***Investigating evidence for final [v] devoicing in Older Scots***

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In our ongoing research project, *From Inglis to Scots:* *Mapping sounds to spellings*, we seek to elucidate the phonological development of Scots by triangulating Older Scots spelling patterns with what we know about earlier (e.g. Old English) and later (e.g. Modern Scots) pronunciations. The Older Scots data derive from the substantial corpus of localised legal texts from across Lowland Scotland, mostly from the 15th century, that make up the *Linguistic Atlas of Older Scots* (LAOS; Williamson 2008).

In this paper, we use the LAOS data to investigate the apparent devoicing of [v] in word-final and pre-inflectional position, as suggested by the use of the spelling <f(f)> in words such as *luf(f)* ‘love’ and *giffyn* ‘giving’ (Johnston 1997: 104). Since words of these types have [v] in both Old English and Modern Scots, the question arises as to whether there was, in fact, a process of devoicing of [v] (to [f]) in the development of Older Scots as the spellings seem to indicate, or whether we are simply dealing with a change in spelling which does not reflect any change in pronunciation (so that Older Scots also had [v] in these words).

Analysis of the LAOS data shows complex patterning of <f(f)>-type and <v>-type spellings for etymological [v] (e.g. *love*) and [f] (e.g. *life*), depending upon the original consonant, the presence or absence or inflections, the source language of the words concerned, and the date of the texts under analysis. If the <f(f)> spellings do indicate final [v] devoicing in Older Scots, then we must assume: (i) that this change was variable (perhaps due to its interaction with final schwa apocope); (ii) that [f] spread by structural analogy to pre-inflectional position; and (iii) that the devoicing was later reversed (during the 15th century in pre-inflectional position, after the 15th century in word-final position). On the assumption that <f(f)> for etymological [v] was nothing more than a spelling change, we must accept: (i) that that Older Scots scribes often failed to distinguish [f] and [v] in certain positions even though they had the orthographic means to represent the difference; (ii) that they used <f(f)> for [v] in word-final position and pre-inflectional position but not in morpheme internal position or initially; (iii) that pre-inflectional <f(f)> must have developed through ‘spelling analogy’; and (iv) that there was a decline in this spelling practice in pre-inflectional but not word-final position in the 15th century. In this paper, we argue that a final devoicing of [v] to [f] is most consistent with the data and with what we know about phonological change and, consequently, that the Older Scots scribes “knew what they were doing” (Laing & Lass 2003: 258) in representing this devoicing as <f(f)>.

**References**

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