless they were a political and social threat. It is now necessary to go deep into Amazonia to find that type of sociolinguistic relationship. Even there, the reach of Portuguese – the language of globalisation in those territories – has expanded considerably, largely due to its association with a cash-based regional (indeed, world) economy. While many languages survive – sometimes thrive – in these environments, most do not. Even here, however, the linguistic ecologies surrounding successful lesser-used languages, such as Guaraní, spoken in Paraguay and the surrounding regions, have themselves encouraged shift away from languages with lower prestige or fewer, more economically marginalised, speakers. As we will see in Chapter 8, the future is not bright for all but a small number of languages with a large number of speakers.

Another tendency exists and has always existed: language maintenance. Some lesser-used languages have, despite everything, managed not only to survive but to gain sufficient prestige of whatever sort to maintain speaker
numbers across the generations and often to increase these numbers. Fishman (1991) makes the point that language maintenance of any type at any time is predicated upon parents (or guardians of whatever sort) passing their language on to their children in a natural manner. If, for whatever social, economic or political reason, this does not take place, a breakdown in generational transfer is inevitable. Everything flows from this relationship. In the modern age, however, more than this needs to be done, not least in relation to mass communication and education, largely due to the dominance of hegemonic languages, including English, in these domains. That it is achievable – if relatively uncommon – is incontestable. While the ‘rebirth’ of Modern Hebrew is probably not a particularly representative example of these processes, the reinstatement of Catalan as a major language or the survival of conventionally transmitted community varieties of Ladin and Friulian in Italy demonstrate that it can be achieved.

1.1.5 Conclusion

Language use is at the centre of our lives as social animals. The social relationships between speakers of different languages make the use of language complex, exhibiting tendencies both to celebrate local identity and ‘authenticity’ and to wish to demonstrate connection with sources of power of a variety of types. This book describes and analyses the apparent triumph of an originally external linguistic variety – Scottish Standard English – over the autochthonous languages – Gaelic and Scots – which were themselves the ‘victors’ in earlier linguistic struggles. It also describes and analyses the survival of the native languages down to the present day. While these outcomes are incontestable, the processes by which they came to these destinations, along with a growing awareness of counter-flow back into the past and now, are not: the ‘victory’ of Scottish Standard English is contingent, partial and always open to reinterpretation.

1.2 The Scottish Environment

1.2.1 Physical environment

Scotland lies, in global terms, in the far north. In the period of the Ice Ages, the country was sometimes under a 1,000 metres and more of ice. If it were not for the North Atlantic Drift, bringing warm water up from the Caribbean Sea, Scotland would be largely tundra, with a climate not dissimilar to contemporary north-east Siberia. The presence of the warm water current means, however,
Map 1  Scotland
Map 2  Scotland: pre-1975 counties
that the country largely enjoys a mild, damp and often windy climate; winters are not generally severe. The eastern parts of Scotland – particularly the regions to the east of the mountains – have a drier climate with colder winters; these distinctions are essentially relative, however. Every decade or so, nonetheless, the wind wheels to the north and north-east for an extended period in the winter; the weather can then become brutal.

The present country is made up primarily of two forms of topography: a series of upland and highland regions consisting of ‘hard’ igneous and metamorphic rock, which produce relatively thin and poor soils, as well as areas of low-lying topography, often associated with river valleys, based upon sedimentary rocks which generally produce soils of considerable depth and fertility. While southern parts of the country are often upland in nature (with the hills of the south-west being essentially mountains) and it is difficult to find any place in central Scotland where higher land is not present within a radius of ten kilometres, the Highlands proper represent a major region of mountainous terrain, the most elevated parts of which evince Alpine or even Arctic climates and environments. At least since the Neolithic period, modes of cultivation – plant and animal – have inevitably differed between Highland and Lowland regions; at times the environmental boundary has also been a cultural and linguistic one.

The sea is no great distance from anywhere in Scotland. For many residents its presence is an everyday reality. On the west coast it enters far into the country up long firths and sea lochs (essentially, fjords); scenery on the east coast is not as dramatic, perhaps, but long firths, often river estuaries, also permit tidal water deep into landward regions. The seas off the whole of the Scottish coastline were historically rich with sea life; this was particularly the case with the east coast, since the North Sea is relatively cold and attracts species like haddock and cod, perhaps pre-eminently herring, with a high nutrient to weight relationship and, more recently, considerable monetary value, close into shore. While fishing as an industry only really began in the Early Modern period, coastal populations have always treated their local seas as part of their seasonal larder; their importance intensified during periods of dearth and famine.

