

Post peer review version.

Mercedes Durham. (to appear). 30 Years Later: Real-time Change and Stability in Attitudes towards the Dialect in Shetland. In Robert Lawson (ed.) *Sociolinguistics In Scotland*. Palgrave MacMillan.

15

30 Years Later: Real-time Change and Stability in Attitudes towards the Dialect in Shetland*

Mercedes Durham

Introduction

A strand of recent sociolinguistic research has focused on how attitudes towards language varieties are intrinsically linked with processes of language shift and language change: some have examined the perception of specific features (Buchstaller 2006; Campbell-Kibler 2009; Labov, Ash, Ravindranath, Weldon, Baranowski and Nagy 2011), while others have concentrated on attitudes towards whole dialects or languages (Coupland and Bishop 2007; Garrett 2010; Lippi-Green 2011). Much of this research comes precisely when a new feature is gaining ground or when a dialect or language is in the process of shift, and indeed, attitudes can be good predictors of linguistic shift related to age, gender, social class and other external factors. How can we be completely sure, however, that the attitudes are genuinely precursors to actual shift if we do not have concrete knowledge about attitudes in the period before the change? Attitude shifts may merely happen to run parallel to the linguistic changes and not be related to them. To gauge whether attitudes influence linguistic shift, real time change

2 *Real-time Attitude Change and Stability in Shetland*

in attitudes need to be examined where possible, alongside research on attitudes at a single point in time. While sociolinguistic research has conclusively demonstrated that the apparent time construct is appropriate to examine language change in many contexts (Bailey 2002), it has not been clarified whether this can be directly transferred to change in linguistic attitudes.

This chapter examines this question to establish in what ways attitudes change over time. To achieve this, I focus on the results of a specific community in Scotland and present a real-time study of schoolchildren's attitudes and self-reported dialect use in 1983 and in 2010. I concentrate on the extent to which the results of the study match previous findings on the current use of the Shetland dialect and determine whether broader conclusions about the study of language attitudes can be drawn.

The study examines the dialect spoken in Shetland: as I will discuss more fully below, younger speakers from the Shetland Islands, particularly those from Lerwick, the main town, are said to no longer use the local dialect. Research on language use across several generations has shown this to be at least partly accurate (Tait 2001; van Leyden 2004; Smith and Durham 2011, 2012), but this does not demonstrate whether the perceptions themselves have changed since the previous generation. To establish whether this is the case, earlier attitudes need to be examined and compared to current ones.

The Shetland Islands and Language

The Shetland Islands are the northernmost part of Scotland and lie equidistant between Aberdeen and Bergen. Although Shetland was traditionally isolated from the mainland, the discovery of oil in the North Sea in the late 1970s meant increased contact as well as migration to the Islands from other parts of the U.K. and abroad.

Linguistically and historically, the Shetland Islands are a melting pot of different cultures. Little is known about the original inhabitants of the islands, but by the ninth century Shetland was populated by settlers from Scandinavia and under Scandinavian rule, and Norn, a local form of Old Norse which developed in Shetland, Orkney and Caithness, was the main language spoken on the islands. In 1468, the Islands were ceded to Scotland as part of a dowry and over the next few centuries Scots gradually superseded Norn (Barnes 1998; Knooihuizen 2005). Barnes (1998) estimates that by the end of the eighteenth century there were no remaining Norn speakers on the island. That is not to say that there is no Scandinavian element left in the Islands: the Shetland dialect spoken today retains some (primarily lexical) traces of Norn, and there are a number of cultural elements which reflect the Shetland Islands' Scandinavian heritage (Up-Helly-Aa, the winter festival celebrated in Lerwick, the main town, being an example, albeit a 'reinvented' one). Additionally, many Shetlanders feel a strong sense of linked heritage with Scandinavian countries and overtly comment on it.

The overlapping mix of Norn, Scots and more standardised varieties of English has resulted in a very distinctive dialect which is rather unique in its combination and distribution of features (Melchers 2004a, 2004b; Melchers and Sundkvist 2010), although it nevertheless shares many features with other varieties of (North-Eastern) Scots (Millar 2007). The distinctiveness of the Shetland dialect is evident in its lexis, its pronunciation, and its morphosyntax. The extract below of Martin, a 56 year-old Shetlander, who was one of the interviewees in the data collected in Smith (2007-2009), offers a sample of the features found in the Shetland dialect (a gloss is provided in the notes):

An' dis fellow was standin' on de pier an' I was dere, an' we were helpin dem ashore an' dey were comin wi' deir bits and pieces an' he seemed to

4 *Real-time Attitude Change and Stability in Shetland*

hae nothing like an' I pointed to dis boys' cases and sort of-, kind of motioned dat like where was a' his stuff an' he kind of lookit, an' den he beamed fae lug to lug an' he trifled in his pocket an' he came out wi' a toothbrush an' he hel' dis toothbrush up wi' a big smile an' pat it back in his pocket. An' I thought, 'yeah, well, poor soul, du's, du's here, du's- du's alive, so likely a toothbrush to dee is the- is the best thing'. He was managed to salvage hit like before he jumped like¹.

