

# What became of 'you'? Language in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* and Alastair Cording's stage adaptation<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In his introductory notes to the print version of Cording's adaptation of *Sunset Song*, Ian Campbell mentions that the novel's great legacy is, among other things, demonstrated by the emergence of radio, television, and drama adaptations (2004: xi).<sup>2</sup> Gibbon's unique use of language, especially the innovative technique of the 'you' as a self-referring and generic device, have been interpreted by several critics as one of the reasons for the success of *Sunset Song*.<sup>3</sup> What, however, becomes of *Sunset Song*'s language when transmuted into a different medium? The present paper investigates this issue by discussing ways in which the linguistic features of *Sunset Song* are affected by the process of adapting the novel for the stage. As a preliminary, the linguistic features of the novel's style will be outlined. Subsequently, the language of Cording's adaptation will be related to the novel's techniques, describing the process of transcoding the various stylistic achievements of *Sunset Song* into dramatic elements.

## 2. Gibbon's Novel

Lewis Grassie Gibbon's use of language in *Sunset Song* has been the focus of several analyses. Scholars such as Young (1973: 79ff.), Trengove (1975: 50), Roskies (1981: 143), Malcolm (1984: 136ff.), Hewitt (1988: par. 12), Campbell (1990: 89 ff.), and Corbett (2003: 89) have commented on the unique nature of the novel's prose and have identified it as one of the main reasons for its success. The main elements of Gibbon's linguistic style, as

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<sup>1</sup> The title was inspired by Graham Trengove's memorable essay 'Who is You? Grammar and Grassie Gibbon' *Scottish Literary Journal* 2:2 (1975). The present paper is based on the author's research for her MA thesis, 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*: Elements of the Regional, the National, and the Universal' (University of Vienna, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> For instance the TV adaptation by the BBC (first aired in 1971), the BBC radio adaptation which is still broadcast regularly, and, of course, Alastair Cording's stage adaptation.

<sup>3</sup> To name but a few; Corbett (2003: 89), Hewitt (1988: par. 12), Malcolm (1984: 136), or MacDiarmid who comments that Gibbon's use of Scots gave his work 'passage and power' (1968: 160).

described by critics, are lexis, syntax, and the use of 'you.' The lexical setup of *Sunset Song's* and its successor volumes' style can be described as a blend between English and Scots, which – on the basis of its orthography – appears as basically 'English,' but incorporating vocabulary that is either taken from Scots or closely mirrors Scots items (Campbell 1990: 53). Since English and Scots share a great number of lexical items, *Sunset Song's* lexical style may appear as primarily English to English readers and as Scots to Scottish readers.

Indeed, Gibbon uses few words that are exclusive to Scots and almost none that a speaker of English could not interpret in the context (Campbell 1990: 275). Such elements are at times taken from archaic or regional varieties, but mostly from general Scots or a recognisable North-Eastern version of it (Corbett 2003: 91). The reasons for attempting such a melange can be found in Gibbon's intention of making the book accessible to international readers and recognisably Scottish to both Scottish and international readers (Campbell 1990: 276; Blamires 1986: 133). The density of Scots items in *Sunset Song*<sup>4</sup> is contingent on the social class of the speaker, the situation, and the image the speaker wants to convey (Ortega 1981: 151). The following excerpt from the novel illustrates some of the points made:

But for days now the wind had been in the south, it shook and played in the moors and went dandering up the sleeping Grampians, the rushes pecked and quivered about the loch when its hand was upon them, but it brought more heat than cold, and all the parks were fair parched, sucked dry, the red clay soil of Blawearie gaping open for the rain that seemed never-coming. Up here the hills were brave with the beauty and the heat of it, but the hayfield was all a crackling dryness and in the potato park beyond the biggings the shaws drooped red and rusty already. [...] Some said the North, up Aberdeen way, had had rain enough, with Dee in spate and bairns hooking stranded salmon down in the shallows, and that must be fine enough, but not a flick of the greeve weather had come over the hills [...] (Gibbon 1995: 25, emphasis added)

In this passage, for instance, Gibbon uses a few words that are exclusive to Scots such as 'dandering,' for the wind's personified movement, or 'biggin,' a general Scots term for a building or a cluster of buildings.<sup>5</sup> Even if the international reader might not know these words, their meaning can be

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<sup>4</sup> For a framework for analysing the density of Scots see McClure 1995: 174.

