Like other girls born into royal families, princess Margaret Tudor (1489-1541) provided her father, King Henry VII, with ‘spare’ diplomatic capital for political marriage. To this end, Margaret was married to James IV in 1503, in the hopes of resolving the perennially turbulent relations with Scotland. Almost from the moment of her arrival in Edinburgh that year at the age of thirteen, Margaret began writing letters back to the English court: originally to that of her father, and then later her brother, Henry VIII. Margaret, like her sister Mary (married into the French monarchy slightly later), was expected to be a peacemaker and ambassador for the larger Tudor project abroad. In conjunction with her primary duty in producing the Scottish (but possibly also English) heir, Margaret was seen variably as a daughter, wife, sister and/or mother, depending on which side of the border one was on. She was expected to hold English interests in-hand, but also, in-line with late medieval queenship, to act as a protectress of the ‘realm of Scotland’. Working from a selection of Margaret’s manuscript letters that remain understudied in a period dominated by her younger brother (Henry VIII), this paper investigates some of the communicative strategies observable in her writing. In particular, it investigates to what extent Margaret appropriated Scots into her idiolect, and then places such usage in the politico-linguistic context of the early sixteenth-century Scottish and English courts.

Keywords: idiolect, letters, Scots.