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# Variation and Variety in Middle Scots Reconsidered: A Test Study of the Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots

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Everyone working in the field of Scottish Studies knows where the first part of my title comes from. Perhaps I should therefore add that my paper is only a preliminary study in which I am trying to deal with some of the many pertinent questions asked in that most important essay by A. J. Aitken[1] which has so often been referred to ever since its publication, quite recently extensively so by Amy Devitt in her book on standardization in Scottish English.[2]

I am one of those who go on reading this study of Aitken's with great enthusiasm, always inspired by his call for more detailed studies of various intriguing aspects of the Scottish tongue. The problems Aitken discusses convinced me of the usefulness of a computer-readable corpus of Older Scots and, as some of you know from my paper at the Aberdeen conference,[3] the

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[1]A. J. Aitken, "Variation and Variety in written Middle Scots," in *Edinburgh Studies in English and Scots*, ed. A. J. Aitken, A. McIntosh, and H. Pálsson (London, 1971), pp. 177-209.

[2]Amy J. Devitt, *Standardizing Written English. Diffusion in the Case of Scotland 1520-1659* (Cambridge, 1989).

[3]Anneli Meurman-Solin, "The Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots," *Bryght Lanternis. Essays on the Language and Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. J. Derrick McClure and Michael R. G. Spiller (Aberdeen, 1989), pp. 451-8.

opportunity for creating one arose when we started compiling the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts in the English Department at the University of Helsinki a few years ago.[4] A computer-readable corpus seemed to me to be just the kind of tool we would need for example in order to study the distributions of variant spellings, of substandard variants, of only or chiefly Scottish lexical items, of morpho-syntactic variants, etc.

The first version of the Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots (HSC) is now ready for use. It consists of approximately 600,000 words of prose, covering the periods 1450-1500, 1500-1570, 1570-1640, and 1640-1700, but there are plans for some important additions to be made. The WordCruncher program[5] makes it possible to study the texts by selecting individual words, strings of words, word-initial or word-final morphemes from an alphabetical list of all the words of the corpus that appears on the screen, each word form and variant spelling followed by the number of occurrences. Each occurrence can be seen in a context of a chosen length, from one line to a whole page. The syntactic environment, the meaning, etc., of an item studied can easily be checked. It is also possible to get frequency lists of variant spellings of any item studied.

The program works perfectly, and it seems that we are now in a position to set about assessing general and particular resemblances and differences between texts dating from different periods and representing different genres. As Aitken suggests, we can now study numerically spelling practices in idiolects "identifying those habits in which each writer is consistent, those in which he shows strong preferences and those in which no preference is visible" (Aitken, p. 185) and then compare idiolects and text types one with another. We can try to answer questions like Do writers/scribes possess fixed spelling systems of their own? Schools of spelling tradition—did they exist? Which variants were freely interchangeable, which had specialized distributions?

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[4]The diachronic part of the main corpus is 1.5 million words and it is structured in sections of Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English. The Corpus of Older Scots is a supplement to this part. For general information about the Helsinki Corpus, see Merja Kytö and Matti Rissanen, "The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Classifying and Coding the Diachronic Part," in *Corpus Linguistics Hard and Soft. Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on English Language Research on Computerized Corpora*, ed. Merja Kytö, Ossi Ihalainen and Matti Rissanen (Amsterdam, 1989), pp. 169-79. Also Merja Kytö, "Progress report on the diachronic part of the Helsinki Corpus." In *ICAME Journal*, no. 13 (1989), 12-5, and M. Kytö, *Manual to the Diachronic Part of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Coding Conventions and Lists of Source Texts* (Helsinki, 1991).

[5]See *WordCruncher. Text Indexing and Retrieval Software, Version 4.1* (Utah, 1987).

The Helsinki Corpus of Scots is not an ideal tool for studying spelling practices, as not all the texts chosen are  holograph texts; some texts included are available only in editions the editing principles of which have not been described by the editor.[6]  As the inclusion of a rich variety of text types was considered important, leaving numerous gaps in the selection of texts did not seem appropriate.  The corpus contains information about the possible discrepancy between the date of the original and the later versions of a text.  The textual history of each text and the quality of the edition are then taken into account in the analysis of data.   On the other hand, the corpus cannot be used for studies of regional variation, as, with the exception of three texts,[7] it represents only the south-eastern area.

