

The Language of Lord Fife in Letters to George Grenville 1763 to 1769

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1 Introduction

English society in the 1760s put heavy linguistic demands on the native Scots speaker who had aspirations to play a part in the British establishment. Scotticisms, those ‘mistakes’ made by the Scot attempting Standard English, were to be eradicated, and pronunciation was to be polished. The polite doctrine of the age also required the use of ‘correct’ English, as codified in such seminal works as Johnson’s dictionary of 1755 and Lowth’s grammar of 1764. Many Scots responded to these linguistic requirements and made efforts to conform to the standard, as shown by the popularity of guidance in the ‘correct’ use of English in this period (Görlach 2001: 19 and Dossena 2005: 56-57). A number of Scots did find a place at the centre of the London elite, among them, James Duff, 2nd Earl Fife. This paper aims to determine the extent to which Lord Fife, a native Scots speaker whose written vernacular was heavily anglicised, further modified his language in communication with an Englishman at the heart of eighteenth century polite society.

Lord Fife was a wealthy northeast Scots landowner and Member of Parliament for Banff. His language in correspondence (from 1763 to 1789) with a fellow Scot, his estate factor, William Rose, has been analysed (Cruickshank 2011) for the use of the Scotticisms identified contemporaneously by Beattie (1779/1787) and Sinclair (1782). This analysis reveals that Fife avoided the use of about 80% of the Scotticisms identified by Beattie and Sinclair (Cruickshank 2011: 98-9). Fife’s use of Scotticisms varied according to the topic under discussion, and the location of the letter writing which correlated with the influence of surrounding social networks. While the investigation of the Fife-Rose corpus gave a very clear picture of Fife’s language with a fellow Scot, it revealed little about his willingness or ability to suppress his use of Scots in the more restrictive atmosphere of polite English society. This investigation uses Fife’s letters to George Grenville, who was Prime Minister from 1763 to 1765, to assess Fife’s command and use of ‘polite’ English. An initial brief quantitative analysis has been made of Fife’s language to identify specific texts to be examined, using a pragmatic

approach, to determine the motivation for Fife's language choice with Grenville. The following section introduces the correspondence before presenting the findings of the quantitative analysis.

2 The Fife-Grenville Correspondence

George Grenville came from a prominent English political family and was First Lord of the Treasury and Prime Minister from 1763 to 1765 (for further details, see Beckett and Thomas 2009 www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11489). Although Grenville was a commoner and inferior to Fife in financial terms, he was Fife's political superior and so had power of patronage over him. There is evidence that a favourable connection already existed between the two men, albeit perhaps only a political one; a letter from Lord Bute's¹ secretary to Fife states:

- (1) as he [Lord Bute] knew M^r Grenville's Friendship for you he did not doubt but you would find Him as well disposed to oblige you

MS 3175/M/K69 April 27th 1763²

There are 22 letters (4844 words in total) held in the British Library (MS57815 Vol XII) written from Fife to Grenville between October 1763 and July 1769. Fifteen were written from Scotland (mostly from Fife's main residence in Banff, and one from his shooting estate in the Cairngorms), with the rest from London, Paris, Bath and Bristol. The correspondence with Rose showed that Fife's Scots lexical usage increased in letters from Scotland (Cruickshank 2011: 185-6), but the sample here is too small to draw any conclusions about the influence of social networks on Fife's language with Grenville. Twelve of the letters were written when Grenville was prime minister and ten when he was effectively the leader of the opposition MPs and therefore in no position to control patronage. The layout of the letters are generally in accordance with instructions found in the letter writing manuals discussed by Sairio and Nevala (2013), that is, the text is well spaced and there are ample margins top and bottom. They contrast markedly with the letters to Rose which often started close to the top of the page and ended with increasingly smaller and cramped writing at the end. There is evidence (see MS 3175/33/2 Fife to Grenville 19th Feb 1768) that Fife wrote drafts of letters

¹ Lord Bute was the prime minister who preceded Grenville in the years 1762 to 1763.

² All MS 3175 and MS 2226 numbers refer to manuscripts held at University of Aberdeen Library Special Collections.

to Grenville and therefore there is little surprise at a lack of crossings out in the received correspondence.

The letters to Grenville must have made a pleasing impression initially, although there is a question regarding Fife's use of address. Every letter starts 'My Dear Sir' which would be acceptable when addressing a commoner, but in the years when Grenville was First Lord of the Treasury, according to *The Art of Letter-writing* (1762: 14), he would have been eligible for the address 'My Lord'. This transgression may have been a device by which Fife drew himself closer to his addressee by use of the less formal term; alternatively Fife may have been unaware of the convention.

