

The ScotsGate Scots Grammar

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Introduction

Why study Scots grammar?

Grammar is the glue that holds any language together and is made up of the rules that make our speech and writing comprehensible to others. Although native speakers of a language usually have an instinctive feel for these structures, learners usually need some formal presentation. In the case of Scots, however, even fairly fluent native speakers are likely to be unaware of the language patterns they are using. It is only when these are written down can it be appreciated how rich Scots grammar is, how it differs often quite markedly from standard and colloquial English and how the forms used today often derive directly from older Scots usage. Given the status of Scots as a primarily oral tongue, there has been inevitable loss of distinct grammatical forms due to convergence with English, but what is really astonishing is how much remains.

Who defines Scots grammar?

A short time ago anyone wanting to find out about Scots grammar had an uphill task. Only two comprehensive grammars had been published; James Wilson's largely forgotten study *'Lowland Scotch'* based on interviews with inhabitants of the Perthshire village of Dunning, published in 1915 and William Grant and James Main Dixon's 1921 classic *'Manual of Modern Scots'* centred on the literary language. Both books had been out of print for decades. However recently there has been a comparative avalanche of Scots grammars. David Purves' booklet *'A Scots Grammar'* was published in 1997; about the same time as Andy Eagle's *'Wir Ain Tung'*, essentially a reworking of Grant and Dixon, appeared on the web. Also in 1997 Philip Robinson produced the masterly *'Ulster-Scots – a grammar of the traditional and spoken language'*, again something of a homage to Grant and Dixon. These reference works were joined in 1999 by Susan Rennie's *'Grammar Broonie'*, a workbook aimed at young learners. As David Purves puts it *'in any language revival, an essential stage is the fixing of standards amongst the welter of variation that is always found in the untended garden of natural speech'*. Although there is no 'official' definition of Scots grammar (there isn't one for English either), these publications can at least be taken as a consensus of how experts believe the grammar of the Scots language functions.

What is Scots Grammar?

A common root and many centuries of close contact between Scots and English have ensured that the grammars of the two tongues are broadly similar. This is good news for an (English speaking) learner, but care still has to be taken, as there are many traps for the unwary. Despite the increasing number of publications, the grammar of Scots, like its orthography and vocabulary can still be considered as being somewhat fluid. Inevitably authors - including myself - are strongly influenced by local dialectical variations, so there are inconsistencies between the various accounts. This section aims to find the consensus and highlight some of the main points of difference with English. Some 'grammatical' terminology has been inevitable to give this document some structure, but I've tried to keep it to a minimum and explain what the terms mean.

1. Articles ('The' and 'a')

A

The indefinite article is **a**, sometimes **an** before a vowel. **Gie's a aipple** or **Gie's an aipple** are equally correct and the former is particularly common in spoken Scots. Note there is no **a** after **monie**, so 'many a time' would be **monie time**. The plural is **some**, as in English. **Some fowk nivver lairn**.

Ae, used before a noun is an adjective, emphasising 'one-ness'. **A'v ae bairn, no twa** (I have only one child, not two).

In old Scots you see **ane** as the indefinite article but this is now only used as a numeral. It was pronounced as **a** or **an**.

The

As in English, the Scots definite article is **the**, but it is used much more in Scots, e.g. before times, places and institutions, diseases, seasons, days and sometimes instead of possessive adjectives.

Examples are **the noo** (now) **the morn** (tomorrow), **the nicht** (tonight), **the year** (this year), **awa tae the kirk**, **at the school**, **aff tae the jile**, **doon the toon**, **up the stair** (upstairs), **Whit'v ye got in fur the denner?**, **She's guid at the Frainch**, **He's aff wark wi the cauld**, **A'll stairt in the ware** (I'll start in spring), **A'm awa the Setturday** (I'm away on Saturday), **doon the brae** (downhill), **wi the train**, **Whaur's the wife the day?** (Where's your wife today), **he bides in the toon** (he lives in town), **Keep the heid!** (stay calm).

There are some dialect variants; **e** or **ee** in Northern dialects, **da** in Shetland and **tha** in Ulster-Scots.

2. Verbs ('Doing' words)

Present

Regular Scots verbs in the present have forms similar to English:

A (I) ken, ye ken, she/he kens, we ken, youse ken, they ken (know)

A greet, ye greet, she/he greets, we greet, youse greet, they greet (cry)

In the simple present tense start with the root e.g. **ken, greet** (with **tae** this is known as the infinitive ie **tae ken, tae greet**) and add **-s** for the she/he form (but see below). For verbs ending in **-sh, -lch, -nch, -rch** or **-tch**, add **-es** e.g. **she nivver fashes** (worries).

Note however that unlike English, plural subjects (apart from **youse**) can take singular verbs; **the gless wis clairtie, the glesses wis clairtie** and **the lassie eats a fish supper, the lassies eats fish suppers**. Many speakers use the English-like plural form (ie they drop the **-s**), so this rule can be regarded as optional.

Present participle

The present participle is formed by adding **-in** to the root e.g. **stert, stertin**. If the root ends with a consonant after a single vowel, double the consonant e.g. **ken, kennin; mak, makkin**. Verbs ending in **-e** drop the last vowel e.g. **come, comin; ettle** (try), **ettlin**, and verbs ending in **-ie** change the spelling e.g. **cairrie, cairryin**. The only real irregular is the verb **gae** (go). Although **gaein** is used, the form **gaun** is just as popular e.g. **A'm gaun hame**. Note also the contraction **gaunae**, often replacing **gaun tae** before a verb e.g. **A'm gaunae mak the tea** (but **A'm gaun tae the gemm** if not followed by a verb). The present participle is used more in Scots than in English e.g. **A'm no needin ocht the noo** (I don't need anything just now), **She stairtit greetin** (She started to cry). As in English, the present participle is used to form nouns such as **biggin** (buiding) and **flittin** (house moving).