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/>.

inferred from the context (Campbell 1990: 275). Moreover, the Scots terms 'bairns' and 'greeve weather' can be understood without too much difficulty.<sup>6</sup> Other sentences comprise largely English words. Several of the items which seem to come from Scots and are listed by the DSL, such as 'fleet,' can also occur in dialects of English, but frequently in specific registers like literary language. In other places, Gibbon again uses Scots words such as 'park' (used in Scots for 'field') or 'shaws' (the tops of the potato plants). Significantly, words like 'enough' or 'weather,' which are familiar to any speaker of English, would be pronounced /ən'juːx/ or /'wiðə/ by a speaker of Scots and could therefore be interpreted as Scots. The pronunciation thus illustrates that many lexical items in Gibbon's prose could be interpreted as either, Scots or English. Gibbon has also been shown to 'cloak' Scots words in English spelling. For instance, as in the example above, he uses the word 'brave' to convey the meaning and sound pattern of what would be 'braw' in Scots (Crawford 1995: x). Considering Gibbon's techniques of blending English and Scots and 'cloaking' words to suggest specifically Scottish-sounding patterns, the hybrid character of *Sunset Song's* lexical makeup becomes clear. The novel's language must therefore be understood as a literary construction of Scots with varying density rather than the representation of an actual spoken variety (Campbell 1990: 276).<sup>7</sup> Significantly, even though lexis might present an obstacle to accessibility, non-Scottish readers largely perceive *Sunset Song* and the other volumes of the trilogy as linguistically accessible while, at the same time, they are persuaded that its language is Scottish (Campbell 1985: 85-86). *Sunset Song's* style thus achieves a feeling of national representation by constructing an image of 'Scottishness' in both, Scottish and international readers (Campbell 1985: 54).

In addition to lexis, syntactic strategies and rhythmic phenomena are an integral part of *Sunset Song's* linguistic style. Gibbon frequently uses inverted sentences and run-on sentences, as well as specifically Scots-sounding rhythms and cadences of spoken Scots (Campbell 1990: 274). Structures which mirror spoken language such as interjections, laughter, ellipses, assonance, alliteration, or repetition feature prominently in many passages (Ortega 1981: 150; Roskies 1981: 147). Moreover, the speaker's breath is often the basic syntactic unit for Gibbon's prose (Roskies 1981: 148, 150). As a consequence, the reader familiar with Scots can almost *hear*

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<sup>6</sup> Should such items pose difficulties, a glossary in the novel's appendix provides help.

<sup>7</sup> For a model of the relative density of Scots in various registers see McClure 1995: 174.

Scots rhythms and the reader unfamiliar with the language *imagines* hearing it. The following example contains several of these elements:

For she ran fleet as a bird inside the door and banged it right in the daftie's face and dropped the bar and watched the planks bulge and crack as outside the body of the madman was flung against them again and again. [...] Then Chris took a keek from one window and saw him again: he was raking about in the basket she'd thrown at his head, he made the parcels dirl on the road till he found a great bar of soap, and then he began to eat that, feuch! laughing and yammering all to himself, [...] the foam burst yellow through the beard of him as he still ate and ate at the soap. But he soon grew thirsty and went down to the burn, Pooty and Chris stood watching him, and then it was that Cuddiestoun himself came ben the road. He sighted Andy and cried out to him, and Andy leapt the burn and was off, and behind him went Munro clatter-clang, [...] Chris unbarred the door in spite of Pooty's stutterings and went and repacked the bit basket, and everything was there except the soap; and that was down poor Andy's throat. (Gibbon 1995: 51-2, emphasis added)

