

A Tait Wanchancie

Teachers also seek help over the issue of orthography. Without a standard form they find it difficult to correct spelling...In my experience, pupils want to have rules of some kind, and many cannot 'see' how to spell a word they can say, even when they speak broad Scots. One pupil told me that he could not imagine how to spell a word because he 'didnae hae the picter'. Until the sight of Scots becomes more common, writing it will remain a struggle.

Liz Niven, in *The Scots Language - Its Place in Education*, p. 68.

I'm ane o thon sad fowk at's interestit in spellin. I canna richtly say hou this cam about - aiblins ane o my genes wis duntit wi a wilt atomic pairticle, or thare wis some awfu mishanter adae wi my chantie trainin. Whitiver, thare it is - cursed ti be a dreep foriver dichtit frae the nebs o thaim at likes ti leuk doun thair academic an leiterary noses at the fuil norie o makkin Scots speakers leiterate i thair ain tongue.

Cause that's whit spellin is about. Like the abuin comment frae Liz Niven shaws, we read bi sicht as weel as soond. Speir at maist Scots-speakin fowk an thay'll tell ye at thay finnd Scots - e'en thair ain dialect o't - haurd ti read an write. The idea at Scots disna need spellin guidelines micht seem ti be leiberal, but in fact it's elitist, cause it twines Scots-speakin fowk o leiteracy i thair ain langage. It micht be aaricht for thaim at uises English for maist aathing an likes ti play thairsels wi Scots whiles, but it dis naething for the lounie at haedna the pictur.

I gat involved in the Scots spellin comatee cause I haed nae mair wit nor write John Law a letter giein my ain consaits about it. I thocht at, wi the prospect o the factions in Scots spellin - siclike as RWS (Recommendations for Writers in Scots), Scotscrieve an the SNDA - comin til a greement on the diaphonemic foond suggestit bi Dr Caroline Macafee, at it wis at laest worth a shottie. As we ken this didna happen, cause the representatives o aa thae three propones haes disassociatit thairsels wi the Report. Nanetheless, I wad haud at the Report pits forrit a maistly mensefu an workable approach ti Scots spellin at can be biggit on, gin the will exists ti dae't.

Coorse, the'r details in the Report - speecially the wordleet - at I dinna gree wi aither, but I dinna think thay'r that important. (It disna mak sense ti me oniewey ti argue frae parteiculars, the wey at David Purves threips for **sk-** an **kk** on the foond o antrin orra maks like *makkin*, *takkin* an *skull*, *skulk*.) Mair important is the underlyin principles. Ane o the problems wi Scots spellin recommends haes been at thay hae ower aften been foondit on unexamined presuppseitions.

'Consistency' is ane o thon words at ye aften come ower in speak about Scots spellin, but it's niver made clear juist whit this means. At ae level (a) consistency coud juist mean aye spellin ae word ae wey - sae it wadna maiter gin ye spelt *fish* as *ghoti* an *dish* as *dish* as lang's ye aye spelt thaim like that.

At anither level (b), it micht mean haein juist ae soond ti ilka spellin - sae, for example, **ou** wad only represent the ‘oo’ soond, niver the ‘ow’ soond. Again (c), it micht mean juist haein ae spellin for ilka soond - sae ye wad hae, say, juist **ei** for the ‘ee’ soond - niver **ee**, **ie**, **i** or **y**. (Merk at ye can hae (b) athoot (c) - sae ye coud hae aa three o **ei**, **ie** an **ee** staundin for the ‘ee’ soond, but niver for onie ithere soond.) Mairatower (d), ye coud hae etymological consistency, like spellin ‘spirit’ an ‘consistent’ - or ‘speirit’ an ‘conseistent’ - raither nor my pronunciations o ‘speirit’ an ‘consistent’; or (e) morphological consistency, like haudin wi the spellin **o** - ‘the back o Bennachie’ - e’en tho the word micht be sayed ‘a’ or ‘ay’ in different airts an circumstances. Ti speak about consistency disna mean muckle except ye’v defined it first.

The tradeition o spellin representit bi RWS claims ti be mair consistent nor English spellin. But RWS only maks recommends for speceifically Scots words an forms. The effect o this is ti add a hail dose o un-English-like spellins - like **kk** an final **-il** - ti the existin English anes, like **ck** an **-le**. This maks the spellin o Scots as a hail less, no mair, consistent (at level (b) abuin) nor English, cause it’s uisin mair weys o spellin the same soonds.

