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# From ridicule to legitimacy? ‘Contested languages’ and devolved language planning

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## ABSTRACT

In 1999, devolved governance was established in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland which altered the contours of language recognition in the United Kingdom. Whilst much focus has been placed on how devolution improved the status of Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, and Irish, less attention has been placed on those minority vernaculars with ‘contested’ linguistic status. Scots in Scotland and Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland fall into such a category as they are considered by some as merely ‘dialects’ of English but by others as independent regional languages. The formation of the Edinburgh and Belfast legislatures created policy processes closer to the point of application and has ensured that policy decisions, including those relating to language, have been influenced by the nuances of local identity (Birrell, 2009). This article, therefore, explores the extent to which devolution in Scotland and Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> has enhanced the status of Scots and Ulster-Scots in areas such as broadcasting, education, and the arts. Whilst supporters in both regions continue to champion better policy coverage, changes since 1999 illustrate how the devolved administrations have facilitated incremental change and evolving policy.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

In the late 1990s, under the Blair administration, devolved governments were established in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Birrell (2009, p. 48) notes that one outcome of the decentralisation of power has been the development of policies that have reflected the specific national characters of each of the UK regions. Language policy provides a clear example of this and a body of academic literature has emerged focusing largely on improvements for Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, and Irish.<sup>2</sup> However, additional features of the language debate in these regions relate to the vernaculars of Scots in Scotland and Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland. Whilst some view these as separate languages with vibrant communities of native speakers,<sup>3</sup> this has been rendered as problematic by others due to their close relationship and mutual intelligibility with English. A middle-ground and perhaps more common point of view notes that they are something in-between, perhaps spoken traditions of their respective regions.<sup>4</sup> Despite the breadth of opinion on Scots and Ulster-Scots, both have witnessed policy development in the two

decades since the decentralisation of power from Westminster. In this piece, therefore, I consider how devolution in the past 20 years has acted as a key catalyst in the manifestation of more formal language planning for Scots and Ulster-Scots in areas such as broadcasting, education, and the arts. Whilst moderate in relation to enhancements for the Celtic languages, the implementation of Scots and Ulster-Scots policy provides useful case studies on how disputed varieties can make inroads towards recognition in devolved contexts.

The article first provides a brief overview which considers how Scots and Ulster-Scots have been defined, both in the past and the present, by the politically constructed distinctions between language and dialect. This is followed by a debate on the growth of decentralised governance in other regions of Europe and how increasing connections with the 'local' have enhanced policy for 'contested' languages elsewhere. Finally, by focusing on Scots and Ulster-Scots before and after devolution the article illustrates how decentralised authority since the late 1990s has facilitated policies which are more sympathetic to regional linguistic traditions. In considering these changes, attention is given to how questions of identity in both regions continue to shape political culture and thus impact on the very nature of policy itself. This analysis aims to address a gap in the literature where comparative work on Scots and Ulster-Scots has principally focused on the philological relationship (Kirk, 2011) but largely ignored their comparative development in language policy. This is surprising given the impact that devolution has had on both cases.

### **Hierarchies of linguistic legitimacies?**

The contours between 'dialect' and 'language' have often been coterminous with disputes on linguistic status. Sociological interpretations note that concepts such as 'language' and 'dialect' are social constructs which are normalised and legitimated via wider power structures (Bourdieu, 1991). Use and possession of power have a key role, therefore, in shaping what is viewed by the wider populace as 'a language.' The normalisation of 'standard' French post-1789 is perhaps the most famous instance of this where the Parisian dialect was elevated to 'national language' in a deliberate political choice which seemingly championed unity but which also centralised cultural and civic power to the north (Judge, 2000). Consequently, regional variants were rendered inferior, marginal and widely discouraged by processes from above. Such practices also extended to other regions like Britain where vernaculars considered as dialects were often usurped under the wider linguistic umbrella of Standard English.

Likewise, processes from below are fundamentally important in defining the contours of what we consider as 'language.' Norwegian's linguistic status in the twenty-first century is hardly under question, yet this has not always been so. Prior to Norway's independence, Norwegian's position was largely viewed as that of a Danish dialect. However, nineteenth and twentieth centuries literary and folk movements which were associated with the quest for independence effectively raised the cultural capital of this 'dialect' into that of a 'language.' More recently, Serbo-Croat fragmented amid nationalist tensions in Yugoslavia from the 1980s. Cultural and political elites in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia set about deliberate processes of corpus and status planning to re-define previously accepted regional varieties/dialects into languages distinct in their own right. In these cases,

because of political change, previously accepted ‘variants’ or ‘dialects’ were consciously moulded into ‘national languages’ deemed suitable for sovereign states.

Power and ideology are, therefore, central in defining and legitimising what constitutes a language (Greenberg, 2004), which relates directly to Scots and Ulster-Scots. McClure (1988), for example, claims that Scots originated from speech brought to Scotland by the Angles in the Middle Ages and was well-embedded within court and government prior to the union with England (McClure, 1988, p. 8). Realignment of power to London after the Act of Union led to the promotion of Standard English within the British state which influenced Scots’ decline. The development of mass education in the nineteenth century was perhaps most significant in cementing a marginal status for Scots vis-à-vis English. A subsequent increase in literacy in Standard English both hastened and legitimised this decline. As Unger (2008, pp. 96–97) notes, ‘as a written standard (almost always English) became increasingly accessible to the population it brought with it the weight and authority of “proper”, “correct” language.’ Even though writers and poets in this period maintained what McClure (1988, p. 36) argues was a distinguished national literature this was only partly successful in establishing ‘national pride in the Scots tongue.’ Instead, at the end of the twentieth century there was a ‘general absence of any conception of Scots as a distinct speech form’ (p. 21). Nihtinen notes that institutional processes cemented Scots’ status as an English dialect or as colloquial/improper English (2008, p. 71).