Two test studies based on the corpus are already forthcoming.  In one of them,[8] my aim was to find out how useful the corpus was in studies of phonological and morpho-syntactic problems; the present paper is a by-product of this study.   In the other study, I suggest a typology of the texts included, applying methods suggested by Douglas Biber in his multifactor/ multidimensional approach to genres and text types.[9]  My specific aim is to describe the evolution of genres in fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish prose by analyzing co-occurrences of linguistic features in the texts of the corpus.[10]  In the near future, studies based on the corpus will also be included in the volumes being prepared at the Department of English, University of Helsinki, within the English in Transition Project, financed by the Academy of Finland.  The first volume, to be published by Mouton de Gruyter, contains a study on the uses of periphrastic *do* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scots.

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[6]For example Sir William Fraser published the correspondences of noble Scottish families because of their historical interest and did not consider it important to comment upon his principles in editing them.  Of course, the compiler of the corpus will replace a poor edition whenever a better one is made available.

[7]*Porteous of Noblenes* (c. 1490), Dr. Gilbert Skeyne's tracts (1568, 1580) and John Spalding's history (c. 1650) represent Northern Scots in the HSC.

[8]Anneli Meurman-Solin, "On the Morphology of Verbs in Middle Scots," *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics*, ed. Matti Rissanen *et al.* (Helsinki, 1990), Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming.

[9]Douglas Biber. *Variation across speech and writing* (Cambridge, 1988).

[10]Anneli Meurman-Solin, "On the Evolution of Prose Genres in Older Scots," forthcoming in *NOWELE*, 23 (1994).

In the present paper, I first look at some of the features mentioned in Aitken's study which may be diagnostic of genre and text type.   I then briefly comment upon Amy Devitt's study and compare some of her results with mine.

Predictably, Aitken's suggestions, which he says he makes on an impressionistic basis, are usually borne out by the corpus.   He writes in his essay:

> It appears that the great majority of Middle Scots texts at each chronological stage adhered fairly regularly to a variant spelling system which included only the more common and widespread variants . . . and in general excluded the rarer variants. Conversely, there also existed a minority of texts in which these less common variants were rather profusely used.   But the boundary between these two classes of texts is somewhat indeterminate, since one is apt to meet an occasional uncommon variant even in texts which generally conform to the more limited system and since there are also texts whose practice falls between the two extremes of somewhat limited variation and the free use of uncommon variants.   Nevertheless it is already possible to specify those texts whose spelling practice is noticeably 'regular' (ie which have a more limited range of variation) and others, less 'regular', in which the less common variants are clustered (pp. 197-8).

An analysis of spelling practices in the HSC shows that there was a fairly uniform Scottish English standard not only up to the Scottish Reformation but quite clearly—in the majority of texts—up to the first half of the seventeenth century.   But there are also differences between genres and text types within this standard.   The language is uniform only in the sense that we can see mostly unidirectional tendencies of differentiation and standardization in it,[11] but both of these types of change take place at different stages and in different ways in different genres and text types.   The corpus contains some specimens of remarkably conservative language use, for example Spalding's history (c. 1650).   His language is of special interest, as the history is known to have circulated in manuscript.   But, on the other hand, there are also a number of texts, in the period 1570-1640, in which anglicization has taken place, for one reason or another, earlier than in other texts of the period.   Consequently, their spelling, and also for example verb morphology, are more regular than that of the majority of contemporary texts.   The most important texts reflecting early anglicization in the corpus are:   Bruce's sermon (1590-91), James VI's treatise against tobacco (1604),

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[11]Early Scots resembled the Northern dialect of the English language, in contrast to Middle Scots, which developed distinctive characteristics of its own, only to lose many of them during the anglicization process.

Birnie's *Blame of Kirk-buriall* (1606), Huntar's handbook *Weights and Measures* (1624), and Lithgow's travelogue (1632).[12]

In other pre-1640 texts, most texts are consistent in their Scottishness; there is, of course, some variation between Scottish and southern forms in texts that are by the hand of a number of writers (local records, criminal trials, correspondence), but variation in idiolects is controlled in the sense that it is usually possible to find a predominant variant and one or two sporadically used variants. Variation in idiolects is also feature-specific, that is to say, the degree of variation depends on which linguistic feature is being analyzed. If we take the Scottish *quh*-variants and the English *wh*-variants as an example, they co-occur only in Bruce's sermon, Robert Birrel's (a 1605) and Alexander Brodie's (1652-1680) diary and Spalding's history. Other types of variants may co-occur more freely, for example Scottish and English variants such as *sa* and *so*, *fra* and *from*, *ony* and *any*.