I haena the scowth here ti gang inti aa the raesons - baith philosophical an practical - whit wey it’s daft ti sinder the ‘English’ pairt o the Scots vocabular - like *waiter*, *scarf*, *funny* an *buckle* - frae the ‘Scots’ pairt - like *maiter*, *scart*, *canny* an *muckle* - an spell thaim different weys. For ae thing, it haes nae etymological foond - Derrick McLure explains this better nor I coud in pp 16-18 o *The Scots Language - its Place in Education*. For anither, it maks spellin bi analogy unpossible - *waiter* but *maitter*; *cannie* but *funny*; *mukkil* but *buckle*; *skart* but *scarf*; an for anither it defines Scots as whit disna happen ti be shared wi English. It’s byordinar at David Purves, at is gleg ti dismiss mere conventions like ineitial **se-** an dooble **aa** as parochial, explicitly defines Scots as whit isna English - ‘in a sense it exists, onlie in sae ferr as it is different frae the Inglish.’ Thare coud hardly be a mair parochial statement nor this, an ti some extent this norie defines the entire RWS approach ti spellin, an the practical problems at kythes wi it.

Aatho the SNDA evites the warst consequences o pairs like *mukkil* an *buckle* bi uisin English-type consonant spellin conventions (like the Report recommends asweel), thay faa intil a puckle heterogeneities o thair ain. Spellins like *seeck*, *jaicket* an *maitter* (creatit bi juist alterin the vowels i the English spellin o the words *ad hoc*, athoot takkin tent o the fact at in English spellin itsel single-letter vowels is forordinar follaed bi dooble-letter consonants an *vice versa*) clecks types o spellins at kythes naither in English (*waiter*, *seek*) nor ithere Scots spellin (*glakit*, *reek/reik*). Sae again, we get a Scots spellin at’s mair inconsistent - except bi the *dish/ghoti* principle - nor the notoriously inconsistent English.

In my opeinion, onie ettle ti reform Scots spellin haes ti recognise at laest three kynds: (1) phonological an diaphonological spellins - like *spuin*, *glakit* - at represents the underlyin soonds (phonemes an diaphonemes) an

brigs dialects whaur possible; (2) morphological spellins o frequent words like *o*, *thaim*, - at haes unemphatic an regional variations like ‘ay’ an ‘thum’ - plus endins like **-na** an **-fu** an aiblins compounds o ither words like *forby* an *maybe*; an (3) etymological maks like *nation*, *pneumatic* an *guide*, asweel as the likes o the **aa** endin (shawin whaur Scots, no juist English, oreiginally haed a final **-l**.) Aa thae principles is tradeitional in Scots spellin, an the Spellin Report gaed some wey along the gate o recognisin an inhaudin thaim; but it coud gang faurer, speccially in the word leet.

Anither word at’s whiles lowsely uised is ‘soond’ (I’v duin it a puckle times abuin!). As Caroline Macafee richtly pynts oot, Scots spellin is ‘no juist a maitter o findin ae spellin for ae soond, sin mony gaitherins o wirds differ frae dialeck tae dialeck in whit soond they tak’ an thairfor ‘whit was socht was no juist a phonemic spellin solution bit whit dialectologists cry a ‘diaphonemic’ ane, subsumin the variation at exists amang the dialecks.’

The thinkin ahint diaphonology is exponed i the Report, section D12, anent the **ui**, **eu** an **u-e** maks, as representin spellins at can be pronounced wi dialect variants - e.g. for **ui**, ‘ee’ i the North East, ‘ai’ (lang) an ‘i’ (short) in Central type dialects; an ‘ö’ or ‘ü’ in some conservative dialects. The dialect correspondences is aa but regular, an, gin the **ui** spellin wis allocate wi this in mynd, aabodie wad can pronounce it thair ain wey. David Purves, houaniver, disna haud wi this - as he says about North East Scots: ‘It isna mensefu ti try ti represent the soun of the modified ‘o’ vowel in this leid wi the ‘ui’ digraph, as in *abuin*, *muin*. Readers haes a richt ti jalouse hou the Buchan leid is pronounced.’

The question at comes ti mynd is: Whit wey than dis Buchan readers no hae a richt ti ken hou Central dialects is pronounced? Shoud Central writers no write ‘flair’ an ‘gid’ - as thay whiles div - raither nor ‘fluir’ an ‘guid’? This means at the **ui** spellin is bein identifeed wi its pronunciation in Central dialects: in ither words, Nor’ East speak is bein regairded as a ‘dialect’ - wi orra pronunciations at haes ti be pyntit oot ti ither Scots speakers - but the Central dialects isna. No takkin tent o the diaphonemic principle implies standardisation o langage an pronunciation i the airt o ae dialect - a thing at the’r naither scowth nor need for in Scots. Ane o the advantages o a diaphonemic approach is at it can pairtly evite ither questions o langage standardisation while still giein a reasonably regular wey o spellin at can brig the sindrie dialects - includin the North East anes.

