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THE ELUSIVE BUTTERFLY OF SCOTTISH STANDARD ENGLISH

It is universally acknowledged that Scottish Standard English (SSE) is one of several standard varieties within the pluricentric global language we call English (e.g. Giegerich 1992; McClure 1994). However, there is still a dearth of research on its non-phonological characteristics (cf. Corbett, McClure & Stuart-Smith 2003; McArthur 1979), although we certainly do not lack in checkable intuitions, as pointed out by Aitken (1979) and McClure (1994) several years ago now. In consequence, the oldest L1 standard variety of English outwith England itself is at the same time perhaps the least documented one – a hard-to-grasp, only patchily understood ‘elusive butterfly’ of a variety.

I will briefly review the current situation and discuss some of the historical, political and linguistic reasons for the relatively weak position of SSE as a standard variety. In particular, I will argue that (1) there is a long-standing narrative of diachronic convergence on (or assimilation to) Southern British Standard English, which sets SSE apart from other L1 varieties; (2) within the Scots-English sociolinguistic continuum, SSE suffers from what I have elsewhere called ‘the Scots bias’ (Schützler, Gut & Fuchs 2017); and (3) pluricentricity is – at least implicitly – associated with fully autonomous nation states (cf. Dollinger 2019).

Against this background, I will sketch possible strategies for future research on SSE: Which features should we look out for, which contexts of language use should we inspect, and what resources can we use or do we need to develop to put SSE on an equal footing with other standard varieties of English world-wide?

References

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