Even if, at each chronological stage, the Scottish standard is fairly uniform, the Scottishness of texts within text types is a variable. Some text types are more heterogeneous than others in this respect. Chiefly Scottish features are more dominant in Fergusson's sermon (1571) compared with Bruce's sermon. Pitscottie's history (a 1578) is more Scottish than Moysie's (1577-1603) and Leslie's (1570) contemporary works, Rev. James Melvill's diary (1600, 1610) more Scottish than Birrel's (a 1605), to take examples from the period 1570-1640.

The stylistic distribution of items of vocabulary in the corpus is easy to map with WordCruncher. Aitken suggests we should look at pairs such as *knaw* and *ken*, *pas* and *gan*, *ga* (p. 178).[13] In this paper, however, I focus on spelling practices.

Were variants such as those discussed below largely interchangeable? How should we interpret results of the following kind? *V* for *w* (*ve*, *vitht*, *vatter*, *vaye*) occurs chiefly in early Middle Scots religious instruction, in pre-1640 letters and pamphlets, and in pre-1700 scientific treatises and some

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[12]For detailed bibliographical information on the primary sources mentioned in this paper, see for example the register of titles of works quoted in the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, Vol. III; for further information on the texts included in the corpus, see Meurman-Solin's article noted in fn. 3, above, and the forthcoming manual of the HSC.

[13]It is perhaps surprising that the Scottish members in pairs of this kind should occur in the majority of pre-1640 texts in all text types. Specialization of distribution could perhaps be recorded if contextual styles were looked at.

private records.[14]  This spelling does not occur in local records and in secular instruction (including handbooks) and it is also absent in most histories and trials.  Even if the spelling is common in pre-1640 letters, there are no instances in later letters.  *U* for *w* (*uith, uatter*) is typical of *Basilicon Doron* (1598), as noticed by Aitken, but the variant also occurs in seventeenth century letters.

*Tht* for *th* (*witht, deitht, truetht*) occurs in burgh records, in religious instruction, official letters and pamphlets in the period 1500-1570.  There are no instances from trials or pre-1500 texts.  This spelling practically disappears after 1570.  Only the scribe of Pitscottie's history, whose language is characterized by numerous irregular spellings, uses it, and also a female letter-writer (Jane, Countess of Sutherland, *Sutherland Bk.*) during the first quarter of the seventeenth century.  *Cht* for *ch* or *th* (*althocht, Edinburcht*; *lencht, norcht, Forcht, threwcht, monecht*) also disappears by 1570 and occurs in the same texts as *tht* for *th*, but also in trials.[15]  It appears that these spellings are more prevalent in certain texts within certain time limits, mostly before the diffusion of Anglo-English variants, but that they are not diagnostic of text type.  I come to this conclusion because of the obvious differences between idiolects representing the same genre and the fact that the genres mentioned cannot be positioned close to one another on a continuum.  What is interesting in their distributions is that they serve to illustrate patterns characteristic of orthographic change in Middle Scots.  One of them records the disappearance of a Scottish variant at a relatively early stage of standardization, the other a slower process in which changes take place at a different pace in different text types, which presumably reflects differences in such extralinguistic factors as the level of formality, the author-audience relationship, the general purpose of the text, etc.  My hypothesis is that variables of this kind may help uncover specializations of distribution which cannot be identified, if only date and text type are taken into consideration.

To mention some more examples, *i*-digraphs (*lait, mair, haill*; *heir, keip, pleis*; *befoir, cloik, lois*; *guid, puir, tuik*; *byid*) become frequent in the sixteenth century and remain in general use up to 1640.  It is, however, interesting that *ai* and *ei* spellings are retained later than *oi*, *ui* and *yi*, and also

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[14]Birrel's diary, Lauder's *Journals* and Turner's *Memoirs*.  There are rare instances also in some trials and Pitscottie's history.

