Some preliminaries

0.1 Introduction

This short book is designed to achieve a number of interlocking purposes. In the first instance it is intended to give you a sense of the structure, sounds and vocabulary of Scots as it is spoken and written by people in Scotland and the northernmost counties of Ireland. It is also intended to encourage you to think about Scots as a living entity which can be profitably studied in exactly the same way as any language. I hope that by the end of your use of the book you will have gained a greater sense of Scots as a living entity, the ongoing threats to its discrete existence, the great diversity of language use in Scotland and Ulster and the ways in which your knowledge of these contexts can be expanded to provide comparison with other language situations elsewhere in the world.

I have envisaged the book as a whole, to be read and used consecutively. You need not follow this pattern, however. You may, for instance, wish to consider the structure of the language before you look at its lexis. This is absolutely fine. There are occasional assumptions made in the book that you already know about a particular pattern or idea when you are reading about something else; I have provided cross-references on those occasions where I feel that the connection is particularly vital. I recommend, however, that you read Chapter 1 before looking at other parts of the book, since it may give you some grounding in the issues raised.

0.2 The description and analysis of pronunciation

Throughout this book, but particularly in Chapter 3, a considerable amount of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) notation is used. I realise that many of you will have had some experience in using this vital resource. If that is the case, you can ignore this section and proceed to the rest of the book. If, however, you have no such background, it

would make sense if you read the next few pages and consider them alongside the diagrams given. A number of online resources exist which allow you to hear the different sounds discussed in the following and elsewhere. The most useful of these may be <http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/> since this presents symbols alongside precise recordings of the particular sounds. You may also find a range of written resources useful. These include McMahon (2002), which begins essentially from first principles, and the classic survey of phonetics, Ladefoged and Johnson (2011). This latter is quite advanced, however.

With a few exceptions, all human beings can make all the sounds that humans make. Not all of these sounds are meaningful for every particular language, however. Most speakers of English do not distinguish between the sounds [k] (as in ***lock***) and [x] (as in ***loch***). They can hear the difference (the first sound is a *plosive*, made with a closure by the tongue and then expulsion of air, while the second sound is a *fricative*, where turbulent air passes between the tongue and a specific place in the mouth), but it is not meaningful. They are perceived as *allophones* of the same *phoneme*, /k/. In Scotland and the far north of Ireland, however, /k/ and /x/ are perceived as separate phonemes.[1]

In English (and Scots) all consonants are produced by air coming up from the lungs, this air passing through a number of occlusions and vibrations which alter the sound. Sounds can be pronounced either only in the mouth or through opening the nasal cavity (compare /b/ and /m/). A consonant pronounced in the mouth can either be voiced or unvoiced, depending on whether the *vocal folds* (vocal cords) are vibrating or not (to test this, say the sound /p/ and then /b/ while touching your 'Adam's apple').

Where the tongue is placed affects how the consonant is pronounced. In English, consonants can be formed on the velum (the soft palate), further forward on the hard palate (both these zones are often termed *palatal*), the alveolar ridge towards the front of the mouth, on the teeth or, indeed, between the teeth. Sounds can also be labial, when pronounced on the lips. Combinations, such as the labio-dental sounds /f/ and /v/ (pronounced between the teeth and the lips), are also possible. On these occasions there is an interaction between lips and teeth. The glottis (at the back of the mouth) is used to pronounce /h/ and the glottal stop [ʔ], as found as the medial consonant in many Scottish pronunciations of *butter*.

Consonants can be *plosive* (where air is stopped and then released explosively; these sounds are sometimes termed *stops*). Examples of plosives are /p/ and /g/, among others. They can also be *fricatives* (where

turbulent air passed through a tight closure in the mouth). /f/ and /Θ/ (the sound in English *thin*) are fricatives. *Approximants* are similar sounds to fricatives, but the mouth is more open. An example of an approximant is /w/. Many English speakers – although perhaps fewer in Scotland – pronounce their /r/ as an approximant. *Nasal* sounds are pronounced with the nasal cavity open, although the nature of the consonant is still connected to the position of the tongue in the mouth: /m/ and /n/ are nasals. *Affricates* are sounds made up of a plosive and a fricative, which are perceived as single sounds by native speakers. The English (and Scots) affricates are /tʃ/ (*ch*ur*ch*) and /dʒ/ (*j*u*dge*). Other languages may have other affricate combinations; these will be heard as two independent sounds by English speakers.

