CREATING A *HISTORICAL THESAURUS OF SCOTS*

Susan Rennie
University of Glasgow (UK)

1. INTRODUCTION

A new lexicographic project is now underway at the University of Glasgow, to create a Historical Thesaurus of the Scots Language (HTS). The HTS will be the first thesaurus of Scots to be organised on historical lines, and the first comprehensive resource for Scots to be arranged according to synonymy and semantic category. It will provide a new type of access to the lexicon of Scottish Lowland life and culture, allowing users to explore links between words in semantic clusters, and to compare both historical and dialectal variants of Scots words and phrases. The project is currently in a pilot phase, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, and it is hoped that this will serve as the basis for a larger project to compile and publish a complete Historical Thesaurus of Scots online.[1]

The HTS will not be the first *historical* thesaurus, nor the first thesaurus of *Scots*, but it will be the first lexicographic work to combine both of those categories in a single comprehensive work. The overall concept of the HTS is modelled on the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE), the first historical thesaurus for any of the world's languages, which was begun by Michael Samuels at the University of Glasgow in 1965.[2] The HTE is a semantic presentation of the recorded lexicon of English from Old English to the present-day, and was compiled from the lexicographic information in the second edition of the *OED* (Kay et al 2009). The HTS will be based on the nearest comparable resource for Scots, the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL), which was developed at the University of Dundee and published online in 2004 (<http://www.dsl.ac.uk>). The DSL is a digital conflation of the two major historical dictionaries of Scots: the *Dictionary*

1 A subset of the thesaurus, with our selected semantic categories, will be available at the end of the pilot phase via the project website at <http://www.scotsthesaurus.org>.

2 The HTE was published in print form as the Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary in 2009 and work continues to enhance the electronic version <http://historicalthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk>.

Mª Victoria Domínguez-Rodríguez, et al. (eds). 2016. *Words across History: Advances in Historical Lexicography and Lexicology.* Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Servicio de Publicaciones y Difusión Científica de la ULPGC, pp. 341-353

of the Older Scottish Tongue (DOST) and the *Scottish National Dictionary* (SND). Together, these two works trace the development of the Scots language from the earliest records in the twelfth century to the late twentieth century. The DSL contains more than 80,000 main entries from the parent dictionaries, illustrated by quotations drawn from over 6,000 sources, covering a wide range of subject areas within Scottish culture and history. It is therefore an essential research tool for linguistic scholars interested in the history of either Scots or English, and for historical or literary scholars whose sources are written in Scots or contain Scots usages.

Although we will be drawing on the comprehensive methodology and experience of the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, the creation of the HTS will require new methods of compilation and a new editorial framework. In order to understand why this is the case, it is important to set the project in its historical and cultural context, by looking at earlier attempts to categorize the lexis of Scots according to synonymy and semantic field.

2. THE THESAURAL TRADITION IN SCOTS

In 1938, the Scottish novelist, Willa Muir, gave a broadcast on BBC Radio to mark the centenary of the death of the Rev. Dr John Jamieson, the founding father of Scots lexicography. In her broadcast, Muir described the pleasure of dipping into the pages of Jamieson's *Dictionary*, and the richness of the language it contained. "The copiousness of the Scottish strikes one at once on looking into the Dictionary," she wrote:

> It is a language of people working in the open air with a keen eye for slight variations of movement, or light, or colour. In how many different ways can you walk down the village street? Well, in Scots you can *bauchle* along, or *shauchle*, or *snauchle*, (described as moving in a snivelling manner) or *trauchle*, or *wauchle* like a young child; if your joints are feeble you *jauchle*; if you are heavily burdened you *hauchle*; and if you are not only burdened but struggling through difficult mire or snow you *hychle* along. (Muir 1938)