The SNDA dis muckle the same. In thair description o the **ui** spellin in the innin ti the Scots School Dictionary, thay richtly pynt oot at **ui** varies wi the dialect, an thay gie the ‘ö’ soonds at ye get in e.g. Shetland, Orkney, Angus an Sooth Scots, an the ‘ai’ an ‘i’ pronunciations at ye get in Central dialects. But than thay say:

‘in the Northern mainland dialects this sound does not occur; **-ee-** is used instead, as in **beet** for ‘boot’.

But the **ui** phoneme nae mair kythes as a sindrie soond in Central Scots dialects - whaur it merges wi 'ai' (lang) an 'i' (short) - nor it dis in North East anes, whaur it merges wi 'ee'. The effect o sayin at **ui** 'is pronounced' a certain wey in Central Scots dialects but 'does not occur' in Northern Mainland anes is ti imply at the **ui** spellin can be identifeed wi the 'i' an 'ai' soonds at it haes merged wi in Central dialects, but no wi the Northern 'ee' soond. Sae **ui** is perceived as a 'sound' - the Central dialect soond - raither nor the historical phoneme ahint it. This haes aa the affcomes at I'v areddies sayed abuin; the'r nae linguistic justification for't; an it blauds the underlyin identity o the dialects.

This is no ti say at North East writers is suddentlie gaun ti stert uisin **ui** in aa thir words - like *spuin* an *fluir* - at thay pronounce wi an 'ee' soond. The important pynt is at, gin thay kent at in thair dialect written **ui** is pronounced 'ee', thay shoud can read ither written Scots wi thair ain pronunciation This can only happen gin **ui** is richt allocate - ti words like *puir* an *tuim* at is sayed 'ee' i the NE, an no ti anes like *wid*, *fit*, an *beuk*, at's no. But thaim at disassociatit thairsels wi the report didna seem ti think at serrin the by-leids in this wey wis important. The effect is ti represent North East Scots as a teuchter variation - a centralised approach at Scots as a hail canna afford.

Houaniver, gin ye read the warks o writers like Sheena Blackhall ye'll areddies finnd historical spellins like *buit* an *guid* (sayed 'beet', 'gweed') alangside mair phonetic anes like *abeen* an *breem*. I jalouse at the better kent a word is in Scots writin, the mair likely North East writers is ti uise a historical raither nor a phonetic spellin for't; an gin written Scots wi diaphonemically allocate **ui** spellins wis better kent - e.g. bi bein teacht i the schuils - this tendency wad nae dout increase. Coorse the ir dialect differs at canna be serred bi diaphonology - North East *nae* for *no* ithergaits is the maist obvious - an the'r nae raeson whit wey thae genuine variants shoud be regularised. Spellin guidelines is no the same thing as langage standardisation.

This leads on ti my ain main girns aboot the report as it staunds. I shoud emphasise at whan I say I'v uised the report recommends sin thay cam oot, I dinna juist mean bi this at I'v written a puckle creative screivins in thaim. Me an a curn ither Scots speakers uises written Scots daily day for e-mails an the like, an I'm no the only ane at haes fund difficulty wi the Report spellin o 'ee' soonds.

The warst practical problem is the spellin o final **-ie** or **-y**, in words like *funny* an *cannie*. This wis settelt on the (anti-) principle at unique Scots words, or anes altert frae English, shoud be spelt wi final **-ie** an anes shared wi English wi final **-y**. For ilkaday uiss - as forment the antrin poiem or siclike at ye can gang ower wi a smaa-teetht kame - this fause disteinction atween 'Scots' an 'English' vocabular is juist no workable. It shoud be aither **-ie** aaway - e.g. *funnie*, *cannie* - or (mair practical, in my opeinion) **-ie** for diminutives an **-y** aa ither wey - i.e. *mannie*, *funny*, *canny*.