Fife used a variety of opening and closing formulae; seven of the letters opened with the standard 'intention to write' formula of 'I had the Honor of your Letter last Post' (see Austin 2004 for further discussion of this formula) and 12 included compliments to Mrs. Grenville in the closing formulae. The closing subscriptions varied but generally started within the final body of the letter as recommended by the contemporary letter writing manuals (*The Art of Letter-writing* 1762: 17) and were along the lines of 'your devoted and most humble/faithful/oblig'd Servant'. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2003: 245-248) investigates forms of address and subscriptions in the grammarian Lowth's correspondence and demonstrates that there was pragmatic meaning associated with each salutation which encoded degrees of respect or affection. Likewise Lowth's subscriptions were not just conventionalised sign-offs, but a means by which he could encode stance. The varying subscriptions in the letters from Fife to Grenville may thus provide supporting evidence in the pragmatic analysis of the letters.

Within the body of the letters, Fife's punctuation could only be described as idiosyncratic, although employed less sparingly than with Rose, with whom Fife's style was more of a 'stream of consciousness' (Cruickshank 2011: 74). In the correspondence with Grenville, commas were used infrequently and the end of a sentence was signalled with < z > or < = >, although < = > could also be interpreted as a paragraph ending. Fife was inconsistent with his use of initial capitals for nouns, which was a feature *The Art of Letter-writing* (1762: 19) suggested was worth the 'Stress put upon the Author'.

Fife's language in his letters to Grenville is now analysed, first by quantitative methods, to assess if his writing was more or less 'correct' with Grenville than with Rose. As with the Fife-Rose corpus, the Grenville letters have been analysed for the Scotticisms that were identified by Sinclair (1782) and Beattie (1787). It is acknowledged that these works were published after

the letters were written, but both authors used Hume's 1752 list of Scotticisms as a base and there was contemporary recognition, not least by Hume himself, that Hume's list was far from complete. The topic of Scotticisms was well aired at the time of the letters to Grenville (see for instance the Scots Magazine Appendix 1760 (Vol xxii: 686-687) and Sheridan's lectures in London, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh on 'Elocution and the English Tongue', (reviewed in the Scots Magazine July 1761 (Vol xxiii: 389-390)).

3 Quantitative Analysis

Table 1 shows the distribution of Scotticisms in Fife's letters to George Grenville. There are 11 instances (six different types) of Scotticisms throughout the correspondence, giving a rate of one Scotticism per 440 words. This is almost four times less than the rate of one per 123 words in the Fife-Rose corpus. As noted, Fife's use of Scotticisms with Rose was primarily influenced by topic, with the greatest use in those concerned with the administration of Fife's business activities in Scotland. This was about twice the rate used by Fife to Rose in the topics of politics, society and electioneering, which were the general subjects of discussion in the Grenville letters. The reduced use of Scotticisms with Grenville can therefore in part be explained by the difference in subject material, but otherwise it may be concluded that, as expected, Fife did indeed employ more Standard English with a member of the London elite than he did with a fellow Scot.

Of the Scotticisms used, three are Scots lexical items; *affront*, *indiscretion* and *otherways*. All these words were current in English but the first two had a different semantic content ('insult' and 'uncivil' respectively), although arguably in the same semantic field. The citations for *otherways* listed in OED are not restricted to Scots writers but a note in the etymology states that *otherways* is 'in older Scots usage more common than *otherwise*' (www.oed.com/view/Entry/133239?redirectedFrom=otherways accessed 6 July 2105). The Scots element in the other Scotticisms used by Fife is morphosyntactic.

Date of Letter	Scotticism Used	English Equivalent
Oct 8th 1763	–	–
June 20th 1764	to affront stole (past participle)	to eclipse, get the better of anyone stolen
July 11th 1764	–	–
July 16th 1764	otherways ³	otherwise
Aug 2nd 1764	indiscretion	incivility
Sept 13th 1764	–	–
Oct 4th 1764	indiscretion	incivility
Nov 14th 1764	–	–
Dec 3rd 1764	–	–
Dec 6th 1764	–	–
Mar 23rd 1765	–	–
April 1st 1765	–	–
Nov 9th 1765⁴	–	–
May 1766	–	–
May 24th 1766	–	–
July 20th 1766	–	–
Sept 3rd 1766	wrote (past participle)	written
Oct 20th 1767	–	–
Nov 21st 1767	–	–
Feb 19th 1768	otherways	otherwise
Apr 18th 1768	notwithstanding of beat (past participle) the half otherways	notwithstanding beaten half otherwise
July 28th 1769	–	–

Table 1 – Scotticisms used in Fife’s correspondence with Grenville

³ There are 63 instances of *otherways* in the Fife-Rose corpus and one of ‘otherwise’.

