



Forum for Research
on the Languages of
Scotland and Ulster

FRLSU PGR EVENT

Method Matters (25th Feb 2026)

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This will be held on Zoom. Register here to receive the link:

<https://tinyurl.com/frlsumethodmatters>

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Programme (25/02/26):

First Session – (09:45 – 11:00 GMT)

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| Asmaa Alenezi (University of Aberdeen) | A Mixed-Methods Design for Examining L2 Experience, Attitudes, and Identity in a Regional English Context |
| Lindsay Bell (Ulster University) | Identifying and examining dialect structure in present day Belfast English |
| Nate Haj Bakir (University of Glasgow) | An alternative method of gathering naturalistic speech data as a community outsider and non-native researcher |
| Hannah Murphy (Ulster University) | Framing the Legacy of our Irish and Scottish heritage (FLOURISH): Investigating young people's social and cultural role in building positive community relations and mutual respect for Northern Ireland's linguistic and cultural diversity |
| Followed by an opportunity for asking questions and sharing feedback on the methodologies | |

Second Session – (11:30 – 12:45 GMT)

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| Beth Beattie (University of Glasgow) | Computational Tools for Older Scots: Methodological Challenges and Solutions |
| Markéta Novotná (University of Edinburgh) | The Position of the Scots Language in Scotland as Reflected in Scots Poetry |
| Chris Gilmour (independent researcher) | A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary Written Ulster-Scots |
| Johannes Trüdinger (University of Bayreuth) | Design and Validation of a Modality Annotation Pipeline for Spoken Scottish Standard English |
| Followed by an opportunity for asking questions and sharing feedback on the methodologies | |

ABSTRACTS

A Mixed-Methods Design for Examining L2 Experience, Attitudes, and Identity in a Regional English Context

Asmaa Alenezi (University of Aberdeen)

This paper presents the methodological design of a mixed-methods sociolinguistic study investigating how extended immersion in a regional English context shapes second-language (L2) speakers' perceptions, evaluative attitudes, and identity positioning. Building on scholarship in sociolinguistic perception and study-abroad research, which emphasises the role of language ideologies, social networks, and regional variation in L2 development (e.g. Meyerhoff & Schlee, 2014; Grammon, 2024), the study examines engagement with regional and non-standard varieties of English in Scotland, with particular attention to North-East Scottish English.

The research focuses on Saudi PhD students living in Aberdeen. This group is selected both because of their substantial presence within the local academic community and because of their shared educational socialisation into exam-oriented, standard-language norms. This background provides a principled basis for examining how entrenched ideologies of correctness and prestige shape L2 listeners' perceptions of regional and non-standard accents, and how these perceptions interact with experiences of mobility, belonging, and academic identity in a study-abroad context. While the participant group is context-specific, the methodological framework is designed to be transferable to other mobile L2 populations in comparable migration or study-abroad settings.

The study integrates four complementary research instruments: a structured background questionnaire, a controlled accent perception task, speech production task, and a semi-structured interview. Together, these tools elicit perceptual, productive, and metalinguistic data, allowing for triangulation across implicit evaluations, language use, and reflective accounts. Attention is paid to stimulus design and task sequencing to maximise comparability while minimising bias.

By integrating perceptual, productive, and experiential dimensions within a single research design, the paper demonstrates how mixed-methods approaches can offer a nuanced account of L2 sociolinguistic experience in regional English settings, contributing to current debates on language, ideology, and identity in contemporary academic mobility.

Grammon, D. (2024). Ideology, indexicality, and the L2 development of sociolinguistic perception during study abroad. *L2 Journal: An Open Access Refereed Journal for World Language Educators*, 16(1).

