

Scots: Language to Dialect to Language?

Another example besides Serbian and Croatian of a language that has moved from being a language to a dialect and may be on its way to being a language again is Scots. Scots one of the three languages of Scotland. It is not Scottish Gaelic (another minority language spoken in Scotland), but a language closely related to English, that was once the language of the court, but has largely been displaced by English. At the present time, because of its similarity to English, Scots is usually considered to be a dialect of English. Historically, Scots was a language distinct from English, with a literary and national history. However, there are a number of activists who are struggling to obtain language status for Scots once again. Scots has its own recognized grammar and dictionary. It is taught as a subject at several of Scotland's oldest universities and in some primary- and secondary-level schools. It is recognized by the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, a non-governmental organization, as one of the five minority languages of the United Kingdom, along with Irish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish. While not widely-taught, it is not considered outrageous to teach Scots in schools and there are published materials for use in teaching it. There is considerable nationalistic feeling in Scotland and it has recently won increased political autonomy from the United Kingdom. Scots is hampered, both in being accepted as a language and as a symbol of national identity, because of people's attitudes toward it. Like Singlish and Ebonics, Scots as it is spoken today is widely considered an incorrect and corrupted dialect of English. Gaelic is available as a linguistic national symbol, further reducing the need for Scots to fulfill that role.