⁴ There is second instance of the inverted auxiliary ‘do’ form the subjunctive in this letter (see Section 4 for discussion of first instance). This construction is not found in the Fife-Rose corpus.

The Scotticisms are discussed in more detail in Section 5 but first the pragmatic environment of the Scots language is established. Three of Fife's letters to Grenville will now be the subject of a qualitative analysis to determine Fife's temperament and intentions in his correspondence.

4 Pragmatic Analysis

The aim of this analysis is to reveal the pragmatic intent beyond the locutionary act of each letter to form a basis for the following discussion of why Fife did or did not use Scots and non-standard language with Grenville. The first letter received by Grenville (8th Oct 1763) is the first to be selected for analysis as an introduction to the correspondence. The two letters with the greatest number of Scotticisms (the letter of 11 July 1764 contains two Scotticisms and that of 18 April 1768 contains four) are also examined to reveal the environment in which Fife chose to use non-standard language.

The first letter in the Grenville correspondence from Fife shows the initial relationship between the two men and is a request by Fife to be excused parliamentary duties due to the death of the 1st Earl Fife on 30 September 1763; this letter is dated the following week. Fife must have been feeling the weight of responsibility at this point, not just politically but to his family. It could be speculated that as this is one of his first communications as an earl, he may have been conscious of his new status. The letter certainly has a very formal feel about it:

Duff-House Oct^r 8th
1763

My Dear Sir

I had the Honor to Receive your letter last Post, my Unfeignd Dutys for the King's Service makes me anxious to be in London before the meeting of Parliament_z— I believe I shall easily convince your Command on every Ocasion have a proper weight with me = The truth is by my Father's death I am throwen in to such a State, that it will be impossible for me to leave the Country befor Christ^{ms}_z My private interest should not detain me_z but there is are various Settlements, from which many Relations have claims, did I leave them unsettd all my Family must be in Confusion =

The Language of Lord Fife in Letters to George Grenville 1763 to 1769

May I beg you may be so very obliging as to take some opportunity of laying my Situation before His Majesty, as it would make me Unhappy to be Misrepresented when my heart is Dericted to his Service

I beg to offer M^{rs} Grenville my Respectful Compliments –

I have the Honor to be with the greatest Respect & Attachment

Your most Obedient
& very humble Servant
Fife

British Library MS57815 Vol XII ff 1-2

The overall impression with this letter is that Fife was making every effort to conform to the norms of politeness. Burke (2000) lists six features that characterised ‘civil discourse’; ‘avoidance of contradiction, accent, euphemism, compliments, forms of address, and a humiliating mode of speech to social superiors’ (2000: 34). Most of these features are found in this letter; (1) contradiction of Grenville’s wishes for Fife’s presence is mitigated by protestation of the opposite in ‘I believe I shall easily convince your Command on every Ocasion have a proper weight with me’; (2) there is no easily discernible trace of a Scotticism in the letter; (3) Fife’s delicate phrasing of ‘it would make me Unhappy to be Misrepresented’ downplays his anxiety about being criticised for his absence; (4) compliments are included; (5) the form of address is debatable because Fife should have used ‘My Lord’ to the First Lord of the Treasury, but there are appropriate opening and closing formulae; and (6) the humiliating mode of speech to a superior is clear in language such as ‘May I beg you may be so very obliging’. However, although all the ingredients are present for a polite letter, on closer inspection, Fife misses the mark slightly on several occasions, leaving a less favourable impression of his command of polite language.