The contemporary status of Ulster-Scots in the north of Ireland raises similar questions. In the seventeenth century a series of economic schemes attracted thousands of Scottish Protestants to Ulster in a period referred to as ‘the Plantation.’ Given that the planters were often Scots-speaking, a clear influence remains on Ulster’s speech varieties today (Corrigan, 2010). For some, original Scots vernaculars brought during the plantation have developed over centuries into Ulster-Scots and continue to be spoken primarily in rural areas (See Fenton, 1995). However, intelligibility between Ulster-Scots and English has meant that those who support the idea of a separate language have often faced open ridicule and scorn. The movement has also proven contentious because of its connections to the narrative of the plantation, a key element of protestant unionist identity. By contrast, Irish nationalist identity has aligned more closely with the Irish language. Affinity to particular linguistic traditions in Northern Ireland, therefore, is reflective of ethnic allegiances and representative of ongoing community differences which were most intense during the violent conflict of the 1960s–1990s known colloquially as ‘the Troubles’ (McMonagle & McDermott, 2014).<sup>5</sup>

### **Regional governance: a platform for linguistic recognition?**

Throughout the twentieth century, cultural globalisation has garnered attention from social scientists (Robertson, 1992) with some claiming that the process is a key catalyst in the encroachment of a homogenous global culture incompatible with localised practices and traditions (Tomlinson, 1991). Others contend that cultural imperialist interpretations are one-dimensional. Nederveen-Piortse notes that rather than enforcing homogeneity, globalisation has provided multiple layers where new identities and forms of social organisation can be re/constructed, especially at the local level (1994). These perceived opportunities include an increase in supranational and sub-national forms of political

organisation which offer opportunities for regional movements to circumvent the central state and consolidate their own positions (Trudgill, 2004), thus providing platforms for local 'voices' in public administration (Keating, 2004). For example, the international human rights system, itself a product of globalisation, has facilitated debates on minority issues since WWII. Minority rights mechanisms have even instigated and validated the very processes leading to forms of self-determination or milder forms of local autonomy (Kymlicka, 2007). Whilst for some these processes positively strengthen the 'local,' for others they negatively weaken the nation state. Nevertheless, what is clear is that regional governance has facilitated a focus on local cultures and languages which central state administrations previously viewed as trivial, unimportant or divisive.

Constitutional change in the 1970s in Spain, for instance, enabled increased levels of autonomy in Catalonia, the Basque region, Galicia, and others which have allowed for the promotion of regional languages within a wider sense of Spanish cohesion (Mar-Molinero, 2000). This was in complete contrast to the centralist policies of the Franco era which were hugely hostile to local cultures and languages and overtly discouraged 'dialects' thus forcing communities to maintain their linguistic heritages 'underground.' Similarly, Sardinian, contested as either a dialect of Italian or a separate language has also witnessed improving status since regional authorities were granted robust powers from the Italian state in the 1970s (Tufi, 2013, p. 149). Such moves have instigated processes such as written standardisation and wider status planning. Regional governance in this example facilitated conversations which enhanced the status of Sardinian in policy. Likewise, in the Netherlands, provincial governance has played an important role since the 1960s prompting debate with central government on the recognition of Frisian as separate from Dutch. Since the late 1980s the provincial government has situated the debates on local languages within wider discourses of European integration –internationalising the issue to some extent and thus utilising global structures for local means (Gorter, 2008, p. 505). Although scepticism remains about the central state's commitment in implementing Frisian policies, local governance has ensured that language issues remain firmly on the agenda in Friesland itself (Hilton & Gooskens, 2013, p. 140).

The cases above bear similarities with the trajectory of policy development for Scots and Ulster Scots and indicate how enhanced local governance has often driven status planning for minority languages whose very linguistic legitimacy has been questioned by the central state. The following sections now provide more specific discussion on these two cases. First, I discuss the pre-devolution context in Scotland and Northern Ireland which was characterised by informal and grassroots activity and limited recognition. This is then followed by a consideration of policy change in the post-devolution era when more formalised policy initiatives have evolved.

### ***Scots and ulster-Scots before devolution***

Prior to devolution, both Scots and Ulster-Scots were largely absent from the public space but championed by small groups of enthusiasts. In Northern Ireland, scholarship on Ulster speech's distinctiveness emerged during the latter part of the twentieth century with emphasis placed on a seventeenth century historical literary tradition (Hewitt, 1974). In Scotland, sociolinguistic debates on Scots were arguably more advanced than in Northern Ireland (Macafee, 1983; McClure, 1988) but likewise placed emphasis on

historical traditions in poetry and literature. Nonetheless, supporters of Scots and Ulster-Scots increasingly mobilised during the 1970s and 1980s.

These developments mirrored the wider European context where a focus on local identity had arisen and inspired sub-national, political, and cultural movements throughout the continent (Kockel, 2010, p. 96). For example, in Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP) had gained early electoral success in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. This growth in political regionalism was echoed by, and indeed intertwined with, a growing interest in local culture, identity, and language which was channelled via community activism. A Scots Language Society and associated journal, *Lallans*, was formed in 1972 as an outlet for writers (Glen, 2010, p. 50) and many of the initial members were also actively involved in the SNP. The society and the journal provided a starting point through which to lobby for the introduction of Scots literature into schools (McClure, 1993, p. 3). Also, in 1976 the society petitioned, albeit unsuccessfully, for the BBC to produce Scots language programmes (Wood, 1977, p. 5).