[15]In his comments on this paper Aitken points out that from *DOST* it looks as if *cht* and *tht* may have been on the way out around 1600.  I would like to thank Professor Aitken for his constructive criticism.  I alone am responsible for any infelicities that might remain.

that the latter three could be claimed to be diagnostic of conservative text types. *Yi* has been attested only in the early sixteenth-century records of Stirling; *ui* is restricted to the Stirling records and to letters, but occasionally occurs also in Alexander Brodie's diary and a religious pamphlet; and *oi* is found only in the Stirling records, Spalding's history and letters. Aitken gives examples of—possibly—mutually exclusive sets, such as *hatt* for "hat" and *hait, hayt* for either "hot" or "to hate." However, the corpus provides evidence of anomalous spellings: the *i*-digraph is sometimes used for short /a/ in informal language use, as in *hait* for "hat" in a schoolboy's letter (Patrick Waus, *Waus Corr.*).

All early Middle Scots texts use *sch* for *sh* (*scho, schape, schewe*). In late Middle Scots Fergusson's sermon, all trials, Moysie's and Pitscottie's histories and private records (diaries and biographies) continue using it, and interestingly enough, also writers of private letters, particularly women writers. The /x/ sound (*richt, michte, sochte, tauchte*) is spelled *ch* in all pre-1640 texts except those which are characterized by early anglicization whatever the linguistic feature studied. It is again significant that Spalding uses this spelling. The /l/ and /n/ mouillé (*failȝye, spulye/spoilȝe; fenȝe, plenȝe*) occur in all text types before 1640 and after that in the Stirling records, Spalding, and Sinclair's *Natural Philosophy* (1683). However, there are no occurrences in the private letters of the corpus.

Features of this kind and their co-occurrences make it possible to characterize the language of each individual text and to position it on a continuum between poles such as regular vs. irregular, conservative vs. innovative, etc. For example the set of variants of the verb *make* mentioned by Aitken (*mak, mack, makk-/make, maik, mayk*) is distributed in such a way as to allow us to claim that /mak/ occurs in the more conservative texts, /mɛːk/ in the innovative.[16] Frequently-used words which have numerous spelling variants may provide important information about the system of phonemes prevalent in each idiolect and time period. For example, *haill*[17] is more frequent than *whole* as late as William Cunningham's diary in the late 1670s and also in all the three samples from the Stirling records (1500-1700). In Spalding only *haill* is used. *Ho(i)ll* is introduced into records of the royal burghs and of St. Andrews Kirk Sessions and into *Criminal Trials* in the period 1500-1570, but occurs also in Skeyne's tracts (1568, 1580) and

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[16]In his comments, Aitken adds that *mak* and *make, maik* seem to have been regionally differentiated, as they are in Modern Scots.

[17]The variants of *whole* in the corpus are: *hale, hail, haill, hayll, haille, holl, hoill, whol* and *wholl*.

Leslie's history. The Anglo-English *whole* becomes common in the latter half of the seventeenth century. *Gret* and *grete*, the early variants of *great*,[18] remain the dominant ones in Nisbet's *New Testament in Scots* (c. 1520), in the pre-Reformation records of Stirling and in some official letters, but occur also in histories dating from the 1570s and in Melville of Halhill's autobiography (c. 1610). In the 1550s *greit* is introduced into burgh records and official letters, *grit, grite* to pamphlets; and *grat* and *grait* are a conspicuous feature in early seventeenth-century private records. In the period 1640-1700 the southern standard predominates except in Spalding's history, which goes on using *gryt* or *grit*. Three letter writers use *gret* or *grat*: two of them are women and the third is Sir Thomas Stewart, whose language also reflects other conservative spelling practices. The spelling variant *girt* was attested in a letter written by a schoolboy.

To sum up, even if many authors or scribes are not consistent in their choice of variants, the fact that they choose one more often than any of the possible other variants is also significant. High-frequency items of the above-mentioned kind are evidence of the position of texts on a scale of variation between conservatively Scottish and highly anglicized. Moreover, if their occurrence correlates with the mode of communication, the age, sex or rank of the author, the text type, etc., these items can be shown to function as markers which can be used to diagnose any text representing the language variety studied.[19]

When did the Tudor English graphemes become predominant? Briefly, either around 1560-1570 or around 1640-1650, depending on the spelling variant. In this context, we could look at two pairs, the variation of *-it* and *-ed* in the preterite and past participle forms and the variation of *quh-* and *wh-* in the relative and interrogative pronouns. The Scottish *-it* is predominantly used in early Middle Scots except in *Craft of Deyng* and *St. Andrews Kirk Sessions*. In 1570-1640 only some letter writers and Buchanan do not use the Anglo-English *-ed*; others use both variants, and the texts can be subdivided into those preferring *-it*, those preferring *-ed* and those which

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[18]The variants of *great* in the corpus are: *gret, grett, grete, greit, greitt, greyt, greytt, grit, gritt, gryt, grite, gryte, gryit, grat, grate, grait, girt, greatt* and *greate*.