Features such as *hae*, *wi'*, *fae*, *a'* rather than *have*, *with*, *from*, *all*, *-it* as a past tense morpheme (*lookit*), the use of *dis* (*this*) as a plural demonstrative and lexical items such as *lug* are all found in other (North-Eastern) Scots dialects. TH-stopping (*dis* for *this*), the use of *be* with perfects instead of *have* (*he was managed*) and the second person singular forms *du/dee* are restricted to Shetland.

Related to their sense of pride in a shared Scandinavian heritage, many Shetlanders are proud of their dialect, and among the older generations it is linked to a strong sense of local identity. Conversations with people from the Islands make this clear, but it is also underlined by the use of the dialect on Radio Shetland, the presence of a regular column in dialect in the local newspaper, the strength of the local dialect society, Shetland ForWirds², and the many publications in and about the dialect. The presence of the dialect goes far beyond the commodification of dialect for tourists sometimes found in other areas with a strong dialect, in the sense that much of this is produced primarily for the locals (Beal 2009; Johnstone 2009).

The apparent pride in the dialect does not translate into actual use of it in some cases and, over the past ten years, the way the dialect is used is seen to be in transition, and a number of reports (linguistic and other) have mentioned that the younger generations are no longer using the more traditional Scots dialect and instead are

shifting towards a (local) form of Scottish Standard English (van Leyden 2004). For example, Tait (2001: 11) claims that ‘In the town of Lerwick... the younger generation... does not speak any kind of Shetlandic, but simply standard English’. Quantitative research on the topic has largely borne out these claims: Smith and Durham (2011, 2012) found that, in Lerwick at least, the dialect is undergoing shift, with roughly half of the Shetland young speakers sampled no longer using the dialect in interviews or with friends. Sundkvist (2011) focussed on the phonology of the standardised form now spoken in Lerwick and uncovered that it has much in common with other Scottish Standard English varieties, underlining that there is a shift away from a purely local model (even if he did not specifically compare the newer variety with more traditional dialectal forms).

An increased use of less local variety in Shetland is not altogether surprising. Traditionally, many, if not all, Shetland dialect speakers would switch to a standardised variety when talking to outsiders. This partially diglossic situation means that many dialect speakers are bidialectal. The code-switching even has a local name, ‘knapping’ (Melchers 1985). The dialect would be used with other locals, whereas a (local) version of Scottish Standard English would be used with outsiders to Shetland. Anderson (2011: 330) and Smith and Durham (2012: 75) underline how in situations where increasing numbers of speakers are bidialectal in local and standard varieties, rather than monodialectal in the local variety, there is a strong possibility that in subsequent generations the shift will be entirely towards the Standard variety, with a complete loss of the dialect variety. The extreme inter-speaker use found in Lerwick’s youngest generation (Smith and Durham 2011, 2012) points in this direction. Non-dialect users in these studies were reported to not even understand when their friends used the dialect,

which suggests that this is not age-graded behaviour, but a concrete case of dialect obsolescence.

The tendency towards dialect shift must be taken alongside the fact that the speakers examined in the abovementioned studies were all born and bred Shetlanders, whose parents came from the Islands as well, as is dictated by general principles of much sociolinguistic research. These results, then, leave out the portion of Shetlanders who were born off the island and/or those without Shetland familial ties. Both of these groups would be less likely to use the dialect than the 'native' Shetlanders, so the community contains further non-dialect users. As mentioned, the islands have had far more contact with mainland United Kingdom following the discovery of oil in the North Sea and the subsequent construction of the Sullom Voe oil terminal in the late seventies and early eighties. This has, of course, been accompanied by population shifts. Although many of the incomers to the islands were transient and temporary, and unlikely to have truly influenced attitudes towards and use of the dialect, others settled on the islands more permanently and contribute to the overall linguistic situation, as the results of the analysis below will make clear.

The non-Shetlanders group, if robust enough, could conceivably influence local speakers' attitudes towards the dialect and act as an additional trigger in Shetland's transition from a situation of bidialectalism towards one of monodialectal Standard use in younger generations. This will depend on the incomers' attitudes towards the dialect, but also on the degree to which they are integrated into the Island community.

