

REGIONAL LANGUAGES AND ACCENTS

Gaelic, the traditional language of Scotland, is closely related to Irish and was spoken throughout Scotland from around the sixth century until the fifteenth, when English began to take over. Gaelic is a soft, cooing, mellifluous language that sounds as if it were invented mainly for soothing animals.

The 2001 census showed that just over 1% of Scots spoke Gaelic. They were all, without exception, irritating bearded people who want to drone on about heritage and force the government to spend millions of pounds making dual-language road signs that nobody ever reads. The census showed that they lived with their mothers, and at home they secretly spoke English.

Welsh, on the other hand, is actually spoken in Wales. The 2001 census indicated that 21% of Welsh people speak the Welsh language – an increase from the previous count, implying that the language is on the ascent. This doesn't mean that 21% of them use Welsh as a first language, and in reality the vast majority of everyday life in Wales is conducted in English. However, if you were to visit Wales there's a reasonable chance that you'd hear a conversation going on in Welsh, even if it was just about your ridiculous hair, or how fat your child was. Welsh is another soft, vowel-y language, although it is punctuated regularly by guttural phlegm-gargling noises, causing speakers to be often mistaken for drunks speaking Hebrew.

The Welsh toy parliament issues all of its literature in two languages, and the teaching of Welsh is compulsory in schools in Wales up to the age of sixteen. There's a Welsh-language BBC radio station and a Welsh-language TV channel.

Neither Wales nor Scotland is nearly as bilingual as Canada, or even Southern California.

There are vast regional differences in accents across the U.K., and even across comparatively small physical distances. A Scot can easily tell the difference between an Edinburgh accent and a Glasgow one, though the cities are barely fifty miles apart. Likewise, someone from Sheffield need only hear two words from a Barnsley resident to know that he's going to need a good shoeing outside the pub after closing time. As you move further away, the accuracy diminishes — a Scot could tell a Northern English accent from a Southern one, but would be unlikely to tell the difference between a Salford accent and a Bolton one. This doesn't mean that Brits are somehow born with a natural ear for accents, as they are unable to tell the difference between a Texan accent, a New York accent and a Canadian one.