

# Capitalising on the City: Edinburgh's Linguistic Identities

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*This paper examines the linguistic identities of Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city, and the contexts in which they are currently used. The city is known by a range of different names that are linked with its historical and contemporary identities as they are represented in Scottish Gaelic, Scottish English and Scots. In terms of its etymology, the name Edinburgh is part Celtic and part Germanic, but in modern usage it exists within the official and standard discourses of the dominant language variety, Scottish English. It is the form of the name most usually employed in other British and International Englishes. In modern Scottish Gaelic, the city is called Dùn Èideann, and of those designations which could qualify as Scots, the best known is probably the nickname Auld Reekie "Old Smoky", made popular in 18<sup>th</sup> century literature and still in use today. Particular attention is drawn here to the role that these toponymic identities play in relation to the place identity of the city. Each name resonates with different narratives of history and culture, which, although subjectively shaped at the individual level, share at least sufficient prototypical meaning for them to be employed effectively (and further shaped and manipulated) in a variety of public and commercial contexts. It is argued here that the ways in which these three toponymic layers describe the city reveal a complex paradigm of contested space, and that by better understanding the uses of these names we can better understand the linguistic politics of the city's image and the current roles played by Scotland's languages.*

## Place Image, Place Identity and Linguistic Heritage

Toponymy exists at the intersection of many different disciplines including linguistics, history, geography and cultural studies. For this reason, this paper draws on several of these intersecting layers, borrowing a number of terms from each. Specifically, in studies of place branding, it has been recognised that "heritage can be used within deliberately promoted place images destined to shape the perceptions of

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1 I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments.

a place as a suitable location for investment, enterprise, residence or recreation destination” (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996, 59). The concept of “place image” may be characterised as “the total set of impressions of a place, or an individual’s overall perception”, or “a mental portrayal or prototype’ of what the travel experience might look like” (Govers & Go 2009, 18). This is a useful term that relates to the present study because, in the case of Edinburgh, even the name of the city itself may be presented in a number of different ways which each contribute to place image, drawing on their cultural and historical legacies and connotations. Place image is, however, a protean concept; it is recognised that “Different projections and perceptions are individual or community constructions, and different individuals and communities might have different or fragmented insights” (Govers & Go 2009, 18).<sup>2</sup> The concept of “place identity” is also relevant to this paper, which will focus particularly on aspects of history, symbolism and communication as they are represented through the multiple identities of the city.<sup>3</sup> Place identity is defined by Govers and Go as being “constructed through historical, political, religious and cultural discourses” (ibid., 17). I follow their use of the term here, focusing on the toponymic and linguistic dimensions to the cultural discourse. However, I do not restrict my discussion to the linguistic landscape visible in the marketing of the city and its attractions, but also draw on evidence provided from other cultural contexts, where language plays a significant role.

While necessity dictates a certain degree of selection, which tends to foreground “prevailing” or “dominant” views, it should be remembered that many “imagined identities” are widely recognised within Scottish culture (Corbett 2007, 337). While the focus on Edinburgh may provide insights into these multiple identities, the discussion here does not attempt to be exhaustive. Viewed through the lens of heritage tourism, the picture is further complicated by the fact that “the tourist is an undefinable entity” (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996, 64). The definition of “tourism”, then, has to be flexible enough to avoid overt stereotyping, and is perhaps best understood as broadly relating to “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment” (Govers & Go 2009, 20). The tourist who visits Edinburgh may have preconceptions about the city’s cultural and linguistic identities, and during their visit may encounter different pronunciations of its names, rendered in Scottish Gaelic, Scots, (Scottish) English, and even Latin. It is argued here that a further dimension – that of the virtual tourist – is also deserving

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2 The term ‘place image’ is also understood here, not as definitive, but as “the ‘dominant view’ or the tendency towards stereotyping place ... keeping in mind that it is in fact an individualized construct that incorporates many variations and interpretations” (Govers & Go 2009, 18).

3 Some commentators have sought to refine this interpretation. Noordman (2004) regards history as a “structural” element of place identity, whereas he sees symbolism and communication as representing its more subjective “colouring” elements.

of particular consideration.<sup>4</sup> By limiting the discourse to the semiotics of the visible landscape, we may miss the alternative views and realities presented elsewhere, including the webscape, where the landscape is presented to prospective visitors.

## Edinburgh as a “Brand” Identity

In terms of a national “brand” identity, then, Edinburgh can be viewed as representing Scotland in microcosm. Its names are often associated with national products such as whiskies, as well as heritage and cultural tourism through its special status as a UNESCO City of Literature, and though notable events and landmarks such as The Edinburgh Festival and Edinburgh Castle. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct an exhaustive search of all of the contexts in which *Edinburgh* itself is used as a marketing tool, but these few illustrative examples are very high profile in terms of “branding the nation”. Summing up the status of Scotland’s “brand” identity, Morgan *et al.* (2004, 23) make the following observation:

Scotland is OK: although it is a small country, it has been around for a long time; it has tartans, kilts, Scotch whisky, the Highlands, *Braveheart* and the Edinburgh Festival.

