

‘A steady hand, a geasend throat, a dry heart and an empty pip’: Scots and vernacular features in William Cameron’s letters¹

Marina Dossena

I simply wrote my Scots as well as I was able
(Robert Louis Stevenson, Note to *Underwoods*, 1887)

1. Introduction

William Cameron’s voice was a very familiar sound in early nineteenth-century Glasgow. Because ‘Hawkie’, as Cameron was nicknamed, was a popular chapman, or peddler of small books of ballads and popular tales (or chapbooks), and many anecdotes have survived about his wit and clever use of language.

Although he wrote his autobiography at the request of David Robertson, a Glasgow bookseller, while he was a winter inmate of the Glasgow Town’s Hospital between 1840 and 1850, the text was not to reach the general public till 1888, many years after Hawkie’s death in September 1851, when John Strathesk (i.e., John Tod) edited it. This meant that it inevitably underwent editorial interventions, not least from the linguistic point of view, and it would certainly be interesting to compare the holograph text, currently in the Glasgow University Library,² with the edited one, in order to conduct an accurate microlinguistic analysis. This, however, is beyond the scope of the current paper, in which, after a general introduction on Cameron and his autobiography, I intend to focus instead on the seven letters and a dialogue that are appended to the 1888 text. My aim is to discuss both the letters and the dialogue as specimens of (re)constructed authenticity, in order to provide an overview of the linguistic profile attributed to popular Scots in the late nineteenth century.

¹ I am grateful to the editor and his reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper; any remaining faults are of course my own responsibility.

² Glasgow University Library also holds ten holograph letters: nine (only two of which are dated, 25.3.1842 and 16.2.1847 respectively) are addressed to David Robertson, while one, dated 29.2.1848, is addressed to one ‘Mr Editor’.

While it is well-known that Scots had continued to function as a literary medium for centuries, its usage in supposedly non-literary documents and indeed in authentic spoken usage still appears to be underinvestigated. The seven letters and the dialogue are therefore considerably interesting for historical sociolinguists. Perhaps predictably, they are not entirely in Scots; however, it is nonetheless possible to detect vernacular features in lexis, syntax and pragmatic moves. To what extent this is due to the editor's interventions is of course an important question, but it is perhaps even more important to consider that the published text was supposed to cater for the needs of an audience whose perception of Scots as a viable medium in all registers had been changing quite considerably over the previous century. Although a literary register was available for the representation of dialogue, this was generally restricted to elderly, humorous or old-fashioned characters, which contributed to the crystallization of Scots usage as hardly suitable for ordinary, non-literary forms of writing. The features appearing in Cameron's text may thus tell us something about the kind of Scots deemed to be acceptable in the representation of supposedly authentic spoken usage. This, in turn, may help us shed light on the reception (and perception) of vernacular features in different registers.

Previous studies in the written production of lower-class writers have shown that, throughout the nineteenth century, these texts attempted to imitate educated models, although this could be limited by the encoders' skills and circumstances; for instance, this is the case of emigrants' letters and diaries (see Dossena 2007, 2008a and in preparation). Instances of ordinary spoken language thus have to be gleaned from other sources, not least dialect literature, which was very popular in nineteenth-century Scotland.³ In addition to 'high' texts, however, we should not disregard other 'lower' texts, such as those circulated by means of chapbooks. Fenton (1990: 71) refers to earlier commentators who stressed the reliability of chapbooks as far as language and society were concerned:

No writer casts any doubt on their authenticity as a mirror of society. John Frazer, in his *Humorous Chap-books of Scotland* (1873) [...] noted that [Dougal] Graham had an advantage over the ordinary historian, in that:

³ Leaving aside the popularity of the works of Burns, Hogg, Scott and Stevenson, to name but the best-known highlights of Scottish literary production, it is worth remembering that local periodicals had also hosted a wide range of articles on politics, industrialization and its consequences, and even the issue of voteless women, in Scots: see Donaldson (1986 and 1989).

the latter from his superior height and position seldom condescended to enter the huts of the poor, and when he did enter, the inmates were frightened into their ‘Sunday clothes and manners’ by his stately and majestic appearance. But Dougal, being himself one of the poorest, introduces us into the most secret, domestic, and every-day life and thoughts of the lower classes of last century. Nothing is hidden from him. He is treated with a familiarity which shows that his hosts have no wish to hide anything. Then, too, he made his reader familiar not only with their mode of life, but with the peculiarities of their dialect, and in this way shed a not infrequent light on philology... Nor are his sketches wanting in dramatic power. The characters are full of individuality and life, rendered more significant by a local flavour of demeanour and dialect.⁴

Fenton (1990: 72), then, quotes David Craig,⁵ who sees the chapbook dialogue as ‘straight off speech, no printed standard intervening, and is thus a close transcript of contemporary spoken usage.... The dialogue... keeps close to a peasant speech whose rhythms, tones, forms, and vocabulary make up a medium quite distinct in character or whole physical entity from Standard English.’ Fenton’s comment is that ‘To these points, syntax could be added.’ The conclusion is that

There is [...], a strong body of agreement on the Bellman’s faithfulness – within the limits dictated by the heightening or exaggeration of any form of popular dramatic presentation – to the manners and speech of his time. (Fenton 1990: 72).

