Languages and the integration of New Scots

Chapter extract from ‘The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: A report on the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland’.

Professor Alison Phipps

Dr Esa Aldegheri

Dr Dan Fisher

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# Terminology and list of abbreviations

In line with Scottish Government policy, this report uses the term ‘New Scots’ to refer to: individuals and family members who arrive in Scotland under various refugee resettlement schemes; people who are claiming asylum and resident in Scotland; individuals who receive refugee status or another form of leave such as Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary leave and their family members; people who arrive in Scotland to be reunited with a family member who is a refugee; young people who are claiming or have claimed asylum or have been trafficked into the UK. The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy is also relevant to other displaced groups such as survivors of human trafficking and people who are stateless.

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

LA – Local Authority

LtR – Leave to Remain

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NHS – National Health Service

NSRIDP – New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project

NSRIS 2 – New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (second iteration)

SRC – Scottish Refugee Council

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# Introduction

This publication is a chapter extract from ‘The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: A report on the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland’.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the main report, we provide interpretive frameworks through which integration can be understood, a comprehensive overview of research findings concerning refugee integration in Scotland, and a series of recommendations to inform the development of the third iteration of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. The findings and recommendations presented in this chapter are based on academic research conducted by the University of Glasgow as part of the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project (NSRIDP), a partnership project led by the Scottish Government with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts (RILA) at the University of Glasgow. The project sought to expand good practice and innovation in the context of integration in Scotland, as well as conduct primary research on refugee integration in Scotland to support the development of the third iteration of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (NSRIS).

This chapter extract summarises findings related to languages and the work of integration in communities across Scotland, which is a multilingual country by statute. The Gaelic Language Act and Sign Language Acts have both ensured that the indigenous languages of Scotland, and the inclusion of communities using British Sign Language (BSL), are accounted for by public bodies and are visibly and audibly supported and resourced. However, the languages which arrive with New Scots have meant that many new languages now form part of the fabric and heritage of communities across Scotland. Under its section on Language, NSRIS 2 had the following intended outcomes:

* Refugees and asylum seekers live in safe, welcoming and cohesive communities and are able to build diverse relationships and connections.
* Refugees and asylum seekers understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements, and are able to exercise them to pursue full and independent lives.
* Refugees and asylum seekers are able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs.[[2]](#footnote-2)

# Languages and New Scots integration

*“As Scotland becomes a more multicultural society all these organisations, they don’t think about equality… They think about access in terms of disability access, but they don’t think about […] simplifying language […] I get sent things all the time and I just think, ‘You can’t send that out to somebody, even a Scottish person with literacy needs is going to have problems with that.”* (Alice, Local Authority)

Those who claim asylum and are resettled to Scotland as refugees come from contexts which are invariably rich in linguistic resources: multilingualism is the norm across the majority of countries from which New Scots arrive. It is important to understand that those arriving do not come with a language deficit and that the idea of a language barrier is an unhelpful concept in the promotion and practice of integration, as arriving communities are rich in valuable linguistic resources. The practice of people using their mother tongue is also a human right and a key cultural right as an element of intangible cultural heritage for New Scots. This is equally the case for receiving communities.

While language funding for New Scots mostly focuses on ESOL provision, peer-led, mutual language learning activities are also increasingly common.[[3]](#footnote-3) Following a pilot scheme funded by the Scottish Government, mutual language sharing drop-ins, cafes and activities are now promoted and commonplace across organisations in Scotland supporting New Scots.[[4]](#footnote-4) These are now actively encouraged by the NSRIS partnership across all local authorities, and by third sector organisations. However, this vision does not seem to be applied consistently in practice in adult ESOL classes, and much provision still relies on a monolingual approach.[[5]](#footnote-5)

ESOL operates at the level of service delivery of classes which can enable New Scots to function well in Scottish society, progressing to becoming linguistically self-sufficient in matters of accessing services and gaining employment or access to education pathways. ESOL is also provided in various ways in the community. However, the primary role of the English language and the requests for further resource and policy attention for delivering ESOL often crowd out the wider linguistic landscape of integration for New Scots.

Research into informal and community-based provision of language practice demonstrates the opening up of the multilingual potential of Scotland.[[6]](#footnote-6) In 2016 the Scottish Government agreed to fund a multilingual pilot supporting communities in projects where languages were shared and discovered. This project, called “Sharing Lives, Shared Languages”, was evaluated[[7]](#footnote-7) and found to be a benchmark of successfully multilingual integration. Where integration is occurring in local communities and through intercultural work in particular, innovative ways of ‘translanguaging’ in society have been developed.[[8]](#footnote-8) ‘Translanguaging’ is the academic term for the way in which new speakers of languages will mix different languages spoken, together with multimodal forms (gestures, signs) in order to both practice new languages, and to ensure comprehensibility over accuracy.