With her novelist's ear for resonant Scots words, Muir took it upon herself in this instance to create an entry (for 'verbs of motion') for a thesaurus which did not yet exist. Yet by the time Muir was writing, there had been several, albeit

partial, attempts to categorise synonymy in Scots. The very work that she was describing, John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, was the first Scots dictionary to include synonyms alongside discursive definitions. Published in two quarto volumes in 1808, Jamieson's *Dictionary* is now acknowledged as a landmark in the development of historical lexicography (Rennie 2012). Jamieson's treatment of synonymy, although an innovation for Scots, was sporadic; and where it occurs, it is linked to his dialectology, relating terms by which a thing is known locally in various areas of Scotland. Here, for example, are his entries for the ball-game known as *heytie* or *hummie* in the Lothians, but more widely (then as now) called *shintie;* and *quicken* 'couchgrass', known as *quicks* in the North of England (*A.Bor.* is Jamieson's abbreviation for 'Anglia Borealis'), and in the Lothians as *ae-pointed* 'one-pointed' *grass*:

> HEYTIE, s. A name for the game elsewhere denominated *Shintie*, Loth. It is also called *Hummie*, ibid.

> QUICKEN, s. Couch-grass, Dogs-grass, S. Triticum repens, Linn. "The *Quicken*. Scot. aust." Lightfoot, p. 1131. This is also the name S.B. *Quicks*, A.Bor. E. *quick-grass*, Skinner. Denominated perhaps because of its lively nature; as every joint of the root, which is left in the ground, springs up anew. In Loth, it is also called *ae-pointed grass*, as springing up with a single shoot.

The second strand of a traditional thesaurus, namely categorisation into semantic clusters, had featured in Scottish lexicography before Jamieson. The first actual dictionary of Scots (as opposed to glossaries to literary texts which had existed for some centuries before) was begun by the young James Boswell in the 1760s, while he was completing his legal studies at the University of Utrecht (Rennie 2011: 95). Boswell's work was prompted at least in part by a desire to preserve the vestiges of what he believed was a dying language. "The Scottish language," he lamented, "is being lost every day, and in a short time will become quite unintelligible. [...] It is for that reason that I have undertaken to make a dictionary of our tongue, through which one will always have the means of learning it like any other dead language" (Pottle 1952: 161). Although Boswell never completed his dictionary, the surviving manuscript contains around 800 skeleton entries, offering a fascinating record of mid-18th-century Scots. Moreover, Boswell includes a number of thematic lists, especially in the rougher parts of the manuscript which represent the early stages of compilation. He lists,

for example, types of berry and varieties of seaweed, and a cluster of Scots names for birds: *mevis* 'thrush', *gowdspink* 'goldfinch', *lintwhite* 'linnet', *gled* 'kite', and *pyet* 'magpie' (Rennie 2011: 105). Most of these words, in common with the majority of Boswell's headwords, are still in use in parts of Scotland today, despite Boswell's dire predictions about the impending death of the Scots language.

Boswell was not planning a thesaurus and there is no indication that he intended to keep this type of categorisation in his final work; but the manuscript shows evidence that he was, on occasion, compiling his dictionary thematically, especially when noting Scots terms for the natural world. In the early stages, his dictionary was most likely compiled from memory, with little access to Scottish literary sources, or to his father's extensive library at Auchinleck. It is therefore a dictionary of remembered Scots, and the thematic organisation of some parts is most likely due to simple word association.

In the mid-18th century, as Boswell was recording Scots for preservation, a contrary fashion developed in Scotland for publishing lists of so-called "Scotticisms" (McClure 2012). These works were part of a trend towards levelling linguistic differences between Scots and English in favour of the latter, and they often grouped words and idioms according to semantic fields, such as food and drink, so that readers could avoid using them in particular social contexts. They were, then, the antithesis of the modern phrasebook, designed to help readers avoid, rather than in engage with, the Scots language. The agricultural reformer, Sir John Sinclair, published a list of "Words peculiar to the Scots, or which they use in a sense different from the English" in 1782, which included this group of tea-time terms under the category of 'Entertainments' (Sinclair 1782: 143):

> Scotch. *To cover the table*.
> *English*. To lay the cloth.
> [...]
> *To serve the tea-things*, (better)
> To hand about the tea-things.
>
> *To fill the kettle*.
> To fill the teapot.
> The *kettle* is emptied, and not filled.