While it is true that Cameron’s utterances may be informed by the literary register typically employed to represent Scots in dialogue, it is nonetheless important to balance this consideration with the fact that contemporary audiences were well aware of this literary register, the kind of authentic usage heard in the street, and the kind of reconstructed authenticity found in chapbooks and records of chapmen’s speech. Indeed, the need to reconcile literary intelligibility and linguistic authenticity for the sake of the audience is discussed briefly by Strathesk himself in the conclusion of his Preface to *Bits from Blinkbonny. Or, Bell o’ the Manse*:

⁴ The source is given in fn.5 as ‘MacGregor, *The Collected Writings of Dougal Graham*, 2 vols, Glasgow 1883, I, 64-65’.

⁵ The source is given in fn. 7 as ‘D. Craig, 1961, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830*. London, pp. 251-2’.

The idiom of the Scottish language – the dear old Doric – has been to the Author a difficult matter to render, so as to be at once intelligible to ordinary readers and fairly representative of the everyday mother tongue of the common people of Scotland. He hopes that he has succeeded in doing this, as well as in preserving a few of the floating traditions of the passing generation which are so rapidly being swept away by the absorbing whirlpool of these bustling times, and that his readers will follow with kindly interest these homely records of the various subjects he has tried to portray in these ‘Bits from Blinkbonny.’ (Strathesk 1882: vi-vii)

The nostalgic tone in which ‘the floating traditions of the passing generation’ are evoked includes ‘the dear old Doric’, also seen as ‘homely’ in a ‘Kailyard’ perspective – associated with a familiar past, as we saw above, of which readers may be very fond, but which they are nonetheless unlikely to reinstate in their daily usage.

Comments on the reliability of representations, whether contemporary or later, are thus very valuable for the information they give us on the linguistic acceptability of such representations. Indeed, one of the most recent studies of chapbooks, Cowan and Paterson’s (2007), actually omits all discussion of editorial interventions in Cameron’s work, thus assuming its overall reliability. As we saw above, already nineteenth-century commentators stressed the general importance of chapbook culture, not least from the literary point of view. William Chambers (1863) actually emphasized the fact that chapbooks were so widespread, that their influence should not be neglected, but should in fact be the object of scientific investigation:

these penny Chap Books constituted a universal literature among the lower orders, old and young, without remonstrance from parents or instructors, and, considering how universally they were circulated, and how great must have been their influence, it strikes one as a remarkable instance of the perfunctory way in which history is written, that no one in composing our national annals takes the least notice of this social phenomenon. (Chambers 1863: 7)

As the century progressed and free press became more widespread, chapbooks began to decline.⁶ However, their popularity may have enabled them to contribute significantly to the type of vernacular usage of ordinary

⁶ On the decline of chapbook popularity after 1830 see also McLean (2001).

speakers, reflecting it and somehow influencing it, much in the same way as present-day media both reflect and influence contemporary usage. These sources, and any texts relating to them, such as Strathesk's, are therefore of considerable linguistic interest.

Within this framework, my aim in this paper is to analyze the main linguistic features of a micro-corpus of seven letters appended to the autobiography of William Cameron, in search of traces of orality. These will then be related to the reconstruction of a dialogue (also appended to the autobiography) between Cameron and his audience, in which the flavour of spontaneous discourse is re-created by means of specific rhetorical devices. The paper will focus on the three types of texts (autobiography, letters, and dialogue) separately, in order to discuss their main characteristics.

2. Cameron's autobiography

Nowadays contemporary readers may find out about Hawkie in several websites, both academic and more popular.⁷ This testifies to the continuing interest in Scottish street culture, but also to the fact that, in many cases, such street culture and the language associated with it is presented as a kind of quaint curiosity, worth preserving on account of its bearing witness to a relatively distant past which thus becomes somewhat romanticized. This, however, distorts the multifaceted reality of the past context, of which certain social traits are deliberately ignored or reinterpreted; for instance, it is not necessarily true that Scots was only employed for pithy remarks as collections of proverbs seemed to suggest (Dossena 2000); in fact, a situation of widespread diglossia (Auer 2005: 22) may be gleaned from witnesses' accounts, in which the attempt to write English coexisted with the usage of Scots in spoken discourse, exhibiting a varying range of socio-geographically marked lexical and morphosyntactic features that characterized individual speech acts.

⁷ Among these, there is a digitized edition (from which a few quotations in this paper are taken) of Strathesk (1888); this digitized edition, however, excludes Appendix I; see <www.gla.ac.uk/t4/dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/hawkie.htm>.

See also

<www.nls.uk/collections/rarebooks/collections/popup/hawkie.html>,

<www.theglasgowstory.com/story.php?id=TGSC02>,

<www.theglasgowstory.com/image.php?inum=TGSA02361>,

<members.fortunecity.com/gillonj/hawkie/>,

<www.portaltothepast.co.uk/heritage/heritage_exhibitions/williamgemmill/hawkie.htm>,

and

<www.electricscotland.com/history/glasgow/anec206.htm>.

Indeed, most sites stress Cameron's figure as 'the prince of gangrels', endowed with excellent communication skills. Born in Plean, near Stirling, around 1790, he had to use crutches because his right leg had been injured in a childhood accident; according to his autobiography, he began his begging career in 1815 in Ecclefechan and, after several stops and detours, finally settled in Glasgow; after a while Cameron moved to Paisley, then to England, and several other places in Scotland, until he finally returned to Glasgow in 1818, where he began to sell books and ballads in the street.