[19]The following comment by Aitken is most significant: "Anglicized features which could be recognized as deriving from a different spelling tradition are more likely to have been under conscious control than mere orthographical variants without phonological significance within the native tradition. So these might be diagnostic of genres, and of considerations such as intended recipient."

do not show any preference.[20]   It is particularly interesting that in many private records the two variants are interchangeable.  In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Scots form occurs sporadically, most conspicuously in the Stirling records and Sir Thomas Stewart's letters to his son.  Again, Spalding is an exception compared with other writers of his time:  there are 312 forms in *-it* and 13 in *-ed* in the sample.

To summarize the distributions of *quh-* and *wh-* variants, practically no *wh*-variants occur in pre-1570 texts (only one letter writer uses both forms). In 1570-1640 the distributions are similar to those of the preterite and past participle forms.[21]   Only five texts go on using *quh*-variants after 1640: Spalding's history, the Stirling records, Alexander Brodie's diary and two writers of letters.  The transition variants *quhich(e)* and *quisch* are rare, the former was found in James VI's *Basilicon Doron*, Pitscottie's history, three letter writers and the Stirling records, the latter in letters by Juliana Ker, Lady Binning, (*Haddington Corr.*) in the period 1570-1640.

As to features labeled as substandard in Aitken's essay, the following should be mentioned.  The occurrence of *ra-* instead of *re-* (*ragaird, ragratour, raward*) correlates with the date of the text, not the type of the text.[22] *Sch-* instead of *ch-* (*schange, scharge, schosine*) co-occurs with conservatively Scots spelling tendencies, but there is no definitive evidence of the spelling being substandard.  In the corpus, *sch* for *ch* is attested in the Peebles records, *Criminal Trials*, the *Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, Pitscottie's  history, Rev. James Melvill's diary and Spalding's history.  It was not found in private letters, but the total number of relevant tokens is small in the letter samples.  *T* for *th* and vice versa seem to be typical of informal language use, for example *tyngis* for *thingis* in a letter written by Katherine Kennedy, Lady Barnbarroch (*Waus Corr.*).

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[20]In this period, the Scottish variant is preferred in the records of Stirling, trials, Fergusson's sermon, Skeyne's tracts, Pitscottie's and Moysie's histories and Fowler's pamphlet, whereas the English variant is prevalent in *Basilicon Doron* and Johnston of Wariston's diary.  Lesley, Rev. James Melvill, Birrel and Melville of Halhill have about equal numbers of each.

[21]The texts listed as examples of early anglicization use the English spelling throughout.  Again, the majority of the rest prefer *quh*-forms in most occurrences of the words.  It is of interest that the Scottish and the English variant are interchangeable in the majority of private records, i.e. diaries and biographies.

[22]The variants with *ra-* occur in all pre-1570 text types in the corpus, in only some of them between 1570 and 1640, and only in Lauder's *Journals* after 1640.

It has not been possible to find many examples of the so-called reduced variants Aitken picks out as possibly diagnostic of informal style. The typical contexts for variants such as *staw* for *stole*, *stoun/stouin/stown* for *stolen*, *sen* for *send*, *twell* for *twelve*, *claise* for *clothes*, are burgh records, trials, letters, particularly women's letters, and diaries. However, for example *sen* for *send* also occurs in the *Complaynt of Scotlande* (c. 1550) and *stoun* for *stolen* in Row's sermon (1638). In its present form, the corpus provides evidence of the relative infrequency of variants of this kind, but on the other hand it is too small to allow a comprehensive study of lexical words.