Meyerhoff, M., & Schlee, E. (2014). Hitting an Edinburgh target: Immigrant adolescents' acquisition of variation in Edinburgh English. In *Sociolinguistics in Scotland* (pp. 103-128). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

An alternative method of gathering naturalistic speech data as a community outsider and non-native researcher

Nate Haj Bakir (University of Glasgow)

Sociolinguistic researchers who are outsiders to their community of interest face challenges gathering naturalistic spontaneous speech data when utilising the standard sociolinguistic interview setup. A self-designed dyad conversation elicitation task allowed me to gather rich speech data from Glaswegian

British-Asians despite being an outsider across several levels, attempting to circumvent the observer's paradox (Labov 1972, p. 209). In this data collection method, the researcher does not interact with the participants after data collection begins; instead, two participants 'interview' one another over a set of questions designed to elicit deep linguistic speech data ('danger of death' questions including topics relevant to the community of practice e.g., cultural traditions (Meyerhoff et al. 2012)) for phonetic analysis.

Analysis of this rich speech data will further be complemented by data from established demographical, attitudinal, and religiosity questionnaires to question whether the speech variability of second generation Muslim and Sikh Glaswegians is affected by their level acculturation into Scottish society (Berry et al. 1989) and their degree of religiosity (Francis 2009) and/or religious community belonging.

Berry, J. W., Kim, U., Power, S., Young, M., & Bujaki, M. (1989). Acculturation attitudes in plural societies. *Applied Psychology*, 38(2), 185–206.

Francis, L. J. (2009). Understanding the Attitudinal Dimensions of Religion and Spirituality. In de Souza, M., Francis, L. J., O'Higgins-Norman, J., and Scott, D., editors, *International handbook of Education for Spirituality, Care and Wellbeing*, 147–167. Springer, London

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Meyerhoff, M., Adachi, C., Nanbakhsh, G., and Strycharz, A. (2012). Sociolinguistic Fieldwork. In Thieberger, N., editor, *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork*, 120–146. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Computational Tools for Older Scots: Methodological Challenges and Solutions

Beth Beattie (University of Glasgow)

My research examines the relationship between religion, language, and national identity during the Scottish and English Reformations through corpus linguistic methods. To investigate these connections, I constructed a million-word corpus of sixteenth-century texts in both Older Scots (OSc) and Early Modern English (EModE).

A significant methodological challenge in this work has been the limited availability of computational tools for OSc. OSc lacks the resources for large-scale linguistic analysis available to EModE (e.g. Baron and Rayson 2009; Fitzmaurice et al. 2017). To contribute to the development of such resources, I have developed a part-of-speech (PoS) tagger specifically designed for Older Scots texts.

While previous smaller-scale efforts have explored PoS tagging for Modern Scots (e.g., Lameris and Stymne 2021), no tagger trained on historical OSc data currently exists. My tagger leverages contemporary machine learning techniques and a training dataset of OSc literature (Bushnell 2021) to automatically assign grammatical tags to words without requiring translation into English.

This presentation will discuss the methodological challenges encountered in developing computational tools for an under-resourced historical language, the innovation of creating a dedicated OSc PoS tagger, and how this resource enables more nuanced linguistic analysis and contributes to future research on OSc.

Baron, A., & Rayson, P. (2008). VARD 2: A Tool for Dealing with Spelling Variation in Historical Corpora. *Proceedings of the Postgraduate Conference in Corpus Linguistics* (Aston University, Birmingham), May 22.

Bushnell, M. (2021). *Equivalency, page design, and corpus linguistics: an interdisciplinary approach to Gavin Douglas's 'Eneados'* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford).

Fitzmaurice, S., Robinson, J. A., Alexander, M., Hine, I. C., Mehl, S., & Dallachy, F. (2017). Linguistic DNA: investigating conceptual change in Early Modern English discourse. *Studia Neophilologica*, 89(sup1), pp. 21-38.

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Identifying and examining dialect structure in present day Belfast English

Lindsay Bell (Ulster University)

This project aims to identify and examine dialect structure in present day Belfast English. It will utilise a combination of an in-person acceptability judgement task to obtain quantitative native-speaker judgements and semi-structured interview questions to elicit more informed responses surrounding the judgements and the relationship with other linguistic domains.