The book edited by John Strathesk in 1888 is a small 16° volume, costing one shilling, with a striking and very vivid cover image: a relatively ragged man in a top hat that has clearly seen better days, standing on his left foot and one crutch, while holding the other crutch under his arm and addressing an invisible listener with his look and gestures (one hand is stretched out, the other pointing). The lettering of the title, subtitle, editorial and publication details is also eye-catching in its attempt to imitate handwritten block capitals in the smaller type, and actual pieces of wood, like logs, in the title.

As for the linguistic traits of the title and subtitle, it is interesting to observe that they open and close with two Scots forms: 'Hawkie' and 'gangrel': while the former indicates the protagonist, the latter is a Scots word indicating the mobility of this same protagonist, whose job is to sell ballads in the street and therefore is always 'on the go'⁸ – the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL, at <www.dsl.ac.uk>) provides the following:

GANGREL, *n.* Also *gangeral*, *-el*, *gangretl*, †*gangril(l)*; *gyang(e)rel*, *-al* (n.Sc.). Often used *attrib.* [...] **1.** A tramp, vagrant, vagabond (Ags. 1808 Jam.; Rxb. 1825 Jam.), freq. *attrib.* as in *gangrel body*. Gen.(exc. I.)Sc., obsol. Also in n.Eng. dial.

***Ags. 1776** C. Keith *Farmer's Ha'* xxxvii.:

There's mony sturdy gangril chiel That might be winnin meat fu' well, And claes an a'.

***Ayr. 1786** Burns *Jolly Beggars* Recit. i.:

Ae night at e'en, a merry core O' randie, gangrel bodies In Poosie-Nansie's held the splore.

***Sc. 1815** Scott *Guy M.* iii.:

He's nae gentleman . . . wad grudge twa gangrel pair bodies the shelter o' a waste house.

***Fif. 1841** C. Gray *Lays & Lyrics* 24:

⁸ The same Scots root of the verb 'go' is found in the proverb 'a gangand foot is aye gettin'.

The Gangerel, on his timmer pegs, Wha, through the day, for aumos begs.

***Gsw. 1884** H. Johnston *Martha Spreull* iv.:

Hoose-holders have plenty to do keepin' up greedy paupers . . . let-a-be gien' charity to gangerals and ither necessitous folk.

***Sc. 1887** Stevenson *Underwoods* (1895) 137:

A while shut in my gangrel feet An' goavin' mettle.

***Dmf. 1914** J. L. Waugh *Cracks wi' R. Doo* x.:

A gangrel body sell't it to me for sixteen shillings.

***m.Sc. 1927** J. Buchan *Witch Wood* xi.:

There was a gangrel body sleepit ae nicht in the loft.

***Bnff. 1936** *Abd. Univ. Review* (March) 115:

I pit it til a gangrel wife, her pyock upon her back, An' 'Life's a shortsome thing,' quo' she, 'the meanin' doesna mak'.'

[...] [From *Gang*, v. + *-rel*, suff. O.Sc. has *gangerall*, *gangrell*, in sense **1.**, from 1530.]

As for the origins of the nickname 'hawkie', several interpretations have been offered. The authentic one is given in ch. 12 of the autobiography, in which Cameron recalls:

I [...] drew up 'The Prophecies of 'Hawkie;' A Cow,'⁹ who prophesied in Fife, of a Prophet who appeared in Glasgow and converted numbers. Like the *hand bills*, some bought them for fun, others out of contempt for the Prophet. [...] By this book I got the name of 'Hawkie,' which has from that time stuck to me. I 'called' this book first in Glasgow, where every person knew the meaning of it; but when I went to Edinburgh and 'cried' it, they did not know its meaning, and not knowing my name they called me 'Hawkie' after the book.

However, in Appendix II, by Finlay, a different version is given:

We suppose the name Hawkie was bestowed on our Trongate Demosthenes, on account of his manner of articulating; a hawking-up-throat-sawing tones, as if there were a war in the windpipe, and the antagonist forces very nearly balanced.

⁹ See DSL:

HAWKIE, *n.* Also *hawk(e)y*, *hacky*, *-ie*, *hawkie*, *-y*. [...] **1.** A cow with a white face (Sc. 1808 Jam., *hawkey*); also a gen. term for any cow or a pet name for a favourite one (Sc. 1725 Ramsay *Gentle Shepherd* ii. iii., 1825 Jam.; Kcb.¹ a.1940; Ags., Knr. 1956). Gen.Sc., but now mostly *liter.*.

In addition, the nickname might also relate to his job, which was to *hawk*, i.e. sell merchandise (in this case ballads) in the street. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides this meaning under *hawk*, v.²

1. *intr.* To practise the trade of a hawker.

1542-3 *Act 34 & 35 Hen. VIII*, c. 10 §2 Euill disposed persons..vse daily the craft and subtilty of hauking abroad in the Country, to Villages and to mens houses, putting the same naughty ware to sale secretly. **1676** MARVELL *Mr. Smirke* 33 The little Emissaryes..hawke about from London to Westminster with their Britches stiffe with the Copyes, and will sell them to any one. **1712** ARBUTHNOT *John Bull* III. iv, To go hawking and peddling about the streets, selling knives, scissors, and shoe-buckles.