Changing political circumstances also impacted on Ulster-Scots' status in Northern Ireland. Here, identity questions were inexorably linked to the ongoing conflict which polarised the nationalist and unionist communities. Unionism had traditionally asserted its identity through civic expressions of Britishness (Todd, 1987). However, from the early 1980s, small but committed facets of Unionism (most common within the Presbyterian denomination) espoused a narrative which drew on historical/ancestral connections to Scotland which, for them, legitimised contemporary political connections to Britain (McCall, 2002).

In the early 1980s, activists accentuated the value of Ulster-Scots as a speech tradition, rather than as a distinct language. Adamson, for example, noted that Ulster-Scots speakers were bilingual in 'two varieties of the English Language' (1981, p. 78). The Ulster Society for the Promotion of British Culture, formed in 1985 to support Protestant culture, included in its remit a desire to examine 'the distinctiveness of Ulster English' (Nic Craith, 2003, p. 81), whilst not inferring 'that this was a separate language from English' (Nic Craith, 2003, p. 82). Despite this lack of focus on linguistic status, there was a genuine growth of interest in Ulster-Scots as a linguistic tradition within elements of the unionist community at this time.

The wider European context is also an important consideration here. In 1982, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) was established to raise awareness about minority languages. Indeed, in 1993, EBLUL provided positions for representatives for both Scots and Ulster-Scots on its UK sub-committee which was an important attribution of 'legitimacy on a cultural concept' (Nic Craith, 2006, p. 122) and supporters were quick to publicise this high-level affirmation (Murdoch, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, in both cases, external recognition provided a platform for supporters to move beyond a literary focus towards more explicit claims for linguistic status.

The 1990s witnessed a growing desire for wider acknowledgement of Ulster-Scots and Scots as distinct languages. Motivation was undeniably influenced in both regions by greater policy gains for Scottish Gaelic and Irish (Nihtinen, 2008; McCall, 2002). Gaelic in Northern Ireland, which had to this point been largely considered a tool of Irish nationalism, benefitted from the British government's softening attitudes in a growing environment of reconciliation – especially in areas like education (McMonagle & McDermott, 2014). Organisations, such as the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council and the Ulster-Scots

Language Society, which had previously underlined historic literary traditions, began to raise a 'living' profile via the organisation of public culture/language festivals and erecting Ulster-Scots street signage.

Likewise, the Scots language movement in the 1980s and 1990s also broadened beyond the literary focus. Here too the growing profile of the Scottish Gaelic movement acted as a catalyst for an expansion in Scots-speakers' aspirations (Horsburgh & Murdoch, 1998). Murdoch (1996, p. 4), for instance, notes how initiatives like Tayside's Scots Language Resource Centre and the growth of promotional groups such as the Scots Language Society aimed to 'emulate the "gains" attained by the Gaelic lobby.' The publication of a Scots dictionary in 1985 (Glen, 2010) showed a growing focus on a print culture which was aligned with wider processes of legitimisation – as is the case with many language movements. Community activism in the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, was fundamentally important in paving the way for the future recognition of both Scots and Ulster-Scots a process comparable to other language contexts where governments tend only to engage with communities when 'grassroots activists have created a firm foundation on which to build' (Wilson, Johnson, & Sallabank, 2015, p. 260).

### ***1999–2007: political change and altering attitudes?***

Levels of recognition before devolution had included bottom-up activism from grass roots and top-down input from supranational organisations. However, the establishment of devolved governance in the late 1990s increased local authority in a variety of policy settings relevant to minority languages, such as education and the cultural sector (Birrell, 2009). In Northern Ireland, this period was marked by an upsurge in the visibility of Ulster-Scots which can be attributed to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The agreement placed a huge emphasis on the parity of esteem between unionist and nationalist communities and eventually led to the establishment of a regional assembly one year later. One section of the document advocated linguistic diversity and explicitly stated that both Ulster-Scots and Irish are 'part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland' (GFA, 1998). As a result, an Ulster-Scots Agency was formed to promote 'greater awareness and use of Ullans<sup>6</sup> and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues, both within Northern Ireland and throughout the island' (GFA, 1998). A separate agency, *Foras na Gaeilge*, was also established to promote Irish illustrating the balancing of linguistic cultures that has occurred in the region as a result of the wider politics of identity (Nic Craith, 2003).

Increasing support for Ulster-Scots was often justified by unionist parties on the basis that it created greater equilibrium for protestant linguistic culture in the face of wider Irish language recognition (McCall, 2002, p. 211). In a 2001 election manifesto, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) advocated 'the promotion of Ulster Scots language, history and culture' because 'there has been too much focus on Gaelic culture' (2001, p. 13). Early policy debates on Ulster-Scots at a political level were, therefore, framed vis-à-vis developments for Irish even though both were very different revival movements. Whilst Irish is not intelligible to English and has a standard written form, Ulster-Scots is largely intelligible to English-speakers and the movement itself had not at this time determined a standardised written format (Nic Craith, 2001, p. 24). However, in 1999, when printed adverts for public appointments were presented in Ulster-Scots there was huge derision from elements of the press. Media commentators frequently raised concerns on expenditure

and labelled this practice as a form of ‘linguistic tokenism’ to appease sections of the Protestant community for increasing Irish language support (Kennedy, 1999, p. 8). Stapleton and Wilson (2004) note that rejecting the entire movement based on the actions of political elites is problematic as it ignores the social meanings attributed to Ulster-Scots by its speakers. For such individuals theirs ‘is a “real” and lived experience for a self-defined community’ (p. 563). Despite disdain, demonstrable evidence of this self-identification was the growing visibility of Ulster-Scots events and festivals in the public space (Nic Craith, 2001).