No sae bad, but still no awfu guid, is the recommend ti uise **ei** as the default for internal ‘ee’ soonds (waur sin it only applies ti words at’s exclusively Scots.) But this begs the question o whit’s meant bi ‘soonds’ here, cause aa ‘ee’ soonds is no ‘ee’ soonds aawey! In modren Scots spellin tradeition - the ane at’s maistly reflectit in the recent SNDA dictionars - **ei** is maist kenspeckle in words like *breid*, *heid*, *deid*, at haes the historical diaphoneme at’s maistly spelt **ea** in English cognates, an at’s sayed ‘ee’ in some pairs o Scotland an ‘ai’ in ithers. Gin this diaphoneme wis sindert in spellin frae the ane in words like (as I wad spell thaim) *neep* an *spier* - at’s sayed ‘ee’ near aawey - this wad mean at fowk frae different airts coud pronounce words wi **ei** thair ain wey - e.g. aither ‘breed’ or ‘braid’ for *breid*.

The follaein spellins allous this:

1. **ei** an **ae** (or **ea**) for words sayed ‘ee’ some airts an ‘ai’ ithers - e.g. *breid*, *heid*, *deid*, *deif*, *deive* an *threip* or *thraep/threap* (**ei** maistly for words sayed ‘e’ in English) an *aet/eat*, *baet/beat*, *maet/meat* etc (**ae** or **ea** maistly for anes sayed ‘ee’ in English.) Alternative-like, **ei** for this hail class o words - *eit*, *beit*, *meit*, etc - tho this aiblins disna faa sae weel inti the tradeitions o modren Scots spellin.

2. **ee** an **ie** for words sayed ‘ee’ aawey - *reek*, *neep*, *leet*, *wee*, *dree*, etc - wi **ie** maistly afore **f**, **v**, **l(d)**, **ch** an whiles **r** - *grief* (ay, that’s a Scots word tae!), *lief*, *grieve* (baith senses), *chiel*, *field*, *bield*, *scrieve*, *driech*, *whiech*, *spier*.

Thir rules o thoom haes the scowth ti serr aa dialects wi the same or gey similar spellins, while bein weel athin the boonds o fameiliarity an allouin maist words ti be spelt bi analogy wi ither. Houaniver, as David Purves’s comments on **ui** shaws, the RWS tradeition is apparently no muckle interestit in briggin dialects thon wey, an the SNDA haes made it clear eneuch (or sae I’m telt) at thay’ll haud wi thair *ad hoc* approach ti spellin, at involves spellin *heid* an *breid* wi **ei** but *deef* wi **ee**, wi’oot onie tent taen o the fact at thay belang the same historical, an sae diaphonemic, category.

Ane o the problems wi the Report as it staunds is at it’s no fairly clear whit its ettle is. Aiblins the warst miskennin about Scots orthography is at it’s first an foremaist for leiterary screivers. But this is the hindmaist thing it’s for. Writers can, an will, please thairsels; an thaim at reads the kynd o things at’s written bi Leonard, Welsh an Kelman - or, on the ither haund, MacDiarmid or Sydney Goodsir Smith - will read thaim oniewey. But, like onie English teacher will tell ye, the feck o fowk disna read muckle, an the feck o thaim at dis disna read thon kynd o things. Caroline Macafee’s *Lea the Leid Alane* (I wad suggest the subtitle: *Ti Dee in Peace*) is a guid example o the conventional academic an leiterary uphaudin o the *status quo*. It mair or less assumes at Scots only haes or can hae a rôle in creative writin, an sin leiterary fashion is agin langage standardisation a Scots orthography is unpossible. But the’r a fause dichotomy here. It’s no true ava ti say, as Macafee dis, at acceptin a standard (whether spellin alane or wider langage standardisation disna maiter here)

wad mean giein up experimental writin. The acceptance o standard English disna scomfish experimental writin, sae whit wey shoud acceptance o a standard Scots? Gin I want ti write *jiwanni* instead o *dae ye want ti*, wha's gaun ti stop me? The pynt o a standard spellin is at it maks a leid easier ti read for thaim at wants ti be easy read. The want o a standard spellin for Scots means at, gin ye want ti be easy read, ye maun write in English; an Scots is only written bi thaim at's no muckle carin about bein easy read, cause, like Leonard *et al*, thay'r appealin maistly til a fashionable leiterary readership. A standard spellin wadna scomfish experimental writin ava; the want o a standard spellin scomfishes about aa ither thing.

The Report coud hae been mair focused in whit it wis etlin ti dae. In my opeinion, this wad hae meant pittin oot shorter an haundier guidelines for spellin on the foond o the Report (the Report, as a report, is faur ower lang an detailed for fowk ti lairn spellin frae) alang wi illustrative texts an the like. The'r nae raeson whit wey this shoudna be duin yet, as pairt o a ongaun process. The emphasis shoud be first an foremaist on the principles ahint spellin, an syne on guidelines derived frae thaim - on reddin up an fillin slaps in the SNDA-type spellins - an less on a alternative word leet. Asweel, the'r a tendency, here an thare, ti derive principles frae details rather nor vice versa - like final **-ie** frae a preference for *onie* an *monie*.