To Sinclair, the Scots language was a potential barrier to cultural integration with England and he saw the eradication of culturally specific terms as essential

to Scotland's political and economic future. "Old things must then be done away," he noted in his Preface, "new manners must be assumed, and a new language adopted" (Sinclair 1782: 2). Each of these lexicographers—Jamieson, Boswell, and Sinclair—classified Scots for different reasons. Jamieson noted synonymous terms to emphasize the dialectal richness and variety of the contemporary language. Boswell used semantic categories as an aide memoire to assist his compilation, keen to record every memory he could muster of spoken Scots before its distinctiveness was lost forever; and Sinclair grouped words themetically to ensure their more efficient eradiction. Our approach in compiling the Historical Thesaurus of Scots will be closer to Jamieson's and Boswell's than to Sinclair's—although, to be fair, Sinclair and his contemporaries did a service to lexicography by preserving information on core 18th-century Scots and Scottish English usage, despite their aims to the contrary.

Jamieson incorporated some semantic clusters in his *Dictionary* of 1808, although again the treatment is sporadic and occurs mainly in his more encyclopaedic entries, for words such as YULE and HALLOWEEN, where he indulges in lengthy discussions and speculations on the origins of traditional festivals and related customs (Rennie, forthcoming). Following in Jamieson's wake, and influenced by his antiquarian methodology, the French philologist, Francisque Xavier Michel published *A Critical Enquiry into the Scottish Language* in 1882: a curious but interesting work which combines etymological speculation with semantic categorisation. Michel was concerned to prove the influence of French language and culture on Scotland. "To thoroughly understand Scottish civilisation," he claimed, "we must seek for most of its more important germs in French sources" (Michel 1882: viii). In order to prove his point, he divides Scots lexis into semantic categories such as 'furniture', 'musical instruments', 'dances', and (of particular relevance for our project) 'games and amusements'. His work takes a historical approach, building on Jamieson in this respect, and is therefore an important forerunner for the new thesaurus, although by focussing on words with French connections, it covers only part of the historical lexicon of Scots.

Moving onto the 20th century, semantic categorisation looms large in a key work of Scots philology: Sir James Wilson's *Lowland Scotch as Spoken in the Lower Strathearn District of Perthsire* (1915). In this study, Wilson recorded the Perthshire Scots dialect of his youth, rendered in his own phonetic spelling system, and classified its lexis into semantic categories, such as 'weather', 'time', 'common occupations', 'health and sickness', and 'terms of endearment'. Although Wilson's work is appreciated for its own sake by Scots linguists, it is more widely known

for the galvanising effect it had on Scottish literature through the poet 'Hugh MacDiarmid'. It was in one of Wilson's semantically ordered lists that MacDiarmid found the central image for 'Watergaw', one of his most influential poems, published in his first collection of Scots poetry in 1925 (Bold 1988: 137). Under the category of 'weather', Wilson had listed *watergaw* 'indistinct rainbow', as well as the terms *on-ding* 'beating rain or shower' and *yowe-trummle* 'cold weather in July', which appear further down the same page on consecutive lines (Wilson 1915: 169). All three terms were later incorporated by MacDiarmid in his poem.

WEATHER	
[...]	
beating rain or shower	oan ding
pretty heavy shower	a but oan ding
very warm	aufay waarum
close, muggy day	maukhay day
very close	aufay cloas
cold, wet fog (from the east)	aisturlay haur
	haur
slush	sleesh
cold weather in May when cows go out	coo-quaak
cold weather in July after shearing	yow-trummul
indistinct rainbow	waatur-gaw
rainbow	renbow
halo round the moon	brukh