The letter starts well with a polite opening and makes assurances of Fife’s sincere intentions. He lays the ground for the request that is to come by appealing directly to Grenville to understand that he is not about to make the request lightly. However, the meaning in the second ‘sentence’ is not clear initially as Fife has confusingly left the verb ‘convince’ without an object and omitted a relative clause marker. There is also a lack of concord with the use of third person plural ‘have’ in the second sentence, presumably because Fife views ‘your Command on every Occasion’ to be plural. Likewise, Fife does not resolve his problem with concord in the use of existential ‘there’ by leaving in both singular and plural variants; ‘but there is are various Settlements’. Fife finishes the paragraph by justifying his absence. He has

formulated an unusual construction of what appears to be a conditional with a periphrastic ‘do’ inversion in the protasis and the modal ‘must’ in the apodosis. This may have been a hypercorrection of the subjunctive form, which has been identified as a politeness marker in the eighteenth century (Auer 2006: 40-42). Finally, the clumsy double use of the ‘may’ modal in ‘May I beg you may’, while adding to the humiliating stance that Fife undoubtedly wanted to convey, edged polite humility towards fawning servility. Fitzmaurice (2002: 257) identified that the use of first person verbs such as *I hope/I beg/I wish* governing complement clauses with modals became conventionalised humiliating discourse markers in the eighteenth century, but Fife’s superfluous initial ‘may’ has produced another hypercorrection. Overall, the lack of correction, the hypercorrection and the poor handling of the polite form give a strong impression of linguistic insecurity.

The next letter from Fife is dated eight months later and there is no evidence of either linguistic insecurity or sycophancy. Fife was clearly enraged by the lack of consultation over the appointment of a significant post in his county.

My Dear Sir

Duff House June 20th
1764

I am Inform’d there is an Intention to move M^r Cockburn the present Sherriff of this County of Banff, to the County of Stirling, & to steal out a Commission appointing some other to succeed him_z with a full intention of effronting me, & hurting my Interest = It is a settl’d thing in all the Countys of Scotland, that the Members Recommend to Places that fall in the County, unless when the Member is in Opposition to Government, Concoidering the great Property I have in this County_z and that I am Return’d unanimously to Parl^l_z standing myself avowedly under your Protection, this would be so violent a Mortification that I could not live in the Country after it = I must therefore most anxiously Request_z that if M^r Cockburn the Sherriff is Remov’d_z M^r Keith Urquhart my Brother in Law who has been a Lawier ten years, may succeed him, he is a young Man of one of the best Familys in the Country, & every way proper for the office, – should a Commission be already stole out I hope it will be recal’d. I beg leave to offer my Respectful Compliments to M^{rs} Grenville = I have the Honor to be with Unfeignd Regard, Attachment

My Dear Sir
Your devoted & much
oblig’d
Fife

British Library MS57815 Vol XII ff 3-4

This letter stands in complete contrast with the first. In terms of eighteenth century politeness standards the opening would have been considered very vulgar. There is no reference to a previous incoming letter, or wishes for Grenville's good health, and Fife launches straight into the purpose of his letter. He begins with the use of the passive with the first person, placing himself as the main topic, thereby leaving Grenville in no doubt as to who is important in this letter. The immediate impression is that Fife is consumed with the event under discussion and his contempt for the actions being described is expressed with the use of the verb 'steal' to convey underhand manoeuvrings and is followed by an accusation of dishonourable intentions. This opening statement has no mitigating aspect; this is the voicing of an immediate visceral reaction and Fife has little interest in civil discourse at this point. Fife makes no attempt at distancing constructions by putting a conditional on the whole event such that 'if a Commission were stolen out, then his interest would be hurt etc'. Fife wants Grenville to know that he is angry and uses straightforward bald statements so there is no misunderstanding.

It should be noted that the appointment of the Sheriff would have been made by the Lord Privy Seal of Scotland, something Fife and Grenville would both have known⁵; Fife was not accusing Grenville himself of underhand behaviour but by explaining the patronage system in the next sentence, he lets Grenville know that he understands how it operated. The Lord Privy Seal of Scotland should have been under the guidance of the Prime Minister, to whom Fife is completely loyal, as Fife reminds Grenville after a mildly threatening assertion of Fife's status. This would certainly not be considered gentlemanly conduct. Fife reiterates the extent of the insult to justify the plea he is about to make. Fife then employs somewhat more polite discourse with 'I must therefore most anxiously Request'. Fife deploys this modal construction as a politeness strategy to place the burden on himself and take the focus off the fact that it is really Grenville who must see to the appointment of Fife's brother-in-law. After detailing Urquhart's eligibility for the job, the tone of the final remark 'I hope it will be recal'd' can be read one of two ways; either as another humiliating marker with the 'I hope + modal construction, or, in view of the preceding repeat use of the verb 'steal', it could have the illocutionary force of a directive. Fife recovers himself, perhaps recalling that

⁵ Whether Fife knew at this point of the distrust Grenville had for the Lord Privy Seal of Scotland, James Stuart MacKenzie (brother of the unpopular Lord Bute), is not clear, but ultimately a disagreement between Grenville and MacKenzie over an appointment for Fife's brother was a factor in Grenville's exit as Prime Minister (Lawson 1984: 213-214).

he is also asking a favour, and ends with a standard closing formula but with a subscription which might be regarded as slightly terse compared to the ‘Your most Obedient & very humble Servant’ in the first letter; despite the inclusion of ‘My Dear Sir’ there are no superlatives and Fife is not Grenville’s servant.

