

BOOK REVIEW - Luath Scots Language Learner: An introduction to Contemporary Spoken Scots

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L. Colin Wilson, *Luath Scots Language Learner: An introduction to contemporary spoken Scots*. Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2002. vi + 346 pp.

Scotland is, and has always been, a multicultural and multilingual country. The linguistic situation in modern Scotland is of utmost interest to sociolinguistic research. There are two main views on the number of languages spoken in contemporary Scotland. According to, e.g., Tom McArthur (1979: 59), Scotland is bilingual between Scots English (further divided into Scots and Scottish Standard English) and Gaelic, the Celtic tongue brought in the first centuries AD from Ireland, spoken now, alongside English, in the remote parts of the Highlands and Islands. Other studies, however, e.g. Withers (1984), assume that modern Scotland has three languages: English (or rather the Scottish dialects of English), the official speech of the country, Gaelic, and Scots, the historic speech of the Lowlands, derived principally from the Northumbrian dialect of Old English. Today different varieties of Scots are spoken by a considerable proportion of the population from Shetland in the North, to the Borders and the South-West.

Recent interest in history, the status and character of Scots has resulted in serious lexicographic achievements (e.g. the completion, after seventy years, of the Dictionary of the *Older Scottish Tongue*, OUP 2002), important studies on Scots language and literature in Scots (e.g. J. Derrick McClure 1995, 2002), a study on translation into Scots (Corbett 1999), and most recently, the publication of the Colin Wilson's *Luath Scots Language Learner*.

Wilson's book is a functional course for learners with no or very little previous knowledge of Scots: "this is a book written for people to learn to speak Scots" (p.4). The author concentrates on the variety of language spoken in north-eastern Scotland, also known as 'Doric'. The book opens with an introductory section which provides basic information on the history and present day of Scots, and some practical notes on spelling and pronunciation. The course is divided into 25 units, followed by a key to the exercises, a concise English-Scots vocabulary, and 3 appendixes with additional grammatical information (verb tables; emphatic forms of possessive adjectives, pronouns, conjunctions and prepositions; double modals and vowel harmony). The units are organized in a similar way and include dialogues (recorded on the accompanying CDs), exercises, notes on vocabulary and grammar, and a highly innovative section *Aboot Scotland* ('about Scotland'). The sections on vocabulary and grammar highlight the differences between Scots and English, and comment on the principal differences among dialects of Scots. The *Scots language* presented by Wilson, though confined almost completely to colloquial and informal contexts, is full of grammatical intricacies and lexical nuances. The *Aboot Scotland* sections provide information on topics as diverse as place-names of Scotland, Scottish industry, education, sports, newspapers and media, literary magazines, religion, and many more. Some

lessons include a section *Guid tae Ken* ('good to know') devoted to thematic vocabulary such as medicine or weather. Additionally, Unit 18 lists the most important web-sites in or about Scots (pp. 212-213).

Scots Language Learner is far more than a typical language coursebook. The book is rich in linguistic, historical, social and cultural information and as such can be recommended not only as an excellent language course, but also as a highly creative introduction to Scotland and Scottish culture. Luath's Scots Language Learner is a very important publication, not only for learners of Scots (in Scotland and overseas), but also for existing Scots speakers as "an assertion of their own tongue's social legitimacy" (p. 1).

References

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