Much of the tartantry associated with Scotland’s brand identity can be attributed to Sir Walter Scott’s (1771-1872) deliberate cultivation of a distinctive image for Scotland, partly through the romanticised ideals he projected through his historical novels, but especially in his orchestration of the visit of King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822 (McCrone *et al.* 1995, 113). Indeed, he is sometimes seen as “single-handedly ‘invent[ing]’ the image of modern Scotland” (Morgan *et al.* 2004, 34). Scott’s literary endeavours are echoed in the pseudo-historical imagined Scotland of *Braveheart*, and it is perhaps these creative visions that carry more weight than kitsch “souvenir” Scotland with its bagpipe-playing dolls, furry Loch Ness monsters and whisky miniatures.

In the case of a capital city such as Edinburgh, which has been widely represented in literary contexts for hundreds of years, the images of Edinburgh evoked in those contexts play an important role in shaping perceptions of the place itself. To fully appreciate the breadth and depth of Edinburgh’s place image and place identity, we must therefore acknowledge the effect of the Edinburghs of the mind, found for example in James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993), and Ian Rankin’s “Rebus” novels (1987–2007). But if language in all of its guises is viewed as the primary

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<sup>4</sup> It is also recognised that some researchers will draw a line between the ‘tourist’ and the ‘recreationalist’ (Hall & Page 2006, 2) but I do not attempt to do so here.

conduit of culture, then it is necessary to take a closer look in order to locate the city within the broader, national, linguistic landscape.

## The Linguistic Background: Scots, Scottish English and Scottish Gaelic

Modern Scotland is broadly recognised as having three main linguistic identities (Murdoch 1996, 2; McLeod & Smith 2007, 21). One of these is a Celtic language, Scottish Gaelic, while the other two are Scots and (Scottish) English, two closely related varieties with an intertwined and complex political history.<sup>5</sup> Each one has its own rich literary and cultural traditions within Scotland, and all three linguistic identities are reflected in the names applied to the capital city. By extension, each name's connections to linguistic and cultural heritage can be exploited and explored by different groups in pursuit of various political, social, cultural, linguistic and economic agendas.

Scots and Scottish English are both “descendants” of the dialects brought to these islands by Germanic peoples in the Middle Ages (Macafee & Aitken 2002). Speakers often code-switch between Scots and Scottish English, and the close relationship between the two, which share a considerable proportion of lexis and grammar, is often characterised as that of a “linguistic continuum” (Corbett *et al.* 2003). While Scottish Gaelic does not suffer from all of the same identity problems as Scots – many of which are due to the latter's close affinities with English – it also bears a historic legacy of inequality and marginalisation. From the evidence of the 2001 census, the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland has been estimated at around sixty thousand; more specifically, 92,400 respondents to the Scottish Census in 2001 identified themselves as being able to read, write, speak or understand the language (Scottish Parliament 2009, 1). Prior to the 2011 Census, no question was ever asked about the numbers of Scottish residents who read, write, speak or understand Scots, with the result that estimates of the numbers of Scots speakers have been even more difficult to determine. The picture is further complicated by lack of education about Scots, making it very difficult for speakers to confidently self-identify.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the speakers themselves, McLeod and Smith (2007, 22) note that “whether one speaks Scots or English seems to be a matter of opinion, often with a political significance”. In the two most detailed surveys to date, conducted in the mid-1990s, 30% of Maté's sample group and

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5 For further information on these varieties, I would recommend the textbooks on Gaelic and Scots in the ‘Edinburgh Companions’ series (Watson & Macleod 2010; Corbett *et al.* 2003).

6 At the time of writing, the results of the 2011 Census were not yet available. In order to attempt to counteract the problem of Scots speakers being able to self-identify, the website ‘Aye Can’ <[www.ayecan.com](http://www.ayecan.com)> (all references to online sources are accurate as of 30 September 2011) was set up by a group of individuals and organisations with interests in Scots.

57% of Murdoch's identified themselves as Scots speakers (Stuart-Smith 2004, 50), but these figures may not be reliable, and there is much to be done to clarify what "Scots" is in the mind of the general public. Until such time as there is a widespread agreed understanding of its linguistic identity, it may be impossible to obtain accurate figures. Murdoch himself concluded that: "figures for speakers vary from zero to 5,000,000 depending on who is reporting them" (1996, 3).