Sae my girns is no juist about things I dinna happen ti like - thay'r maistly about whaur the Report disna haud wi its ain principles o serrin dialects as muckle as possible, an spellin the hail o Scots as a single leid. Houaniver, thir girns is no eneuch ti gar me lowp aff the dyke cause the'r a wee bittie sharn on it an land i the byre midden syne. I aye thocht on the Report as a set o principles rather nor o rules ti be folloed ti the letter, an I still think the feck o the recommends (apairt frae the spellin o 'ee' soonds) is workable an wad hae the potential ti redd up maist o the raivelment in Scots spellin. The recommends ti uise English-type consonant spellins (like the SNDA maistly dis) alane redds up hauf the heterogeneity creatit - completely unnecessarily - bi the RWS recommend ti uise **kk**, **-il** an siclike, an is a step forrit, no backlins; an the emphasis on diaphonemic uiss o **ui** wad redd up orra groups o words at ye get in the recent SNDA dictionaries, like *yiss* (n), *yaise* (v), *uisless*, *yuisfae*, *usual* - twa Central dialect spellins; twa diaphonemic **ui** anes (ane wi ineitial **y-** an ane athoot); an ae English ane, wi fower different spellins o the ae underlyin diaphoneme (no coontin the North East anes spelt wi **ee**). The'r nae raeson, ither nor sindrie ideological thrawnnesses, whit wey the tradeitions o modren Scots spellin mentioned bi Caroline Macafee shoudna be combined wi a mensefu diaphonological approach. But naither the SNDA nor supporters o RWS is apparently interestit in redd-ups, principles or consensus; an maist leiterary an academic types regairds spellin recommends as the prerogative o gypes an gowks. As I've funnd oot frae sindrie comments I've haurd sin the Report wis feinisht (some frae fowk at didna ken I'd haen adae wi't), bangin yer heid or it's level - as Caroline Macafee allous - winna hinder ye ti be lockit awa in Scotland.

Cause the leiterary fashion for ‘voices’ haes it’s ain wee jobbie set aside for Scots. As James Robertson says in his introduction til *A Tongue in Yer Heid*, Scots canna hae a standard spellin cause that wad blaud its ‘less-than-respectable status’. It wadna dae ti hae it chyngin oot o its orra bitties o clout an gaun ti onie midnicht sprees amang the orthographic an gremmatical uppities, wad it, nou? Thae preivileges haes ti be keepit for standard English, sae it can be uised ti ruise the doun-toun strynds o Scottie Prattle an fleir at thaim at wad try ti gie her daicent claes like onie ither leid haes.

Sae whit about the picturless loun, an the fact at maist Scots speakers is illeiterate in thair ain tongue? Mysel, I hae nae dout ava at naething signeificant can be duin about Scots except it haes a reasonably regular spellin, foondit on diaphonemic principles, at speakers o aa the Mainland Scots dialects can identifee wi. The’r nae wey at eneuch parents is gaun ti see the value o haundin on Scots ti thair bairns, or at government is gaun ti tak it seriously, except it haes the potential for status at comes wi haein sic a written form. The idea at this wad kill aff local dialects, as gin no haein a standard Scots spellin wad save thaim, is rideiculous - thay’r bein killt aff bi English areddies. Whaur wad Faroese an Catalan be gin Hammershaimb an Fabro haedna gien thaim workin orthographies? Thay didna stert frae the dominant poseition at Caroline Macafee pents for standard English. But this is Scotland, whaur the very pynt o Scots is at it maunna be taen ower serious-like, except wir neibors, leiterary freinds or academic colleagues thinks we’r heid-bangers.

I winna try ti spae whether written Scots will iver be made uiser-freindly for thaim at speaks it or wants ti lairn it, or keepit in a state o terminal raivelment for thaim at likes ti play thairsels wi’t or ti shaw the orra wey at ither fowk speaks. Eneuch ti pynt oot at it’s aesier ti mak a bourach nor redd it up, specially whan ye dinna bide in it yersel. Houaniver, for want o a conclusion ti this airgument an epitaph micht be nott:

*Aince thare wis a tongue caad Scots,
Ti this its sad demise wis wytit:
At thaim at wrat it coudna speak it,
An thaim at spak it coudna write it.*

John M. Tait