Curiously, the entry for *onding* in the DSL (defined as 'a heavy, continuous fall of rain or snow') does not cite MacDiarmid's famous use of the word, even though 'Watergaw' was published in 1925 and the last citation in the entry is from 1958. (The SND Second Supplement, published as an adjunct to the DSL in 2005, does not redress this anomaly, including only citations from 1979 onwards.)[3]

It was not until the late twentieth century that a separate thesaurus of Scots was published. The *Scots Thesaurus*, published by the Scottish National Dictionary Association in 1990, is more limited in scope and historical range than

3 Onding n., v. *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. Last accessed 08/02/2015 <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/sndns2740>.

the planned Historical Thesaurus of Scots. It does not, for example, include a category for sports and games, even though the vocabulary of traditional Scottish sports such as golf and shinty features extensively in the DSL, and has been included in Scots lexicons since at least the 18th century. (Allan Ramsay's poetic glossary of 1721 had included the first published definition of a golf *tee*: "a little Earth on which Gamsters at the Gowf set their Balls before they strike them off".)[4] The category of weather is, however, well represented in the *Scots Thesaurus*, which lists over 700 terms classed under seven sub-categories covering types of weather, forecasting, temperature and natural light, and these will provide a useful starting-point for the HTS.

Currently then, researchers interested in semantic relations between Scots words, or in analysing clusters of words within a certain field, can start with manual searches in the print *Scots Thesaurus*, or look for selected terms in full-text searches across the whole DSL; but such methods are time-consuming and inexact. The *Historical Thesaurus of English* also includes data on Scots from the OED and its Supplements; currently over 11,000 words are labelled as Scots in the HTE database. Research has already been carried out on Scots kinship terms using this data (Kay 2013), and the creation of a resource specifically focussed on Scots should provide more scope for this type of historical semantic analysis.

3. BILINGUAL LEXICOGRAPHY IN SCOTS

There is a third strand to the proposed Historical Thesaurus of Scots, and one which distinguishes it from our sister project, the *Historical Thesaurus of English*. Although many users will approach the HTS to find Scots words in a given semantic field (all the Scots words that have ever been used to describe weather, for example), we anticipate that others will approach the data from the starting point of an English term (such as *icicle*), in order to find equivalent terms in Scots for any historical period. Indeed, a future area for research using the full HTS will be the relationship between Scots and English terms for the same or related concepts. How, in other words, have Scots terms for individual concepts fared historically alongside comparable terms in Standard English? Have some semantic fields retained more Scots terms than others, and is this consistent across the various dialects of Scots?

4 Ramsay's Poems (1721) included an early Scots glossary compiled by the poet himself: see McClure (2012).

Arguably, all Scots lexicography is bilingual, as there has never been a complete monolingual dictionary which defines Scots headwords with Scots definitions. The first published Scots lexicon of which evidence survives is a bilingual work from Latin into the Lowland Scots vernacular of the late 16th century.[5] As standard English gradually replaced Scots as the language of state and education, Scots dictionaries reflected that shift in status, so that Scots became the language which required glossing, and English the language in which definitions were framed. Until the twentieth century, Scots lexicography concentrated on preserving and interpreting Scots, and interest in the other side of the bilingual equation—lexicons from English *into* Scots—only began to appear in the post-war years, in response to a growing interest in writing and translating in Scots and encouraged no doubt by the concurrent publication in parts of the *Scottish National Dictionary*.[6]