In Scotland, by contrast, the years immediately after devolution witnessed limited improvements for Scots which initially garnered only fleeting interest from the main political parties. Under Liberal Democrat/Labour coalitions, from 1999 to 2007, most strategic policy relating to language focused on Gaelic, such as the 2005 Gaelic Act which increased the standing of the language in public service delivery. However, Scots was not completely absent from policy discourse. The National Cultural Strategy, published in 2000, made very general references to the Scots language as a means of accessing other forms of regional culture/arts (Scottish Government, 2000). However, this further underlined the perception of Scots as a literary and heritage tool as opposed to a living tongue. In the same period, a cross-party group was established ‘to raise the political profile of the Scots language in part through parliamentary questions and memos from members of the group to Ministers’ (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 24). Whilst this mechanism provided a platform at an official level, supporters were often frustrated by the lack of progression on more formal policy (Millar, 2006). One example was the failure to include a question on Scots language use in the 2001 census which could have gathered tangible evidence of a Scots-speaking community.

The director of the Scots Language Centre (SLC), a grass roots organisation formed in the early 1990s to promote Scots, notes that devolution, despite the initial slow pace of change, was beneficial to some extent because ‘... from then on it was easier to have a direct conversation with the government locally about what the centre could do in order to advance our interests or policy in relation to language here’ (M. Hance, personal communication, May 5, 2015). He noted, nonetheless, that change, especially in the early years of devolution, was gradual. Under the Labour/Liberal Democrat administrations, campaigners for Scots attempted to express their cause in ways which spoke to party ideologies. In this period, the movement often framed itself within a rights-based context which it was felt the parties could relate to. As the director of the SLC noted,

... they couldn’t really understand it [Scots] as a policy issue, you had to work very hard to explain it ... A lot of these people had come from maybe Trade Union backgrounds ... so we had to try and explain to them in terms of a rights-based agenda, this was about human rights. (M. Hance, personal communication, May 5, 2015)

Therefore, manifestations of lobbying for Scots in the immediate period after devolution drew more frequently on the linguistic rights agenda which had already gained some relevance due to the earlier establishment of bodies like EBLUL.

The UK’s ratification of the Council of Europe’s Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) was also significant in integrating a rights-based approach to debates on minority languages. The ECRML requires periodical reporting on policy improvements from a European committee of experts which has consistently criticised

the Northern Ireland and Scottish governments on unsatisfactory recognition of Scots and Ulster-Scots (CoE, 2004). Another structure which has extended the language rights agenda is the British–Irish Council (BIC), established under the 1998 Agreement to encourage dialogue between the UK’s devolved administrations. Since 2002, Indigenous Minority languages (IML), including issues relating to Scots and Ulster-Scots, are one of the BIC’s areas of concern (Gormley-Heenan & Birrell, 2015, p. 118). Recent collaborative discussions have explored the need to improve attitudes to IMLs and increase their public visibility in media and business. Involvement by the ECRML and the BIC have provided some form of international and regional pressure for policy improvement. Although, again, this often does not go far enough for language supporters, structures such as these ensure that issues pertaining to Scots and Ulster-Scots remain on the agenda of the devolved administrations.

### ***Consolidating language policy: 2007–2016***

The period after 2006 witnessed fundamental shifts in both Scotland and Northern Ireland’s political environments which rendered both Ulster-Scots and Scots as more politically expedient for certain party ideologies. In Northern Ireland, the local Assembly was suspended from late 2002 until 2007 amidst political instability. Unionist parties, as a means of further balancing provisions made to Irish-speakers, achieved certain stipulations for Ulster-Scots in the 2006 St Andrews Agreement – an accord which would lead to the restoration of devolved power one year later. The Agreement committed to ‘*enhance and develop* the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture’ (UK Government [my emphasis], 2006), a departure from the more ambiguous commitments of the 1998 Agreement. Significantly, the electoral success of the DUP, with its focus on a regional Ulster British identity aligned to the Ulster-Scots narrative. The Party’s status as the largest in Northern Ireland since 2007 has been one factor which has influenced more formal Ulster-Scots policy.

Alterations to Scotland’s political situation have similarly led to more favourable policy rhetoric towards Scots. In 2007, the Liberal Democrat/Labour Coalition was replaced by a majority SNP Government. The SNP stances on Scottish independence and social democracy have been matched with attempts to embed ‘Scottishness’ across public administration more widely – especially in the lead-up to the 2014 independence referendum (Leith, 2010; Mycock, 2012, p. 54). Promoting Scotland’s languages has been an emerging theme as evidenced by the SNP’s 2007 manifesto for the Scottish parliamentary elections which committed to encourage ‘the use of Scots in education, broadcasting and the arts’ and to collect census data on Scots in future censuses (SNP, 2007). Similar sentiments were since repeated in the 2011 and 2016 manifestos.

