



THE FUTURE OF SCOTS

Project report on Scots media workshop

Introduction

This report addresses the themes that have emerged during a workshop with participants involved in Scots and the media. This workshop was part of a series of workshops which were conducted for the Future of Scots project, a collaborative research project aiming to understand how a community-driven language policy could be developed in the case of Scots in Scotland.

Before the workshops, the Future of Scots team designed and conducted an online survey addressed at the general public. This was done in order to have an understanding of the views on Scots and its use in various domains such as education, media, culture, and in policies. The workshops were then designed to engage with the survey results. The purpose of the media workshop was to hear from stakeholders not only their views on Scots as a whole and its relationship with the media, but also to discuss issues and how they could be addressed.

In addition to the moderation team, 5 participants joined the discussions for a total of 2 hours. All the participants had been involved in using Scots in media, either written or spoken. Before the discussions started, participants listened to two brief presentations, one about the survey results obtained thanks to the Future of Scots project, and the other one dealing with language policy. The starting point for the discussion was the use of a prompt (*“There should be more provision for Scots in TV, radio, and newspapers.”*) presenting the results that were obtained to it by 1616 self-selecting respondents who were overwhelmingly in favour, across all age groups.

From the discussion with the participants, several themes arose and are summarised in this report: 1) Scots in social and traditional media, 2) identifying the audience, 3) writing in Scots for the media, and 4) what can be done to support Scots in the media.



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Discussion themes

1) Scots in social and traditional media

The distinction between social media and traditional media for the use of Scots was a theme that appeared in the discussion. Here, traditional media were understood as newspaper articles, the radio, or the TV, whereas social media included for example Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, etc. Social media were thought of as being more polarising, with a lot of misinformation and arguing about Scots. Some people saw social media as a place where hatred towards Scots was being amplified. Still, there was a general consensus that social media had positive aspects, such as creating the opportunity to reply and react to misinformation. It was felt that the digital space was more open and that it would be the future of information and expression in Scots.

On the other hand, traditional media were seen as conveying information in one direction only, and not offering the space for reacting. Traditional media thus did not offer the same scope for discussion as social media. In addition, some participants also felt like traditional media did not allow to gauge opinions about Scots, unlike social media.

The use of Scots on the radio was also addressed. As noted by participants, it allowed to speak in your own voice but also in a voice that others could understand, thus limiting the backlash that could be found with, for example, newspaper articles. However, there was a need for more programmes in Scots, as opposed to programmes about Scots. There was also a need for more provisions to make programmes in Scots, as they remain limited at the current stage.

2) Who is the audience?

While the participants agreed that hatred towards Scots was amplified on digital media, it was thought that most people in Scotland were not polarised when it came to Scots. Rather, potential audiences for Scots-language journalism and reporting were to be found in the middle-ground among people with an interest in Scots. The challenge was that many people in Scotland were not interested in the issue at all. Still, many felt that Scots has been increasingly presented as a talking point. It was also clear that there was a need to go beyond the debate about the linguistic status of Scots as a language. The solution that emerged was to write for the average person who shows an interest in and is willing to engage with Scots, rather than writing for people who already know a lot about Scots or those who are unwilling to engage. The discussion also highlighted that writing in Scots should be pro-active and positive, and that one should not be drawn into discussions with “bad-faith actors”, spreading hatred and misinformation about Scots.

3) Writing in Scots for the media

Writing in Scots for media outlets and the issues around writing in Scots were also tackled in the discussion. A key issue that participants identified was authenticity. As Scots is not typically used in formal contexts, the challenge is to find the right balance between traditional and modern use of the language. The media representatives who had had experience of

writing in Scots for newspapers felt that choosing traditional style, e.g. historical spellings or archaic vocabulary, alienated a large group of Scots users, even though it reflected the language distinctiveness. On the other hand, writing in line with the current use of the language, and thus being more inclusive for all Scots users, led to their Scots being too similar to English, which was perceived as damaging the legitimacy of Scots as a language. Accessibility was considered to be more important by participants, nonetheless.

4) What can be done to support Scots in the media?

Participants agreed that a potential solution to problems faced by Scots in the media could be the use of a style-guide sheet for Scots. Participants thought such a style-guide should be kept short, approximately 1 page. It should include a list of basic information about Scots as well as a check-list for journalists and news reporters. For example, one thing to check for could be not to call Scots a dialect, another - to make sure to implement current stylistic guidelines for Scots, such as the avoidance of “the apologetic apostrophe”. This simple guide could help to avoid spreading misinformation and ensuring stylistic consistency. It would also help to move beyond the debate of “whether Scots is a language”, which seems to dominate newspaper discourse when the topic of Scots arises in any context.