2. *trans.* To carry *about* from place to place and offer for sale; to cry in the street.

1713 SWIFT *Imit. Hor.* I. vii. 41 His works were hawk'd in ev'ry street, But seldom rose above a sheet. **1759** *Compl. Let.-writer* (ed. 6) 215 They immediately hawked it about to every surgeon. **1833** ALISON *Hist. Europe* (1849-50) I. vi. §56. 51 Inflammatory addresses were hawked in every street. **1866** ROGERS *Agric. & Prices* I. xix. 457 Salt was hawked about by retail dealers.

The book comprises 125 pages; the first 112 pages deal with Cameron's autobiography, divided into 14 chapters; there follows an appendix in which seven letters are presented with editorial comments (see Section 3 below), and an extensive excerpt from William Finlay's *Street Oratory*, in which the author offers a description of Hawkie, a few stanzas from the song of the same title, in which Hawkie is mentioned, and a long dialogue between the gangrel and his audience (see Section 4 below).

The chapters in the autobiography have the following titles:

1. Early years
2. Starting on 'the road' – 1815
3. The dens of Glasgow
4. The Irish 'question'
5. A birthright for a mess of pottage
6. On the war path – Buffy
7. In full swing
8. Kittle company
9. The 'ins' and 'outs' of begging
10. 'A chiel's amang you taking notes'
11. 'Rogues in all trades'

12. Street oratory
13. ‘The croon o’ the causeway’
14. The gloamin’ – ‘some hained rig’

As we can see, several titles evoke Scots poetry, Biblical phrasing (‘a birthright for a mess of pottage’) and proverbs or idioms, such as ‘the croon o’ the causeway’; in particular, ‘A chiel’s amang you taking notes’ is a quotation from Burns’ poem *On Captain Grose’s Peregrinations through Scotland*.

Indeed, title chapters might be studied as a genre of their own, on account of the light they shed on the author’s ability to create expectations in his readers, simply relying on a few, carefully selected and purposefully evocative words. What seems to have been the intention here is to set the autobiography in the context of a well-known literary tradition, in which vernacular usage is perceived to be restricted to users who belong to specific social categories (as we saw above, they are elderly and/or minimally educated) and move in certain social contexts (typically working class). This has the effect of distancing vernacular usage from the envisaged reader, who is instead assumed to be fairly educated and presumably middle class, and is expected to appreciate the ‘quaintness’ of this exotic-but-familiar register.

As for Hawkie’s own linguistic awareness, this is summarized in picturesque tones by Finlay, who describes him as ‘a very extensive Manufacturer of Facts; with a most copious vocabulary, the warp and woof of his Munchausen fabrics, are of wonderful consistency.’ Interestingly, it is lexical richness that makes Hawkie’s speeches particularly intriguing; discussing Hawkie’s rivalry with another chapman, Jamie Blue, Finlay says:

Hawkie [...] cut his rival as with a butcher’s saw, telling him that he knew nothing of the language, that he addressed the public in, ‘Come out to the street, and be a listener, and I’ll let you hear the Scottish language in its pith and purity; ye ken as muckle about it, as grumphy does about grammar.’ (in Strathesk 1888: 120)

Hawkie accuses his rival of using a code that does not match actual usage (though we do not know in what ways it appeared to be inadequate: we may suppose it was because it was the kind of literary and rather thin Scots found in the works of Ramsay and Burns, but there is no precise evidence), and invites him to ‘come out to the street, and be a listener’. It is a comment which evokes a scenario in which ordinary people speak ‘the Scottish language in its pith and purity’ – a case which would seriously undermine

the traditional view of prescriptive success stories, as the idea of ‘purity’ would contrast with the hypothesis of widespread anglicization, at least in working class usage. On the other hand, already in the seventeenth century commentators had underlined the greater ‘purity’ of Scots as opposed to English, as the influence of French following the Norman Conquest had been less widespread on the former (see Dossena 2005). As for ‘pith’, this was a trait that was frequently associated with Scottish proverbs (see Dossena 2000), and this might therefore indicate that the commentator (Finlay) attributed to vernacular forms the same kind of poetic quaintness frequently underlined by collectors of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century proverbs. It is also interesting that Hawkie refers to authentic spoken usage: being a ‘listener’ ‘in the street’ will enable his opponent, whom he describes as grossly ignorant of the matter, to become familiar with the language of ordinary people – the same people who are supposed to buy his ballads, and with whom it is therefore vital to establish successful exchanges in a shared code.

3. Cameron’s letters

Appended to Hawkie’s autobiography, in Appendix I, readers find seven letters,¹⁰ most of which bear no date (one is dated 15th March 1842, another 16th February 1847). The letters were mainly sent from the Town’s Hospital (the City Poorhouse) to ‘Mr David Robertson, Bookseller, Trongate, Glasgow’, and discuss a variety of topics, though as many as five out of seven include a request for tobacco, and two mention spirits. In two letters Cameron laments his very difficult writing conditions – see (1a) and (1b) below:

(1a) SIR,

I am sorry to state that I only on Tewsday last received the glasses from Mr Muier, and a bad fit; however I wil make them do and I have no tabel, and has to stand and writ on *the foot (sic.)*¹¹ That

¹⁰ The editor informs readers that these are a selection of the many letters that ‘have the ‘pure ring’ of Hawkie’ (Strathesk 1888: 113), whereas ‘other leaves among the manuscripts [...] are either written in a different hand, or, for other reasons, do not appear to be genuine’. No further explanation is provided as to what is meant by ‘pure ring’, though it is possible to imagine a certain stylistic homogeneity. Given that nowadays the Glasgow University Library only holds another three letters, the fact that Strathesk mentions instead ‘many’ letters may let us conclude that other documents may have been lost or are untraced.