It was in these changing contexts that census data on Scots and Ulster-Scots were collected for the first time in 2011. Results showed that in Northern Ireland, 8% of the population (140,000 people) claimed ‘some ability’ in Ulster-Scots whilst only 16,000 (or 0.9% of the population) declared an ability to ‘speak, read, write and understand’ (NISRA, 2011). Areas on the north coast contained the highest concentration of speakers, validating claims of previous studies (Fenton, 1995, p. vii). In Scotland, almost 2 million respondents (38%) stated that they had some ability in Scots. Of these, 1.2 million (23.94%) specified that they possessed a complete range of skills in spoken and written Scots (NRS, 2011).

The large number of respondents, however, claiming ‘some ability’ suggests that sizeable sections of the population recognise Scots as a natural part of their linguistic repertoire. By contrast, the results show that Northern Ireland is some way behind in such levels of acceptance. Nonetheless, available census data in both regions have undeniably provided additional impetus for policy just as statistical data have helped minority communities gain recognition elsewhere (see McDermott, 2017).

In Scotland and Northern Ireland at this time questions of identity became ever more connected to language policy as identity issues were mobilised more frequently for political purposes. This, of course, is not to suggest that Scots and Ulster-Scots are always utilised for such reasons. For example, during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, ballot papers appeared only in English. Such a move indicates that authorities were perhaps wary that the visibility of Scots and Gaelic in this context would be interpreted by some voters as a subtle form of linguistic nationalism that was not compatible with the supposedly civic approach of the referendum. However, of course, this move angered many native speakers and activists.

### *Regional frameworks*

As noted, the period after 2006 was marked by more sympathetic environments for Ulster-Scots and Scots policies. This has been channelled through a number of frameworks and development plans which were drafted in both regions.

In Northern Ireland, the St Andrews agreement placed specific obligations on the authorities to establish an Ulster-Scots strategy. This approach became more visible in the 2011 five-year ‘Programme for Governance’ which formed a Ministerial Advisory Group for Ulster-Scots (MAGUS) to advise on policy change and to allocate £4 million in funding to support the language movement. After lengthy consultations, the Department for Culture published an extensive framework to enhance Ulster-Scots language, heritage, and culture from 2015–2035 (DCAL, 2015). The strategy’s aims have included empowerment of speakers and improving attitudes towards Ulster-Scots – particularly within communities not traditionally associated with the movement. Education, media and the wider public sector were identified as key areas where better language planning could be implemented. Additionally, research and the establishment of an Ulster-Scots Academy were stressed as important for longer-term corpus planning aims alongside the development of an ‘agreed standard form.’

As in Northern Ireland, the Scottish government has also introduced a regional framework for Scots. In 2009, after the SNP entered government, a Scots language working group was established and drafted a recommendation document which argued for better policy coverage of Scots. This was subsequently described by some supporters as ‘one of the most important documents ever to be produced about the Scots language’ (SLC, 2016). The consultation’s outcome led to a national ‘Scots Language policy,’ drafted jointly by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland in 2015. The policy made commitments to ensure that ‘what for many is the language of the home, can be used in other areas of Scottish life’ (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 2). The shift to promote the contemporary use of Scots marked a significant change from previous approaches which overwhelmingly focused on Scots as a historical tradition rather than a living heritage. As with Ulster-Scots, the emphasis was placed on generating more positive attitudes and wider levels of acceptance and legitimacy for Scots. Specific objectives to

achieve this included the further incorporation of aspects of Scots into the school curriculum, encouragement of public services and public media and improved funding of community organisations working in Scots. Whilst the outcomes of these overarching policies for Scots and Ulster-Scots are long-term goals, the debates in this period also initiated policy movement in specific sectors like education, media and the arts which are now discussed in the sections below.

### **Broadcasting**

The presence of a minority language in public broadcasting is frequently regarded by speakers as a form of affirmation which bestows some form of legitimacy on a language movement itself. However, Scots and Ulster-Scots have not acquired the same coverage by public media as the Celtic languages (McDermott, 2007). For example, the BBC Alba digital channel was opened in 2008 to transmit programmes in Scottish Gaelic, whilst a dedicated station for Gaelic has operated since 1985. In Northern Ireland, Irish has a digital presence on the BBC NI website and a small amount of programming has appeared on radio since the 1980s and television since the 1990s.

Despite the disparity, Scots and Ulster-Scots have witnessed increasing debate in this sector. Ulster-Scots, for instance, benefitted from the linguistic diversity clause in the 1998 Agreement which encouraged notions of linguistic diversity and parity of esteem for diversity in the public space which also influenced public media to an extent (Ramsey, 2016, p. 152). For example, since 2002 the BBC has broadcast *A Kist o Wurds*, a weekly radio magazine programme in Ulster-Scots which is considered as a 'valuable commentary on the revival movement' (Spence, 2013, p. 98). Recent changes have indicated a stronger commitment to Ulster-Scots since the St Andrews Agreement. In 2010, the British exchequer agreed to provide £1 million per annum for the instigation of an Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) to 'ensure that the heritage, culture and language of Ulster-Scots is expressed through moving image' (USBF, 2015). The USBF has supported productions including music series (*Santer*), television drama (*Stumpy's Brae*) and animation (*Five Fables*). Although these examples are still relatively rare, USBF has created an initial platform for television broadcasting in Ulster-Scots.