In this passage, a re-telling of an event in the community, oral elements such as the frequent use of the conjunction 'and' abound. Structures like 'and then it was that Cuddiestoun himself came ben the road,' which contains an it-cleft, can be diagnosed as those inverted sentences found by Campbell.<sup>8</sup> Repetition of elements ('again and again' or 'ate and ate') is noticeable, as well as assonance ('clatter-clang') and interjections ('feuch!'). Moreover, there is alliteration ('bit basket') and even a near rhyme ('soap'- 'throat') emphasising the oral quality of the prose. In general, these elements seem to be central to Gibbon's style, stressing orality and conversational intimacy by mirroring elements of spoken discourse.

Gibbon's use of 'you' in *Sunset Song* and the following volumes of the *Quair* is highly innovative. While the orthodox use of 'you' – when characters address each other directly – might be expected in a text such as *Sunset Song*, two different and significant uses can be distinguished in Gibbon's novel: the self-referring 'you' and the generic 'you' (see also Trengove 1975). The self-referring 'you' expresses emotions as if in a dramatic monologue, as if Chris was talking to herself and the reader was eavesdropping (Corbett 2003: 91). Due to the indirectly confessional function of this kind of 'you,' the most intimate thoughts and emotions of

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<sup>8</sup> It has been argued that Gibbon uses anapaestic rhythm to suggest 'Scottish' cadence. For a discussion of this see Corbett 2003:93.

the character are voiced. Through focalisation, the self-referring 'you' thus provides insights into the psyche of the character, which could otherwise be gleaned only by the use of an omniscient narrator. Chris' emotional world and her experience of the land, the community, and their pull on her are famously related in an extended passage using the self-referring 'you':

You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine [...] You saw their faces in firelight, father's and mother's and the neighbours', [...] you wanted the words they'd known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart, how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to the English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all. (Gibbon 1995: 32, emphasis added)

Thus, the technique of the self-referring 'you' creates a close character-reader relationship and a strong emotional involvement in Chris' feelings. This immediacy greatly helps characterisation and is one of the most lauded aspects of *Sunset Song* (Malcolm 1984: 137; Young 1973: 139; Trengove 1975: 53). The generic 'you' is used to express common knowledge or common opinion in Kinraddie and can be described as universally-referring (Trengove 1975: 53-55). It is used frequently in reported speech in the novel and could be substituted with 'one.' Significantly, the speaker using this device might be left unnamed, which emphasises its generic nature. Thus, often using the generic 'you,' a 'Kinraddie voice' is created that seems to be representative of the general community opinion. It gives the impression of a 'homogenous body of opinion' (Trengove 1975: 49) which assumes that its views are taken at truth value.

Indeed, the narrative pattern of *Sunset Song* is constructed using several voices. Chris is the focaliser<sup>9</sup> of large parts of the story, the events of the novel being rendered through her consciousness. While her voice dominates the text, often using the self-referring 'you,' other characters may occasionally act as focalisers. This multiplicity of voices creates the perception of hearing the thoughts of the people of Kinraddie (Power 1935: 192). However, whole communities receive a voice in *Sunset Song*, as well, for instance in the 'Kinraddie voice' mentioned before. It regularly

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<sup>9</sup> According to Genette's narratological framework, the focaliser is the character from whose limited perspective the narrative is rendered (1998: 132 ff.)

interprets the events of the community and expresses people's views in a sarcastic, sometimes even cruel way: '[...] and some said there was no bottom to it, the loch, and Long Rob of the Mill said that made it like the depths of a parson's depravity. That was an ill thing to say about any minister, though Rob said it was an ill thing to say about any loch [...]' (Gibbon 1995: 12). This passage relates a conversation between Rob and a member of the community which has become the village gossip. Whereas in this passage the gossip is marked by the insertion of 'some said,' in other places Gibbon omits such markers when using the Kinraddie voice. In such situations the question of the identity of the speaker creates some ambiguity. Both Young and Wittig perceive this ambiguity as a technique allowing the novel to paint an authentic picture of a community like Kinraddie (Young 1973: 90; Wittig 1958: 332).