¹¹ As we saw above, Cameron could not stand on his right foot.

disconvenience arises from Mrs Reid's mother being badly this some time, and is at present lying in a coffin. I hear to be interred on Monday. I think if you would send a line to Mr Stirling he would find me a table, (Strathesk 1888: 114)

(1b) [...] my desk is the bottom of a window and writes standing on the *left foot*. (Strathesk 1888: 115)

In most cases Cameron reports on how his work is progressing. In the quotation below we are also offered a catalogue of the subjects of Hawkie's materials:

I have now thirty-six subjects new to the world among which are a sketch (sketch) of the life and adventures of Andrew Wood, Daft Dawson of Menstry, a blink il (?) eye, a charm for the tooth-ache by a tailor with his wonderful adventures, Billey O'Neals statement of the difference between hanging in Scotland and Ireland, with the life and adventures of James Cock-up as a Unitarian Exorter with his defenses at the police Court. (Strathesk 1888: 115-116)

In another case Hawkie addresses the issue of glossaries, which were by then deemed to be indispensable for 'polite' readers; however, he adds a self-deprecatory comment on his oral delivery: he claims he's typically drunk when out in the street, and cannot guarantee the reliability of his statements:

in your card you request a glossary on the cant. Were a glossary not given the cant would then be a dead language, and could I not define it I would prove a fool to myself and an imposter on you, which is avers to my natural principles however corrupted. I will give you a correct translation of every cant term used by me in the narrative, and for the narrative, if I go beyond truth I am aware that it would make me the least character in existence, as every town and village in my peregrinations can judge for itself as for what has taken place between me and my congregations on the street. I am in general drunk when they happen and I do not commit them to memory. (Strathesk 1888: 114-115)

On the other hand, Hawkie's style could be quite elegant; his self-ironic description of the poorhouse dwellers at the beginning of the last letter in

Appendix I includes a metatextual reference to emigrants' reports, to which the author compares his own:¹²

Sir,

When a person strays from hom and enters a foraeu clemet, after staying sometime, he, in general, sends back a letter giving his opinion of his new residenc, giving a steatment of its inhabitance with their custems and maners both sivel and religeous, with the produce of the country together with the trowbels that naterly ariseth in the clemet. The inhabetens are devided into three secks - wan seck are embesiles or lunetecs, another leam (lame) or deseased, woren out, men and weamen, whos circumstances in life has compeld them to become papers (paupers), a third and most notorious are a mixter of notorious drunkards, the ban of morality, the offscourens of brothels, fling out of bredwals (Bridewells) the refuse of Bottany bay (*an early penal settlement-Ed.*), so that in this colny there is a diverity of spirits as wel as sitewations of distresses, so that, although we are don to far beyond what we deserve, yet the discutions that ariseth among the lawles, unruly, tribe holds this place in as much agitation as Danl O'Conel¹³ did the Parliment. [...] This place speaks in high creadit to the town of Glasgow as it is the secret closet for the eadged (aged) to make up their minds for an everlasting hom, a bed of downs for the afflicted, a cradle for the outcast infent, and a nurs for the parenteles orfint, and a city of refuge for the self-destroyer. (Strathesk 1888: 117)

Undoubtedly, Hawkie's autobiography reads like a picaresque novel, and it may be supposed that its editor did mean to make it as appealing as possible for his readership, though this meant diluting the original and making its syntax and spelling accessible to a fairly educated audience. Apart from the letters in Appendix I, it is only in the last paragraphs of the text that we are allowed to glimpse what the author's spelling was actually like; in the quotation below, the first part (2a) still belongs to the edited text, while the second (2b) is presented as original:

(2a) The inmates who are in good health, get about two pints of substantial well-made porridge, of the best grain, with an imperial half-mutchkin of milk for breakfast; [...]

¹² In spite of social differences, which imply different schooling, and therefore different writing styles, the topics under discussion in emigrants' letters are remarkably similar; they all include information and comments on the weather, the landscape, wages, prices, local people and other immigrants – see Dossena 2008b).

¹³ Reference is made to the Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847).

