VERB MORPHOLOGY OF SOUTH-WESTERN MIDDLE SCOTS[1]

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the Middle Scots verbal inflections in the Scottish south-west, the region called Galloway. The manuscripts from the local archives are still virtually unknown to a wider public, which causes much imprecision and doubt in describing the position of Galloway on the map of Middle Scots dialectal areas. This study has been based on a collection of burgh court records from the burgh of Wigtown, dating back to the early 16th century, and concerns verbal inflections: the present participle, the third person singular present, the present plural, the regular preterite, the regular past participle and the irregular past participle. The paper presents the features of the manuscript compared with the Linguistic Profile (LP) of Wigtownshire included in *The Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (LALME). The analysis exposes mistakes committed by the authors of the atlas in the verbal inflections and puts forward a revised version of the LP, based on the manuscript data.

1. Introduction and terminology

Scotland is and has been a country with a unique linguistic situation, stemming from its history and peculiar political and social developments. For the sake of clarity, some crucial notions have to be outlined briefly.

Even though the terms "Scots" and "Scottish English" are used in literature to represent two different varieties, one is often not aware of the difference between them. While Scottish English is a dialect, or rather an accent, of Modern English with a relatively short history on the territory of Scotland, Scots is a descendant of an Old English dialect, Old Northumbrian dating almost 1000 years
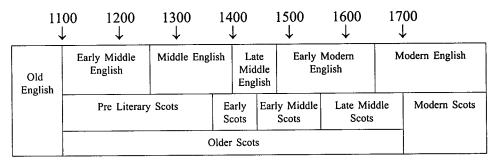
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[1] This paper was presented in its earlier version at the Symposium in the Memory of Prof. Margaret Schlauch. After that the paper has been enlarged with the findings compiled during the work on my Ph.D. dissertation. This revised version has been submitted here.

back. This northern English dialect gained importance amongst the Scottish nobility and burgh inhabitants in the 11th-12th centuries and, unlike northern Middle English, started developing towards a prestigeous, independent variety in Scotland. Eventually, this process led to the emergence of a new national language – Scots. Confusingly, until the late fifteenth century the inhabitants of the Lowlands called their language *Inglis* in order to distinguish it from *Scottis* – the tongue of the Celts. The Celtic variety used to be the original language in Scotland, spoken by the descendants of Gealic-speaking Irish settlers, initially called the *Scoti*. The name "Scots" started to be applied to *Inglis* in the period of a growing national confidence, reflecting a general Rennaisance tendency in favour of vernaculars (compare the situation in Spain, France or Poland).

The crucial thing to remember is that the periodisation of Scots differs from the one of English. Middle Scots, for that matter, is a period shifted about one century forward with respect to Middle English. One needs to be careful and make sure not to look for parallels or contrasts in varieties written down at different points in time. The chart below illustrates this incompatibility.

Figure 1. (Kopaczyk 2002: 191)

	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700

Old English	Early Middle English	Middle English	Late Middle English	Early Modern English		Modern English
	Pre Literary Scots		Early Scots	Early Middle Scots	Late Middle Scots	Modern Scots
	Older Scots					

When looking at the chart, one can notice that research into Scots from before the late 1300s is impossible for the lack of textual evidence. The most fruitful period to examine would be the 15th-16th centuries, the time when Scotland had its own all-purpose standard, with a variety of dialects, most of them written down in daily documents (letters, wills, local court records, etc.). In writings from this period one can observe pressures from different sources, be it the language of the powerful southern neighbour, Latinate influences from higher registers, Norse influences from the territories conquered in the past by the Vikings, or from the Gaelic substratum.

2. The database and the purpose of study

The corpus of the present study is a collection of burgh court records from Wigtown, situated in the south-west of Scotland. The Wigtown Burgh Court

Book (Wgt Ct Bk) dates back to the early sixteenth century, the heyday of Scots as a literary standard. The Scots of the time displayed a regional variation suggested to some extent by differing spelling practices, but also by local syntactic and lexical peculiarities and the degree of influence from the neighbouring dialects and languages.

As mentioned above, the aim of this paper is to analyse verbal inflections in the south-west on the basis of the collection of texts from Wigtown. Nobody has looked into this matter so far, and the only source of information about the area is a questionable Linguistic Profile of Wigtownshire in the LALME (see Bugaj 2002). To illustrate some misconceptions and misinterpretations of earlier reserach, especially the ones traced in the LALME, in the present paper the analysis has been restricted to the verbal categories included in the atlas for Wigtownshire: the present participle, the third person singular present, the present plural, the regular preterite, the regular past participle and the irregular past participle.[2] These categories have been scrutinised as to the peculiar features pertaining to the south-western region of Scotland, and the LP provided by the LALME has been revised.