In terms of languages, translation and interpreting, our report identified key issues which led to challenges for New Scots:

* Court observations of asylum appeal hearings demonstrated a significant lack of consistency in the ways in which court actors worked with interpreters, including inconsistency between judges.
* There is limited awareness in the asylum process (including in court spaces) of how interpreting actually works - including instances of judges requesting exact ‘word-for-word’ interpreting. There is therefore a need to empower interpreters to explain concepts and cultural / intercultural points beyond a ‘plug and play’ transactional model of interpretation.
* The minimum levels of certification and training in terms of interpreting for the asylum process vary significantly between ‘core’ languages and ‘rare’ languages, yet judges are not instructed to take account of this difference.
* Many important resources pertaining to immigration status are only initially provided in English by the Home Office.
* Lack of cultural awareness in decision-makers regarding conflicts between people from the same language group or country, especially in terms of interpreting. Sometimes interpreters are allocated to people seeking asylum who represented an opposing side in a conflict, or they might be from different ethnic groups which can negatively affect the relationship between the interpreter and the person seeking asylum.

Finally, our research confirmed that it is imperative that the needs of New Scots with regard to language learning and language use are viewed through a trauma-informed lens. Research has shown that language learning when it is enforced does not progress in the same manner as language learning when it is chosen freely.[[9]](#footnote-9) For people forced to flee, enforced language learning for integration purposes, alongside the loss of their mother language as a familiar auditory context for living and working, can form part of trauma experienced and impede learning progress. This contrasts strongly with the learning outcomes for those who have chosen their migration pathways and associated language learning needs and goals.

# Recommendations

*Sharing lives, Sharing languages* offers a positive blueprint for moving forward with mutual, mother language supportive programmes for multilingualism in Scotland and for supporting translanguaging as part of a pathway to greater linguistic capacity across Scotland. This report recommends that:

* The practice and learnings from *Sharing lives, Sharing languages* should be extended and consolidation across Scotland, giving a context for the practice of new languages by new speakers and enabling environments where integration is happening through a common interest in practicing languages. This will complement the ESOL system adding time for practice as part of intercultural dialogue but does not take away from the need to increase the number of hours available for formal ESOL learning.
* A core set of standards for interpreting and translation in statutory and non-statutory contexts is required - like those developed for the UK as National Standards in Interpreting and also in Intercultural Working. These will allow the New Scots partnership to set a benchmark for interpretation and translation and to uphold the right to the use of the mother language, whilst at the same time developing language resources, ESOL services and translanguaging support in communities.
* Intercultural communication and community development skills should be embedded across sectors – these will enable service delivery professionals to better support language learning of populations who may be experiencing trauma, and whose language learning pathway is not freely chosen but has come through necessity. Intercultural listening and some aiding of the translanguaging that will make up intercultural encounters and dialogue can be embedded into the training and attitudes for professionals working in the sector. In addition, community development workers are critical to community-based language initiatives success as part of restorative integration whilst ESOL provision is a baseline for ensuring a developing approach to learning as part of efficient and effective service delivery, scaffolded by translation services.
* If not provisioned under the forthcoming Human Rights Act for Scotland, ungirding the role of languages in Scottish society will be greatly enhanced by the provision of a Languages Act for Scotland, complementing the Gaelic and Sign Language Acts for Scotland.

1. The full report can be accessed at <https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_900243_smxx.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scottish Government. (2018) New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022 (pp. 54-55) Available at:

   <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hirsu, L. (2020). Lessons in response-ability: Supporting social encounters by ‘doing’ language. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 20*(2), 153-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hirsu, L. and Bryson, E. (2017). Sharing lives, sharing languages: A pilot peer education project for New Scots’ social and language integration. Retrieved from: <https://scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Sharing-Lives-Sharing-Languages-Summary-June-17.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cox, S. (2020). Can an Ecological, Multilingual Approach Help Us to Better Support Reunited Refugee Families in Scotland with Language Learning? *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition, 2*(6), 11-34; Cox, S., & Phipps, A. (2022). An ecological, multilingual approach to language learning with newly reunited refugee families in Scotland. *International Journal of Educational Research, 115*, 101967. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cox, S. (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hirsu, L. and Bryson, E. (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cox, S., & Phipps, A. (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. De Costa, P.I. (2015) Re-envisioning Language Anxiety in the Globalized Classroom Through a Social Imaginary Lens, *Language learning 65*(3), 504-532; Dewaele, J. 2013, "The link between foreign language classroom anxiety and psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism among adult Bi- and multilinguals", *The Modern language journal, 97*(3), 670-684. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)