Simple past

The simple past tense of regular ('weak') verbs is formed by adding **-it, -t** or **-ed** to the root. The rules seem quite complicated but really follow the sound of the root and you do get used to them!

Verbs ending with	Past tense ending	Examples
-b, -d, -g, -k, -p, -t, -te	-it	big (build), biggit ; howk (dig), howkit , pent (paint), pentit ; keep , keepit
-ch, -f, -l, -le, -n, -r (sometimes), -s, -se (with s sound), -sh, -ss, -th, -x	-t add apostrophe after silent -e, -le and -ll becomes -ilt	ken, kent (know); birl (spin) birlt ; speir (ask), speirt ; lauch (laugh), laucht ; fash, fasht ; hirple (limp), hirpilt ; skoosh (spray), skoosht ; fix, fixt ; bile, bile't (boil)
-e (except those above), -m, -oo, -r (sometimes), -se (with z sound), -w, -y, -z	-ed (displaces -e) Add apostrophe for verbs ending -ee	daur, daured (dare); stey, steyed ; cry (call), cried

Past tenses of irregular verbs

As in all Anglo-Saxon languages, many common Scots verbs are irregular (also known as 'strong'). This means that their past tenses and past participles do not follow the rules above. There are considerable differences between Scots and English in this respect. Verbs which are irregular in English may be regular in their Scots equivalents: **keep, keepit**; **sell, sellt**; **tell, telt**; while several verbs which are regular in English are irregular in Scots e.g. **quit, quat**; **hit, hut**. To make matters more complicated, a few Scots verbs have both regular and irregular forms of the past

forms e.g. **stick** has the forms **stickit** (regular) or **stack** (irregular). Unfortunately all you can do is learn them as you go along!

Some of the most common ones are as follows (the past participle is also given – see below):

English	Scots	simple past	past participle
be	be	wis	been
become	become	becam	become
begin	begin	begoud	began
break	brek	brak	brukken
bring	bring	brocht, brang	brocht, brung
build	big	biggit, bug	biggit
buy	buy	bocht	bocht
choose	choose	choose	choosen
come	come	cam	come
do	dae	did	duin
draw	draw	drew	drewn
drink	drink	drunk	drunken, drukken
drive	drive	drave	driven
eat	eat, aet	ett	etten
fall	fa(w)	fell	fawn
find	fin(d)	fan(d)	fun(d)
forget	forget	forgat	forgotten
get	git	gat	gotten
give	gie	gied, gien	gien, geid
go	gae, gang	gaed	gaen, went
grow	growe	growed	growed, growne
have	hae	haed	haen, haed
hear	hear	haird	haird
hold	haud	held	hauden
let	lat	lat, loot	latten
make	mak	makkit, made	makkit, made
put	pit	Pat, pit	pit, pitten, putten
run	rin	run, ran	run, ran
see	see	seed, saw	seen
seek	seek	socht	socht
sit	sit	sut, sat	sutten
speak	speak	spak	spoken
stand	staun	stood	stooden
stay	bide	bade	bidden
take	tak	taen, took	taen
win	wun	wan	wun
work	wirk	wrocht	wrocht
write	write	wrut, wrate	wrutten

Perfect tense

Uses the present tense of **hae / hiv** (have) with the past participle in a similar way to English. Not that forms often differ from English. **Hae / hiv** is described later.

Future tense

In English, *will* and *shall* can be used almost interchangeably to form the future tense. This is not the case in Scots, only **will** (or **wull**) or the abbreviated form **'ll** simply implies future action but **s(h)all**, when used at all, in Scots always implies assertion. To a Scot, **A wull gae tae the pub the nicht** and **A shall gae tae the pub the nicht** state quite different levels of commitment to pub-going. Don't forget the immediate future tense is also widely used **A'm gaunae gae tae the pub**, meaning I'm about to go. **Wull** can also indicate supposition, as in the stereotype Edinburgh welcome **Come in, ye'll hae haed yer tea**. The negative is **wunna** or **'ll no** i.e. **A'll no gae tae the pub** or **A wunna gae tae the pub**. The negative question is **Wull ye no gae tae the pub?**

Forming the negative

Scots **no** is used generally in the same ways as English *not* e.g. **A'm no cauld**. **Nae** carries out this function in the North East dialect, otherwise 'nae' before nouns is the equivalent to English 'no' e.g. **There's nae luck about the hoose**. Note however the auxiliary verbs (as with **wull** above) have particular negative forms.

Imperatives

Generally the same as English: **Gae hame!** (go home), **Dinna gae hame!** (don't go home) and **Lat's (no) gae hame!** Unlike English the subject pronoun can be used for emphasis **Dinna you fash** (don't worry). Note the use of **an**, where the equivalent is 'to' e.g. **Come an see me the morn, Mind an pit the cat oot**. (Remember to put the cat out). Polite 'imperatives' are common: **Wull ye gae hame, Ye cudna gae hame, cud ye?** as is the imperative pseudo verb **awa** as in **Awa hame!** and **Awa bile yer heid!** (clear off!)

