

Doric's not dead, pupils at Buckie High are told

By Alan Beresford

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BUCKIE'S dialect is far from dead - that was the message which was issued loud and clear last week when a linguistics expert visited Buckie High.

Higher English students had the chance to learn more about the dialect many of them have spoken all their lives - Doric - from former BCHS student Dr Jennifer Smith, a proud Doric speaker herself who is a Reader in English Language and Linguistics.

She was joined last Tuesday morning in the school by research assistant Sophie Holmes-Elliott.

"It may seem surprising, but many kids don't think they speak in dialect and surprised to find out they actually do," she told the Advertiser.

"Many people also have this impression that speaking in dialect is somehow wrong, thick or stupid, which most certainly isn't the case.

"It has its own rules and grammar just like any other



Dr Jennifer Smith, front right, and research assistant Sophie Holmes-Elliott show these BCHS students some of the ins and outs of Doric.

Picture: Lyn Macdonald

language, and getting this point across is something you can only do by showing people, not telling them.

"For example, you can say toon for town, oot for out but

are changing and evolving, but not dying. Some words may change, old words leave the language and others come in, but dialects like Doric still retain their basic grammar and rules."

Buckie's distinctive version of Doric is down to two main factors, Dr Smith explained. Firstly, the area's relative isolation from the rest of the country over the centuries has meant that many words and pronunciations used in older versions of English have been kept, while further south they have vanished. Many Buckie pronunciations, she revealed, are akin to those used by Shakespeare in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The second component to this individuality is known as independent innovation.

Ms Holmes-Elliott said: "It's similar to environmentally isolated places like Australia where they have animals which don't exist anywhere else in the world.

"Being isolated gives evolution an opportunity to go off on its own track.

"Linguistically, this means

you get features like 'f' for 'wh' - foo instead of who, for example - which is found in the north east of Scotland nowhere else."

"Alongside this isolation is the fact that the dialect has had the chance to pass down the generations, the population having remained relatively stable over the years unlike some areas such as the Western Isles, where there has been a large outflux of young people."

Dr Smith and Ms Holmes-Elliott's talk was warmly welcomed by Jean Wilson, PT English.

"We were delighted to have them in the school and the students seemed to enjoy the talk," she said. "There were some strong opinions and debates about various issues raised.

"By understanding how Doric works, hopefully it will also help students identify patterns in English."

The interactive session drew heavily on research work being pursued by Dr Smith, which focuses on the circumstances in which people switch between using dialect and standard English, and to what degree.