### 3. Cording's Adaptation

Considering Gibbon's unique use of language, Cording's treatment of *Sunset Song's* linguistic strategies acquires great consequence for the success of the adaptation. Thus, the techniques used by Cording in order to replicate the various effects of Gibbon's style will be considered in further detail. By definition, the adaptation of a novel into a performance-based medium must entail some compression of plot and character (Hutcheon 2006: 11-13, 19). Cording notes this necessity and points out that, looking at *Sunset Song's* structure, several characters can be dropped and actors can take the part of more than one character in the play (Cording 2004b: xiii). The fact that *Sunset Song's* language reflects the author's intention to make the novel universally accessible poses a further challenge to an adaptation like Cording's. Gibbon's text provides elements of orality in its dialogue, in the narrative voice(s), and also the inner monologues of characters lending themselves to being spoken. Yet, Cording's stated aim was to avoid quoting lengthy passages, aiming to create much of the dialogue 'in the style of Lewis Grassie Gibbon (Cording 2004b: xiv).

When examining lexis in Cording's adaptation, the main focus lies on comparing Gibbon's and Cording's prose in terms of density of Scots items. For instance, Gibbon's opening paragraph (quoted above) could be juxtaposed with Cording's version:

CHRIS: For days now the wind has been in the south, shaking and playing in the moors and dandering up the Grampians, quivering the rushes about the loch. But it only brings more heat. All the parks are fair parched, sucked dry, the red clay

soil gaping open for the rain that seems never coming. Some say the North, up Echt way where we used to bide, has had rain enough. [...] (Cording 2004a: 3, emphasis added)

Cording's compressed and adapted script lets Chris voice the information which is presented through focalised narration in the novel. It retains a few of the most prominent Scots words used by Gibbon such as 'dandering' or 'fair'. However, Cording significantly shortens the densest part of the passage in the novel, i.e. the sentence about the potato park. Cording's decision to cut this sentence, and others like it, might have resulted from necessary compression, but it certainly renders the overall impression of the play less dense, and therefore, more 'English' in its lexical setup. Indeed, as director Benjamin Twist notes,

The play is actually written mostly in English, with a few Scots words to give a sense of the language. We took a decision early on in rehearsal not to go too far down the Scots line, nor to play the piece with strong North Eastern accents. This fits with the language in which Lewis Grassie Gibbon wrote the book. We also wanted to make the piece accessible to a wide audience, not just one that understood North Eastern dialect. But it was important to give a sense of the setting and the north east. (Twist 2003c)

Moreover, Cording frequently uses Scots words which appear only infrequently in Gibbon's novel. For instance, he introduces 'to bide,' which appears in the DSL (in its various spellings) and is not used frequently in the novel. Cording also repeatedly uses the word 'yon' in the play, which, as Purves points out, is common in Scots (Purves 2002: 29) but features in the novel only once in the idiom 'hither and yon' (Gibbon 1995: 123). In the play John Guthrie uses the word 'kine' several times (e.g. Cording 2004a: 6), which is only used once in the novel (Gibbon 1995: 141), while all other instances in the novel, as well as in the adaptation, feature 'kye' (e.g. Cording 2004a: 23). Moreover, while the word 'braw' is largely retained in its transformed shape of 'brave' in the play, it is used once by Aunt Janet and once by Chris herself (Cording 2004a: 34, 19).