Auxilliary Verbs (Be, have, will etc.)

These are verbs used together with a main verb to expand meaning and expression. Scots usage is almost the same as English, but the forms are quite distinct. **Be** and **hae** are the usual auxilliaries used to build compound tenses, **be** is used to make the present and past progressive tenses **Whit are ye daein?** and **hae** the present and past perfect tenses e.g. **Whit hae ye bocht?, Whit haed ye bocht?**. **Dae** is the supporting auxilliary used for negatives, questions etc e.g. **D'ye ken whit's wrang? Whit did ye brek? Wull, maun and nicht** are the modal auxilliaries which form the future and tenses which express uncertainty e.g. **Wull ye gang the morn?** Auxilliary verbs have distinct negative forms in Scots and several also have emphatic forms. You will come across many spelling, dialectical and form variants of Scots auxiliary verbs. I've tried to pick a fairly conservative/neutral set here.

Be has eight different forms: **be, am, are, wis, wur, bin/been** which correspond to the English cognates. As Scots has survived as a spoken language, elision (missing out letters) is normal in many auxiliary verbs (and indeed throughout the language) where there are two adjacent vowels. The elided form of the present tense of **tae be** is therefore:

A'm, ye're, he/she/it's, we're, youse are, they're

The negative of most auxiliaries is formed by adding **-na(e)**, to the unelided form: **A'm, A amna; ye are, ye ar(e)na, ye wis, ye wisna** etc. The negative of **be** is **binna** ie **binna feart** (afraid) but nowadays **dinna be feart** would be more common.

Note that the English 'there is/are' is often translated by **there** (ie 'is' is not used) e.g. **There yer tea**. The same applies to **here** e.g. **Here the buik ye gied me**.

The past tense is usually written **wis** and **war**. Remember the singular forms **is** and **wis** often replace **are** and **war** e.g. **Thae lassies is fleein** (Those girls are drunk), **The English wis bate at Bannockburn** (The English were beaten at Bannockburn).

Hae has the forms: **hae, his, haen, hid/hed/haid, haen** (see irregular verb table) as well as the emphatic form **hiv**. A common alternative elided form to **A hae** is **A'v**. Negatives: **hisna** (often shortned to **hinna**) /, **hidna** etc. The past is **haed(na)**, elided to **'d**.

Dae has forms **dae, dis, did, duin/done** (see irregular verb table) as well as the emphatic form **div**. Elided form of past **-'d**. Irregular negative of **dae** is **dinna** (**disna** in the **he/she/it** form), **didna** etc. 'To do' is often written **adae**. The past is **did(na)**.

Modal Verbs are used in a similar way to English except for the future tense (see above). Negative forms **wull, wullna** (often shortned to **winna**); **maun, mauna** (note single 'n'); **micht, michtna, daur, daurna, need, needna**. **Daur** and **need** not really modals, but still take the **-na(e)** form that was once more widespread in Scots. **Maun** is a synonym of **need tae** or **hae tae** e.g. **A maun speir at the high heid yin** (I must ask the boss). **A maun awa** implies the verb **gang** and means (I must go). The past is usually written as **wad(na), micht(na), durst(na), needed**. **Maun** has a rarely used past **bud** ie **it bud tae be**.

Can, cud, shuid, wid/wad all have **-na(e)** negative e.g. **canna, shuidna, cudna**. **Wad** has the elided form **-'d**. As well as meaning to be able to **tae can** (to be able) also implies permission, and would be translated in English as 'may' **Ye can gang hame airtle** (early), **Ye hae tae can lauch at yersel** (You must be able to laugh at yourself). With **tae can**, double modals appear e.g. **A micht can dae it the morn** (I might be able to do it tomorrow). The past is usually written **cuid** and **shuid**.

Remember that you can still use the **no** from of negation with auxiliaries. E.g. **The buik isna bad** or **The buik's no bad**. **She hisna come** or **She's no come**. There is no difference in meaning.

With short verbs, sometimes you still hear an old form of asking questions without **dae**. **Cam ye wi the bus? Think ye so?**

3. Nouns ('Naming' words)

Plurals

As in English, for plurals normally add **-(e)s**. Unlike English, words ending in **-f** or **-fe** simply add an **-s** (e.g. **wifes, leafs, lifes**). When coming immediately after a number, measurement or amounts don't change in the plural (e.g. **twainch, fower fit, nine metre, ten mile**), nor do **meenit, oor** (hour), **month** and **year** (but **day, days**). Some Scots irregular plurals are: **ee, een** (eyes); **shae, shuin** (shoes); **wumman, weemen; coo, kye** (cows); **fit, feet** and **ox, owsen**, not forgetting **moose, mice; loose, lice**; and **goose, geese**. As in English, some nouns are the same in singular and plural such as **deer, sheep, troot** (trout), **cod, saumon** (salmon), **grouse**, but in Scots so are **gait** (goat/s) and **horse**. **Fish** has two plurals, **fish** (a lot of fish) and **fishes** (a countable number of fish). **Teeth** the plural of **tuith** (tooth) is sometimes used as a singular. **Parritch** (porridge) however is sometimes a plural, and several nouns are only used in the plural e.g. **breeks** (trousers), **duds** (rags), **shears** (scissors).