In 1947, James Nicol Jarvie published the first work in this new field. *Lallans: A Selection of Scots Words arranged as an English–Scottish Dictionary* was compiled, as the author states, "for the many whose everyday speech is English and who wish, on occasion, to write or to speak Scots" (Jarvie 1947: 5). Jarvie's work is entirely alphabetical, and he usually gives a single Scots equivalent for his English headwords, so that his work cannot be used as a thesaurus. There are also frustratingly few cross-references (in contrast to Jamieson's approach a century and a half earlier). For example, Jarvie gives consecutive entries for RAIN (equated to Scots *ren*) and RAINING HEAVILY (for which he suggests *plashin weet*), but does not refer his readers back to the earlier entry for HEAVY FALL OF RAIN (*plash o weet*); and he lists *onding* only under HEAVY FALL OF SNOW, despite its additional meaning of a downpour of rain, as noted by Wilson and adopted by MacDiarmid. (The SND entry for ONDING, mentioned above, which refers to both snow and rain, was not available to Jarvie, as it was not published until 1965.) Jarvie was succeeded by William Graham, whose *Scots Word Book* (1977) included an English–Scots section which later formed the basis for the SNDA's *Concise English-Scots Dictionary*, published in 1993 and the only such work still in print (Macleod 2012: 182). Although the HTS will fit into this bilingual tradition, we will not be drawing on these earlier works for our English–Scots data, as their contents have largely been superseded by the digitisation of the DSL, which offers full-text searches on English defining terms in both SND and DOST, and therefore covers a far greater range in both synchronic and diachronic terms.

5 Andrew Duncan, *Appendix Etymologiae* (Edinburgh, 1595). See Rennie (2012: 23).

6 The SND was published in parts from 1929 until 1976. See Macleod (2012).

4. A PILOT *HISTORICAL THESAURUS OF SCOTS*

Underlying the new *Historical Thesaurus of Scots* will be a lexicographic framework that combines the structure of a thesaurus (linking words to related synonyms and semantic categories) with that of an English-to-Scots bilingual dictionary. Although the vocabulary of Scots has been in gradual decline since the 18th century, the language has remained strong in certain semantic categories, in particular those which reflect the natural or built environment of Scotland, and those which relate to Scottish material culture or cultural traditions. For the pilot phase, we will be focussing on a number of semantic categories which are rich in Scots vocabulary, including *sports and games*, *food and drink* and *weather*, as well as a separate category of Scots idioms. The inclusion of weather as a category allows us to link the new Thesaurus with the centenary of the publication of Wilson's *Lowland Scotch* (1915), with its influential classification of Scots weather words. The choice of Scots idioms and proverbs also has a historical dimension. Boswell was particularly keen on recording Scots idioms and included a separate list in his dictionary, noting such idiomatic expressions as being *as fu as a partin* 'as stuffed as a crab', for which his manuscript is now the first written evidence (Rennie 2011: 105). Idioms and proverbs are not specifically identified in the DSL, and are often embedded in citations taken from historical works, such as those by James Kelly (1721) and David Fergusson (1641), both of which were much copied by later compilers.[7] A by-product of the HTS research in this area will therefore be a new understanding of the coverage of these works, their historical relations to each other, and the extent to which they have been subsumed within the current DSL.

In compiling our thesaurus, we must first find all the Scots terms related to our chosen concepts, and then subdivide them into appropriate categories. A key question for us is therefore: to what extent can we re-use the existing categories in the *Historical Thesaurus of English*? How adaptable, in other words, are semantic categories devised for a different, though historically related, language? Take, for example, the humble porridge stick, called variously a *spurtle* or a *theevil* in Scots. The HTE includes a category for *cooking equipment* and does indeed list both *spurtle* and *theevil* as types of 'stirring stick'— but there is nothing to link them to oats or porridge, and the HTS would certainly specify that, as the

7 James Kelly, Complete Collection of Scottish Proverbs (London, 1721); Fergusson's Scottish Proverbs from the Original Print of 1641, ed. E. Beveridge (Edinburgh, 1924).

association is so strong in Scotland. Other Scots cooking utensils feature partially in the HTE. *Potato* (or *tattie*) *beetles* (for mashing potatoes) are listed, but are not identified as Scots (as they were not so labelled in OED2, although they are in OED3), and there is no mention of the synonymous *potato-* or *tattie-champers* (the most common modern term). The HTE does not link ingredients such as oats and potatoes to the utensils used to cook them, and so loses the links sometimes established in the parent dictionary entries (*potato beetle* for example was nested under POTATO in OED2).