While there are only a small number of generally small islands lying off the east coast, the west coast contains a wealth of islands of different sizes, most organised in a series of archipelagos – such as the Outer Hebrides. Each island has, since ancient times, exhibited its own environmental character. Islay, for instance, is much more fertile than its near neighbour Jura. These environmental
differences may well have affected the language use, as well as the social and political strength, of their inhabitants. While it is common nowadays to think of the islands off the west coast as being in some ways cut off and distant, there have been times in the country's history when the islands have been at the centre of North Atlantic and Irish Sea trade and power politics. Along with the southernmost parts of mainland Argyll, the islands’ proximity to Ireland must always be borne in mind.

As well as the sea, Scotland south of the Great Glen, the long narrow valley which runs from Inverness on the North Sea south west to Fort William on the Atlantic, in particular possesses a range of water courses whose sources lie far into the interior. The Tay is a particularly good example of this. The Tay proper and many of its tributaries rise considerably further west or north than the place it becomes tidal. While not all of these waters are navigable, they have provided useful transits since ancient times, still often used for major or minor roads. In the south, the Earn rises near to a number of tributaries of the Forth, thus making communication into that river’s valley straightforward; further north, the River Dochart (which flows into Loch Tay at Killin (Perthshire), leaving it at the other end as the Tay) rises in a pass within walking distance of streams that flow into Loch Lomond (and thus, via the short River Leven, into the Firth of Clyde) and, with a rather longer walk, waters that flow directly into the Atlantic. The northernmost of the tributaries of the Tay, the Garry, rises only a few kilometres away from streams that flow into the Spey, the watershed acting as a relatively easy transit that takes travellers down to the Moray Firth. Rivers also contain stocks of much needed protein which become particularly abundant during, for instance, the annual salmon run.

To the north of mainland Scotland lie two sizeable archipelagos, Orkney and Shetland. Discussion of these islands must always be approached in the knowledge that politically they are relatively recent additions to the kingdom (in 1469–70). The people of Shetland in particular still look towards Norway to a degree, albeit in a somewhat stylised and sentimentalised manner. Nonetheless, the linguistic development of the two archipelagos’ inhabitants connects to – in many ways is a part of – the general Scottish scene, or to parts thereof.

The two island chains possess some environmental similarities – not least the dominance of the sea which is the norm in insular communities. In other ways, however, they are strikingly different. Orkney is generally fertile, for instance; its southern islands are visible from the Scottish mainland. Shetland
is considerably less fertile and is situated far out in the North Atlantic, closer to Scotland than to Norway or the Faeroes, but still far from close. The inhabitants of the northern archipelago have of necessity been long accustomed to fishing in deeper and more distant waters than have their southern neighbours.

1.2.2 Natural resources

The economic history of Scotland has been in some ways written by its geology. Easy transit across central Scotland – particularly along the ‘great valley’ of Strathmore – has undoubtedly encouraged trade (and population movement); the softer rocks and deeper soils have also encouraged intensive arable agriculture different from the sheep and cow herding based around transhumance which dominated elsewhere. In the modern age in particular, however, other natural resources also became of great importance. Coal, for instance, was found in considerable quantities across the Central Belt (the heavily populated area stretching from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Forth), as well as in southern Ayrshire and parts of Dumfriesshire; less significant deposits are also found in eastern Sutherland. Iron was also found in many of these areas, as was shale. This wealth was harnessed systematically from the eighteenth century on, making central Scotland a player in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Small oil reserves are found in the same areas; these have been exploited on occasion, not least during the Second World War. They are dwarfed, however, by the oil deposits found around the country’s coasts. These are mostly associated with the North Sea, but considerable quantities are to be found under the Atlantic. These reserves began to be exploited in the 1970s. The economies of the north-east and the Northern Isles in particular have become connected to the rise and fall of the price for this commodity. Other minerals, especially lead and silver, were also present in locations across the country; small amounts of gold and uranium are also found.

1.2.3 Reasons for settlement

Many of the settlements in Scotland are of great age; geographical reasons underlie their initial settlement and longevity. Aberdeen was originally a settlement raised above marshy land, less than a kilometre inland from the natural harbour at the mouth of the River Don. Fishing, whaling and sealing were possible, excellent paths into the Grampians and beyond were available up both the Don and the nearby Dee. Glasgow stands on a bank of dry ground above a
ford over the Clyde where fresh and salt water meet. *Edinburgh Castle Rock* is a near-perfect defensive site. *Dundee* lies at the narrow ‘neck’ of the Firth of Tay.

### 1.3 A Brief Conclusion

In the following chapters I will attempt to describe and analyse the social, political and economic forces which drove the course of language use over the last 15,000 years. Many of the ideas and patterns discussed in this chapter will inform what follows.