Diminutives

Often added to proper names e.g. **Davie, Jeanie**, the diminutive suffix **-ie** is also commonly used to indicate smallness as an alternative to the adjectives **wee, bit** or **sma** e.g. **lass, lassie; kist, kistie** (chest/box); **hoose, hoosie; bit, bittie**. Scots is not alone in this, Dutch has an even more obsessive tendency to add **-je** to words e.g. **een kopje** (a **cuppie** – small cup), **een reisje** (a **trippie** – short trip). In both languages there is an implied affection.

Quantifiers

The use of nouns like **bit** as quantifiers is actually quite common, but note they are not necessarily followed by **o** (of) e.g. **a bit bried, a drap watter, a moothfu haggis**. **Whuskie** of course has its own terminology: **dram, (wee) hauf** and even a **thocht**. **Aw** (all), a **when** (some), **onie** (any), **eneuch** (enough), **hauf** (half), **baith** (both) are used as in English. **Some**, when used in Scots, often has the implication of 'big': **that's some dunt on the caur** (that is a big bash on your car). **Baith** and **maist** (see below) are usually used with **the** e.g. **the baith/maist o thaim**. **Monie, mair, maist** are the forms for countable nouns, **muckle** (or nowadays usually **much**), **mair, maist** for uncountable nouns. 'How many/much' is **Hoo monie/much?** English 'few' is translated as **nae monie**, both fewer and less as **less**. 'Too much' is **ower monie**. 'A few' is a **when, twa-three/three-fower** etc. Larger amounts are expressed by **awfie** (a **awfie midges**), **hantle** (a **hantle fowk**), **rowth** (abundance). A **dod o breid** is a 'chunk'. A **crood** is a large group of people or things and a **corn** is a small group.

Compound nouns

Scots compound nouns may be hyphenated to clarify meaning or pronunciation e.g. **week-en**, **post-caird**, **twā-bedded** (twin-bedded). The use of double nouns is very common in Scots e.g. **tumshie hied** (stupid person), **baa heid** (idiot), **muck midden** (dunghill, bit usually used metaphorically), **stair fit** (bottom of the stairs), **piece poke** (sandwich bag), **brae heid** (top of the hill).

Possessive forms

Possessive forms as in English with **-'s** or **-s'** or alternatively with **o** e.g. **the convener o the meetin**. Note the idiomatic use of the possessive in **the morn's morn** (tomorrow morning), **the morn's nicht**.

4. Pronouns (Take the place of a noun)

Personal pronouns

Scots is said to have both unemphatic forms and emphatic forms of personal pronouns. The emphatic forms are given in [square brackets] in the text below and usually correspond to the English equivalent. This is a useful distinction. **A telt ye**, **I telt ye**, **A telt you** and **I telt you** all have different emphases which would be expressed in English by stress if spoken or putting in italics/bold if written. The concept that English-like linguistic forms are more assertive or emphatic is an interesting theme and you often hear Scots speakers code switch into English for effect e.g. **A told you tae dae it**.

Subject (nominative):

A [**Ah/I**], **ye** [**you**], **he/she/it** [**he/she/hit**], **we** [**we**], **ye(z)/youse** [**you**], **they** [**they**]

The 'I' form seems to cause problems in orthography. Scots pronounce it **A**, **Ah** (a bit longer), **EH** (distinctive of Dundee) as well as **Ay** (the usual English way). Personally I write **A**, leaving **Ah** and **I** for emphasis. In West central dialects **ye** has distinct plural **yiz** [**youse**]. This is so useful it seems to be becoming a standard, replacing the **ye** [**you**] plural e.g. **Whit're yez daein the nicht?**. An informal US equivalent would be 'y'all' or 'you guys'. Nowadays Scots, like English, largely lacks a familiar form of you, but **tou** [**thou**] - survived on the mainland until this century, but is now only used in Orkney (**thoo**) and Shetland (**du**) with the verb in the s/he form. Note that when combining **A** with another pronouns, the object forms are used and the I equivalent is usually placed first.. **A'm no comin** but **Me an her isna comin** (She and I are not coming). When using **it** with subject pronouns, order is different from English e.g. **Gie hir it** (Give it to her), **Did ye tell him it** (Did you tell it to him?).

Object (accusative):

me [me], **ye** [you], **him/her/it** [him/hir/hit], **us** [hiz], **ye** [you/youse], **thaim** [thaim] (but the unstressed form is usually pronounced *thum*).

The **us** form is often used colloquially in the first person. **See's thon buik** (Pass me that book over there), **Gie's a poond** (Give me a pound), **Come wi's** (Come with me). **Thaim that** is the equivalent to the English 'those that' e.g. **There wark for thaim that want it** (There's work for those that want it). **Is that you? Ay, that's me** means 'Are you ready/finished? Yes I'm ready'.

Possessives (My one, your one etc)

The possessive pronouns are **mines**, **yours**, **his/hers**, **oors/wirs** and **theirs** e.g. **thon buik's mines**, **it's no yours**. (My, your etc is in the adjectives section). For emphasis **my ane(s)**, **your ane(s)** etc.

Reflexive pronouns

masel, **yersel**, **himsel** [hissel], **hersel**, **itsel** [hitsel], **oorsel/wirsel**, **yersel** or **the sel o ye**, **thaimsel/theirsel**. The plurals alternatively take –s ie **wirsels**.

