News Release

Issued: Friday 21 April 2017

Pro-independence tweeters dial down Scots language for debate

Twitter users who back Scottish independence are more likely to use Scots words in their posts – except when tweeting about the referendum issue itself, analysis shows.

A computer-based study of thousands of tweets written during the 2014 referendum campaign looked at how people's use of language was related to their identity, views and discussion on the debate.

Scottish words – such as oor, yersel or bairns – were used more frequently by users who favoured pro-independence hashtags, but not necessarily in the same posts.

Overall, tweeters decreased their use of Scots words when discussing the referendum.

In the first large-scale study of its kind in the UK, experts found that people whose tweets suggested they identify as Scottish nationalists were more likely to use language that reflected this. They also found that tweets with hashtags relating to the referendum, from either side of the debate, featured fewer identifiably Scottish words than other posts.

The findings suggest that users reduce their use of Scots words in tweets related to the independence referendum not necessarily because of the topic, but because the hashtag broadens the audience, as indicated by previous studies.

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh used computing techniques to identify thousands of tweets relating to the Scottish referendum. They then carried out a statistical analysis of users and their posts to explore how people's use of language related to their position in the debate.

The study, presented at the *European Association for Computational Linguistics* conference, was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Dr Sharon Goldwater of the University of Edinburgh's School of Informatics, who led the study, said: "People might be expected to use Scottish words more when discussing the referendum, but interestingly the opposite is true: this is probably because tweets with hashtags are intended to be seen by a broad audience."

For further information, please contact:
Catriona Kelly, Press & PR Office, 0131 651 4401; 07791 355940; Catriona.Kelly@ed.ac.uk

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