- (2b) The supper of the inmeats is the same as brakefast – in trwth, the whole stwddies to the utemost the comfort of the inmeats; [...] I consider it prowdent at this time, to end my peregrinations hear. (Strathesk 1888: 112)

Discrepancies are observed in the spelling of *inmates* and *breakfast*. In addition, we see that *here* is spelt as *hear*, on account of its homophony with the verb; as for phonetic spellings, there is an interesting use of <w> in *truth*, *studies*, and *prudent*, whereas in *utmost* an intrusive <e> features in the spelling, possibly to signify the different phonetic rendition of the <u> grapheme, which is actually replaced with <w> or <ow> in other lexical items. And, as a matter of fact, Strathesk (1888: 114) does say that the letters ‘might be enlarged upon as establishing Hawkie’s claim to be one of the forerunners of the reform of the English language known now-a-days as ‘Phonetic Writing’.¹⁴

In addition to spelling, syntax and pragmatic moves are also worth discussing. In particular, it is interesting to see that several instances of the Northern Subject Rule occur in the letters; see for instance (3a, b, c) below:

- (3a) the discussions that ariseth among the lawles, unruly, tribe
(3b) My possions (possessions) at present consists of a steady (steady) hand, a geasend (very, very, parched) throat a dry heart, and an empty pip (pipe)
(3c) even from my residence breathes out the yewls (yowls) of cadging and hopping the cry will penetreat yower ears and touch yower heart

Indeed, this is a syntactic feature often found also in emigrants’ letters, as in ‘I hope all the old friends is well’. It is possible to assume that this form was actually part of the encoders’ active linguistic competence and of the supposedly non-standard quality of which they were not aware, as it is never self-corrected.

As for pragmatic moves, opening and closing formulae and the expression of requests may be fruitful grounds on which to compare Hawkie’s letters with other working class texts.

¹⁴ Indeed, phonetic spelling had already been advocated in the eighteenth century: see Jones (2006).

Hawkie always begins his letters (that is, the ones in the sample in Strathesk 1888) with the vocative form ‘Sir’; only in one case does he begin the letter with ‘Respected Sir’, possibly on account of the begging tone of his message:

Respected Sir,

In order to prevent defrawd, I send you thes lines steating a most lamentable teal and sorrey to add too trew – I am out of tobaco, has no money, creadet crackt, and accounts due that makes me keep under cover; [...] I do not expect a sealebele news peapre, but be so kind as send me an old wan of some kind.

No more, But remains, Sir, unfortenat Hawkie.

On the other hand, it was not uncommon for Hawkie to beg: in another letter the editor seems to reproach him good-humouredly for his statement concerning his supposed reluctance to advertise his poverty:

SIR,

A disagreeable needsesity urges this intrusion. I should not wish that a steatment of my presant circumstances should cast you into the despond in which I am pleast. [...]. I have heard people prayed for in kirks with les than half the troubls, but, ye ken, I was alyes unwilling to tell the publick of my poverty. (*Eh Hawkie! Hawkie! - Editor*)

Indeed, requests are a typical feature in these letters (normally signed ‘(With all due respect) Your (humble) (Servant) William, or W., Cameron’).¹⁵ Such requests are normally accompanied by expressions of gratitude, the directness of which may vary, as they are phrased employing the conditional mood and stressing that the encoder does not ‘wish to be greedy’ or ‘break’ the recipient. Negative face is constantly foregrounded, and the encoder is careful to be as tactful as possible, though making it clear that his requests are in earnest; see for instance the following quotations:

- (4a) Sir, I do not wish to be greedy but a bit tobaco would be aceptibal-
- (4b) if you would be so good as smudder (smother) the report with a morsel of tobaco, youer humble servant, and afllicted petitioner, as in duty bound shall ever pray.
- (4c) I would not wish to break you, but, if you would be so kind as send me a bit tobaco it wil be thankefulley reseived.
- (4d) I am dying for tobaco, if it wowlde come up yower bak to send me

¹⁵ In one case the signature is ‘unfortenat Hawkie’ – see above.

a smak it wouuld releeve the drooping spirits of
(4e) if you have a newspaper to spear, and would give me a reading of
it, I would take it kind.

Such attention to facework is indexical of the asymmetrical relationship existing between the encoder and his recipient, as the latter's status is higher, and therefore spontaneous usage has to be filtered by the requirements of polite interaction: content is honest and direct, but form reflects the expectations of users who are perfectly conscious of their mutual status.

Status consciousness also appears in the dialogue in Appendix II, but this time the situation is different, as it is the chapman who expresses his superior competence by responding to teasing interruptions on the part of the audience in very direct and often colourful ways. The aim was not to pose a threat to either participant's face anyhow: the interruptions and the repartees were part of a game played by both parties and meant to gauge the quickness of the chapman's wit on the one hand, and to amuse on the other. Though some comments might sound quite offensive if taken at face value, it may be assumed that neither party actually felt insulted.

4. The chapman and his audience: (re)constructed authenticity

In the dialogue presented in Appendix II, Hawkie is shown to interact with his audience while advertising a beggar's biography. The dialogue consists of 2249 words, including editorial interventions, such as 'retort' or 'continued', and it can be broken down into several sections. First of all, the text opens with the chapman drawing the attention of the audience and inviting people to listen to him:

A-hey! bide a wee, bodies, and dinna hurry awa hame, till ye hear what I hae gotten to tell ye; do you think that I cam' out at this time o' nicht to cry to the stane wa's o' the Brig'-gate for naething, or for onything else than for the public guid?

This time the text is in Scots, almost as if it were a piece of dialect literature, but its use of discourse markers, vocative forms like 'bodies' and 'man', and undiluted syntax and lexis appear to indicate the wish to reconstruct a piece of authentic discourse – though of course editorial 'improvements' cannot be ruled out.