Me and **ye** can replace **masel** and **yersel**. **A bocht me a new caur the day** (I bought myself a new car today), **Sit ye doon!** Some idioms : **Yer twa sels** (both of you), **He did it aw his ain sel** (He did it all by his self), **Ye missed yersel at the pairtie** (you missed something good), **A'v aften seen masel getting tae the office at seven** (a bit untranslatable...often used when telling a story), **himsel/hersel** often implies an important person at home or at work ie a boss, husband or wife **Whan hersel hears yon, there'll be a stushie** (when the boss/wife hears that there'll be trouble). English 'alone' is translated as **his/her/their** etc **lane** e.g. **We gaed wir lane** (We went by ourselves). Also **Is thon lass by her lane?** (Is that girl alone?).

Relative pronouns

The relative pronoun (English which, who etc) is simply **that** or **at**, depending on the dialect and sometimes it is omitted. **The bairns that brak the windae**. When English 'whose' is a relative pronoun, it is not, as you might expect, **whase**, but **that** plus a possessive ie **The man that his siller wis tint** (The man whose money was lost). In speech this is contracted to **that's** for all pronouns. **The bairn that's breeks wis tore** (The child whose trousers were torn).

Wha is normally only used as part of a question, so Burns' **Scots wha hae** is stirring but nowadays ungrammatical! **Scots that haes** is the modern form.

Interrogative pronouns

The interrogative pronouns are all different in form from English, but used similarly to their equivalents: **Hoo** (how or why), **wha** ('who' as well as

‘whom’), **whan** (when), **whase** (whose), **whaur** (where), **whitna** (which, what kind of), **whit** (‘what’ or ‘which’), **whit wey** or **hoo** or **whit for** (why, for what reason) and **whit like** (what sort of). A distinctive feature of the North-East dialect of Scots is that the **wh** sound is replaced by **f** (so **foo**, **fa**, **fit** etc **Fit like?** is ‘How are you?’). There are several other dialectical differences for example **what** (to rhyme with ‘cat’) instead of **whit**. A few idioms **Whit bonnie!** (How pretty!), **Whit for no?** (Why not?), **Whit’s he greetin/roarin at?** (Why is he crying/shouting), **Whit a fowk!** (What a lot of people!). **Whit** is often used where ‘which’ would be expected in English **Whit wey noo?** (Which way now?).

Indefinite pronouns

In Scots these are: **a bodie** (someone, somebody), **naebodie** (no one, nobody), **oniebodie** (anyone, anybody), **awbodie** (everyone, everybody), **sumhin/sumthin** (something), **naethin** or **nocht** (nothing), **oniethin** or **ocht** (anything), **awthin** (everything), **nane** (none). English ‘one’ is **a bodie** e.g. **Gin a bodie meet a bodie**. Also ‘ilkane or **ilka ane** (each one), **onie ithir bodie** (anyone else), **nae ithir bodie** (no one else). As in English **ye** is an impersonal pronoun: **ye nivver can tell**.

5. Adjectives (Describe nouns and pronouns)

Suffixes and prefixes

Scots often use **-lik(e)** added to simple adjectives sometimes equivalent to English ‘-ish’ or ‘-ly’ but often with added metaphorical or poetic undertones e.g. **blecklike** (blackish, darkly etc), **bairnlike** (childish, childlike, juvenile etc), **doucelike** (sweetly, respectfully etc), **shilpitlike** (starved-looking), **wicelike** (sensible, proper, good-looking). Other common endings are **-some** meaning ‘full of’ e.g. **lichtsome** (carefree, cheerful), **forritsome** (forward, impudent), **scunnersome** (disgusting), **waesome** (sorrowful); **-ie** e.g. **creeshie** (greasy), **reekie** (smoky), **stoorie** (dusty); and **-fu** meaning ‘full’ e.g. **fearfu**, **thochtfu**, **mensefu** (polite, respectable), **awfu** or **awfie**. Perhaps the most common prefix is **un-** or its equivalent **wan-** e.g. **wanchancie** or **unchancie** (unlucky, unfortunate), **unbraw** (unattractive).

Comparatives

Comparatives and superlatives are formed in the same way as English, by adding **-er** or **-est** e.g. **bonnie**, **bonnier**, **bonniest** or using **mair**, **the maist**. Note **wee**, **wee-er**, **wee-est** and **like**, **liker**, **maist like**.

When there is a second part to the comparison, use **nor** e.g. **Jock is mair glaikit nor Tam** (more foolish), **Mair siller nor sense** (More money than sense). Note irregulars; **guid**, **better**, **best**; **bad/ill**, **waur/warse**, **warst**; **faur**, **forder**, **fordest**; **awfie**, **mair awfie**, **awfie-est**. Double comparisons are sometimes used for effect e.g. **The maist brawest sicht A ivver seen**.

Demonstratives (This, that etc)

Used to specify the distance or location of something in relation to the speaker. **This** and **that** are used as in English and Scots has two extra forms **thon** and **yon** to refer to things more distant from both speakers. **Thon** seems to be between **that** and **yon** both spatially and linguistically. These can be used as pronouns **yon's awfie** (that's awful).

singular	this lad	tha(t) lad	thon lad	yon lad
plural	these/thir lads	thae lads	thon lads	yon lads

In some dialects the *th* sound often disappears from **that** and **this**, and the demonstratives are sometimes written as **at** and **is**. That one is **that ane/yin/wan** depending on dialect. Note the related: **hereawa** (hereabouts), **therrawa** (thereabouts), **yonderabouts** (there or thereabouts).

Distributives (Each and every)

In written Scots 'each' and 'every' are both often translated as **ilka**, but in spoken Scots **each** and **ivverie** are probably more common. **Aither** (either) and **naither** are used as in English. 'Each one' is **ilk/each ane** and 'each other' is **ilk/each ither**.

