

The undermining of Scots was not the result of decrees and proscriptions, but of the gradual weakening of independent Scottish institutions. The Reformation, which played such a key part in Tudor policy, had its strong adherents among sections of the Scottish bourgeoisie, so there was no need for the English to impose it. Elsewhere in the British Isles, the language of religion has often proved an important factor in language maintenance; but in southern Scotland, it does not seem to have been an issue. Scots accordingly never became the language of prayer books and Bible in Scotland, and this seems to have been vital in exposing Scottish people to the metropolitan language of England. This variety was also disseminated in a great deal of printed literature at this time. Scotland had its own presses, but these printed English forms alongside those of Scots. Other Scottish institutions were soon to be eroded. In 1603, the Union of Crowns meant that a Scottish king was on the throne of England; but it was at London that he held his court. Gradually the most privileged and powerful class in Scotland adopted the language of England.

Finally, the Act of Union in 1707 ensured that Scotland's laws and administrative arrangements were determined in London, and therefore in English. By the eighteenth century Scots had become the Low language, and metropolitan English was now the medium of law, administration, education, and religion. And in language, as well as politically, it was 'the end of an auld sang', as was said in Scotland at the time.

From the eighteenth century onwards, the gentry of Scotland tended to receive an English education. This meant that all ideas about the best or most correct usage were articulated with respect to English; no variety of Scots was codified. Scots, therefore, came to be seen as a dialect, to be disparaged; there was a proliferation of books listing Scotticisms to be avoided in polite company. The first Scottish Members of Parliament, finding their accents derided in the English parliament, strove to sound like Englishmen. Like the dialects of England, Scots lost all social status, and its use in school was punished after the 1872 Education Act.

Unlike the dialects of England, however, Scots was never reduced to a patois. A literary tradition was maintained, by people such as Burns; and in the nineteenth century Scots was used to record versions of ballads and folk-songs as they were found by assiduous Scottish collectors. In the twentieth century, attempts have been made by poets like Hugh MacDiarmid to promote Scots as the medium for a serious and tough-minded poetry that was international in character without losing its Scottishness, but which was unencumbered by the traditional associations of Burns. The maintenance or re-creation of a literary

prose tradition has been more problematic, since continuity was interrupted in the sixteenth century. There are few models for serious, expository prose, and even in the novel, Scots has gone the way of English dialects in that writers have tended to use it in depictions of regional or lower-class dialogue only. Modern Scottish novelists must cultivate their own literary language, as MacDiarmid had to do for poetry; but it is worth noting that one writer, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, achieved this in the 1930s with *A Scots Quair*.

Outside imaginative literature, however, a Scots prose tradition was maintained in popular Scottish newspapers, particularly those of the north-east, where there is a strong loyalty to the local form of Scots. And in 1983 a Scots translation of the New Testament appeared, a work hailed as a monument of prose style and literary achievement, even as a turning-point in the fortunes of Scots. Since then there have been numerous experiments with written Scots within what has become a vigorous literary culture in Scotland.

The notion that Scots is at most a dialect of English has been communicated to most Scottish people. With no census returns to remind them of the number of speakers of Scots, and no classical texts to give them a sense of historicity – save, perhaps, the *New Testament* – many Scottish people, like some speakers of English-based creoles, may feel that their tongue is not different enough from English to justify calling it a separate language. In other words, it is linguistic criteria that are uppermost in their minds (as they are in the minds of most English people in their attitude to Scots): Scots sounds, grammar, and vocabulary are close to those of English in a way that those of Gaelic, say, are not. But purely linguistic criteria are not enough in settling demarcation disputes of this kind. Speakers of Dutch dialects, say, on the border with Germany, may understand speakers of neighbouring German dialects better than they can the speakers of Dutch dialects on the other side of Holland; but the conventional wisdom is that people who live in Holland speak Dutch, and that Germans speak German. To call Scots a dialect of English is to ignore its development during Scottish independence, and to reduce its status to that of the regional dialects of England, unless we use the term *dialect* in a more specialised sense, to refer to regional varieties with their own traditions of writing (as we speak of the dialects of English in medieval times). In sum, the terms *dialect* and *language* are not fine enough to apply unequivocally to Scots.

Opponents of the view that Scots and English are separate languages are likely to argue that many alleged Scots usages can be found in northern dialects of English. Boundaries between usages, for instance, do not by any means always run parallel with the border.