Scots and Scottish English have often been described as diametrically opposed in terms of their stereotypical connections with different social strata. Stuart-Smith (2004, 47) characterises the situation as follows: "Scots is generally, but not always, spoken by the working classes, while Scottish Standard English is typical of educated middle class speakers". The relatively "high-brow" status of Scots names such as *Auld Reekie*, firmly linked with historical and literary tradition, interfere with this polarisation. Since the Vernacular Revival of the eighteenth century, Scots has often been employed by writers who sought in some way to challenge the "establishment" by expressing ideas in "the language of the people" (McClure 2000; Kay 2006). However, this opposition of identities – perhaps most precisely summed up by MacDiarmid's "Caledonian Antisyzygy" (Duncan 2007, 250) – have been challenged as commentators move towards a more hybrid paradigm that acknowledges a multiplicity of voices (Dosa 2009).

Set against this complex linguistic and historical background, we find a wide range of names applied to the city of Edinburgh. It is *Dùn Èideann* in modern Scottish Gaelic, *Embra* or *Embro* in (colloquial) Scots,<sup>7</sup> *Auld Reekie* in (poetic, literary) Scots, *Edinburgh* in (Scottish) English, *Edina* in its Latinised form,<sup>8</sup> and has been nicknamed *The Athens of the North* in (Scottish) English. By choosing to use any one of these names at a given time, the writer or speaker is making a political decision to ally themselves with particular historical and contested discourses about the city, and perhaps about Scottish identity more generally.

It may be tempting to look for polar oppositions within this discourse that resonate with historical divisions, Scots versus Scottish English, Scottish Gaelic versus Scottish English, and so forth, but that course is not advised here. Rather, it is argued here that this situation is similar to those discussed in other toponymic critical literature, where although names from different languages and cultures may vie with one another for status and recognition, those differences should not be automatically equated with the speaker's own ideology of identity.<sup>9</sup> As Kearns

7 As the city is represented by the latter, for example, on Billy Kay's (1993) *Scots Map*.

8 A name that has been adopted, for example, as the title of a UK-wide data centre based at the University of Edinburgh <[edina.ac.uk/about](http://edina.ac.uk/about)>.

9 The need to sub-categorise the linguistic labels above (e.g. (Scottish) English) attests to some of the contested identities themselves, and my own attempt to represent different readings of those identities as equally valid.

and Berg (2009, 163) point out, such assumptions have often been assumed in discussions of Maori and Pakeha (i.e. “non-Maori”) place-names in New Zealand. They argue that this polarisation obscures a number of realities, and that:

... the underlying identity logic of biculturalism needs to be re-thought as “both/and” rather than “either/or”. Thus it is important to remember that both Maori and Pakeha can be found on both sides of the colonial/anti-colonial divide (Kearns & Berg 2009, 163).

Similar points can be made with regard to Scotland’s trilingual identity. While there have been various attempts to place Scotland in the role of a “colonised” country rather than a partner in the political Union with England (and Wales) in 1707, many modern commentators have rejected this view. As Schoene (2008, 75–76) argues:

Scottishness must be articulated inclusively and directly, true to the distinct ways in which it emerges from its historical and transcultural contexts, not categorically estranged by postcolonial demarcation from Britain (of which it has been, and continues to be, an integral part).

The position of Gaelic, Highland Scotland in relation to colonisation is not straightforward, and it could be argued that, in the wake of the Jacobite risings, a form of “internal colonisation” took place (Hechter 1975). But there is little popular support for the idea that all of Scotland suffered this fate as part of the United Kingdom (Hechter 1999, xviii). While the historical relations between different factions may be interrogated in this way, it is suggested here that such polarisations are unhelpful for understanding modern Scotland. The diverse linguistic landscape of Scotland’s capital city can therefore be read as a living metaphor for the hybridity of the nation itself.

## **Names for This Place: The Etymological Narrative**

In the United Kingdom, traditional accounts of name histories typically present the material in the form of a chronological timeline showing changes in spelling as documented in various records and sources.<sup>10</sup> These linear histories may by their very layout seem to imply an evolutionary progression towards the modern standard form, and accounts of the history of the name Edinburgh are no different, e.g.

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<sup>10</sup> This methodology was adopted by the English Place-Name Society in the early 1920s for their county surveys of England, which are still ongoing in very much the same format. Dictionaries of English and British place-names tend to follow this style, albeit in an abridged fashion to save space (Ekwall 1960; Mills 2003).

**Edinburgh** Edin. *Eidyn* c. 600 *Edenburge* 1126. “Fortification at Eidyn”. OE *burh*. The meaning of *Eidyn* is unknown. (Mills 2003, 173)

Little interpretation here is provided, except to identify the second element of the twelfth-century name as Old English (OE), and although we are told that the meaning of *Eidyn* is “unknown”, we are not told that it is generally believed to be Celtic. Further context is provided by the prevailing historical narrative which explains that under the rule of King Oswald of Bernicia (633–641), “the fortress of Edinburgh or Cumbric *Eidyn* was besieged and captured” by the Angles (Nicolaisen 2001, 88). The early forms, *Eidyn* and *Din Eidyn* are recorded in the sixth-century Welsh *Gododdin*, placing them firmly in a Celtic context (Gelling, Nicolaisen & Richards 1986, 82; Harris 1996, 236).<sup>11</sup> Some accounts also discuss the folk-derivation of the place-name from the name of St Edwin, king of Northumbria in the seventh century (Mills 2003, xxv). While these folk-narratives make an interesting contribution towards the place identity of the modern city, their lack of “factual” accuracy can lead scholars to summarily dismiss them in the interests of *philological* accuracy. In *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, for example, Nicolaisen notes:

“Edwin’s fortress” is ... a scribal etymology of the twelfth century which is impossible to defend but which has lingered on in history books as a convenient explanation, especially in view of the fact that we do not know what *Eidyn*, the name of the fortification, meant. (Gelling *et al.* 1986, 83).

