The Scottish Enlightenment

Scotticisms

Source 1: A list of Scotticisms by David Hume, first printed 1752

Here are a few of Hume’s ‘Scotticisms’, below, taken from Source 1 ‘A list of Scotticisms by David Hume, first printed 1752’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCOTCH</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mind it</td>
<td>remember it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anent</td>
<td>with regard to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cry him</td>
<td>call him</td>
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**mind it**
The word ‘mind’ also appears in the poet James Beattie's book Scotticisms, arranged in Alphabetical Order, Designed to correct Improprieties of Speech and Writing which was published slightly later than Hume’s now famous list, in 1787. The word ‘mind’ is a word common to many Scots speakers, meaning to remember or remind. Another common Scots expression is the word ‘mindin’, which is a small inexpensive gift to acknowledge that the gift-giver is thinking of, or ‘mindin’, the recipient.

**anent**
The word ‘anent’ is perhaps less common to speakers of modern Scots. Hume translates this word to ‘with regard to’ but it may be simpler to think of the word anent as meaning ‘about’, e.g. ‘She wid become best kent fir her Scots poems anent the First World War...’ which, translated into English, means ‘She would become best known for her Scots poems about the First World War’. 
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cry him

The verb ‘cry’ is reasonably common in modern Scots speakers. The same translation that Hume provides, ‘call’, is still accurate today. The verb ‘cry’ works in the same contexts as the word ‘call’, e.g. to summon someone, to name someone, to visit or ‘call in’ on someone. Here’s an example of it being used to mean ‘summon’: ‘The Holy Faither then cries his offices tae council...’.

Discussion points

1. Why are some of these Scots words or expressions popular in modern usage whereas some are more unusual?
2. Why might attitudes like Hume’s still exist today?
3. Hume’s advice leads us to consider the difference between some people’s perceptions of what is acceptable in speech, compared to what some deem to be acceptable in writing.
   a. Is Scots more likely to be used in writing or in speech? Why?
   b. Are there circumstances in which you would use Scots yourself?
   c. Are there circumstances where you would deliberately avoid using Scots?

¹ Wee Windaes, Mary Szymon (1863-1938), https://wee-windaes.nls.uk/mary-szymon/
Source 2: Lectures on the art of speaking English, 1761

In the first advertisement quoted, we are advised that Sheridan's lectures will focus on the following:

ARTICULATION, PRONUNCIATION, ACCENT, EMPHASIS, PAUSES or STOPS, PITCH and MANAGEMENT of the VOICE, TONES, and GESTURE.

and that:

...he will point out the true source of the difficulty (at present thought to be insuperable) which all foreigners, as well as natives of different kingdoms and counties, that speak a corrupt dialect of English, find in the attainment of the right pronunciation of that tongue.

These days, despite Scots having an official status as a language (as reflected by the European charter of Regional and Minority Languages as well as the inclusion of Scots in the 2011 census) some people may still perceive Scots to be a dialect – or maybe even a ‘corrupt dialect’. 'mindin', the recipient.

Discussion points
1. The advertisement implies that, to be a good public speaker, you must have a particular accent and must pronounce words in a particular way. Does this attitude exist today?
2. The advertisement also suggests that people who speak ‘a corrupt dialect of English’ have previously found it ‘insuperable’, which means that they found it impossible to overcome.
   a. Why did some people aim to eradicate evidence of their own regional dialect?
   b. If people attempted to hide their regional dialect, why might this have been difficult?
   c. Discuss the moral and/or cultural reasons why these lectures would be censured if they were to be advertised today.
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Source 4: Observations on the Scottish dialect by Sir John Sinclair, 1782

In this source, Sinclair asserts that:

Whilst so striking a difference as that of language exists between England and Scotland, antient local prejudices will not be removed; nor can it be expected that two neighbouring nations, which, though now so happily united, were for many ages at variance with each other, will be able to consider themselves as the same people.

This statement provokes thought about language and its importance in terms of personal and national identity.

Discussion points
1. Scotland has three indigenous languages – Scots, Scots Gaelic, and English. Does speaking one or more of these languages affect your personal identity?
2. In terms of National identity, is it important that all of Scotland’s indigenous languages are acknowledged and respected?
3. Consider Sinclair’s statement that English and Scottish people will not be able to ‘consider themselves as the same people’ if they speak different languages.
   a. Is this the case? Can neighbouring nations who have cultural, economic, social or linguistic differences ever consider themselves ‘the same people’?
   b. Is it desirable for neighbouring nations with these differences to assimilate themselves with their neighbours?
   c. In what way are these ideas related to what is happening in politics now – that is, in terms of the stability of a United Kingdom?
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Source 6: The richness of the Scots language, 1792

In this source, Geddes laments on what he sees as missed potential. The word choice used in the following quotation is particularly thought-provoking:

...if the Scots, remaining a separate nation, with a King and court residing among them, had continued to improve and embellish their own dialect, instead of servilely aping the English, they would at present be possessed of a language in many points superior to the English.

Discussion points

1. Thinking back to Sources 1 and 2, why might some Scots writers and speakers have been under pressure to imitate or 'ape' English writers and speakers?

2. This source leads us to think about the link between language and power. Geddes accuses Scots of 'servilely aping', inferring that Scottish people were eager to please their English counterparts.
   a. To what extent does power and money influence the growth of a language?
   b. How do we raise the status of a language?
   c. In which circumstances might the use of a regional or minority language be considered a rebellion against power or authority?

Final Points for Discussion

1. Are there writers who have common viewpoints on Scots? What are those viewpoints?

2. Think about the reasons behind Hume's publication of Scotticisms. How does that relate to perceptions of language today, and pressure to conform to a particular standard or 'norm'?

3. Are there other languages that face the same pressure as Scots? Why might some languages be more susceptible to this type of pressure than others?