For example, Neil Butler's *The Roost* (2011), a collection of stories about teenagers set in Shetland, makes it clear that, for some people at least, being born locally is not enough to make someone a true Shetlander and you may still be

considered a ‘Soothmoother’³ or half-English if your parents are not from the Islands, as is clear from the example below:

“It was Kenneth, the half-English kid, opposite him who noticed. [...] Arthur said, ‘Shut up, soothmoother! This is between David and Grant!’

Kenneth said, ‘I’m not a soothmoother! I was born here, the same as you, you bastard, Shetland, the Gilbert Bain!’ (Butler 2011:12)

Butler’s short story collection also makes clear how some speakers (or characters) see the use of the dialect as affected and not a choice they would make themselves, as in the example below.

Rita was one of those fiddler types. They played for the school fiddle orchestra, and spoke in a yokelly accent, even if they came from the town, even if two years ago they’d spoken like she did. They took over the Lounge Bar on a Wednesday and any fiddle session and sneered. Why? Because they *loved* Shetland. (Butler 2011:43)

Sentiments such as these may help understand why dialect use was found to be so divided among young people in Lerwick in previous studies. While it is a clear way of signalling local identity, not all young speakers may want to index that identity and might prefer to use Scottish Standard English as a way of separating themselves from what they see as a ‘yokelly’ way of life.

The results presented in this chapter focus on the attitudes of children towards language use in Shetland’s school system aged roughly between 13 and 16. Childhood, adolescence particularly, is a period in which people are the most likely to be influenced by their peers (Eckert 1997), so the number of children born outside of the islands

and/or without family ties to it and the attitudes of these children may be revealing, particularly because the results show an increase in incomers since 1983. It may be that these locally born children, but who have no family ties to the Islands, do not feel the same pressures to learn the Shetland dialect as they would have previously.

As well as quantifying the demography of the schoolchildren in 1983 and 2010, the analysis will establish whether children born on the Islands, but without local ties, have different attitudes to children who have a local heritage. Examining the attitudes of children in 1983 and comparing them to those of children in 2010 will allow us not only to see how attitudes have changed, but also to assess in what ways the distribution of children themselves has changed. This may help establish to what extent a shift in attitudes might influence broader linguistic shift.

Project Methodology

The results discussed in this chapter come from a real-time analysis of children's linguistic attitudes and perceived use of the dialect. The analysis is a trend study comparing two related projects conducted in 1983 and 2010 respectively. Taken together, the projects represent a snapshot of attitudes and reported use of the Shetland dialect over nearly 30 years. The data from the first project was collected by Professor Gunnel Melchers (1985) in 1983 as part of a project on the Scandinavian element in the Shetland dialect. Its main aim was to establish what the linguistic attitudes of Shetland school children aged 13 to 16 were, particularly in terms of the use of the Shetland dialect. The attitudes were collected by means of a questionnaire, with 35 main questions and a number of sub-questions. This paper questionnaire was distributed to students at Anderson High School in Lerwick, and of the around 350 originally collected a total of 348 remain. The second project aimed to replicate the first project

and used more or less the same questions⁴ to ensure comparability. Unlike the 1983 corpus, however, the data was collected via an online questionnaire which the students completed during class hours. A total of 484 students completed the questionnaire in 2010 and came from six different schools.

Although there was an initial analysis of the 1983 data and preliminary results were disseminated (Melchers 1985), a complete study of the data was never undertaken and the data existed only in hard copy form. To ensure preservation of this valuable data, the 2010 project's first aim was to digitise the 1983 corpus by inputting the answers of each questionnaire onto a single spreadsheet. This step made the two analyses more comparable. The number of questions in each questionnaire and the number of questionnaires completed represents a large body of data, and while the chapter will not be able to present the full results, it focuses on a few key points and examines what they reveal about the situation in Shetland. This chapter also discusses the schoolchildren's reported use of the dialect in general and in a range of specific situations, as well as their general comments on the dialect (and the project) itself.

Although reported use often does not fully match with actual use (Trudgill 1972), reported use is a good way to gain insight into attitudes towards (specific features of) varieties. Additionally, the earlier research on change in the Shetland dialect makes it possible to judge how accurate the schoolchildren are in terms of what they report. Questionnaires, although they do not offer as much detail as interviews about attitudes, are a good way to gather large amounts of data and ensure a good sample of the community. The real time component of the research project meant that the format of the original questionnaire was kept and newer sampling methods were not considered.