Just after the chapman's appeal to the audience, somebody makes a comment:

(Voice from the crowd) - ‘Hawkie, ye should hae been sent to parliament, to croak there like some ither parliamentary puddocks till yer throat were cleared.’

Hawkie’s reply is as direct as potentially insulting, as the person who interrupted is called a ‘cabbage stock’, but it indicates his ready use of language, which links the idea of parliament with that of authority, though represented by a hornspoon:

(Reply)- ‘Tak’ aff your hat when ye speak to a gentleman – it’s no the fashion in this kintra to put hats on cabbage stocks – a haggis would loup its lane for fricht afore ye – ye’ll be a king whare a hornspoon is the emblem of authority!’

Another interruption follows as soon as Hawkie begins the story of the beggar whose biography he intends to sell, and again the chapman is ready to respond in kind, concluding his reply with a reference to an idiom based on the same metaphor on which the interruption was constructed (a personified cow):

(Resume’) - ‘Here ye hae the history of a notorious beggar, the full and particular account of his birth and parentage - at least on the mither’s side. This heir to the wallets was born in the byre of a kintra farmer, an’ just in the crib afore the kye, and was welcomed to the world by the nose of honest Hawkie.’

(From the crowd) - ‘Was this a sister of yours, Hawkie?’

(Answer) - ‘Whatna kail yard cam’ ye out o’? that’s your brither aside ye, is’t? you’re a seemly pair, as the cow said to her cloots.’

The next interruption is not overtly humorous, but might sound as actual criticism of the chapman and his style; again, however, the chapman turns the tables on his critic, accusing him of being too dull to make a good beggar; the insult, however, is made humorous by adding the ironic remark about the impossibility of giving pensions to other beggars:

(From the crowd) - ‘What a poor stock ye maun hae; ye hae been yelling about that beggar, till the story is as bare as your ain bellows.’

(Retort) - ‘Hech, man, but your witty – when ye set out on the tramp, dinna come to me for a certificate, for I really cou’dna recommend ye; ye havena brains for a beggar, and our funds are no in a condition to gi’e ony pensions the now.’

Another member of the audience makes a comment, this time possibly expressing even admiration, as Hawkie is indicated as a potential schoolteacher for beggars, but Hawkie also accuses him of dullness:

(Voice from the crowd) - ‘Ye should hae keepit a school amang beggars, and nicht hae ta’en your stilt for the taws.’

(Retort) - ‘Oh, man, I would like ither materials to work wi’ than the like o’ you; it’s ill to bring out what’s no in; a leech would as soon tak’ blood out o’ my stilt, as bring ony mair out o’ you than the spoon put in.’

Cultural stereotypes are seen to affect attacks and defences when an Irishman addresses Hawkie as ‘Willie’, and he – probably on the basis of his accent – addresses him as ‘Paddy’, after which a much longer reply is given, with rather derogatory remarks on proverbial Irish poverty:

(Voice from the crowd) - ‘Och, Willie, is it your own self that I’m hearin’ this morning? and how did ye get home last night, after drinking till the daylight wakened ye? troth ye did not know your own crutch from a cow’s tail.’

(Retort) - ‘Oh, man, Paddie, it’s naething new to me to be drunk, but it’s a great rarity to you - no for want o’ will, but the bawbees. What way cam’ ye here, Paddie? for ye had naething to pay for your passage; and your claes are no worth the thread and buttons that haud them thegither; - gin I had a crown for every road that your trotters could get into your trowsers by, it would be a fortune to me. ‘Take me over,’ said you, to your ould croak-in-the bog; - ‘I wish I had my body across agin, out of this starvation could country, for there’s nothing but earth and stones for a poor man to feed on; and in my own country, I’ll have the potatoe for the lifting.’ Hech, man, - but the police keeps ye in order - and ye thought when ye cam o’er, to live by lifting? man! aff wi’ ye to your bogs - there’s nae place like hame for ye, as the Deil said when he found himsel’ in the Court o’ Session.’

Before continuing the summary of what is in the beggar’s biography, the turn closes with another proverbial idiom in the form ‘as the Deil said’, similar to the one seen above in ‘as the cow said’. Such phrases, which attribute humorous or sarcastic comments to animals or the devil himself, were very well-known elements in popular culture, and were often listed in collections of proverbs. It may be assumed that Hawkie’s audience could recognize and possibly predict (at least part of) them, thus participating more actively in the chapman’s presentation.

The reply is somewhat personalized also when a boy's voice takes the floor:

(Boy's voice from the crowd) - 'Was ye there, Hawkie? surely, if the stilt could haud ye up!'

'Och, sirs, are ye out already – you're afore your time – you should hae staid a wee langer in the nest till ye had gotten the feathers on ye, and then ye would hae been a goose worth the looking at'

Hawkie replies with mock politeness addressing the boy as 'sirs', but concludes that he is still too young even to look like a proper goose, implying he should not be among the crowds to begin with: being there, he just makes a fool of himself.