Although the political dimension of naming and re-naming poses some interesting analytical challenges when so far removed in time from the present day, Nicolaisen also hints at this process as it was practiced in the medieval period. “Both Gaels and Angles had to be content with a part-translation, rendering *Din* as *Dùn* and *-burgh* respectively” (Gelling *et al.* 1986, 83). From this account, and the dates of the historical forms, it can be seen that several different linguistic and cultural groups had already applied distinctive labels to the settlement by the twelfth century.

## Scotland’s Languages and the Capital’s Names

In some environments, tri-lingual Scotland is represented through multi-layered forms of the names of the city. Edinburgh became the first UNESCO City of Literature in 2004, and the website currently uses four alternating banner headings: “Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature”; “Welcome tae Auld Reekie”; “Fàilte gu Dùn

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<sup>11</sup> Various terms have been employed to identify this P-Celtic language, the precursor of modern Welsh. While in some ways, ‘Welsh’ may be the most straightforward label, some commentators use ‘British’, while others including Nicolaisen follow Kenneth Jackson in the use of the term ‘Cumbric’ for this variety as it was used in Southern Scotland from around the second to ninth centuries (see Scott 2003, 21).

Èideann”; and “Welcome to Edinburgh”.<sup>12</sup> While all three “Welcome” statements have equal authority, it is significant that the language in which the purpose of the site is expressed is (Scottish) English, the variety that clearly carries the greatest “authority”. The use of Gaelic and Scots in this context also goes beyond “tokenism”, though it could be argued that a further Scots translation, “Walcome tae Embra” would more effectively identify the city with Scots speakers.<sup>13</sup> Scotland’s languages are explicitly discussed in the organisation’s accompanying guidebook:

The Scots tongue has been the vehicle for some of Scotland’s outstanding literary works, and its wealth of colourful vocabulary and idiom have conveyed the fiery imagination, intellect, stoicism and affection of the Scottish character to the world. During the Middle Ages, Scots was the official language of the courts, of state, and of kings. Following the Union in 1707, English became the language of government and polite society. This trend continued into the Enlightenment, when the use of English implied elevated class status. However, the continued use of Scots in popular poetry and fiction had a major impact on the Scottish people’s sense of identity and kept their culture intact. It is the living language spoken daily by millions of Scots. Although Gaelic is now spoken by only a small fraction of the Scottish population, it has a cultural profile and influence far greater than such a statistic might suggest. Gaelic has contributed a wealth of cultural assets to the nation in terms of music, songs, dance, poetry and storytelling. (UNESCO City of Literature 2005.)

I quote this passage in full as it provides an interesting account of the history of Scots and presents it in a fairly positive light and recognises its complex political relations with English. Scottish Gaelic, on the other hand, is covered rather fleetingly, and very little is said about the problematic history of the Highland Clearances and the suppression of Gaelic language and culture. To some extent, this paragraph reflects the linguistic reality that Scots is widely spoken; visitors to the capital are certainly far more likely to encounter Scots than Gaelic unless they seek out, for example, a Gaelic church service at Greyfriars Kirk.<sup>14</sup> This type of marketing may signal some “rehabilitation” of positive attitudes to Scots, albeit ring-fenced within a tourism-oriented discourse.

## Gaelic Edinburgh

The reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 after nearly three hundred years of absence has visually highlighted the use of Scottish Gaelic in several high-profile contexts associated with the organisation (Puzey 2012, 134–136). Bilingual signage is visible both inside and outside the Scottish Parliament building, and

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12 See <[www.cityofliterature.com](http://www.cityofliterature.com)>.

13 I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for rightly drawing my attention to this point.

14 ‘Kirk’, the Scots word for ‘Church’, is in general use as part of the name of this notable landmark.



the website displays its main title, “The Scottish Parliament”, above the Gaelic form “Pàrlamaid na h-Alba”.<sup>15</sup> A National Gaelic Language Plan has recently been published by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in accordance with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005,<sup>16</sup> and an increasing number of local councils across the country are now implementing Gaelic Language Plans.<sup>17</sup>

Gaelic place-names in Scotland are widely represented on bilingual road signs across the traditional Gaelic heartland of the Scottish Highlands, with policies and ongoing developments detailed on the website of Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (AÀA), “Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland”.<sup>18</sup> Although Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba works “to agree correct forms of Gaelic place-names for maps, signs and general use”,<sup>19</sup> there are many Scottish place-names whose Gaelic forms are not widely known or used outside the Gaelic-speaking world. Edinburgh is rather unusual in this regard, as its Gaelic name is comparatively visible in the virtual and actual linguistic landscape, and although *Dùn Èideann* is most often found in Gaelic contexts (apart from its uses in signage), it also appears in environments where no other Gaelic occurs.