The last letter for analysis is dated almost four years later by which time Grenville had been in opposition for nearly three years. Fife and Grenville had exchanged letters on a variety of topics in the interim and there seemed to be an ease and familiarity between the two men. This extract, dated ‘Nov 1st 1767’, is from Grenville:

- (2) [...] I very heartily wish your Brother Success in his Canvass, & hope that notwithstanding what you tell me of the Wanton Strokes of Power, you will meet with no Difficulty in your own County. M^{rs} Grenville is considerably better than she has been. She desires me to make her best Compliments to you, & we join in offering them with our sincerest Wishes for her Recovery to Lady Fife. I should have been very happy to have seen you if it had been possible, before you Set out, & to have expressd to you in Person the Affectionate Regard, with which I am ever, My Dear Lord,

Your most Faithful,
& most Obedient Humble Servant
George Grenville

MS 3175/33/2 Nov 1st 1767

However, the balance of power was in Fife’s favour by this time as Grenville’s aim was to preserve the measures he put through parliament, for which he required every vote he could muster, and in Opposition he had no power of patronage with which to persuade his followers. This is the third letter:

Duff House, April 18th
1768

My Dear Sir

I hope I may now congratulate you upon ending agreeably all the Elections that you tak [sic] any part in, – those I had any share of in this part of the World are all over, my own was perfectly unanimous, notwithstanding of every attempt against me = My Brother stood for the neighbouring County, & is beat, owing to his being to late in starting & all the power of present Adⁿ exerted against him,- the Member return’d (Colonel Grant) has not a foot of property in this Island, or any part of His Majestys Dominions, & the half of the votes that return’d him are in the same state with himself,- I confess from the manner Elections have been carry’d on, my hopes from this Parl^t are not Sanguine = We are undone here by

this Prohibition of the exportation of Grain, a great part of our Rents is paid in Oat Meal, it is intirely unsold, no Merchant offering for it, & a great part of our Grain in the same Situation, I think ther should be some Exceptions in the Act of Prohibition, and not make it general over all sort of Grain = I hope that M^{rs} Grenville & all the Family are in perfect health, Lady Fife is pure & well, & joins in offering Respectful Compli^s I have the Honor to be with the greatest Regard & Attachment My Dear Sir

Your Devoted &
most faithful Servant
Fife

I hope Government will act with some spirit against this terrible Wilks,
otherways there is an end to all

British Library MS57815 Vol XII ff 47-48

This letter begins without the formulaic opening but politeness is maintained with the use of the polite stance marker 'I hope + modal' in 'I hope I may now congratulate'. The ease of the polite language without the need for the formulaic opening also gives a more familiar air to the correspondence as Fife seems to know his addressee well enough to immediately identify the subject that is on Grenville's mind and can refer to it in an informal yet polite manner. News of his brother's electoral defeat then follows, with an immediate acceptance of his brother's disorganisation being the reason for his lack of success, although a grumble at the tactics of the opposition was not resisted. Fife also points out that his brother's opponent was not eligible to stand, remarking that there were many improprieties in the election, and uses this as another way of sneering at the government, which would bring him closer to Grenville. These are general dissatisfactions rather than personal grievances; the remarks are mitigated by the use of the epistemic verb 'I confess' which Fitzmaurice (2002: 257) notes 'soften[s] the force of the speaker's confidence in the opinion being asserted'. The next 'paragraph' continues with the general discussion of political business and the use of the deictic 'this Prohibition' assumes a comprehensive understanding of the topic on the part of his addressee. Fife continues with a sketch of the situation in Scotland and keeps the topic general by the use of plural first person pronouns i.e. 'we are undon[e]', 'our Rents', 'our Grain' which all serve to depersonalise Fife's comments. Again, the use of the epistemic phrase 'I think there should be' makes this a set of, albeit partial, observations rather than a rant.