Cording's treatment of *Sunset Song's* lexical makeup, therefore, reflects Gibbon's style of including a number of prominent Scots words. Yet, in line with Cording's creation of dialogue 'in the style' of Gibbon, it also uses Scots items which feature only infrequently in the novel. In general, however, the lexical makeup found in the adaptation seems to have

undergone a movement towards English forms due to considerations of wider audience appeal. Yet, the play's aural experience would emphasise the dialect used by the actors. As noted by Benjamin Twist above, directors of *Sunset Song* might decide to use general Scottish accents rather than North-Eastern ones to make the play more accessible. In fact, Twist made this decision for his Tour of Prime Productions' version in 2001, which was revived in 2002. Kenny Ireland's production of 2008 seems to have introduced more voices resonating with the North-Eastern accent but manages to retain accessibility. Still, the use of Scottish accents – if general rather than North-eastern – might have helped to balance out the comparably 'English' nature of the script's lexis. It seems, therefore, that the play's linguistic creation of a particularly 'Scottish' feeling largely relies on pronunciation rather than on lexical distinction. The technique of implying Scots sound patterns while using lexis that could be interpreted as either, English or Scots, had already been established in Gibbon's novel and seems to find its natural culmination in the play.

The orality of *Sunset Song's* prose conditions the way in which syntactical phenomena translate into the dramatic medium. Since the novel's text incorporates several elements of spoken language, Cording's script introduces few alterations and echoes the novel's elements of orality. Many of the repetitions found in the novel, such as the frequent use of 'and,' are dropped by Cording for reasons of compression. The basic rhythm of many passages in the novel, which had been modelled on spoken language, is retained in the stage adaptation but becomes more pronounced in the performative medium. For example, in the play the rendition of Andy's rampage is shortened and dramatised thus:

SPEAK: [...] About midday he chased Chris Guthrie all the way to Pooty's.

ANDY (*now frightening in his madness*). You Come!

SPEAK: He near battered the door down to get at her. He was still at it when Cuddiestoun and Alec Mutch caught him.

ANDY *is seized and a horse-harness thrown over his head.*

Back to Coudiestoun he was driven and they say  
Mistress Munro took his breeks down and leathered him  
sore. (Cording 2004a: 15)<sup>10</sup>

In this example, the novel's rhythmic pattern is largely retained and repetitions are cut. The SPEAK tells the events while they are acted out by

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the SPEAK and its functions see p. 172.

other characters on stage. Since Chris is now a participant in the story, her focalisation is lost and transferred to a member of the community. The oral elements used in the novel, which created the impression of a community member retelling the story, lend themselves to being transformed, in the context of a play, into the act of showing events. All in all, thus, Cording's script appropriates various elements of orality in Gibbon's prose and transcodes others into dialogue or action.

The self-referring and the generic 'you' translate into different elements in the dramatic medium. As Hutcheon points out, in contrast to novels or short stories, stage media have difficulty representing the 'res cogitans,' the space of the mind of characters, having to represent their feelings and thoughts in the material realm using aural and kinaesthetic signifiers (Hutcheon 2006: 14). At times, Cording's text echoes the novel's use of the self-referring 'you' in relation to Chris. In the example below, Gibbon's text is taken over into the play with a few cuts but very little alterations. Such insights into Chris' mind are frequently transposed into her direct speech, but retaining the self-referring 'you':

CHRIS (*to audience*): You hate the land and the trauchle and the coarse speak of the folk and English and learning is brave and fine; then you see faces in the firelight. Father's, Mother's and the neighbours', and you want the words they use, Scots words. (Cording 2004a: 9)

Thus, the self-referring 'you' lends itself to being voiced. Yet, Chris' thoughts as expressed by the self-referring 'you' might also be put into the speech of other characters close to her, such as her mother:

So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her [...] you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you [...] (Gibbon 1995: 32)

JEAN: [...] There's Chris reading and schooling, and another Chris waking to pewits crying and seeing the moors yellow with broom and powdered purple with heather. Two Chrises. Two Chrises, fighting for her heart. (Cording 2004a: 9)

Having another character voice Chris' intimate feelings reduces the need for soliloquies but also emphasises the close relationship with her mother and the fact that she shares this experience.