Possessives

The possessive adjectives are **ma**, **yer** [your], **her**, **his**, **oor** or **wir** (our), **their** e.g. **oor school**, **ma freens** (friends), **yer faither**.

There are a number of idioms different from English e.g. **A'm awa tae ma bed**, **Whit did ye get for yer Christmas? Whit are yea haein for yer tea?** Note that in Scots (as in French, for example) 'the' is sometimes used where English would use the possessive pronoun e.g. **The wife's oot daein the messages** (My wife is out doing the shopping), **Dinna loss the heid** (Don't get angry/crazy).

Compound adjectives

As with nouns there is a tendency in Scots to form compounds such as **crabbit-luikin** (of cantankerous appearance), **guid-gaun** (lively), **thrown-luikin** (of disobligng appearance), **weill-daein** (respectable), **greetin-faced** (tearful), **doonhertit** (dejected).

6. Adverbs (Describe how something happens)

Most adverbs are formed by adding **-lie** (or **-ly**) to the end of the related adjective e.g. **slaw**, **slawlie**; **saft**, **saftlie**; **braw**, **brawlie**; **maist**, **maistlie**. Some have an optional extra **-s**: **aiblins** (perhaps), **mebbies**, **geylies** (pretty much), **brawlies**.

When the adverb is positioned next to the verb, it takes the same form as the adjective e.g. **He cam in quiet**. **He's near feenished**. When more emphasis is needed, **-lik(e)** can be added e.g. **Run, quick-like!** Perhaps by extension, **like** has become a very common intensifier in West Central and Ulster dialects **Are ye comin we me, like?**

Many Scots prepositions (see below) can be used as adverbs. A few other adverbs worth knowing about:

- The common adverb **awa** which appears in several idioms, sometimes replacing a verb e.g. **A'm awa** (I am going), **come awa** (come here), **awa (wi ye)!** (expression of disbelief), **awa (an) bile yer heid!** (get lost!), **A'm fair awa wi it**(happy/proud).
- The adverb **gey (an)** is used to intensify an adjective e.g. **It wis gey dear** and it is worth noting are the range of words, very distinctive of Scots, used to intensify adjectives such as **awfie, fell, rare, sair, unco.**
- **That** is used as an adverb equivalent of the English 'so' **A wis that wabbit a jist gaed hame.**

7. Prepositions (Used to indicate movement, position, relation etc)

Many can also be used as adverbs. Some of the most common are:

ablow below, **aboot** about, **abuin** above, **aff** off, **afore** before, prior to, **agin** against, **ahint** behind, **alang** along, **amang** among, **aneith** beneath, **anent** alongside, regarding (in a letter), **aroon** around, **as** as, **aside** beside, **at** at, **athort** across, **athout** without, **atween** between, **ayont** beyond, **ben** within a house, **bi wey o** via, **by** by, past, **doon** down, **efter** after, **fornent** opposite, **frae/fae** from, **for** for, **furth** out of a town, country etc, **in** in, **in aneith** under, underneath, **in maugre/spite o** despite, **in o** inside, **inby** within, inside a building, **intil** into, **near** near, **o** of, **on** on, **ontae** onto, **or** until, **ootby** out-of-doors, outlying, **ootwi(th)** outside, **ower** over, **roond** round, **syne** since, **throu** through, during, **tae/till** to, **till** till, **taeward** toward, **unner** under, **up** up, **upon** upon, **wantin** without, **wi(th)** with, **wi-in**, within.

Many of these can be used as compounds e.g. **intil, inower, ootower** (outside), **in o, aff o** etc.

The positioning of prepositions such as **aff, oot** is sometimes different from English equivalents. **He took aff his bunnet** (He took his cap off), **She humphed oot the bucket** (She hauled the bin out). Otherwise use is broadly similar to English although there are some variations especially related to nouns e.g. **think on** (think about), **merrit on/wi** (married to), **beelin at** (angry with), **ower the windae** (out of the window), **in a praisent** (as a present), **wyte on** (wait for), **cry on** (call to), **feart for** (afraid of), **mind o** (remember), **lippen tae** (depend on), **speir at** (ask, request), **get oot the road** (out of the way), **ask for** (enquire after someone's health). **Needs** and **wants** don't take **tae** but use a past participle instead. **The wife wants taen hame** (My wife would like to be taken home), **Thon hoose needs pentin** (That house needs to be painted).

Prepositions are idiosyncratic and illogical in most language and therefore quite difficult to learn. The best way is to 'collect' examples. Here are a few Scots idioms featuring prepositions to get you started.

- **The dominie is aye at me aboot ma hamewark** The teacher is always complaining to me about my homework
- **Whit's she on aboot noo?** What is she talking about now?
- **The car wudna stert wi the cauld.** The car wouldn't start due to the cold.
- **He's at it.** He is up to no good.
- **A'll se ye efter** I'll see you later
- **A'm awa for a cairrie oot** I'm going for take-away food or drink.
- **Gae doon the watter** Go for a pleasure cruise on the Firth of Clyde.
- **Whan a seen him at seven, he wis areddie weel on.** ...he was already drunk
- **On Fridays the club is aye stowed oot...** full of people
- **They telt me the loch wis stappit fu o troot...** packed with trout
- **Hill walkin is sair on yer feet...** hard on your feet
- **It's ower late for me, A'm offski** ...I'm going (Glasgow slang)
- **Its cauld oot, mind an hap up...** remember to wrap up warm
- **He has a but an ben near Loch Lomond...** small cottage.
- **The buik is no aa it's bummed up tae be...** all it is claimed to be

This highly idiomatic use of prepositions to greatly extend the meaning of verbs, although of course a feature of standard and colloquial English, is very common in Scots and to some extent belies the claim that Scots has a restricted vocabulary. A few other examples are **come roon** (recover), **gie in tae** (confess), **git on** (be friendly), **get thegither** (assemble), **git gaun** (rile), **gae agin** (argue), **gae wrang** (lose one's way), **tak tent** (pay attention), **gae efter** (chase), **tak efter** (resemble), **pit doon for** (register), **pit oot** (advertise), **pit by** (save), **be pit oot** (offended), **pit on** (pretend).

8. Conjunctions

Scots conjunctions tend to work harder than English ones, and generally cover a range of English synonyms. As a result of this and the use of prepositions to extend meaning described above, Scots texts often seem more concise and direct than their English translations. A few illustrative equivalents are given below.

Afore (before, previous to, earlier than, prior to, ahead of, rather than), **an** (and), **as** (as), **athoot** (unless, except, save, but for), **but** (but, excluding, other than, save for), **efter** (after, following, subsequent to), **for by** (besides, except, apart from, excluding, bar, aside from, with the exception of), **hooanivver** (however, nevertheless), **or** (or), **sae** (so, as a result, thus, therefore, subsequently, accordingly, hence, consequently), **sae bein** (provided that, since), **seein as** (given that, given the fact that, seeing that, considering, bearing in mind, in view of the fact that, since), **syne** (from the time that), **tho** (though, although, even if, despite the fact that), **whan** (when), **whaur** (where), **wioot** (without, devoid of, lacking)

There are two words for 'if' in Scots, **if** and **gin** (pronounced with a hard 'g'). The first covers matters of fact **If ye'r that smert, you dae it** (if you are so smart, you do it), the other for speculation (and nowadays more written than spoken) **Gin ye gat the job, whit wid ye dae?** (if you got the job, what would you do).

9. Numbers (Cardinals are 1,2,3 etc; Ordinals 1st, 2nd 3rd etc)

Cardinal numbers are largely different to English in spelling and/or pronunciation, but the construction of complex numbers is the same e.g. 444 **fower hunner an fowertie fower**. There are some minor variations in spelling/pronunciation between Scots dialects. Note that sometimes ‘one’ is used in English in an emphatic way, acting more like an adjective. ‘That’s *one* man I can’t stand’. This has a special construction in Scots, **ae**, or **yae** in some dialects. **Thon’s ae man a canna thole**.

<i>1</i> ane/yin een/wan (as a numeral), ae (as an adjective only)	<i>11</i> eleeven
<i>2</i> twae/twaw	<i>12</i> twal
<i>3</i> three	<i>13</i> thirteen/thretteen
<i>4</i> fower	<i>14</i> fowerteen
<i>5</i> five/fev	<i>15</i> fifteen
<i>6</i> six/sax	<i>16</i> saxteen
<i>7</i> seven	<i>17</i> seventeen
<i>8</i> echt/aucht	<i>18</i> echteen
<i>9</i> nine	<i>19</i> nineteen
<i>10</i> ten	<i>20</i> twintie
	<i>21</i> twintie-ane etc

30 **thertie**, *40* **fowertie**, *50* **fufftie**, *60* **saxtie**, *70* **seventie**, *80* **echtie**, *90* **ninetie**, *100* **a hunner**, *1,000* **a thoosan(d)**, *1,000,000* **a million**, 0 is **zero**, **nocht** or **naethin**.

Ordinal numbers nearly all end in **-t** ie **first**, **saicant**, **third** (irregular), **fowert**, **fift**, **saxt**, **sevent**, **echt/aucht**, **nint**, **tent**. Add **-t** to the cardinal numbers for subsequent forms. Sometimes the ordinal is used instead of the cardinal e.g. the **the twintie Mairch**. The abbreviated form is **1t**, **2t**, **3d** (irregular), **4t** etc. Related vocabulary: **single**, **dooble**, **threuple** and the suffix **-some** to indicate a group of people e.g. **a fowersome at the gowf** (golf), **a echtsome reel** (a type of dance with 8 participants). Fractions are **hauf**, **third**, **quarter**, **fift** etc. Remember **twae-three**, **three-fower** mean ‘a few’ and a **dizzen** (dozen).

10. Time

To answer the phrase **Whit’s the time?** (What time is it?): **Fower (o’ clock)** or **fower oors**, **juist efter fower**, **the back o fower**, **ten efter fower**, **a quarter efter fower**, **hauf fower**, **a quarter til/tae five**, **ten til/tae/rae five**, **juist afore five**. Until a few generations ago Scots **hauf fower** would have meant 3.30 (as in German). Units are **saicant**, **meenit**, **oor** (remember no plural forms immediately after numbers).

Some common expressions of time: **morn** (morning), **twalours/nuin** (midday) and **midnicht** (midnight), **weeoors** (early morning), **keek o day** (sunrise), **morn(in)** (morning), **nuin** or **twal-oors** (noon), **efternuin** (afternoon), **sundoon** (sunset), **gloamin** (just after sunset) **eenin/fornicht** (evening) and, of course, **nicht** (night). Remember **the morn** is ‘tomorrow’ and **the nicht** is ‘tonight’ and **the morn’s morn** is ‘tomorrow morning’.