Several uses of *Dùn Èideann* in commercial contexts relate to companies that are local to Edinburgh, such as the eponymous Sea Kayaking company based on the Firth of Forth north of the city.<sup>20</sup> The name *Dùn Èideann* is also used for a range of whiskies produced by Signatory, an independent whisky bottling company whose headquarters are based in the Newhaven district of Edinburgh.<sup>21</sup> A search of the database of Companies House, which records all registered companies in the UK, reveals some interesting results. *Dùn Èideann* is not widely represented here – at least, there are only two results for this spelling of the name: the Dun Eideann Scotch Whisky Company Limited, based at the Edradour Distillery (now owned by Signatory), and the cleaning company Dun Eideann Services Ltd, which is based in Fife and provides services for estate agents throughout Perth, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Cupar and Glenrothes.<sup>22</sup> A search for *Dùn Èideann* in the lists of dissolved companies only added one further example to the tally – Dun Eideann Exports (dissolved 1992).

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15 The Scottish Parliament <[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)>.

16 See <[www.gaidhlig.org.uk/en/national-plan-for-gaelic](http://www.gaidhlig.org.uk/en/national-plan-for-gaelic)>.

17 See <[www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20084/gaelic\\_language\\_and\\_cultural\\_support/954/gaelic\\_language\\_plan/1](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20084/gaelic_language_and_cultural_support/954/gaelic_language_plan/1)> for details of Edinburgh City Council's Gaelic Language Plan.

18 See <[www.gaelicplacenames.org](http://www.gaelicplacenames.org)>. This organisation is supported by a number of local councils and cultural organisations, the latter including the Scottish Place-Name Society.

19 See <[www.gaelicplacenames.org](http://www.gaelicplacenames.org)>.

20 See <[www.duneideannseakayaking.com](http://www.duneideannseakayaking.com)> .

21 See <[www.whisky-distilleries.info/EI\\_Signatory\\_EN.shtml](http://www.whisky-distilleries.info/EI_Signatory_EN.shtml)>.

22 See <[www.duneideannservices.co.uk](http://www.duneideannservices.co.uk)>.

A search for the anglicised form of *Dùn Èideann* (i.e. *Dunedin*) reveals a considerably larger number of results. The picture is somewhat complicated by the existence of a companies and organisations using the name of the New Zealand city of Dunedin, itself named after Edinburgh by settlers who emigrated there from Scotland, and it is not always possible to deduce whether historic Edinburgh or modern Dunedin lies behind these examples. The New Zealand city is the inspiration for such names as that of the British warship, HMS Dunedin (1918–1941) which served the New Zealand division of the Royal Navy.<sup>23</sup> *Dunedin* is also the name of a town in Ontario, Canada and another in Florida in the United States. According to the Companies House database, *Dunedin* appears in the names of over two hundred company names in the United Kingdom (including those dissolved or going through liquidation).<sup>24</sup> Companies and organisations that use this name are located across the UK and include a private equity firm with offices in London and Edinburgh, a property company based in London, an Edinburgh taxi firm, and a Musselburgh company that disposes of waste oil.<sup>25</sup> Dunedin is a bed and breakfast in Kirkcaldy, Fife and a guest house in Edinburgh;<sup>26</sup> Dunedin Consort are an Edinburgh-based group of classical musicians who play music “from the Middle Ages to the present day”,<sup>27</sup> and The Dunedin Dancers is a charity based in Edinburgh.<sup>28</sup>

While many of these organisations (especially those involved in finance and property management) are not especially visible in the linguistic landscape, it is clear even from this brief survey that the name Dunedin is very popular in brand identities compared to the modern Gaelic form, *Dùn Èideann*. The anglicised form is perhaps a popular choice as it is accessible to the non-Gaelic-speaking population (and by extension the majority of the tourist population), yet perceived as distinctively Scottish. If we follow Landry and Bourhis’s (1997, 26) assertion that “the linguistic landscape can ... provide information about the sociolinguistic composition of the language groups inhabiting the territory in question”, the comparatively wide range of uses of *Dunedin* reflect an echo of a historical Edinburgh with ties to a Celtic heritage, while the comparative absence of *Dùn Èideann* reflects a lack of connection with a modern Scottish Gaelic identity.

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23 See <[www.hmsdunedin.co.uk](http://www.hmsdunedin.co.uk)>.