3. Corpus study

The whole extant text of the Wgt Ct Bk falls into two parts with a gap between them. The first part includes folios 1a to 99a and the second one – folios 175a to 293a. There are substantial differences between the two parts, especially in the spelling, which makes it crucial to compare both parts and trace the changes in progress. The first 53 double folios (25,500 words) of the Wgt Ct Bk studied here provide the very same corpus as the one analysed in the LALME. In the following sections of the present paper the results of this independent research will be confronted with the data provided by the atlas. All the remaining folios of the first part have also been analysed, which gives together a corpus of about 51,170 words. The second part of the MS has been searched as well in order to show that certain preferences of the scribes changed over time. The full study presents an outline of verbal inflections in the south-west of Scotland in the early 16th century and can help to reassess the status of this variety on the map of Older Scots dialects.

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[2] The term *regular* is used here to denote verbs which form their past tense inflections by means of a dental suffix, and *irregular* – those which mark the past tense with an internal alternation. This nomenclature seems more adequate for the sixteenth-century usage than the terms *weak* and *strong* used in the atlas.

3.1 Present inflections

A very interesting and peculiarly northern phenomenon (found in Scotland and the north of England) is the Northern Present Tense Rule (NPTR), connected with the appearance of the {S} morpheme in the present tense inflections. Generally, Scots had the {S} morpheme in all persons in the present tense for both singular and plural. However, the NPTR caused the verb not to attach an ending when the subject was a personal pronoun in the first person singular or in the plural immediately adjacent to the verb. This phenomenon, described as particularly northern, was never subject to southern influences and in this respect Scots verbs never underwent anglicisation (Meurman-Solin 1993: 256; Agutter 1990: 5).

Due to the NPTR, there were two inflectional paradigms for Scots verbs in the present, depending on the adjacency of the pronoun subject. The difference between Scots and Northern English dialects was that the latter could choose an <-es> or <-is> spelling for the {S} morpheme. When the subject was not pronominal, the <-is> inflection was also used for all persons and numbers.

Table 1 presents Older Scots present tense inflections (when the pronoun subject and the verb are adjacent) contrasted with the contemporary southern and northern English variants.

Table 1. (King 1997: 175)

		Older Scots	Southern 'Standard' English	Northern English
Singular	1st	- ø	- ø	- ø
	2nd	- (i)s	- (e)st	- (i)s/-(e)s
	3rd	- (i)s	- (e)th/-(e)s	- (i)s/-(e)s
Plural	All	- ø	- ø/-(e)n	- ø

In Table 2 we can see the endings appearing when the subject is not a pronoun, or when a pronoun subject is distant from the verb.

Table 2. (King 1997: 175)

		Older Scots	Southern 'Standard' English	Northern English
Singular	1st	- (i)s	- ø	- (i)s/-(e)s
	2nd	- (i)s	- (e)st	- (i)s/-(e)s
	3rd	- (i)s	- (e)th/-(e)s	- (i)s/-(e)s
Plural	All	- (i)s	- ø/-(e)n	- (i)s/-(e)s

3.1.1. Present 3sg

For the third person singular it is not so much important whether the verb is standing in a sentence in a position causing the NPTR. The {S} morpheme is always attached, however it can be rendered by means of various graphemic se-

quences. In the LALME, under the heading *pres 3sg* we find the following endings, in a sequence from the most to the least common one.

1) Wigtownshire LP 1362, pres 3sg: -is, *-es*, -ys

This Linguistic Profile (LP) suggests that there were three equally common markers. The <-is> ending is typically Scots. The abbreviated ending (hence italics) has been analysed by the LALME as <-es>, which is misleading insofar as it suggests English influence. In practice, the abbreviated ending was just a flourish or a curl, without any features of the <es> graphic sequence, and could have as well stood for the regular Scots marker <-is>, which, in fact, is the most common spelling in the text (see the discussion below). In the present paper, in order to reflect the manuscript data faithfully, it has been chosen to replace the italicised expansions with a neutral symbol in the tables below. The ending <-ys> in the Wigtownshire LP does not imply a different phonetic value than <-is> but is often used in Scots as a graphemic alternant.

In a study carried out on the same material as covered in the LALME (Table 3) it has been found that in fact the Scots variant is clearly predominant but the rest of the endings present in the Wgt Ct Bk cannot even be classified as tertiary choices of the scribe. The picture changes with the expansion of the database to 99 double folios. Only then can one notice a growing tendency for an abbreviated marker. The picture emerging form the later part of the records is even more altered, with the <y>-variant gaining the position of a second scribal choice on a par with the abbreviation.