Certain features claimed to be diagnostic of text type are, as a matter of fact, noticeably rare in the texts of the corpus: e.g. *ou* or *ow* for *u* (*hourt*, *pout*, *schoun*). Some other features, such as *e* for standard *i* (*mestour*, *meln*, *begit*, *kel*, *mecht*, *hem*, *well* (=*will*), are more frequent, but not as frequent as to provide statistically valid data. Yet it is interesting that *hem* for *him* occurs only in pre-1570 letters written primarily by women.[23]

In Amy Devitt's study of the diffusion of Anglo-English forms in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish, genre proved to be a highly significant variable in the anglicization of Scottish-English, as significant a variable as time.[24] For example, according to her results, religious treatises are the most highly anglicized genre, national public records the least anglicized. She considers level of formality, the degree of removal from ordinary and domestic life, the nationality of the audience, the intimacy between writer and audience, and whether the text is printed or not, as possible motivations for different degrees of anglicization of the texts (pp. 62-9). My study confirms that particularly important among these are 1) the proposition that long-standing, established, genres tended to be linguistically more conservative: a genre would be so well established as to serve as a constraint on writers of the genre, and 2) the nature of the audience the author had in mind and, in the Scottish case, the nationality of that audience.

Devitt does not pay due attention to the fact that individual texts representing a genre differ greatly from one another. For example, she includes sermons among religious treatises, and yet in my opinion, the usage varies in these text types to a considerable extent.[25] In the Helsinki Corpus of Scots, in pre-1570 texts representing the category of religious instruction, only *quh*-forms of relative pronouns occur, but in 1570-1640 two texts (one sermon

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[23]Also variants such as *fycht* for *fish*, *flecht* for *flesh*, *schoun* for *shoes*, *syourd* for *sword*, *syoerne* for *sworn*, *syen* for *swine* (Aitken, p. 201) are rare in the corpus.

[24]Devitt, *Standardizing Written English*, p. 54.

[25]See my "On the Evolution of Prose Genres in Older Scots," noted in 10, above.

and one treatise) use only *wh-* forms, and four texts (two sermons and two treatises) use *quh-* forms. This heterogeneity also makes it impossible to refer to the influence of the Bible, as Devitt does. Why did not all sermons show a tendency to anglicization, if the English Bible influenced their language in an important way?

To conclude, the analysis of the distributions of variant spellings is useful in studying differentiation and standardization processes in Middle Scots. Even if the evidence provided by conservatively Scots features is incontestable in our attempt to characterize the level of formality of a text, the relatively poor knowledge of other factors diagnostic of genre and text type makes it rather difficult to interpret results of the present kind. As opposed to phonological variation, purely orthographic variation is in many instances not controlled by genre. At present, we can draw conclusions about characteristics of idiolects, which are controlled by factors related to the date and the textual history of each text, but we should avoid making easy generalizations about genres or text types on the basis of spelling practices and variant word forms. Still, I hope I have been able to show that five text types—local records, trials, histories, diaries and letters—are particularly rich in orthographically and phonologically marked features.

Is the Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots representative of the language variety? This test study shows that the size of the samples is appropriate for analyzing the spelling practices of the texts included. On the other hand, the selection of texts should perhaps be more comprehensive, particularly in the period 1570-1640. Periods of intensive change, most notably the decennia around 1600 (cf. Devitt, *Standardizing Written English*), should be represented by texts produced at shorter intervals than those chosen for the present corpus. Also, the *DOST* must be used for further evidence.

In recent research, it has been shown that there are important crosscuttings and overlappings between genres as to the co-occurrence of linguistic features, so that dichotomies such as written and spoken, literary and non-literary have been found to be unjustified. Consequently, the specialized distributions of spelling variants can be interpreted only by studying also sets of consistently co-occurring features and those which are in complementary distribution. The study of a great number of linguistic features, for example through the application of Biber's and Finegan's multifactor/multidimensional approach, seems to me to be a useful method for tracing the development of Scottish genres.[26]  A better understanding of the special nature of

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[26]Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan, "Drift in Three English Genres from the 18th to the 20th Centuries: A Multi-dimensional Approach." In *Corpus Linguistics, Hard and Soft. Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on English Language Research on Computerized Corpora*, ed. Merja Kytö, Ossi Ihalainen and Matti Rissanen (Amsterdam,

each genre in a particular  historical context will make it possible to under-
stand better also the variation and variety in Middle Scots.

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1989), pp. 83-101 and D. Biber and E. Finegan, "The linguistic evolution of five written
and speech-based English genres from the 17th to the 20th centuries." *Proceedings of the
Sixth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics*, ed. Matti Rissanen *et al.*
(Helsinki, 1990), Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming.