

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 27 (English Language and Literature)		
Title of case study: Restorative Linguistic Practice: maintaining and promoting the native dialect of North-East Scotland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Robert McColl Millar	Professor	1996 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>In the sixteenth century, Scots was the dominant language of Scotland. Despite centuries of Anglicisation, aided by education policy, over 1,500,000 speakers remain, many in North-East Scotland. University of Aberdeen research, developed from methodological engagement with local communities, has focused on the North-East dialect (Doric), its history, nature and the restoration of its centrality to the region. The research has influenced the development of education, both formal and cultural, on and in Doric; influenced decision-making on language at regional and national levels; and inspired documentary film production, which promotes and celebrates Doric producing commentary across traditional and digital media.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Modern Age has not been kind to languages whose speakers do not have immediate access to economic, social and political power. Scots, one of the native vernaculars of Scotland and in the Early Modern period the dominant language of the country, has been essentially <i>dialectalised</i> under Standard English, but continues to have considerable speaker numbers. In the North-East of Scotland, almost 160,000 speakers of Scots were recorded, according to the 2011 census, from a population of a little under 350,000. But even here, generations of, at best, official neglect have led to even 'good' native speakers evincing prejudice against their own language, often choosing not to pass this heritage on to their children.</p> <p>The research carried out by Robert McColl Millar has helped to analyse and illustrate the dialects of the North-East as a whole, employing theory and methodology derived from dialectology, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics. His first study represented a major survey of everyday use of Scots, particularly in dialects local to the North of Scotland, informed by interactions with local communities and an historical appreciation of change and language retention in the dialect area [1]. Not only did the survey provide a modern and comprehensive mapping of the various dialects in use north of the River Tay, it also signalled a change to the traditional methodology used to study Doric (the local name for the Scots dialect of North-East Scotland), which had previously focused on abstract phonological issues, or the literature of the region, rather than on how it was actually used within everyday situations.</p> <p>This work helped Millar attract significant AHRC funding, enabling extensive fieldwork to be carried out in coastal communities around Scotland's North-East, on the retention and attrition of local vocabulary [P1; 2]. This research provided, for the first time in nearly a century, a clear picture of language use in those areas, accessible to interested laypeople while at the same time increasing our understanding of how lexical variation and change occurs.</p>		

The methodologies developed in both of these projects were then employed in relation to the Scots dialects spoken across Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The approach included a linguistic overview of the key regional varieties of the language [3]. The resulting work provided the first detailed analysis of all Scots varieties. But the focus of much of this work is primarily on those areas where Scots is a major part of community life. This is most markedly true with Doric and the North-East.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] **Millar, Robert McColl**. 2007. *Northern and Insular Scots*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[2] **Millar, Robert McColl**, William Barras and Lisa Marie Bonnici. 2014. *Lexical variation and Attrition in the Language of the Scottish fishing communities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[3] **Millar, Robert McColl**. 2018. *Modern Scots: An Analytical Survey*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[P1] The underpinning research was supported by peer-reviewed funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the project 'Fisher Speak: Variation and Change in the Lexis of Scottish Fishing Communities' (2007-2011; GBP254,877). Principal Investigator, Robert McColl Millar

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Millar's research has informed the development of educational materials, from pre-school to university; enhanced knowledge and understanding of Scots within local communities; influenced decision-making in relation to the recognition of Scots as a language to be supported; and inspired the creation of documentaries promoting and celebrating Scots.

Informing the development of educational materials, from pre-school to university courses

Banff Academy, aided by the Elphinstone Institute, the University of Aberdeen's local cultural and linguistic promotion unit, have used Millar's research to develop Scots materials for secondary school. The school was felt appropriate for the experiment because Doric remains the primary community spoken variety. The teacher central to these changes, Jamie Fairbairn, remarks that *Modern Scots* [3] is essential for teaching; Millar's talks and the documentary discussed below enhance his understanding of local language [S1]. *Modern Scots* informed a touring exhibition, 'Fair Trickit', created by Banff teachers and pupils, which showcased their Doric knowledge and use. Around 800 people across Scotland viewed the exhibition in autumn 2019 [S7]. The Elphinstone Institute's *Scots Language Pathway* (2018-; supported by a British Educational Research Association GBP10,000 grant) was strongly influenced by these developments. Trialled in four schools, these plans are available for general use; its site has had 1040 visitors.