24 Search conducted using the WebCHeck [*sic.*] database <[www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)>.

25 See, respectively, Dunedin <[www.dunedin.com](http://www.dunedin.com)>; Dunedin Property Ltd <[www.dunedinproperty.co.uk](http://www.dunedinproperty.co.uk)>; Dunedin Executive Cars Ltd; Dunedin Oils Ltd.

26 See <[www.dunedinhouse.com](http://www.dunedinhouse.com)> and <[www.dunedinguesthouse.co.uk](http://www.dunedinguesthouse.co.uk)>.

27 See <[www.dunedin-consort.org.uk](http://www.dunedin-consort.org.uk)>.

28 See <[www.dunedindancers.org.uk](http://www.dunedindancers.org.uk)>.

## Scots Edinburgh

The name *Auld Reekie* emerged in the literature of Scottish vernacular revivalist writers in the eighteenth century (SND s.v. *auld adj.* 9. [16]), whose deliberate focus on Scots probably encouraged the re-coinage of the name of the capital city, arguably reclaiming it from the competing Scottish English linguistic hegemony. The name, which literally means “Old Smoky”, can be read as either a “familiar” or potentially “irreverent” designation for the capital city, focusing as it does on one of the less attractive, everyday features of the city at that time.

In present-day Scotland, Auld Reekie is also the name of a ten-year-old Scotch Whisky produced by Duncan Taylor;<sup>29</sup> a guest house in Edinburgh;<sup>30</sup> and an Edinburgh-based Ceilidh Band (not to be confused with Auld Reekie Sawbones).<sup>31</sup> Auld Reekie Photography is based in Edinburgh and specialises in weddings;<sup>32</sup> also in Edinburgh is Auld Reekie Feet, which provides chiropody and podiatry services (apparently punning on the word *reekie* “smelly”).<sup>33</sup> The current records of Companies House reveal five examples of commercial uses of the name: Auld Reekie Ltd; Auld Reekie Investments No 3 Ltd; Auld Reekie Roller Girls Ltd; Auld Reekie Solutions Ltd; and Auld Reekie Taxis Ltd.<sup>34</sup> Auld Reekie Ltd was a window-cleaning company based in Edinburgh. Auld Reekie Investments was not based in Scotland and no longer exists, although a New Zealand based company of the same name is still trading. Auld Reekie Roller Girls, “Edinburgh’s first women’s flat track roller derby team” explain that they are: “Named after the city of Edinburgh, affectionately known as ‘Auld Reekie’ (Scots for Old Smoky)”.<sup>35</sup> Auld Reekie Solutions Ltd provides computer services in Edinburgh, and Auld Reekie Taxis Ltd speaks for itself. Further searches of the database for companies no longer trading reveals that Edinburgh had a gardening company called Auld Reekie Garden Angels (dissolved 2007); an Auld Reekie Brewery (dissolved 2006); an Auld Reekie Painter and Decorator (dissolved 2009); Auld Reekie Removals (dissolved 2007); an Auld Reekie Bakehouse (dissolved 1992); and an Auld Reekie Pub Company that changed its name in 2008.<sup>36</sup> Web searches reveal a number of other uses of

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29 See <[www.duncantaylor.com/products/auld\\_reekie.htm](http://www.duncantaylor.com/products/auld_reekie.htm)>.

30 See <[www.auldreekie-guesthouse.co.uk](http://www.auldreekie-guesthouse.co.uk)>.

31 See <[www.auld-reekie-ceilidh-band.com](http://www.auld-reekie-ceilidh-band.com)> and <[auldreekiesawbones.co.uk](http://auldreekiesawbones.co.uk)>.

32 See <[www.auldreekie-photography.co.uk](http://www.auldreekie-photography.co.uk)>.

33 See <[www.auldreekiefeet.co.uk](http://www.auldreekiefeet.co.uk)>.

34 Search conducted using the WebCheck [*sic.*] database <[www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)>. The first two companies are listed as “dissolved”.

35 See <[www.arrg.co.uk/about.php](http://www.arrg.co.uk/about.php)>.

36 Search conducted using the WebCheck [*sic.*] database <[www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)>.

this name. A. Auld Reekie is, aptly, a Chimney Sweeping company.<sup>37</sup> Auld Reekie Tours take visitors on walking trips around historic Edinburgh.<sup>38</sup> They explain the name's etymology as follows:

This is the Victorian nick name for the city of Edinburgh. It translates as "old smoky" or "old smelly" and was used by locals and those who travelled to Edinburgh to describe the city.