Alongside the literal uses of our terms, we also want to include figurative expressions. *Spurtle*, for example, has spawned a number of compounds in Scots that no longer relate to cooking oats, and which are based on the shape rather than the function of the utensil: *spurtle-legged* (or *-leggit*), means having thin legs like porridge sticks, and *spurtle-grup*, or *spurtle-shot* is a pain in your side after walking or running (known as a *stitch* in English), possibly from the notion of being stabbed by a spurtle. A future entry in our thesaurus would link to the figurative *spurtle-shot,* and show that this is also called *theevil-ill* in parts of Scotland, thus taking us back to porridge sticks and completing the semantic circle.

In terms of weather, you would expect there to be fewer culturally unique terms in Scots, as the weather in the British Isles does not recognise national or linguistic borders. There are however interesting differences in the terminology used to refer to the same states of weather. Cirrus clouds for example are traditionally called *gait's hair* 'goat's hair' in Scots, or *hen scarts* 'hen scratchings', in reference to their streaky appearance. There are also a number of Scots terms to describe the action of snow that have no direct equivalent in English. If we start with the upper-level category for *snow* in the HTE, and then narrow the search to verbs used to denote driving snow, there are two verbs listed: *reek* and *stour.*[8] However, if we follow the link to the source entry in the OED, we find that *stour* (despite the *Sc and north* label) is not actually used in this sense in Scots. For this category then, the HTS will *not* give *stour* (as there is no evidence for it in Scottish sources), but we will include other verbs which are used for snowfall in Scots and which do *not* feature in the HTE. Two immediate examples are the verbs *feefle* and *feuchter*: the DSL suggests that the former may apply to snow whirling round a corner, and the latter to snow falling in soft flakes:

8 These searches were run on the online version of the HTE at <http://historicalthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk>. Last accessed 13/02/2015.

FEEFLE, *v.*2 To swirl, as of snow round a corner (Ork. 1958 *Ork. Herald* (25 Feb.) 3; Sh. 1975).
[Prob. chiefly imit. *Cf.* FEEF, *n.*, WHIFF, phs. formally influenced by FEE—E, *v.*1]

FEUCHTER, *n.* Add: *v.*1
Add: II. *v.* Of snow: to fall lightly, to come down in odd flakes.
Ags. c.1840 Jervise MS.:
It's feuchterin on o' snaw.

Both these entries from DSL date from the first SND Supplement, compiled in the 1970s, so that they postdate the edition of OED on which the *Historical Thesaurus of English* was based—and hence their omission from that work. Neither *feefle* nor *feuchter* has a direct synonym in standard English, although there may be equivalents in English dialects (and that is a further area of future research, of course, made possible by the recent digitisation of Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*).[9]

In structuring the HTS, we will be linking each lemma to its source entry in the DSL, thus creating a linked dataset that will allow users to view and analyse the historical lexis of Scots in varying yet complementary formats. We will also be exploring the possibility of providing links from Scots terms to their English equivalents in the HTE, which itself links to related entries in the online OED. From an entry point in the HTS, it would therefore be possible for a user to follow the semantic path of a given term or cluster through four separate lexicographic resources, each of which is the most comprehensive of its kind. We will also be inviting users to upload their own photographs or audio clips to illustrate entries in the thesaurus (for example, types of sky or cloud in the category of *weather*). This type of crowdsourcing may be seen as an extension of the illustration (by publishers) and annotation (by users) which have been a traditional part of dictionary production and use for centuries. By encouraging users to contribute to the online content of the thesaurus, we aim to foster a sense of shared participation in the creation of a major new lexicographic resource. William Grant, the first Editor of the *Scottish National Dictionary*, once described his hopes for the SND in words which we have taken as the motto for the HTS

9 A beta version of the Electronic EDD is available online at <http://www.uibk.ac.at/anglistik/projects/edd-online/>.

project. "Our Modern Scottish National Dictionary," he wrote, "with its wealth of illustration, will be a kaleidoscope of dissolving views of the many phases of our national life."[10] In the Historical Thesaurus of Scots, we hope to provide a new and innovative way to realise Grant's vision.

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