Finally, the last interruption also refers to Hawkie's disability; when Hawkie presents 'the order o'the procession at the burial' of the beggar he has been talking about, someone throws in 'Your stilt would, nae doubt, be stumpin' at the head o' them a'.'. Hawkie, however, does not take up the comment, and – like in previous cases – makes the hypothesis the commentator is in fact an animal. In addition, he provides a comment on rank and (lack of) intelligence, which seem to be a consequence of each other, as in Burns' *A man's a man for a' that* ('[...] See yon birkie ca'd a lord [...]'). Hawkie's reply is quoted below:

'Stan' aside, lads, I'm just wantin' to see if he has cloots on his trotters, for horns are sae common, now-a-days, amang the gentry o' the blood, whar we should look for an example, that they hae ceased to distinguish the class that nature intended them for.'

At the end, the chapman resumes his direct address to the audience, encouraging them to buy the book even though they may have no money and – paradoxically – promising to lend it to them for the purpose:

Buy this book: if ye hae nae bawbees I'll len' ye, for I'm no caring about siller. I hae perish'd the pack already, an' I am gaun to tak' my Stilt the morn's morning, and let the Creditors tak' what they can get.

5. Concluding remarks

However brief, an assessment of the texts appended to Cameron's autobiography (both his letters and his dialogue with his audience) allows us to make some observations on the features of orality which appear to be, or to have been made, more prominent in such documents.

If first of all we focus on letters, we see that, like in emigrants' letters, it is only in the body of the text that spontaneous usage is observable; opening and closing formulae, together with fixed pragmatic moves, indicate that participants in the exchange were conscious of their mutual status and of the indicators of deference that this required. As a result, the letters are both standardized and personalized – they aim to imitate models, while preserving their communicative specificity.

As for the dialogue, it is almost theatrical in its representation of an authentic exchange, which might suggest editorial intervention. Indeed, there is no guarantee that this is a verbatim transcription of a documented episode; quite the opposite, in fact, as the editor may have 'embellished' the text to suit his readers' expectations, while preserving the flavour of chapbook authenticity which commentators have always found so valuable.

In both cases, however, present-day linguists witness the editor's great interest in providing his audience with a talking picture of language as it was used a few decades before. It is possible that the editor's intent was both humorous and educational, and not really philological, but it is nonetheless valuable for the light it sheds on representations of usage beyond literature – among the people whom literature portrayed, but to whom it did not necessarily give any 'real' voice.

References

Primary source

Strathesk, John (ed.) 1888. *Hawkie. The Autobiography of a Gangrel*. Glasgow: Robertson.

Secondary sources

- Auer, Peter. 2005. 'Europe's Sociolinguistic Unity, or: A Typology of European Dialect/Standard Constellations'. In Delbecque, Nicole, Johan van der Auwera and Dirk Geeraerts (eds.) 2005. *Perspectives on Variation. Sociolinguistic, Historical, Comparative*. Berlin: Mouton, 7-42.
- Chambers, William. 1863. *Historical Sketch of Popular Literature and its Influence on Society: A Paper Read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, February 2, 1863*. Publisher: S.I.
- Cowan, Edward J. and Mike Paterson. 2007. *Folk in Print. Scotland's Chapbook Heritage 1750-1850*. Edinburgh: John Donald.
- Donaldson, William. 1986. *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland. Language, Fiction and the Press*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.
- 1989. *The Language of the People. Scots Prose from the Victorian Revival*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.
- Dossena, Marina. 2000. "'Sense, Shortness and Salt': Ideas of Improvement in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Collections of Scottish Proverbs'. *Review of Scottish Culture* 12: 93-106.
- 2005. *Scotticisms in Grammar and Vocabulary*, Edinburgh: John Donald (Birlinn).
 - 2007. "'As this leaves me at present" – Formulaic Usage, Politeness and Social Proximity in Nineteenth-century Scottish Emigrants' Letters'. In Elspaß, Stephan, Nils Langer, Joachim Scharloth and Wim Vandebussche (eds.) 2007. *Germanic Language Histories from Below (1700-2000)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 13-29.
 - 2008a. 'Imitatio literae. Scottish emigrants' letters and long-distance interaction in partly-schooled writing of the Nineteenth century'. In Kermas, Susan and Maurizio Gotti (eds.) 2008. *Socially-conditioned Language Change: Diachronic and Synchronic Insights*. Lecce: Edizioni del Grifo, 79-96.
 - 2008b. 'Many strange and peculiar affairs': Description, Narration and Evaluation in Scottish Emigrants' Letters of the Nineteenth Century.

Scottish Language 27: 1-18.

- in preparation. “‘I write you these few lines’”: Metacommunication and Pragmatics in Nineteenth-century Scottish Emigrants’ Letters’. In Hübler, Axel and Ulrich Busse (eds.) In preparation. *From the Meta-communicative Lexicon to Historical Pragmatics*.
- Fenton, Alexander 1990. ‘The People Below: Dougal Graham’s Chapbooks as a Mirror of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth Century Scotland’. In Gardner-Medwin, Alisoun and Janet Hadley Williams (eds.) 1990. *A Day Estivall. Essays on the Music, Poetry and History of Scotland and England & Poems Previously Unpublished in Honour of Helena Mennie Shire*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 69-80.
- Jones, Charles. 2006. *English Pronunciation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McLean, Scott A. 2001. ‘Cleansing the Hawker’s Basket: Popular Literature and the Cheap Periodical Press in Scotland’. *Studies in Scottish Literature* 32: 88-100.
- Strathesk, John (Tod, John), 1882. *Bits from Blinkbonny. Or, Bell o’ the Manse*. Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier.