THE TEACHING OF SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGES IN SCOTLAND

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In 1968, the Scottish Certificate of Education Examination Board introduced examinations in Swedish and Norwegian at Ordinary grade. In 1969, Higher Norwegian was added, followed in 1978 by Higher Swedish. This article represents an attempt to review the growth of Scandinavian Studies in Scottish schools and colleges, outwith the university sector, from the pioneering efforts of the early sixties up to the present day.

An initial enquiry addressed to the SCE Examination Board in Dalkeith elicited the following detailed set of statistics relating to presentations in Norwegian and Swedish over the years:—

		School	F.E.	External	Total
Norwegian Ordinary grade	1968	—	10	2	12
	1969	7	11	2	20
	1970	11	2	3	16
	1971	6	2	3	11
	1972	21	1	2	24
	1973	24	2	1	27
	1974	10	6	—	16
	1975	23	2	4	29
	1976	23	4	5	32
	1977	17	2	2	21
	1978	19	5	4	28
	1979	15	8	11	34
Swedish Ordinary grade	1968	15	—	—	15
	1969	7	—	1	8
	1970	3	4	1	8
	1971	5	6	—	11
	1972	7	4	1	12
	1973	7	—	2	9

		School	F.E.	External	Total
Swedish Ordinary	1974	17	—	2	19
grade	1975	6	1	4	11
	1976	1	1	0	2
	1977	7	0	3	10
	1978	8	0	1	9
	1979	6	1	0	7
Norwegian Higher					
grade	1969	—	4	—	4
	1970	4	6	3	13
	1971	4	1	2	7
	1972	1	10	3	14
	1973	3	2	4	9
	1974	5	3	4	12
	1975	3	—	6	9
	1976	4	3	1	8
	1977	5	—	9	14
	1978	6	—	—	6
	1979	3	1	3	7
Swedish Higher					
grade	1978	4	2	2	8
	1979	2	1	2	5

These figures pose some intriguing questions. Why, for example, were the first candidates for "O" grade Norwegian in 1968 studying exclusively at F.E. colleges while their "Swedish" counterparts were seemingly confined to secondary schools? Why did this situation rapidly change in the following year? What lies behind the fluctuation in numbers between "O" grade Norwegian presentations in schools and colleges in the early years? Why, when Higher Norwegian was introduced in 1969, did Higher Swedish have to wait until 1978? And, an inevitable question, why is the language of our only Scandinavian partner in the EEC nowhere represented? Subsequent enquiries led to the solution of at least some of these questions. To Miss Irene Scobbie, of the Centre for Nordic Studies at Aberdeen University, I owe the information that the Scottish Education Department had, as early as 1949, distributed to schools a memo, expressing interest in the setting-up of Scandinavian language courses, subject of course to the availability of

qualified staff. It was this official encouragement which led Miss Scobbie, who had taken over the running of the Dept. of Scandinavian Studies at Aberdeen in 1964, to make initial approaches to local headmasters, an initiative which eventually led to the introduction of Swedish on a trial basis at three Aberdeen schools: St. Margaret's, Harlaw Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School.

A little later, in 1967, a veteran of the old Aberdeen University Ordinary class in Swedish, Mr. George Sinclair, took over as headmaster of Powis Academy, and lost no time in introducing Swedish into the curriculum. In his own words: ".... it seemed to myself .... that there was a good case for at least one school in Aberdeen to present Swedish as a Minority subject and I did feel at that time that the peculiar geographical position of Aberdeen facing as it does Scandinavia seemed to make it particularly appropriate for such a language." Mr. Sinclair was remarkably fortunate in obtaining the services of a native-born Swede who was also a registered teacher in Scotland, and consequently was able to offer Swedish as an alternative to French and German in 1st year and also as a second language in 3rd year. Although the latter option was seldom taken up, the former proved popular, and in session 1977—78 Powis Academy presented the first three pupils in Scotland for Higher Swedish, the SCE Examination Board putting on the examination at the special request of the school.

At this point, it seems appropriate to look at some of the reasons given by pupils for taking up Swedish. The following extracts are taken from letters written by the current "crop" of Higher Swedish students in the school:—

"I chose to do Swedish because I had done French at primary school and I didn't like it. I didn't want to learn German either because lots of people were going to take German as a language. I thought that Swedish would be different. Also one of my relatives is married to a Swedish girl."

"I had done French at primary school and I did not like it. I chose to do Swedish because it was different, and because most people chose to do German."

"I chose to do Swedish because I was taught French at primary school and I did not like it. I also thought that it would be different to study Swedish because most people were studying German so I chose Swedish to be different."

Obviously the Scandinavian languages have a certain appeal for the individualist! It is also interesting that an early acquaintance with French seems to have put pupils off that language, but not off languages in general. Of course, it is not normally possible to complete secondary school without *some* study of at least one foreign language, and we need not jump to the conclusion that Swedish is always chosen by Aberdeen pupils for its intrinsic interest or value.

Sadly, Mr. Sinclair may now be forced to phase out Swedish at Powis Academy because of Grampian Education Committee's new staffing standards, which do not allow him to continue offering a minority language. This seems unfortunate in view of the fact that there are seemingly young people in the area willing to accept the intellectual challenge of learning a little-known language like Swedish. Indeed one could make out a case for regarding Norwegian and Swedish as of at least equal status to French and German in areas of Scotland which have traditional historical, trading and/or cultural links with Scandinavia.

If we turn now to the position of the Scandinavian languages in Orkney, we find a very different situation prevailing. Here the interest seems to be solely in Norwegian, which has been taught as an evening class subject in Kirkwall Grammar School since the mid-sixties. As Mr. Michael Drever, Assistant Director of Education for the islands, has remarked in a letter to the writer, "For various historical reasons, Orcadians have ever felt themselves more closely aligned culturally to Scandinavia than to Scotland." Whether this holds true for the majority of Orcadians today is perhaps debatable, but it illustrates the point made in the previous paragraph. It is the *feeling* of kinship with the Nordic countries, however well-founded or otherwise that feeling is, which is probably the most potent stimulus to the learning of this group of languages. As for the

question of why the teaching of Norwegian in Orkney has so far been confined to evening classes, the answer is simple. To quote Mr. Drever again:– "Because of the long-term interest in the language there are now many people in Orkney who are able to teach the subject to evening classes. However, few of them would be able to meet the General Teaching Council of Scotland's regulations for day-school teaching." No-one with any experience of the educational bureaucracy in Scotland will be surprised at this state of affairs. Bureaucrats are seldom the driving force behind curricular innovation. However, Norwegian seems at least assured of a permanent place in Orcadian Further Education, with 52 people currently enrolled for classes at various levels at Kirkwall Grammar School Further Education Centre, to say nothing of the thriving Orcadian/Norwegian Friendship Society.

The picture in Shetland is rather more varied. The Anderson High School, Lerwick, presents candidates in "O" grade and Higher Norwegian, and in the Further Education field courses are offered at Lerwick Further Education Centre; Brae Junior High School; Baltasound Junior High School, Unst; and Mid Yell Junior High School, in Yell. Incidentially, the Norwegian Vice Consul in Lerwick, Kay Garrioch, is a graduate of Miss Scobbie's department at Aberdeen, a fact which can only be of advantage for the future of Norwegian in Shetland.

In addition to the areas already mentioned, where one might have expected some degree of interest in our Scandinavian heritage, there are a few other less likely outposts of Nordic culture, notably Balwearie High School, in Kirkcaldy, Fife. Here once again we can discern the influence of an enthusiastic pioneer of Scandinavian Studies – in this case Mr. W. Grahamslaw, formerly Principal Teacher of German in that school. Feeling that Norwegian grammar would pose less of a problem for his pupils than the grammar of French or German, Mr. Grahamslaw introduced the subject into the modern languages curriculum in the early seventies, initially as a first-year option. This proved unsuccessful as many parents, with true Fife canniness, preferred the solid virtues of French and German to the uncertain merits of Norwegian. However the subject

did manage to assert itself in third and fifth year, and at present there are 21 pupils at Balwearie studying Norwegian, seven of whom will shortly be attempting the "O" grade and two the Higher examination. In addition, two former pupils are now studying Scandinavian languages at Scottish universities. The reasons given by today's pupils for studying the language can be summed-up as follows:—

1. A pass at "O" grade in a language is required for college or university entrance.
2. Many pupils come from Burntisland, which is "twinned" with Flekkefjord in Norway, and they would like to be involved in an exchange visit.
3. Some pupils wished to study a third foreign language.
4. Some were advised to take Norwegian as an "easier" option than French or German.
5. Many pupils simply wished to be "different".

Clearly Norwegian at Balwearie is not simply the preserve of the language specialists, but is integrated fully into the curriculum as a viable subject for pupils of varying levels of ability.

Finally, there remains the question of why the language of our only Scandinavian partner in the EEC is as yet totally unrepresented in Scottish schools. According to Mr. Knud Lindum-Poulsen of the Danish Institute in Edinburgh, Danish is taught only at that institute, apart from a Linguaphone course at Napier College, also in Edinburgh. Admittedly, Danish probably poses more problems to the average learner in this country that either of its sister-tongues, especially in the areas of pronunciation and orthography. Yet these problems are not likely to be widely known outside of professional linguistic circles. Much more plausible reasons for the poor showing of Danish in Scotland are that a.) no part of the country at the present day feels itself to have a historico-cultural relationship with Denmark on the Shetland/Norway model, and b.) there are simply not enough Danish specialists around who are willing or able to teach their subject at

subtertiary level. The Scandinavian departments at Aberdeen and Newcastle universities – the two pioneering centres of Scandinavian Studies in the northern part of these islands in the post-war years – both owe their inception to Swedish specialists, and derived much of their early strength from Britain's participation with Sweden in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). It will be interesting to see whether the appointment of a Danish specialist to the Chair of Scandinavian Studies at Newcastle, and our at present rather shaky relationship with Denmark in the EEC, do anything in the long run to further the cause of this neglected language in Scotland.

Summary

What conclusions can we then draw from the foregoing brief, and admittedly impressionistic, survey? The following points at least seem reasonably clear:–

1. The role of our universities, in which, with some temerity, I should like to include Newcastle, is indispensable if the Scandinavian languages are to survive as a minority subject in Scottish school curricula. The initial spade-work was done by enthusiasts such as Miss Scobbie and Mr. Sinclair in Aberdeen, and Mr. Grahamslaw in Fife, and only by producing more graduates with the necessary language skills who are willing to plough back their expertise in Scottish schools and colleges will we ensure that the momentum is kept up.
2. It seems that these languages have the best chance of success in areas where "the Scandinavian connection" has never quite been lost. Foundations exist to be built on, and if Orkney, Shetland and Aberdeen can demonstrate that Scandinavian links with modern Scotland are worth cultivating, other parts of the country might well lend an ear. The Centre for Nordic Studies at Aberdeen has already taken the lead in promoting cross-cultural studies, and a recent programme in the television series "Current Account" from Norway dealt with issues of mutual interest to Scots and Norwegians, such as public transport subsidies for inaccessible rural areas.

The oil boom in Aberdeen and Shetland, coinciding as it does with severe economic problems south as well as north of the Border, has drawn the eyes of the Scottish people northwards for the first time, and it is surely not too much to ask that the languages and cultures of our Northern neighbours should occupy a respected if minor place in our education system, particularly at a time when, according to the educational pundits, the more traditional "school" languages, such as German, are in decline.