

Scots language and culture teacher CPD

Unit 7, Appendix 3

Scots spelling conventions

The three tables in this document represent the spelling conventions of consonant sounds, the English spelling conventions of vowel sounds in the Scots accent, and the traditional Scots spelling conventions of vowel sounds in the Scots accent.

These tables use the [International Phonetic Alphabet](#) which has been developed from the Latin alphabet to 107 letters to represent the basic sounds of all spoken languages, and my own representation of the sounds of Scots accents derived from the letters available on the keyboard.

How to spell Scots – beginnings of conventions

A consequence of using the Latin alphabet to represent English and Scots is that we find there are too few written letters available to give each sound its own individual letter. In the Latin alphabet there are 21 letters considered consonants and 5 letters considered vowels. In Scots accents there are 26 basic consonant sounds and approximately 16 basic vowel sounds. That is why traditional spelling conventions have arisen to represent these sounds using the Latin alphabet.

Written Scots and written English, along with many other written European languages, share spelling conventions and have their own unique conventions related to the sounds of the language. The spelling of the consonant sounds tends to be held in common across more languages. The spelling of the vowel sounds tends to vary more across languages and Scots and English have different traditional spelling conventions.

When reading Scots in dialect writing and pan-dialectal writing, it can be useful to consider which spelling conventions are being used. The representation of consonant sounds are largely the same in Scots and English writing. It is the representation of the vowel sounds which can variously draw from the traditional Scots spellings, conventional standard English spellings, on the author's own innovations.

Table 1 The most common consonant spelling conventions in Scots and English by sound		
Dempster's shorthand	Example words	IPA spelling
p	p en, happ y and top	p
b	b ed, rubber and web	b
t	t ale, lat er, lett er, receipt and hat	t
d	d rum, ado , ladder , odd and clad	d
k	k id, ink , cat , act , back , queen and exam	k
g	gh ost, get , begin , beggar , and leg	g
m	m ap, vamp , humming and jam	m
n	n ag, band , spanner and can	n
ng	singer , bring , linger and brink	ŋ
f	f ish, raft , baffle , half , chaff , roughage , cough , photo , graphite and graph	f
v	v an, pave , Slav and of	v
th	th ink, with out and bath	θ
dh	th ese, moth er and bathe	ð
s	s lide, gasp , messy , gas , guess , exit , city and lace	s
z	z oom, faze , guzzle , buzz , viz , phase and does	z
sh	sh ine, washing , lash , sugar , session and emotion	ʃ
j	m easure, beige , equation and azure	ʒ
h	h ot, Birmingham and whole	h
ch	loch	x
wh	wh ich, wh ite	ɹ
w	w ink, qu ick and aqua	w
y	y es, alliance .	j
l	l ike, balance , telling , bell and fool	l
r	r ap, bard , harrumph and star	r/r
tsh	ch in, batch es, nature and teach	tʃ
dj	g in, joke , Dj ango and jud ge	dʒ

Table 2 The most common vowel spelling conventions in English arranged by Scots accent sounds		
Dempster's shorthand	examples	IPA spelling
i	s it, b it, g ive, w ith, s ince and	ɪ

	<i>fish</i>	
uh	<i>above</i> and <i>runner</i> or any vowel	ə
u	<i>tonne, fun, just, young</i> and <i>world</i>	ʌ
ee	<i>be, feed</i> , and <i>beat</i>	i
ae	<i>late, wear, game, where, make, gain</i> , and <i>way</i>	e
eh	<i>bed, head, chest, were</i> and <i>said</i>	ɛ
ah	<i>bat, hang, had, yard, farm, aunt</i> and <i>half</i>	a
oo	<i>cool, foot, pull, do, Luke</i> and <i>loose</i>	ʊ
oa	<i>coat, both, old, bowl, soul</i> and <i>told</i>	o
aw or aa	<i>talk, what, dog, from, got, naught, saw</i> and <i>off</i>	ɔ
awy	<i>boy, toy, voice</i> and <i>boil</i>	ɔi
ow	<i>how, pound</i> and <i>down</i>	ʌʊ
yoo	<i>new, few</i> and <i>tube</i>	jʊ
ay	<i>shy, die, live, by, my</i> and <i>I</i>	ae
iy	<i>mice, blind, fight</i> and <i>find</i>	əi

Table 3

The most common vowel spelling conventions in Scots arranged by Scots accent sounds

Dempster's shorthand	examples	IPA spelling
i	<i>pit, guid, an the</i>	ɪ
uh	<i>afore</i> an <i>scunner</i> or any vowel	ə
u	<i>tonne, fun, full, haes, an young</i>	ʌ
ee	<i>be, scheme, feed, heid, grieve, guid, feart</i> , an <i>deave</i>	i
ae	<i>nae, clae the, day, grey, maist, lave</i> , an <i>wi</i>	e
eh	<i>bed, merse, fairm, an heard</i>	ɛ
ah	<i>tap, an dance</i>	a

oo	<i>coo, hoose, an dour</i>	ʊ
oa	<i>tho, shop, brose, horse, an board</i>	o
aw or aa	<i>haar, haun, cause, faw, an twa</i>	ɔ or ɑ
ui	<i>guid, uise, buke, an neuk</i>	ø
awy or oay	<i>boy, toy, vyce an noise</i>	ɔi or oi
ow	<i>stow, an clout</i>	ʌʊ
yoo	<i>new, few, neuk, muir an tube</i>	jʊ
ay	<i>shy, buy, rive, die, guise, by, an I</i>	æ
iy	<i>pey, while, blind, fyle, an find</i>	əi