Having previously used an acceptability judgement task through the medium of an online survey to conduct research on Belfast English imperatives (following Alison Henry (1995)), challenges were identified regarding remoteness and potential focus on prescriptive grammaticality and grammatical correctness rather than acceptability within their own dialect, especially when the sentences are not produced in a naturalistic speech setting.

By addressing these challenges in the present study by using the abovementioned methods, the main aim is to provide a naturalistic speech setting that will help participants with contextualising scenarios, identifying any phonological or prosodic features that may contribute to their judgement or understanding, in addition to providing clarification around any ambiguity that may arise.

Henry, A. (1995). *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect Variation and Parameter Setting*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Henry, A. (1996) Imperative Inversion in Belfast English. In: *Amsterdam studies in the theory and history of linguistic science*, series 4 (pp.79-94).

Henry, A. (2005) Non-standard dialects and linguistic data. *Lingua*, 115 (11), pp.1599-1617.

Jamieson, E. (2020) Viewing dialect change through acceptability judgments: A case study in Shetland dialect. *Glossa: A journal of general linguistics*.

Myers, J. (2017) Acceptability judgments. In: *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*.

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A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary Written Ulster-Scots

Chris Gilmour (independent researcher)

This project presents the creation of a 1,000-word frequency dictionary of the Ulster-Scots language, based on a 300,000 word corpus of written texts. The corpus represents a linguistic snapshot of 21st century Ulster-Scots usage by around fifty grass-roots writers, largely associated with the Ulster-Scots Language Society, and excluding writers whose authenticity is unclear. Quantitative corpus linguistic methods are used to rank the most frequently occurring lexical items. It records each word's part of speech and treats both content words and function words as equally important, following approaches applied in British English frequency research (Brezina & Gablasova 2024). Due to spelling variation within Ulster Scots, spelling variants for each word, including spellings shared with English, will be grouped together allowing both the most common spelling and other attested forms to be presented.

The resulting frequency dictionary aims to serve as a practical tool for educators, and language planners, by offering evidence-based insights into core vocabulary and the distribution of lexical items in modern

usage. Knowledge of the most frequent words allows learners of a language to engage with various types of discourse, including participating in conversations, and basic understanding of written texts (Nurmukhamedov & Webb, 2019).

Brezina, V., & Gablasova, D. (2023). *A Frequency Dictionary of British English: Core Vocabulary and Exercises for Learners*. Taylor & Francis.

Nurmukhamedov, U., & Webb, S. (2019). Lexical coverage and profiling. *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 188–200.

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Framing the Legacy of our Irish and Scottish heritage (FLOURISH): Investigating young people’s social and cultural role in building positive community relations and mutual respect for Northern Ireland’s linguistic and cultural diversity.

Hannah Murphy (Ulster University)

Aspects of culture and society in Northern Ireland have been divided, politicised and polarised due to our contentious history, serving to create stereotypes, alienate communities from each other, maintain and further perpetuate division. One aspect of society affected by this is language; Northern Ireland is a linguistically rich and geographically unique space, situated on the island of Ireland but in close proximity to Scotland. This position has led to the development of both Irish and Ulster Scots (US) within the province, each sharing parallel bonds with Scottish Gaelic and Scots respectively. This shared cultural heritage and linguistic tradition should be celebrated and cherished, however it has been used as a vehicle to further divide society into Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) camps.

Taking a critical and reflexive approach to participatory action research and youth peacebuilding, this project aims to address and challenge the common misconceptions and stereotypical beliefs surrounding the languages in Northern Ireland through a School’s awareness raising programme. This programme will be developed alongside the extended FLOURISH project team and delivered across 40 secondary schools in Northern Ireland, comprising of an initial attitudes survey, a series of interactive workshops to elicit and challenge students’ perceptions of Irish and US, and a final questionnaire.