The generic 'you' is also easily incorporated into the play. In many instances, the text of the play retains this device. For example, sentences from the novel like 'the roads you walked down to Kinraddie smithy or up to the Denburn were fair blistering in the heat' (Gibbon 1995: 25) are rendered very similarly by Cording: 'But here the roads you walk down are fair blistering' (Cording 2004a: 3). Also Long Rob's introduction (quoted above), when transposed into the play, retains the generic 'you' being voiced by Chae as 'He'll tell you stories about horses till you're fair grey in the head. Horses are all he thinks on, when he's not sweating and chaving on his moor, horses and books' (Cording 2004a: 6). The following example shows how a generic 'you' can be translated into dramatic action when the Kinraddie voice is embodied by actors playing the SPEAK.

Mistress Gordon was a Stonehaven woman [...] She was a meikle sow of a woman, but aye well-dressed, and with eyes like the eyes of a fish, fair cod-like they were, and she tried to speak English and to make her two bit daughters, Nellie and Maggie Jean, them that went to Stonehaven Academy, speak English as well. And God! they made a right muck of it, and if you met the bit things on the road and said *Well, Nellie, and how are your mother's hens laying?* the quean would more than likely answer you *Not very meikle the day* and look so proud it was all you could do to stop yourself catching the futret across your knee and giving her a bit skelp. (Gibbon 1995: 20, italics his)

SPEAK: There goes Mistress Gordon from Upperhill. She's a real fool. She thinks she's gentry and tries to speak the English and God!, she makes a right muck of it.

SPEAK: Aye, Mistress Gordon! And how are the hens laying the day?

SPEAK: (*English accent, Scots words*) Not very meikle the noo, hoo about your ain? (Cording 2004a: 6)

In this scene, several actors embody the SPEAK and interact with Mistress Gordon. The 'you' used in the novel thus translates into direct speech and a kinaesthetic representation of the situation in the play. Consequently, Cording's treatment of Gibbon's innovative technique of the 'you' mirrors that of the novel. However, Cording seems to have translated several of the instances in which Gibbon uses the self-referring or the generic 'you' into the direct speech of characters, actions, as well as songs to express Chris' feelings, for instance after her father's funeral (Cording 2004a: 32-33). Moreover, as Cording notes, by turning interior monologues of Chris into

songs, he heightens the emotional register and establishes an intimate connection between Chris and the audience (Cording 2004b: 23).

Cording's adaptation aims to transpose character voices, which are heard in the novel indirectly through inner monologues, into the dramatic medium. Most significantly, large parts of the novel are focalised through Chris' voice. Cording transformed several of such monologues into soliloquies but the frequent use of such a device might have been detrimental to the play. Thus, as becomes clear in the following example, not all the inner monologues of Chris are turned into her own speech in the play, but other characters may voice these thoughts and feelings:

[...] she could never leave it, [...] she was bound and held as though they had prisoned her here. [...] She could no more teach a school than fly [...] The kye were in sight then, [...], the smell of their bodies foul in her face--foul and known and enduring as the land itself. Oh, she hated and loved in a breath! (Gibbon 1995: 120, emphasis added)

ROB: [...] You hate it and love it in a breath.

CHRIS (*overlapping*): I hate it and love it in a breath.

CHRIS: I can't leave. I could no more teach school than fly! (*Not unhappy at the thought.*) I'm fair a prisoner, bound and held. Bound and held. (Cording 2004a: 35, emphasis added)

In this passage, Rob's line overlaps with Chris'. Significantly, the fact that Rob knows Chris' feelings so well hints towards the connection they will feel later in the play, before he leaves to join the war (Cording 2004a: 55).

Adapting the Kinraddie voice to the stage, Cording created the SPEAK as a dramatic counterpart which, as the adaptor himself puts it, functions as a chorus representing the voice of the community with all its opinions and gossip like a collective unconscious (Cording 2004b: xiii). The part of the SPEAK can be spoken by any character in the play, except the protagonist. The following example – the text of the novel has been quoted above – explicates the way in which the Kinraddie voice of the novel is turned directly into lines for the SPEAK.