The modern forms of the days of the week are: **Monday, Tuesday, Wadensday, Thursday, Friday, Seturday, Sunday**. **Sunday** is also **the Sawbath**, and **Friday** is, if you’re lucky, **Peyday!** As usual you will see some spelling differences, sometimes the older forms **Monanday** and **Tyseday**. **Nixt/neist** is used differently for days of the week. **This Seturday** is the equivalent of English ‘next Saturday’, while **nixt Seturday** is the next Saturday but one.

The months of the year are: **Januar, Februar, Mairch, Aprile, Mey, Juin, Julie, August, September, October, November, December**. The last five or six months are of course similar in many European languages. **Laist**, referring to time, is used like English ‘last’ (but ‘last year’ can be **fernyear**). (When ‘last’ refers to position, use **hin(ner)** or **hinnermaist**).

The **Fower Saisons**: **Spring/Ware, Simmer, Hairst, and Winter**. A few important days in the Scottish calendar are **Ne’erday** (New Year’s Day), **Burns’ Nicht** (25 Jan), **Fastern’s een** (Shrove Tuesday), **Pace** (Easter), **Gowk’s Day** or **Huntigowk** (1 April), **Beltane** (1 or 3 May), **Guy Fawkes Nicht** (5 November), **Sanct Andra’s Day** (30 November), **Yuil Een** (24 December), **Yuil (Day)** (Christmas) and **Hogmanay** (New Year’s Eve). The Scots **Quarter Days** (still used at some Universities) are **Cannlemas** (2 Feb), **Lammas** (1 Aug), **Michelmas** (29 Sep) and **Mairtinmas** (11 November). The autumn half term school holiday is still sometimes called the **tattie holiday** - a time when traditionally children were needed to help with bringing in the potato harvest.

11. Exclamations

Scots has a remarkable range of colourful exclamations, several derived from religious phrases e.g. **michtie** (Almighty God!), **crivvens** (Christ defend us!), **fegs** (Faith!). A few other common ones are:

Ach! (impatience), **Awa wi ye!** (disbelief), **Ay ay** (disbelief), **Blethers! Bletheration!** (disbelief), **Caa cannie!** (Watch out!), **Crivvens!** (astonishment), **Feech!** (disgust), **Fegs!** (surprise), **Gaun yersel!** (Go/come on!), **Guid kens!** (puzzlement), **Haivers!** (disbelief), **Haud on!** (Stop!), **Hievens!** (wonder), **Hish!** (Be quiet!), **Jings!** (surprise), **Mercie me!** (surprise), **Michtie!** (alarm), **Nivver!** (disbelief), **Och!** (impatience), **Wheesht!** (Be quiet!), **Yer grannie!** (disbelief)

You really know you are a Scots speaker when you start saying these spontaneously! Oh and don’t forget real Scots shout **Heech!**, **Hooch!** or **Heuch!** whenever dancing to a reel.

12. References and further reading

The following books and website were used in the preparation of **The ScotsGate Scots Grammar**.

The The Aiberden Univairstie's Scots Leid Quorum's **Innin Ti the Scots Leid** (1995) is a useful 44 page booklet and where I started with the grammar of Scots. Strong on spelling (I use most of their system) and of course grammar with some useful vocabulary, but alas probably unobtainable now.

Andy Eagle (2002) **Wir Ain Leid** [<http://www.scots-online.org/grammar/>] Required browsing, the site is an extensive re-working and up-dating of Grant and Dixon (see next), and currently the most comprehensive work on Scots grammar currently available. Particularly strong on Scots dialects.

William Grant and James Main Dixon (1921) **Manual of Modern Scots**. Not in print. OK, a bit hard to find, but a mine of information if you do. A detailed attempt to describe a standard 'literary' Scots based on contemporary East Central speech and (mainly) 19th Century literature. The wide range of sources include 'Kailyard' writers (eg Barrie, Crockett, Maclaren), Bell (see below), Burns, Scott and Stevenson as well as local papers and 'reminiscences'. The manual is in 3 parts: Phonetics (70pp), Grammar (120pp) and a Reader (with phonetic transcripts).

David Purves (2002) **A Scots Grammar** (Revised Edition) published by the Saltire Society, Edinburgh is as close as we have to an 'official' grammar for standard Scots. Lots of examples.

Susan Rennie and others (1999) **Grammar Broonie** published by Polygon, Edinburgh is aimed at children (and their teachers) and is a basic introduction to Scots grammar, complete with exercises.

Philip Robinson (1997) **Ulster-Scots: A Grammar of the Traditional Written and Spoken Language**, published by The Ullans Press, Belfast. Outstanding scholarship; a re-writing Grant and Dixon for the Ulster dialect.

L Colin Wilson (2002) **Luath Scots Language Learner** published by Luath Press, Edinburgh is the first-ever Scots language course aimed at the complete novice and with extensive sections on grammar.

Wilson, James (1915) **Lowland Scotch** Not in print Another one you won't find in your local Waterstones but worth hunting down. Meticulous investigation of the speech of the Perthshire village of Dunning (where I used to live!): pronunciation, grammar, wordlists, sayings, idioms, expressions. Legend has it this was the book that inspired Hugh MacDiarmid to start screivin awa in Scots, and I'm not surprised.

The Concise English-Scots Dictionary (1993) and its companion **Scots School Dictionary** (1996) from The Scottish National Dictionary Association and published by Chambers, Edinburgh were used to attempt a standardised spelling for The ScotsGate Scots Grammar.