In Scotland, Scots is traditionally framed as a natural part of the English-speaking broadcast environment with the boundary between Scots and English remaining an undefined one. A Scottish government audit on public services in Scots noted that 'BBC Scotland's policy has been to maximise exposure to Scottish speech forms by "mainstreaming" them within the overall fabric of the output, reflecting the natural Scottish speech.' (2009, p. 89). This sentiment has been evident in outputs such as drama and comedy but news and current affairs are presented in formal Standard English. For many advocates this is problematic as it merely maintains both varieties under a wider umbrella of English in the broadcasting sphere. One media commentator noted that this confined Scots to genres such as comedy and drama as opposed to 'issues such as the economy and world politics,' (Cited in Ross, 2015). More recently, some programmes have focused on Scots itself as subject matter. This includes 'The Scots Language,' a BBC Radio Scotland series exploring the history and development of Scots. Similarly, *Blethering Scots* was transmitted on BBC television in 2016 and explored views and attitudes, in a light-hearted way, towards Scots.

The examples above, however, constitute programmes *about* rather than *in* Scots and are perhaps attempts at awareness raising. Indeed, activists, such as former SNP leader, Gordon Wilson, have called on the BBC to improve overall provision in Scots. In a submission to the organisation he argued that the presence of a Gaelic channel in the absence of an outlet for Scots is a ‘cultural flaw’ and that BBC Alba should broadcast Gaelic and Scots programmes to create linguistic equality (Wilson, 2015). This illustrates the tensions over resources that are often evident between different minority communities. It is such competition for resources, including financial, spatial, representational and symbolic which constitute key concerns within wider politics of identity.

By comparison to BBC Scotland, BBC Northern Ireland is more likely to overtly label its content as Ulster-Scots, perhaps due to the need to acknowledge the support of the USBF. Ulster-Scots content also has its own logo and ident which is visible at the beginning of programmes. However, one BBC Northern Ireland producer has noted that programmes are often broadcast in a ‘fairly accessible form of Ulster-Scots’ (Spence, 2013, p. 97) which can be understood by native English-speakers. Avoidance of the purest form of Ulster-Scots (Braid Scotch) can again be considered an example of ‘mainstreaming’ and a deliberate appeal to those audiences not traditionally associated with the movement.

In both regions, community radio has provided an alternative to public media. From 2007, fUse FM<sup>7</sup> operated every summer across North Antrim, a traditional Ulster-Scots heartland. The station then acquired an official licence for full-time transmissions in 2015 and identifies as ‘Northern Ireland’s only Ulster-Scots radio station ... covering the language, culture and heritage of Ulster-Scots’ (fUsefm, 2016). In Scotland, community radio is also a ‘growing outlet for the expression of Scots’ (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 14). Importantly, even though such initiatives are described as ‘community-based’ many have acquired funding from public sources provided by the devolved institutions and other official bodies. For instance, fUse fm has obtained backing from sources like the Ulster-Scots Agency, whilst various Scots language community stations have also received moderate funding from official bodies like local councils and Creative Scotland (the region’s arts funder) (2015, p. 10). When grassroots initiatives are supported in such ways it is often viewed as a form of soft recognition which reflects altering attitudes at the official level. This mirrors the situation elsewhere such as in the Serbian province of Vojvodina where community stations have also received official funding to broadcast in minority and contested language varieties such as Ruthenian. Thus the financial support of grass roots movements is often viewed by different governments and official bodies as a strategy to meet their public service objectives and minority rights expectations (CoE, 2015, p. 144).

### Education

Recognition by official education bodies is also a crucial aspect of legitimisation processes for minorities. Indeed, since the establishment of regional governance, Scotland and Northern Ireland have witnessed some increased levels of coverage for Scots and Ulster-Scots within the education system. Scottish authorities had initially included aspects of Scots poetry within the English literature syllabus in 1991 (Glen, 2010, p. 50). After the election of the SNP into government formal provision for Scots emerged and an audit on Scots language policies across public services was commissioned. The findings indicated that there was a wealth of work conducted by individual teachers to promote

Scots in the classroom – particularly in primary schooling (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 20). Nonetheless, approaches were not formalised and practice could vastly differ from one local authority to the next which emphasised a need for more structured approaches. A region-wide ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ was introduced in 2010 which aimed to address this by placing emphasis in relevant subjects on the value of ‘the languages which children and young people bring to school’ which includes Scots (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 3).

Such curricular changes have prompted further recognition like the National Scots Policy, discussed earlier. It is significant that this policy, which extends across the whole range of public sectors, was established by the government in close conjunction with Education Scotland. A network of coordinators was formed to support educators and champion greater respect for Scots in the classroom. Additionally, the Scottish government underlined a need for wider visibility and use of Scots in more official capacities. For example, opportunities for individuals to communicate and receive responses in Scots from education authorities is advocated as is the use of Scots in departmental signage, logos and in official email signatures (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 6). Processes such as these indicate the implanting of subtle senses of ‘Scottishness’ which was expedient, especially for the SNP, in the lead-up to the independence referendum. An ambiguity here, however, is the extent and level at which Scots is incorporated into the school syllabus. For instance, it is still unclear as to whether or not Scots is to be encouraged as a language of instruction or if only an awareness of Scots should be included in aspects of the curriculum such as literature, drama, history or citizenship.