Initial and final surveys will allow for direct comparison of pre- and post-intervention language attitudes, facilitating measurement of the impact of the programme. Survey findings will be analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods (statistical and thematic analysis respectively), allowing for a clear overview of prominent attitudes towards the languages of Northern Ireland among young people and any changes brought about by the programme. This project will therefore allow for insights and suggestions for future curricular developments and youth engagement in peacebuilding and political change.

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The Position of the Scots Language in Scotland as Reflected in Scots Poetry

Markéta Novotná (University of Edinburgh)

This diploma project investigates the dynamic relationship between Scots poetry and the sociolinguistic status of the Scots language. The research diachronically and qualitatively examines how poets have articulated their cultural and linguistic identities over time, exploring the social, cultural, and personal

circumstances surrounding the creation of these poems and what they reveal about the position of the Scots language as perceived by the poets. In particular, the analysis could address questions concerning correlations between poetry in Scots and the growth of official provisions for the language, poets' responses to specific developments, policies, and events, their choice of Scots dialects, and their awareness of Ulster Scots. To prevent invalid generalized conclusions, the methodological approach will be both text- and context-centred, focusing not only on the poems themselves (e.g., their intended audience) and on the historical context of the poems' composition but also on the poets' biographical details (e.g., their political affiliations, their social status, etc.).

At this stage, a corpus of poems from different historical periods that explicitly comment on the position of the language and its speakers is being compiled. Given the abundance of potentially relevant texts, selection is conducted in consultation with poets and academics.

By analysing the attitudes, opinions, and emotions expressed toward the sociolinguistic status of Scots, this study seeks to provide comprehensive evidence of the language's evolving position within Scottish society. To make the poems accessible to a wider audience, the thesis will also include annotated English translations of the selected extracts.

Design and Validation of a Modality Annotation Pipeline for Spoken Scottish Standard English

Johannes Trüding (University of Bayreuth)

Traditionally, research on Scottish Standard English (SSE) has long suffered from a strong phonological bias (Schützler 2024), the assumption being that its grammatical system mirrors Standard English English (Stuart-Smith 2008: 48). This study addresses this by introducing an innovative, large-scale pipeline to analyse core modal verbs in spoken SSE and two reference varieties. It asks: (i) whether automated modality classification at scale is viable; and (ii) whether the distribution of modality senses in Palmer's (2001) framework differs across the varieties.

To bypass labour-intensive manual annotation, this paper utilises a custom random-forest classifier to categorise over 38,000 tokens. Pre-processing uses a pipeline consisting of a fine-tuned BART (Lewis et al. 2020) model for punctuation restoration and sentence segmentation, followed by feature extraction using the frame semantic transformer (Chanin 2023). Model validation uses an 80/20 train-test split on manually annotated data. The best-performing model currently achieves 89% accuracy.

For analysis, normalised frequency rates and multinomial models are used to compare distributions. Preliminary results indicate that SSE differs significantly in both modal frequency and semantic sense distribution. These findings demonstrate that automated, large-scale semantic analysis of modality is feasible.

Chanin, David (2023). *Open-Source Frame Semantic Parsing*. arXiv:2303.12788. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2303.12788>.

Lewis, Mike; Liu, Yinhan; Goyal, Naman; Ghazvininejad, Marjan; Mohamed, Abdelrahman; Omer, Levy; Stoyanov, Veselin; Zettlemoyer, Luke (2020). Bart: Denoising Sequence-to-Sequence Pre-training for Natural Language Generation, Translation, and Comprehension. In: *Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*. 7871-7880. Online: Association for Computational Linguistics. <https://aclanthology.org/2020.acl-main.703/>.

Palmer, Frank R. (2001). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schützler, Ole (2024). The Elusive Butterfly of Scottish Standard English. In: Christine Elweiler (ed.), *The languages of Scotland and Ulster in a global context, past and present. Selected Papers from the 13th triennial Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, Munich 2021* (Publications of FRLSU 8). Aberdeen: FRLSU. 91-138).

Stuart-Smith, Jane (2008). Scottish English: phonology. In: Kortmann, Bernd; Upton, Clive (eds.), *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 48-7.