Table 3. Verbs - pres 3sg endings in Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-is	29	87,9%	52	57,1%	71	56,3%
-S	2	6,1%	36	39,6%	27	21,4%
-ys	1	3%	2	2,2%	28	22,2%
other: -iss	1	3%	1	1,1%	-	-
Total	33	100%	91	100%	126	100%

3.1.2. Present plural

Unlike in the pres 3sg inflections, in the plural it is crucial to observe whether the verb form is taken from a syntactic environment causing the NPTR to operate or not. In the LALME there is no mention where the quoted endings were taken from. The category of plural is said to exhibit one ending <-is>.

2) Wigtownshire LP 1362, pres pl: -is

Such a practice misleads the readers as they assume that the ending <-is> always appears in verbs in the plural present, which, in fact, is not the case in the MS. Table 4 presents the frequency of spelling variants when the ending is added (when the subject is not a pronoun or when a pronoun subject is not adjacent to the verb).

Table 4. Verbs – pres pl endings in the Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-is	8	80%	10	66,7%	10	27,8%
-S	0	-	3	20%	15	41,7%
-ys	2	20%	2	13,3%	11	30,5%
Total	10	100%	15	100%	36	100%

Even though in the burgh court records there are mostly past and participial constructions, the present tense appears as well. Usually the subject is a personal name or a pronoun separated from the verb, which causes the {S} morpheme to appear, as in *we yat cumis, yai yat haldis*, etc. However, there are several cases in the MS where the endling is not added, due to the NPTR, e.g. *ffalzeand at yai agre* 'failing that they agree' [5b], *as yai alleig yat* 'as they allege that' [53b], etc. What is disturbing here is the fact that some of these forms have been found within the atlas's corpus.

3.1.3. Present participle

The present participle in <-and> was a distinctive feature of Middle Scots because in the English of the period this category was marked with <-ing>, just like the gerund. The Scottish form could have appeared as a result of the contact situation with Old Norse, which had *-andi* for the present participle. In the process of gradual anglicisation this feature was lost in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Agutter 1990: 4) but in the period under scrutiny here it was still a diagnostic feature.

In the LALME <-and> appears indeed as the primary choice of the scribe, there are, however, two tertiary variants: <-yng> and <-in>.

3) Wigtownshire LP 1362, pres part: -and ((-yng, -in))

Even though the research conducted on the same data confirms <-and> as the primary ending in Wigtownshire (appearing even more stable in the expanded database), the choice of the tertiary variants seems very arbitrary. On a closer in-spection, one would notice that practically all the other possible endings could be classified as rare choices on the basis of an almost identical frequency, and <-yng> certainly would not be in the lead amongst them.

Table 5. Verbs – present participle endings in Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-and	77	75,5%	165	83,3%	92	87,6%
-in	7	6,8%	8	4%	-	-
-yn	6	5,8%	6	3%	-	-
-yng	6	5,8%	8	4%	5	4,8%
-ing	4	3,9%	9	4,5%	5	4,8%
other: -an, -ane, -yne, -ynge	3	2,9%	3	1,5%	3	2,8%
Total	102	100%	198	100%	105	100%

3.2. Past inflections

3.2.1. Regular preterite

The largest group of verbs with a regular set of endings for the past tense and the past participle stems from the Old English weak paradigm, which marked past forms with what is typically called "a dental suffix". This ending was realised in Scots most often as <-it>, the vowel spelled at times as <y> (the characteristic Scots allography) or lost in phonologically permissible clusters. The LALME quotes these two endings as equally frequent primary choice of the scribe.

4) Wigtownshire LP 1362, weak pt: -it, -yt

However, in the MS the ending in <-it> is clearly most common, with its position growing stronger when the atlas's database is expanded to include the whole of part I. The ending <-yt> seems to be just a graphemic alternant in confusing environments of multiple vertical strokes, and certainly not the primary choice of the scribe in the first part of the records. The second part, however, exhibits a growing tendency for the implementation of the <y>-variant, just like in the case of present inflections. This development most probably points to a change in spelling practices and does not have to imply any phonological consequences.

Table 6. Verbs – regular preterite endings in Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-it	89	81%	191	85,7%	93	36,2%
-yt	21	19%	31	13,9%	159	61,8%
other: -et	0	0	1	0,4%	5	2%
Total	110	100%	223	100%	257	100%

3.2.2. Weak past participle

The past participle depended on the conjugation of a verb (regular vs irregular) and in the case of regular verbs it exhibited the dental ending. This is the only verbal inflection where the LALME's analysis faithfully reflects the MS data.

5) Wigtownshire LP 1362, pt part: -it, (-yt)

Clearly, <-it> is the predominant scribal choice and <-yt> comes as a secondary variant, depending, as mentioned above, mostly on the graphemic sequence in a particular item. Again, the second part of the records shows the scribal preference for the <y>-variant (compare Tables 3, 4 and 6).