Northern Ireland’s integration of Ulster-Scots into education reflects the awareness of the movement channelled since the 1998 and St Andrew’s Agreements. When a new regional curriculum was introduced by the Department for Education (DENI) in 2007 it placed importance on the local environment, identity, history, and culture. The Ulster-Scots Agency and the body responsible for setting the Curriculum, the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), developed digital teaching and learning resources on Ulster-Scots language and heritage. These aimed to assist primary teachers to integrate aspects and awareness of Ulster-Scots culture and language in the classroom. This approach was also reflective of the experiences of other contested languages such as Frisian which have seen similar design of curriculum activities and textbooks in recent years to generate more favourable attitudes (CoE, 2008, p. 16). Authorities also introduced a language strategy which encouraged ‘an awareness of and respect for Ulster-Scots traditions’ and advocated ‘ways of employing Ulster-Scots linguistic and cultural icons’ in relevant subjects such as English literature, music, and drama (DENI, 2010, p. 8). DENI have also helped to implement the government’s regional strategy, discussed earlier. In its first year the department provided support to those wishing to establish youth groups working through Ulster-Scots, whilst the CCEA, in conjunction with Ulster University, developed educational material and teaching aids for use in post-primary settings. This was significant in that previous projects had largely focused on primary school age. Again, the incorporation of an Ulster linguistic identity (as opposed to an Irish one) in the syllabus could be construed as an attempt to legitimise an emerging cultural narrative for the protestant community (Gardner, 2016). Whilst the early peace process acted as a catalyst for the Ulster Scots movement, the devolution

of policy areas like education have further facilitated some recognition in more structured and formal contexts.

Whilst macro-level policies have started to emerge in both regions, approaches in pedagogy provide areas of concern for some commentators. Costa (2015), for example, in his observations on Scots initiatives in the classroom has indicated that attempts to include Scots within the curriculum, such as in literacy initiatives, often unintentionally position English as the language of the first reference. In such cases teachers may replicate the wider views of Scots as merely a vernacular whilst English continues to be considered as ‘a full language, a model against which other practices are to be evaluated’ (Costa, 2015, p. 39). Consequently, Scots-speaking pupils are defined in an institutional environment ‘within a broader narrative of Scots as an incomplete language’ (Costa, 2015, p. 39). Therefore, whilst aspects of ‘awareness raising’ policy have become more visible in both Scotland and Northern Ireland the effective implementation of pedagogical practice in the classroom is still somewhat underdeveloped, an issue which is applicable in both jurisdictions.

### *Culture and the arts*

Historically, the Scots and Ulster-Scots movements focused on cultural elements like literature, poetry, and oral tradition to emphasise their authenticity. The heritage sector remains an important platform through which to further legitimate their status within the public space of their respective regions. The instigation of devolution, however, raised a consciousness among official arts agencies and funders about local traditions and the past decade has consequently seen an additional increase in cultural strategies for Scots and Ulster-Scots.

These issues have proven relatively uncontroversial when compared to other aspects of language planning. For instance, provision of financial support for language initiatives in Scots and Ulster-Scots heritage initiatives has generated little animosity in the public media when compared to areas like publicly funded interpreting and/or translation. This correlates with social attitude surveys mentioned earlier which demonstrate a general acceptance of both Scots and Ulster-Scots as aspects of their regions’ tradition. Whilst animosity continues towards policy recognition in some sectors, the arts and heritage arena allows for ‘fluid’ representations of spoken and written forms of Scots and Ulster-Scots which can transcend the questions around language status. Activities and events such as public drama, song or poetry recitals provide overarching spaces for those with different perceptions of what exactly Scots and Ulster Scots are to engage with and share the tradition together.

Evidence of increasing roles for heritage and arts initiatives include the establishment of the Scottish Storytelling Centre which was opened in central Edinburgh for writers and performers in all of Scotland’s languages to showcase their work. Cultural institutions such as the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh have also included permanent audio-visual exhibitions which focus on Scottish languages with a significant focus on Scots. In Northern Ireland, recent advances have included a new publicly funded Ulster-Scots Centre in Belfast which details aspects of the culture and language. Exhibition panels explain the linguistic connection between Scotland and Ulster to visitors, as well as the role of Ulster-Scots emigrants to North America from the eighteenth century onwards. Public festivals around Ulster-Scots culture and language have also been evident since the early years of the peace process (Nic Craith, 2001, p. 22).

Arts-based policies have also been developed such as Creative Scotland's Scots Language Policy which aims to encourage the acquisition and validity of Scots by facilitating its use through the arts (Creative Scotland, 2015, p. 2). Creative Scotland also intends to extend the use of Scots in arts administration, funding applications, in communications and digital outputs. A key strategy objective was the establishment of a designated *Scriver*/poet to act as an ambassador and promote Scots through literature and to 'produce original creative work in Scots, its variants and dialects, across any art-form, as well as raising awareness, appreciation and use of Scots' (Creative Scotland, 2015, p. 10). In Northern Ireland, the Arts Council, whilst not having an official Ulster-Scots policy, initiated the Language Arts scheme after a period of consultation from 2002 to 2005. Since then the Arts Council has funded theatre, music, oral and literary projects conducted through the medium of both Irish and Ulster-Scots. The organisation notes that Irish and Ulster-Scots are 'living elements of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage' and that the 'language communities have developed many distinctive forms of artistic expression, and both have the ability to adapt and reinvent themselves' (Arts Council, 2013, p. 2).