Millar's work underlay a workshop on Doric for secondary schoolchildren in Forres (2019), organised by Moray Council and the Elphinstone Institute. It brought together experts on the language with children from a Doric heartland, foregrounding something central to their lives [S3].

Educational influence is apparent beyond the North-East. Education Scotland's Scots Language Co-ordinator, Bruce Eunson, commented: '*Modern Scots* ... [is] a key text for anyone working with, or interested in, the Scots language today' [S6]. Eunson used that book in a Level 1 Scots Language and Culture course for the Open University (2019-). In 2020, 78 students completed the course; over 10,000 people visited the site, with Eunson noting that 'The course has generated huge interest and has been one of the most-visited courses on the OpenLearn Create platform to date!' [S6].

Enhancing the knowledge and understanding of Scots within local communities

Learning support went well beyond formal teaching. Using *Modern Scots* [3], the Elphinstone Institute established an evening class, delivered first in 2019 (45 participants), improving confidence in reading and writing Doric. The *Doric Dabblers* (2019-), a smaller group from across the region, produce educational materials for younger children, informed by [3] and the Elphinstone Institute materials. Central to these initiatives was Jackie Ross, who also led a Doric course in Huntly (2019) [S4], encouraging active use. A Turkish participant wrote: 'Thank ye fer keeping the language alive' [S5].

The Elphinstone Institute's Hame—Home—Dom project (2018-), informed by Millar's work, introduces newcomers to local language and culture. Its online Doric course has proved attractive for people around the world (often of North-East parentage), providing confidence in language use [S8].

Influencing decision making regarding support for the Scots Language

Millar was appointed academic advisor to the North-East Scots Language Board, established in 2018 and bringing together local authorities' staff responsible for cultural matters and community representatives to develop policy for maintaining and promoting Doric. Drawing on Millar's expertise, the Board influenced the implementation of Aberdeenshire Council's Doric Language Policy (2017, [S2]). This connection inspired council support for the documentary *North-East Scots* (2019), discussed below, along with the policy's use in schools and libraries. The Board's importance can also be seen in the employment of Doric by the NHS, including its use in recorded spoken instructions given to patients inside MRI scanners in local hospitals.

Nationally, Millar's research has informed growing support for the establishment of a Scots Language Board and a new Scots Language Policy, both under consideration by the Scottish Government. At Westminster, MPs called for action to safeguard Scots in broadcasting and education (13 May 2020) [S9]. The motion references *Rebel Tongue*, discussed below. Finally, Millar's research underpinned a European Parliament briefing document on Scots (published 13 August 2019) [S9].

Inspiring the creation of TV and documentary productions promoting Scots

Millar's research has inspired several creative outputs. He features prominently in *North-East Scots – The Doric Language* (a film developed by the Elphinstone Institute, 2019), employed in schools and by community groups. The documentary was supported by Aberdeenshire Council (GBP5,000). It has been viewed over 63,000 times online, liked 427 and shared 546 times. It was premiered, with a panel discussion, at the University of Aberdeen's MayFest (2019) to an audience of around 100 [S10].

Millar's research also inspired *Rebel Tongue* (a documentary produced by, and aired on, BBC Scotland, 2020), presenting the history and present use of Scots [S10]. It was commissioned by the channel because of general interest in the subject matter in Scotland and the UK's obligation to support and promote Scots following its adoption of the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (2001).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] E-mail from Teacher at Banff Academy, responsible for the development of Scottish Studies (with heavy emphasis on Scots language) in the school

[S2] E-mail from Aberdeenshire Council

[S3] Commentary on a workshop at Forres from Moray Council

[S4] Commentary in various forms from a workshop in Huntly and from its organiser

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[S5] Commentary on the *Doric Dabblers*

[S6] Comments from Education Scotland's Scots Language Co-ordinator and creator of the Scots course at the Open University

[S7] Material from the *Fair Trickit* initiative

[S8] Material from the Hame-Home-Dom initiative

[S9 (group)] Early Day Motion record: <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/56951/rebel-tongue>; European Parliament briefing document on Scots Language: <https://bit.ly/2lQw1Py>

[S10 (group)] *North-East Scots – The Doric Language* documentary (video and transcript); details of the BBC *Rebel Tongue* documentary