SPEAK: Folk say yon loch has no bottom to it.

ROB: Like the depths of a parson's depravity.

SPEAK: That's an ill thing to say about a minister.

ROB: It's an ill thing to say about a loch! (Cording 2004a: 4)

In this passage, the narrative of the novel, which uses phrases like 'Rob said' as a marker, translates seamlessly into lines spoken by the SPEAK in dialogue with Rob. The SPEAK also regularly provides expository information, for instance telling the story of Andy the daftie's rampage or that of the big storm and the Reverend Gibbon diving under his duvet for cover (Cording 2004a: 14-15, 37). Benjamin Twist mentions that the SPEAK is mostly used ironically (Twist 2003b), and indeed it reflects Gibbon's biting sarcasm which manifests itself in the Kinraddie voice. Generally, the tone of the Kinraddie voice and the SPEAK seems to be more malevolent than the characters' comments. Yet, two of the actors who participated in the first production of *Sunset Song*, Estrid Barton and Alan McHugh, mentioned that they were putting extra effort into the distinction between their acting as a character and as the SPEAK (Barton Discussion, McHugh Discussion). They pointed out that the differentiation between playing their character and playing lines of the SPEAK was a crucial element in their interpretation of the play. They consciously changed their voices and mannerisms so that the audience would realise which part they were playing. Thus, certain clues like dress, use of voice, and mannerisms tell the audience that it is the SPEAK they are listening to.

#### 4. Conclusion

Cording's adaptation, which clearly aims for great faithfulness to Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (Speirs par. 4.), retains several linguistic elements found in the novel. The linguistic quality of Cording's text is inspired by the novel's use of lexis, syntax, and voice. Similar to the novel, the lexical makeup of the play shows a certain number of prominent Scots words embedded in prose which could be interpreted as either, English or Scots, or a blend of both, by different readers. A decline in density can be detected, but is balanced out by the aural experience of hearing the dialect on stage. Cording's adaptation displays syntactic and rhythmic patterns similar to Gibbon's text. It seamlessly appropriates the various elements of orality of the novel and transposes many instances into aural and kinaesthetic elements like dialogue and action. Gibbon's use of the self-referring 'you' is echoed in the play, sometimes taken over directly, sometimes remodelled into direct speech, often directly addressing the audience, or the speech of other characters. Also the generic 'you' is retained in certain passages, often translated into the speech of the SPEAK, and sometimes into dramatic action. In terms of voice, the characters give expression to their own feelings, but at times others take this part, for instance Chris' mother. The Kinraddie voice

translates readily into the SPEAK with its scathing comment and gossip. Cording thus used several techniques to transpose Gibbon's unique language onto the stage successfully.

However, Cording's treatment of the novel's narrative has been received with mixed feelings by critics. For instance, Brown argues that the narrative, similar to many literary adaptations,

[...] regularly breaks off from the dramatic action to narrate the story directly to the audience. As a result Alastair Cording's play is stilted and too often fails to generate the energy of the novel. It is the nature of the script rather than the performances which leaves the production somewhat flat. (Brown 2002: par. 13)

Thus, Cording's translation of narrated content into direct addresses of the audience is not always successful. In Hutcheon's terms, this arises from difficulties in transcoding description and narration, which had been transmitted via Chris' focalised narratives in the novel, into speech, action, sounds, and images (Hutcheon 2006: 40). Such problems could be attributed to a large part to the epic scope and simultaneous intimacy with the main character and the community of Kinraddie conveyed by the novel's language. Yet, even though Cording's script seems to have shortcomings in these respects, its audience appeal has been considerable (Cooper 2008: par. 2) and its language successfully picks up Gibbon's style. Moreover, Cording's adaptation has created fresh interest in the novel, bringing *Sunset Song* to a wide contemporary audience.

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