The general conversational tone in this letter is also conveyed with the use of contractions, e.g. Adⁿ for Adminstration, which were frowned upon in formal

letters (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006) and the addition of a postscript which The Art of Letter-writing (1762: 17) advised against as being disrespectful in not having thought through the contents of the letter properly. Again, Fife uses the deictic ‘this Wilks’ in the postscript knowing that Grenville would comprehend the full story surrounding the Wilkes affair at that time and cements the bond between the men. The closing formula is greatly extended in this letter, this time Grenville’s family are mentioned with Mrs. Grenville in the hopes for perfect health, and information is given about Lady Fife’s state of health in a response to previous exchanges (see extract (2) from Grenville above). Overall this letter has the feel of a casual discussion with a close friend, mulling over mutually interesting topics and showing concern for the addressee. The rigid polite conventions of the age have been adapted to present a more genuine regard for the addressee rather than slavish adherence to etiquette.

Clearly Fife had quite different intentions in sending each of the three letters analysed here and there is no immediately obvious common ground for the use of the Scotticisms in the second and third letters. A closer look at the use of the Scotticisms is required to determine Fife’s motivation for their inclusion.

5 Fife’s Use of Scots

The quantitative analysis of Fife’s use of Scotticisms suggests a pattern in line with that of a second language/dialect learner, that is; the suppression of the more salient Scots lexicon; confusion of the semantic content of the same lexeme in each language with the use of *affront* and *indiscretion* (Winford 2003: 211); and the continuing morphosyntactic influence of the first language on the second, for example, the use of the definite article with the quantifier ‘half’ (Thomason 2001: 74-6). The quantitative analysis also showed that the majority of the letters were free from Scotticisms and that some letters seemed to be more ‘Scottish’ than others, which suggests a motive for language use other than just incomplete acquisition of English. The pragmatic analysis of the letters shows that each one reflected a distinct mood in Fife; the first is polite, the second is irate; and the third is familiar. Table 2 shows the distribution of Scotticisms in each.

Date of Letter	Mood	Polite	Scotticism Used
Oct 8 th 1763	polite	yes	none
June 20 th 1764	irate	no	to affront stole (past participle)
Apr 18 th 1768	familiar	yes	notwithstanding of beat (past participle) the half otherways

Table 2 – Fife’s use of Scotticisms correlated with pragmatic information

The distribution of the Scotticisms in the three letters does not immediately propose an explanation for their use. Certainly Fife appeared to be very careful with the composition of the polite letter and so may have been more able to avoid the use of Scotticisms. In the irate letter, Fife could have been more interested in the subject matter and so was less attentive to his language and the same could be said of the familiar letter when Fife seems more generally at ease in his communication with Grenville. However, the politeness of the third letter does suggest that Fife paid attention to his language, so mere inattention cannot be the explanation for use of non-standard language. Further investigation of the Scots and non-standard language of the three letters is required to provide a more convincing explanation for its use.

Although the first, polite letter does not show any Scotticisms, the difficulty Fife had with the issue of subject-verb concord may have its roots in the Scots rules concerned with the nature and position of the subject, as discussed by Beal (1997: 356-357). There are a number of instances of the use of these rules in the Fife-Rose corpus, for example, this occurrence of Trotter’s ‘compound nominative’ rule (1901: 26, quoted in Beal 1997: 357):

(3) Dunbar & his Br has refus’d 40 years purchase for Durn

MS 2226/131/108 7th January 1768

Although Beal (1997: 356) notes that *-s* inflection for third person plural subjects was not identified by either Sinclair or Beattie in their list of Scotticisms, it could be classified as a solecism made by a Scot attempting English. Fife was clearly aware that there was an issue over its use in ‘correct’

English. This is demonstrated by his ambivalence in the selection of a singular or plural verb with existential ‘there’. Although he left the matter unresolved, it is a demonstration that he was paying particular attention to his language. The linguistic insecurity described in the pragmatic analysis of the letter in Section 4 is further confirmation that Fife was concerned with his language use in the first, polite letter. These observations on the first letter lead to the conclusion that Fife, as a second language learner, included Scotticisms as errors in language acquisition. It could be the case that, irrespective of how careful Fife was, his status as a second language learner led to the occasional inclusion of errors in Standard English.