Table 7. Verbs – regular past participle endings in Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-it	332	80%	787	86,5%	87	15,9%
-yt	77	18,6%	116	12,7%	447	81,9%
other: -et -te, -ite, -yte, -T	6	1,4%	7	0,8%	12	2,2%
Total	415	100%	910	100%	546	100%

In the MS one comes across two interesting morphological processes not mentioned by the atlas. There are several items which could appear in their participial form either with the regular ending or without it: *constitut – constitutit, statut – statutit*, etc., and there some cases where the ending was phonetically reduced and spelled without a vowel, e.g. *furnist* 'furnished', *reyffest* 'refused'.

3.2.3. Strong past participle

Verbs belonging to the irregular paradigm could display the ending <-in> (together with its allographic variants) or a vocalic alternation as a past participle

marker. In the LALME there is no mention of the latter process and two endings are given as primary choices of the scribe.

6) Wigtownshire LP 1362, strong ppl: -in, -yn

Again, a closer examination of the data does not confirm this analysis. The ending <-in> is a primary choice, and even more so when the data base is expanded. The graphemic alternant in <-yn> appears quite often, nevertheless its frequency should not be treated as primary in the first part of the records. Characteristically, the situation changes in the later part, where the <y>-forms gain the primary status.

Table 8. Verbs – ablauted past participle in Wgt Ct Bk

	folios 1-53a		part I		part II	
	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage	tokens	percentage
-in	64	64,7%	184	81,8%	11	12,4%
-yn	311	31,3%	34	15,1%	12	13,5%
-yne	-	-	-	-	45	50,6%
-ene	-	-	-	-	11	12,4%
-en	-	-	1	0,4%	8	8,9%
other: -et -te, -ite, -yte,	4	4%	6	2,7%	2	2,2%
Total	99	100%	225	100%	89	100%

Another point to mention here is that not all ablauted verbs followed the above pattern and some of them did not display any ending, e.g. ppt *suorn, creat, put*. Some of the formerly regular verbs had already lost the transparency of the past and past participle markers and were treated as "endingless" irregular variants: ppt *said, maid/mayd, deit, pait/paid*. Finally, there was a group of irregular verbs which appeared in the MS both with the ending and without it: ppt *it is fand/fundin, it is writt/writtin*;

4. Conclusion

To conclude, an in-depth analysis of the same MS as studied by the LALME has resulted in a different picture of the south-west of Scotland. If the LP was to be corrected, it should accept the following form:

Table 9. Wigtownshire LP 1362:

	LALME	revised version: part I	revised version: part II
pres 3sg:	-is, *-es*, -ys	-is (-S)	-is (-ys, -S)
pres pl:	-is	-is (-S, -ys)	-S (-ys, -is)
pres part:	-and ((-yng, -in))	-and	-and
weak pt:	-it, -yt	-it ((-yt))	-yt (-it)
weak ppl:	-it (-yt)	-it ((-yt))	-yt (-it)
str ppl:	-in, -yn	-in (-yn)	-yne (-yn, -in, -ene) ((-en))

From the revised version one can see that the scribes were quite consistent in choosing the endings for verbal inflections, and that there was always a prevailing variant. The LALME, however, misleads the reader, giving several primary choices in the third person singular present, the regular preterite, and the irregular past participle. Secondary and tertiary variants resemble the ones given by the LALME only in the preterite paradigm, while the present endings have been misinterpreted, so that they suggest an English influence, which is, in fact not to be found in the corpus. Another fault of the LALME's interpretation lies in too strong a position given to the variant in <y>, while in the first part of the records (and, at the same time, in the atlas's corpus) it was little more than a spelling device in the environment of multiple vertical strokes. The apparent "promotion" of the <y>-forms to primary variants in the second part of the Wgt Ct Bk could not be discovered (or foreseen) by the atlas, given the limited size of their sample. However, it points to the necessity of taking the effort to analyse bigger excerpts, if not whole extant MSS. Otherwise it is possible to overlook important or interesting developments.

It is a disturbing fact that an analysis conducted on exactly the same material as the one used by an acknowledged source of reference, yields markedly different results. Unfortunately, also in other categories the atlas does not seem to be reliable (nominal inflections have also been misinterpreted to a great extent, see Bugaj (2002)). Perhaps it should make the scholars aware of certain dangers when they rely on the information provided by such vast projects, where the editors may not have had a full control over the individual analyses. It is true that Scotland is just a periphery in the LALME and the mistakes could have been caused by a certain relaxation or sloppines on the part of the researchers, which by no means excuses the authors. Sadly, for the lack of similar sources of reference for Scots, one is often confined to using the LALME.

The question arising here is whether the profiles for the English dialects reflect what was really there in the MSS. It is only left to hope that this situation does not imply the necessity to analyse all the MSS again for the sake of verification, but I believe that this problem should not be left aside without giving it a deeper insight.

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