This account says nothing about Scots, and (like Auld Reekie Feet, above) plays on English *reek* "a fume or odour emanating from a body or substance; (now chiefly) a strong and unpleasant smell, a stench; impure, fetid atmosphere" (OED s.v. *reek* n.<sup>1</sup> 3a., 3.c.). This use of the word was rare in eighteenth century Scottish texts, where the sense "smoky" was widely used (OED s.v. *reek* n.<sup>1</sup> 1; SND s.v. *reek* n.<sup>1</sup>). Furthermore, the vernacular poet Allan Ramsay's reference to "Auld Reekie's Ingle" (i.e. Edinburgh's fireplace) in "An Epistle to Lieutenant Hamilton" (1721), one of the earliest known examples of the name (SND s.v. *auld adj.* 9. [16]),<sup>39</sup> puts a strong emphasis on a "smoky" rather than a "smelly" fireside context. In etymological terms, then, "smoky" is the more plausible historical meaning, but it should be pointed out that the way a name is understood or explained, and the way in which it therefore becomes most culturally "meaningful" may not echo the historical etymology. Folk-interpretation is, of necessity, relevant to the folk. It may also be the case that a "smelly" Edinburgh better serves the marketing purposes of a company that specialises in "scary" theatrical tours, often conducted late at night. As they say on their website:

The fermenting slums of the old town also left a mark on the landscape and whispers of body snatchers raiding the graves of the recently deceased filled the lantern lit air. Our guides will take you on a journey through these exact streets and slums where you will hear all about life in old Edinburgh. For these reasons we believe that the name Auld Reekie's best suits our tours and their content.<sup>40</sup>

The interpretation of the name as "Old Smoky" still has sufficient general currency for it to be used, for example, on buses in Edinburgh to emphasise that they are less destructive to the environment. A current slogan reads: "With a new low emission exhaust, this bus is Auld but not Reekie!"<sup>41</sup> This meaning is also perhaps reinforced by other well-known Scots expressions such as "lang may your lum reek", which translates as "long may your chimney smoke" (i.e. because you are fit/ healthy/ wealthy enough to provide it with fuel; it is often used as a way of wishing someone well on parting, and is even

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37 See <[www.auldreekie-edinburgh.co.uk](http://www.auldreekie-edinburgh.co.uk)>.

38 See <[www.auldreekietours.com](http://www.auldreekietours.com)>.

39 See the entry for Auld Reekie s.v. *auld adj.* 9 (16) in the *Scottish National Dictionary*.

40 See <[www.auldreekietours.com](http://www.auldreekietours.com)>.

41 I am grateful to Guy Puzey for drawing this example to my attention.

used by speakers who might ordinarily make little use of Scots in their speech; see SND s.v. *reek n.*<sup>1</sup>, v. II. 1. (a)).

With the exception of the investment company, all of the businesses noted above are or were based in Edinburgh, with many of them contributing to the Scots semiotics of the linguistic landscape. Certainly the central position of Auld Reekie Tours near Greyfriars Kirk makes it a very prominent commercial example of Scots in the city. *Auld Reekie* has sufficient cultural weight to transcend the class-driven polarisation that so typically accompanies descriptions of the Scots continuum. In contrast, the Scots variants *Embra* and *Embro* do not appear to have been widely adopted for use in the names of Scottish companies, although they do appear quite frequently in the Scots webscape.<sup>42</sup>

## British Edinburgh

The city has also been known as *The Athens of the North* since at least the early nineteenth century, and this name is often employed by writers drawing comparisons between the architectural splendour of Edinburgh's New Town and that of Ancient Greece.<sup>43</sup> It also owes something to the creative and intellectual enterprises of the Scottish Enlightenment, which provoked similar parallels. However, early comparisons between Edinburgh and Athens were not always entirely favourable. John Galt's reference to "the soidisant intellectual metropolis and modern Athens of Edinburgh" in *The Entail* (1823, 143) is decidedly tongue-in-cheek, as his description of "the company consisting chiefly of lawyers, — as dinner parties unfortunately are in the modern Athens" (*ibid.*, 217). This comparison with Athens is more a matter of pretension than prestige.

The designation *The Athens of the North* also (perhaps unintentionally) overwrites the native linguistic and cultural nomenclature with a colourless "English" phrase bearing no outward hallmarks of distinctive "Scottishness". Considering the high degree of similarity between Scottish English and English English in their written forms, *The Athens of the North* can also be read as a "Scottish English" designation that embraces a new, united British identity, speaking the same language, albeit with different accents. "The North" may be read as synonymous with "Scotland", in the style of the "North British" identity advocated by some after the Act of Union in 1603 (for an early example see Bacon 1604). Against this backdrop, at the time of its inception, the concept of *The Athens of the North* may be read as politically charged, repositioning the national status of Scotland's capital within the new

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42 For example, in articles featured by the Scots Language Society <[www.scotslanguage.com](http://www.scotslanguage.com)>.