The immediacy of the second, irate letter, conveyed by the absence of any opening formula to act as a bridge into the main body of the letter, supports the idea that a lack of attention to language was the cause of Fife’s reversion to his native Scots. However, the status of *affront* as a Scotticism in ‘with a full intention of effronting me’, is debatable. Johnson’s dictionary (1755) entry for *affront* gives the principal meaning as ‘insult’ but also gives the additional Scots meaning of ‘[d]isgrace; shame.’ Fife would certainly have felt insulted in being excluded but the Scots extension to the English semantic content would also be appropriate in Fife’s position. It is likely that a Scot would have comprehended the full meaning, but it is not certain that the sense of ‘shame’ would have been conveyed to Grenville at that point. It is not until later in the letter that Fife elaborates on his position with the statement that the appointment ‘would be so violent a Mortification that I could not live in the Country after it’. Here the sense of ‘shame’ is explicitly stated. Also, in this statement, Fife used both the English sense of ‘mortification’ (the Scottish sense is a ‘charitable endowment’ (Beattie 1787)) and the verb ‘live’ instead of the Scotticism *stay*⁶. Fife used *affront* in both the Scots and English senses with Rose, so as both were in his repertoire, its use as a Scotticism cannot be confirmed here. The anglicisation of the statement just discussed suggests that Fife was taking care in how he expressed himself and that he did not employ the Scots meaning of *affront*.

The second noted instance of a Scotticism in the irate letter, that of *stole* as a past participle, is also used in the Fife-Rose corpus; in fact there is no instance of the ‘standard’ *-en* past participle morpheme in the Fife-Rose correspondence. This usage has also been found in familiar correspondence by other writers, which may explain their use in the letters to Rose. For example, Fife used *broke* for ‘broken’ (MS 2226/131/270 22nd April 1775)

⁶ There are 11 instances of *stay* in the Fife-Rose corpus e.g. ‘Lady F was thinking of taking back Mrs Mellis to stay with her’ MS 3175/F33/4 5th June 1770.

and *forgot* for ‘forgotten’ (MS 2226/131/317 12th Feb 1777). Tieken-Boon van Ostade notes (2000) that Lowth used the non-standard variants in familiar correspondence, which may explain their use in the letters to Rose, but not to Grenville at this point in their relationship. The conclusion must be that either the *-en* form for the past participle was not in Fife’s repertoire or he did not understand its situational use. Fife’s use of *stole*, and *affront*, if they were Scotticisms, can again much more readily be explained as the errors of second language acquisition rather than mere inattentiveness. However, neither Scotticism may have made much of an impact on the reader as they were both in use in contemporary English, although perhaps not in this register. The really salient issue for the reader in the irate letter was the lack of politeness.

The familiar letter displays the greatest use of Scotticisms with four in evidence. The absence of the *-en* morpheme on ‘beat’ does not seem out of place in this letter and would have contributed to the mood of familiarity. As discussed in Note 4, Fife used *otherways* almost without exception in the Fife-Rose corpus and generally must have felt that *otherways* was acceptable and so its use may be attributed to incomplete acquisition of Standard English. The use of the additional preposition in ‘notwithstanding of every attempt against me’ escaped Fife’s ‘correction’ despite the fact that he did not use it categorically with Rose and that Grenville had not used it in a previous letter, see extract (2). The use of the definite article with a quantifier is a well-recognised Scotticism (Beal 1997: 361-363) and although there are a number of instances in the Fife-Rose corpus, Fife did not use it categorically. The use of these last two Scotticisms in the familiar letter might be attributed to inattention to language, but there is a conflict with this motivation as this letter was also polite, showing that Fife must have put some thought into it, unless this part of his repertoire had extended in the intervening four years since his first ‘polite’ letter. Fife had been writing ‘polite’ letters to influential men for at least a decade (see e.g. MS 32737 Vol LII (ff551) f83 and f292 (held in the British Library), both written in 1754, to the then Prime Minister the Duke of Newcastle), so he had had some practice with the register before the correspondence with Grenville. Also, the surviving draft of a letter to Grenville shows an alteration in his use of a modal in the following extract:

- (4) I Pray God some-thing ~~could~~ may be don to prevent the Violence of the present Corruption