All of the above initiatives relate directly to the wider heritage industries, including tourism, and, therefore, perhaps are part of a process which aims to normalise Scots and Ulster-Scots into the contemporary experiences of both regions. Unger notes that there are critics of the heritage focus within the Scots language movement because this is seen to 'obscure issues that are more important to the *contemporary* use and even survival of the language' (2013, p. 150). Such assertions, however, ignore that heritage itself is a concept which utilises the past as a resource for today's present whilst also reflecting changing social and political environments. Thus the emergence of Scots and Ulster-Scots language and heritage movements is indicative of a growing contemporary relevance and political value for their supporters.

## Conclusions

The two case studies in this article confirm the increased policy visibility since devolution. As Irish and Scottish Gaelic are not mutually intelligible with English, policy for these languages focus has primarily championed language acquisition activities such as immersion education alongside strategies to promote visibility. By contrast, Scots and Ulster Scots policies have focused less on acquisition and almost exclusively on what might be termed as prestige and image planning (Ager, 2005), which largely champions the symbolic value of both as elements of regional identity.

The close linguistic relationship between English, Scots, and Ulster-Scots, therefore, has rendered acquisition policies as a lower priority than that afforded to the Celtic languages. Devolution has, however, brought policy makers closer to community activism which has allowed for more nuanced understandings of language recognition for a contested variant to appear in public policy. Whilst decision-makers in Scotland and Northern Ireland may still not wholeheartedly consider Scots or Ulster-Scots as 'languages' per se, they have been more open to some recognition. For example, programmes in schools have attempted to emphasise the cultural role of Scots and Ulster-Scots by drawing on historical literature, there has been an increased use of signage in civic buildings and public places as well as support for arts and media. These measures aim to legitimise/normalise the existence of Scots and Ulster-Scots as living linguistic traditions but do not have the more robust

elements of language revitalisation seen within Irish and Scottish Gaelic policies. Whilst the value and short-term success of these approaches might be questioned by activists on the ground, the very emergence of policy is significant in that it forms some element of official recognition.

Additionally, language planning since devolution can be understood within wider identity struggles. In the context of the Northern Ireland Peace process Irish has often been considered as a cultural tool reflective of an all-island identity. Consequently, the development of Ulster-Scots policy is frequently considered as a balancing agent for unionists in the face of advancement of Irish language policy. Indeed, the largest unionist political party continues to advocate Ulster-Scots as a 'vital strand of *Northern Ireland's* identity' (DUP, 2016, p. 31 [my emphasis]). Ulster-Scots, therefore, continues to provide a linguistic symbol for those who wish to promote a simultaneous 'Ulster' and 'British' identity (Tonge, Braniff, Hennessey, McAuley, & Whiting, 2014, p. 118).

In Scotland, the enhanced status of Scots has similarly been entangled within wider identity politics. Many of the policy changes to date have come under SNP administrations which have championed enhanced senses of 'Scottishness' in the public space, which was certainly expedient in the lead-up to the 2014 independence referendum. Whilst these identity politics have in some ways facilitated an enhanced coverage within policy this has not come without tensions as government and community differ on the ways language policies are framed within such contexts. Nonetheless, in both examples the policies which have been introduced have clearly increased public consciousness as indicated by the results of the social attitudes surveys and national censuses discussed earlier.

The two decades since the establishment of devolution have, therefore, witnessed developing language policy in both regions which have been shaped by the efforts of grass roots initiatives and shifting political dynamics. It is likely that future language policy will continue to be influenced by these factors. At the time of writing, political insecurity resulting from the UK's decision to leave the EU is altering the landscape again. In Scotland, the SNP's opposition to 'Brexit' is vociferous and the enhanced promotion of 'Scottishness' is likely to continue if the regional government moves towards a second independence referendum in the coming years. The Northern Ireland political system faces an equally tumultuous period where identities have also been mobilised in the face of 'Brexit'. Moreover, in 2017 the Belfast administration collapsed amidst a public finance scandal when the largest nationalist party, Sinn Féin, withdrew its support. In its statement of withdrawal from government, the party particularly noted its dissatisfaction with what it viewed as unsatisfactory progress on Irish language legislation. It is likely that any future settlement to restore devolved government, given the careful balancing of identity politics in the region, will involve some further public support for *both* the Irish language and Ulster-Scots movements.

These cases provide just two examples within similar political structures but offer useful points of reference for those considering the changing nature of language planning at local rather than centralised levels. Altering dynamics have allowed for more complex discussions on the nature of policy provision in those cases where a language is contested. Whilst not all will be totally convinced of the legitimacy of both language movements, policy recognition has certainly gone some way towards enhancing the public status and role of Scots and Ulster-Scots in the past two decades.

## Notes

1. In 2017, a financial scandal led to the collapse of the Northern Ireland government. Attempts are under way to restore devolution.
2. On Irish see McMonagle and McDermott (2014); On Scottish Gaelic Dunbar (2017).
3. In the 1990s, 1.5 million Scots speakers were estimated (Nihtinen, 2008, p. 71). In the same period, 100,000 Ulster-Scots speakers were estimated by supporters (Nic Craith, 2006, p. 111).
4. In recent surveys two thirds of respondents stated that they 'don't really see Scots as a language – it's more just a way of speaking' (Scottish Government, 2010, p. 2) yet 67% regarded the continued use of Scots as important. In a Northern Ireland survey, 49% 'agreed' that Ulster-Scots is valuable aspect of Northern Ireland's heritage (DCAL, 2010, p. 5).
5. There are some examples of unionists learning Irish and of support for Ulster-Scots by small numbers of nationalists.
6. Alternative moniker for Ulster-Scots.
7. fUSe FM = 'for Ulster-Scots enthusiasts.'

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