43 Examples from the early nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century can be found in the online *Supplement to the Scottish National Dictionary* (2005) s.v. *The Athens of the North prop.n.*

United Kingdom. In more recent uses, however, which are considerably removed from the construction of Scotland as “North Britain”, this name tends to be used in celebration of the capital’s architectural history. Articles in the press are likely to invoke this identity when protesting about the state of specific buildings. In relation to one local issue in 2003, the *Edinburgh Evening News* asked: “So in a city world renowned for its built heritage, we are the Athens of the North after all, why is it that buildings owned by the council are being allowed to crumble?” and the *Daily Record* employed the term very similarly in 2004: “It’s said to be the Athens of the North but one street in Edinburgh is more like the slums of Naples”. Connections with the Greek city of Athens also provoke use of the name, as in the following extract from *The News of the World* (2004) which capitalises on the link to the Olympic games: “Born in Edinburgh – the Athens of the North – Butler booked her place in the UK team with a strong run in the 10km trials at Watford”.<sup>44</sup>

Alongside this “British” designation, which has no overt link to Scotland as a nation, we might also usefully consider cases in which the city’s name is noticeably absent. A recent literary example is provided by Anne Donovan in *Buddha Da*, where she draws attention to the problematic representation of national locations in “official” narratives. The novel is written in Scots, which is not restricted to the speech of the characters. When the two young Glaswegian girls, Anne Marie and Nisha, consult an atlas in the public library to research Tibet, they struggle to find it:

“Tibet’s no in this.” ... “Anne Marie, that’s it. It’s no a country.” “Aye it is, that’s where the lamas come fae.” ... Nisha turned tae the back of the atlas. “Look here it is ... in the index. Tibet – see Xizang Zizhiqu, China.” It gied me a shock, seein it like that. (Donovan 2003, 261)

This metaphor for national and political power is further complicated by their search for Scotland in the atlas. Nisha even predicts that they may encounter difficulties:

“Bet you Scotland’s no in it either.” And it wasnae. No as a country anyway, just part of the UK. (Capital: London. Status: Monarchy.) And nae flag either. Or languages of wer ain. (Ibid., 262)

While a direct comparison between Tibet and Scotland may seem extreme, given their radically different political realities, this passage renders both nations as subaltern by omission. Donovan would thus disagree with Schoene’s argument that Scotland should not be viewed through a postcolonial lens. Rather, with regard to both Scotland and Tibet, she makes her own contribution to the idea that “the writings that emanated from anti-colonial movements ... continue to rail against

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44 *Supplement to the Scottish National Dictionary* (2005) s.v. The Athens of the North *prop.n.*

injustice, and to use the power of language to convince us that other worlds are possible” (Gilmartin & Berg 2007, 120).

## Conclusion

While Edinburgh remains the virtually unchallenged official name for the city, the Gaelic and Scots identities for the city have taken on a range of roles in relation to its identity. Both *Dùn Èideann* and *Auld Reekie* are found in contexts associated with tourism and leisure. The names are used to brand national products such as whiskies and other goods, and cultural “experiences” such as walking tours, events and exhibitions. However, *Auld Reekie* is by far the more prominent name of the two, with the Gaelic name more often occurring in business and commercial contexts in its anglicised form *Dunedin*. It may work to commercial advantage to have the nickname *Auld Reekie* available as an alternative name for the city, and one which, by being Scots, appears to connect more directly with “the language of the people” than the official map name. With its long-standing literary connections, *Auld Reekie* situates Edinburgh within a tradition of creativity, and perhaps also with some of the sentiments of the Vernacular Revivalist poets, allowing the city to be reclaimed from official discourse by those who feel a strong connection to it. This may be part of the motive behind the name for Ralph Lownie’s recent collection of writing, *Auld Reekie: An Edinburgh Anthology* (2008), as it allows him to draw on both an “unofficial” and an “official” city identity. It is unlikely that any of the larger international events such as The Edinburgh Festival, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, or even Edinburgh’s Hogmanay (Scots for “New Year’s Eve”) would ever replace the *Edinburgh* of their official titles with *Auld Reekie*. Nevertheless, in tourism and marketing terms, *Auld Reekie* is a strong and enduring brand that has been used to endear people to the city since it first appeared in literature in the eighteenth century. Both *Auld Reekie* and *The Athens of the North* have been reinterpreted in different contexts based on the different possible meanings they might convey, and this is interesting in terms of the folk-narrative that has grown up around each name, reconfiguring its linguistic and cultural identities. Another contender for the Scots title is *Embra* or *Embro*, although it has yet to achieve widespread recognition.

Each of the names for Edinburgh has its own cultural footprint and may be employed for different purposes, and each has contributed something to the place image and place identity of the city. Landry and Bourhis (1997, 29) argue that the linguistic landscape may be regarded as an “observable and immediate index of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory”. If we therefore apply this metric to the physical and virtual linguistic landscape observable through the names for the city, we see a fairly close parallel to the national position of Scotland’s three languages. (Scottish) English dominates and Gaelic is

not well represented, although anglicised forms like Dunedin attempt to convey something of its muted heritage status. Scots has a fairly healthy representation, but is much more visible as *Auld Reekie*, with its marketable, prestigious literary associations, not as the vernacular *Embra* or *Embro*.

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