MS 3175/33/2 19th Feb 1768

The letter sent to Grenville letter reads ‘I pray God some-thing may be don’ (MS 57815 Vol XII ff41-42 19th Feb 1768) but the draft demonstrates that just two months prior to the ‘familiar’ letter, Fife was clearly mulling over his use of polite language, providing evidence that the ‘polite’ register was still at the limits of his linguistic repertoire. The fact that Fife took care in composing a polite letter to Grenville yet still included unambiguous use of Scotticisms may be a result of the development of the relationship between the two men over the years. The later letters contain more personal details, although these were still often based on political matters. The two men also discussed the health of their wives in more detail than was required by the exchange of compliments in civil discourse, suggesting a closer bond. It should be noted that in the last letter Fife wrote to Grenville, he reported ‘I am now going to the Muirs like an idle fellow to shoot for some weeks’ (MS 57815 Vol XII ff 49 28th July 1769). The Scots *muir* was not identified contemporaneously as a Scotticism, but there is a possibility that Fife was aware that he was using the Scots variant with Grenville, and that the third, familiar letter analysed here was not an isolated lapse into Scots.

The selection, or even avoidance in some cases, of a Scots variant seems to be motivated by a style choice when Fife wanted to convey a particular attitude or stance, especially when coupled with the use of polite language. The first, polite letter was designed to present Fife as a gentleman with the best interests of parliament at heart and the inadvertent use of non-standard language does not dispel that he wanted to convey this impression, even if he may not have been completely successful. The second, irate letter was more complex with the use of both non-standard and anglicised language, and generally couched in less than polite terms until the request was made. It is also notable that there are no signs of linguistic insecurity in this letter despite the anglicised language and a very assured Fife was able to portray himself as a stern and uncompromising man who nevertheless understood where the power lay. The third, familiar letter appears more devoid of an ulterior motive, and merely served to maintain an important friendship. Consequently, it is not surprising that Fife’s language in the familiar letter should most closely match the unmarked language he used with Rose. However, the use of features of civil discourse elevated what could have been a tone of indifference with an inferior to a display of genuine companionship.

6 Concluding Remarks

The reduction in the use of Scots and non-standard language by Fife in correspondence with Grenville was in the first instance driven by the need to

conform to societal norms. It could be speculated that initially, the recently elevated Earl Fife was keen to make a good impression with the relatively new prime minister and wanted to appear as much a part of the establishment as possible. However, it seems Fife had reached the full extent of his English linguistic repertoire which included almost passable 'standard' English but did not quite encompass 'polite' English. These findings show that even native Scots speakers with a relatively anglicised repertoire made a further effort to suppress their Scots language when necessary, and thus support the contemporary perception that Standard English was required for advancement in English society. However, as Fife's position became more assured and the relationship with Grenville more balanced, he felt no need to mask his vernacular and it appears that once acceptance in society was achieved, then suppression of Scots became less of an issue. This conclusion may be relevant in the development of Standard Scottish English. If other Scots speakers in London took their cue from established Scots such as Fife, then it would seem that the occasional Scotticism was not only tolerated but an indicator of familiarity, and as such, a mark of acceptance in London society.

Lastly, the analysis here has shown that Fife's repertoire lacked the nuances of 'polite' English language and that his correction and hypercorrection show some self-awareness of this deficiency. This pragmatic aspect to the English language in the eighteenth century was also of great concern to Hume. Bailey (1991: 74) states that Hume and Robertson developed the 'intellectual foundation for the ideology of Scotticisms' in a bid to catch up with England in their emergence from barbarism (see, for example, Langford 2002; Fitzmaurice 1998; Klein 2002 for discussions of eighteenth century politeness). In his list of Scotticisms, Hume noted that the use of the modals 'shall' and 'will' in England were at variance with their use in Scotland and attributed their sense in England 'to have proceeded from a politeness in the *English*' (Hume 1752: Annex). Klein notes (1994: 43-44) that the 'linguistic thinking of the early eighteenth century was heavily oriented toward pragmatic concerns rather than lexical and grammatical ones, which only rose to the top of the agenda later in the century when grammatical prescriptivism really took off.' Jones (2010: 225) asserts that, in the second half of the eighteenth century, '[f]rom many an English perspective', the English spoken in Scotland was regarded as at best second rate, the repository of 'errors', 'barbarisms' and 'vulgarity'. This preoccupation with the perceived 'barbarity' of Scots may have been rooted as much in the lack of proficiency in 'polite' English, as in the overt use of Scots. Perhaps there was a certain charm in the considered, infrequent, use of Scots but 'impoliteness'

was never acceptable. Certainly in Fife's familiar letter to Grenville, he was more concerned with being polite to a friend rather than eliminating all the Scotticisms. This preoccupation with politeness and limited tolerance of Scots in otherwise polite language may also have played a part in the foundation of Scottish Standard English.

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