In order to understand how vowels are pronounced, imagine your mouth as a quadrilateral. At the front of the mouth, the upper corner of the quadrilateral is significantly further forward than is the case at the bottom (because of the position of your teeth). Different vowel sounds are pronounced depending on where your tongue is within this space. When the tongue is at the top of the mouth, it is said to be *high* or *closed*: this can be heard in the vowel in *seek*; the lower down in the mouth the tongue is, the more *open* it is: this can be heard in the pronunciation of the vowel in *caught* (if you are a user of Received Pronunciation (RP) or a related South-East of England accent, you will have an even lower vowel in your pronunciation of *bath*). Vowels can be pronounced at the *front* of the mouth (as with *day*), in the *centre* (as with the unstressed second vowel in *butter*; in most varieties of English spoken outside Scotland, *fir* has a central vowel) or at the *back* (as with *goat*). Vowels can be *rounded* or *unrounded* (this refers to whether the lips are rounded or not when the sound is being made). As Figure 0.1 demonstrates, at least most places where a vowel can be pronounced offer the opportunity of either rounded or unrounded pronunciations (the vowels on the left

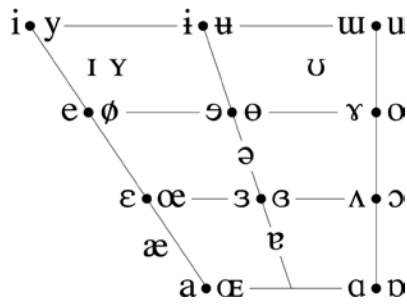

Figure 0.1 Vowel quadrilateral.

are the former). The vowel in *boat* is rounded, while the vowel in *cat* is unrounded. Unlike many languages, English does not normally have pairings of rounded and unrounded vowels pronounced in the same place in the mouth; a number of dialects of Scots have at least traces of such a pattern, however, as we will see in Chapter 3.

Vowels can be *diphthongal* (or, indeed, triphthongal, although that does not concern us here), where two vowels glide together (such as the vowel found in *ride*), or *monophthongal*, where only one vowel sound is made (as with the vowel in *cat* in most pronunciations of English). As we will see in Chapter 4 and elsewhere in this book, varieties of Scots (and indeed Scottish Standard English) are less likely to have diphthongs than most varieties of English. For many (not all) of the latter, *boat* has a diphthongal vowel. This is very rarely the case for Scottish varieties, where the historical monophthongal pronunciation has been maintained (conversely, as we will see, most Scots varieties (and Scottish Standard English) have an extra diphthong – found in *bite* as compared to *try* – where most English varieties have only one pronunciation for both sets).

Nasal vowels (vowels where the nasal cavity is open when the sound is made) can be found in a range of languages – French, Portuguese and Polish spring to mind – but are not established as perceived separate sounds in any of the varieties discussed here, exceptions being the use of nasal vowels by some speakers when using a French word such as *genre*. This has been learned later in life with some effort; most English-speaking people, when attempting this vowel, tend not to be entirely successful in producing the 'authentic' pronunciation. This does not mean that some of the people whose language use is described in this book do not have more nasalised vowel pronunciations than do others; these differences are not perceived as actual distinctions between separate sounds by native speakers, however. It should be noted that no speaker of any language variety will ever perceive all of the vowel sounds possible for all humans as separate vowels. Instead, she will hear some vowel sounds as being part of the set of another vowel, while others may not be recognised at all.

0.3 A final point

Of course, I have my own views about what should be done for Scots in Scotland and Ireland. On occasion I have expressed these views in this book – particularly when discussing language planning and policy in Chapter 7. I wish to stress that these are *opinions*, however. I do *not* expect you to agree with me; nor do I believe that there is only one way to achieve a goal. I *do* believe, however, that a degree of critical thought

needs to be applied to these topics and that the issues involved should be analysed thoroughly.

I also, of course, have my own views on the present and future constitutional status of Scotland and its position in Europe. I hope I have kept these in the background, however. It is possible to be a speaker, writer, reader, or student, of Scots, while subscribing to any or no political view. In particular, I would like to stress that I have no axe to grind in relation to the present or future constitutional settlement in Ireland. Again, I have my own views on this (no doubt not as well informed or visceral as for my own country), but these have not informed the analysis here.

Note

1. The use of square brackets when discussing pronunciations implies that the description is phonetic. Slanted brackets imply that the sound involved is a phoneme in that variety. In English, for instance, the phoneme /p/ has allophones underlying it, such as [p] and [p^h] (the latter involving aspiration, a 'breathy' sound following the plosive). Although English speakers may be aware of the difference between the two pronunciations, it is not perceived as categorical. In Gaelic, however, these two sounds constitute separate phonemes. In this book, phonetic description and discussion will be severely limited; there will be occasions, however, where descriptions of this type will be both helpful and necessary.