As mentioned, the situation in Shetland, both socially and linguistically, has substantially changed between the two periods of data collection. The data from the

10 *Real-time Attitude Change and Stability in Shetland*

1983 corpus was collected at the start of the oil boom and the contact with outsiders (particularly children from off the islands) was minimal. The data from the 2010 corpus, on the other hand, was collected after a period of sustained dialect contact with incomers and at a time when the dialect was in a period of transition and potential shift.

Increased migration to the islands shows up in the 2010 data in another way: although it has been anecdotally claimed that many of the incomers to the islands were short-term workers and did not settle, the fact that there are more children born on the Islands to non-Shetland parents in 2010 than in 1983 underlines that migration was not purely transient. Indeed, the demography of the student population across the two data sets shows clear changes, an issue which will be examined in more detail below.

A final difference between the data sets is that in 1983, Anderson High School was the only higher level secondary school on the islands, so children who lived outwith Lerwick either had to commute in daily⁵ or, in some cases, live in a hostel at the school⁶ during the week and spend weekends at home (this accounted for 20% of respondents in the 1983 data). In 2010, there were a number of other schools on the islands which had facilities for older students (Whalsay, Brae, Baltasound, Aith, and Yell all have students aged 13 to 16), so although Anderson High still has the most students between those ages (62% of the whole), students from further away did not need to live in town during the week to go to school. The 2010 phase of data collection surveyed all six schools across Shetland, and the breakdown of questionnaires completed in individual schools for the 2010 data set is presented in Table 15.1.

Table 15.1 Breakdown of number of questionnaires completed by school

School name	Number of questionnaires completed
Anderson High School	297
Brae	99
Aith	49
Whalsay	29
Yell	5

Baltasound	5
Total	484

Although the number of questionnaires completed in individual schools is very low in some cases, this is not to do with a low rate of students at those schools responding. Rather, some of the schools simply did not have many students in the school years targeted⁷ and, at both collection times, a sizeable portion of the entire student population of the age range studied completed a questionnaire. The increase from around 350 questionnaires in 1983 to 484 in 2010 is tied to an increase in student numbers over the past thirty years rather than different sampling methods⁸.

Results

My discussion of the results concentrate first on general comments to the questionnaire. I then focus on more specific questions about overall language use and use with specific people, before finally presenting the results of the children's use of dialect across a range of media.

General comments

The 1983 questionnaire did not specifically provide space for additional comments, but a number of the children chose to add a few words to the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire concluded by thanking the students for their help and many simply stated 'you're welcome' or something similar, with some deliberately writing in the dialect, and one or two noted that they were not in fact from the islands⁹. In light of this, space was left at the end of the 2010 questionnaire for students to add any comments they have about the project or the dialect.

12 *Real-time Attitude Change and Stability in Shetland*

Not all students in 2010 chose to make use of this space (overall, 26 per cent of the questionnaires completed contained a comment) and some of the responses were not particularly revealing (random strings of letters, comments about running out of time or about typos they felt they had found in the questionnaire) or were relatively short (there were a number of smiley faces or just the word thanks: clearly denoting a favourable view of the project and/or the dialect), but there were a number of more useful comments.

What is most interesting about the responses while most were very favourable to the dialect (and the project), others were very negative. This demonstrates a seeming dislike of the dialect which was not present in 1983¹⁰. The degree to which the comments were polarised is particularly relevant to the analysis on shifts in attitudes: for every response which showed that the student was happy to complete the questionnaire and hoped that it would somehow help the dialect, there was another student who simply wished to express their annoyance at being made to answer questions about a variety which they did not speak and in which they were not interested.

The responses were divided into three categories: those which were positive about the dialect, those which were negative, and those which commented on a non-Shetland identity. The examples below give an idea of the comments in each.

*Positive comments*¹¹

Many comments showed positive attitudes towards the dialect, either praising the project or demonstrating approval of it through the use of the dialect within the answers. These comments are from students for whom the dialect is an important facet of their

identity and something which they are proud of and view positively, whether they choose to use it overly in the questionnaire or not.

- i think that its our language and everyone should speak it in shetland
- WIR DIALECT IS EXTREMELY TYOCH UN MUCKLE GOOD
- i hope your survey goes well and i hope you try to change the attitudes of people to speak Shetland.
- Noo bairns i tink da dialect his tae be kept i da isles
- shetland dialect forever!

Negative comments

The second category is made up of the negative responses towards the dialect. These comments are overwhelmingly negative judgements about the dialect or about the people who use it.

- Brainwash anyone who speaks it. Especially stop them from typing in it as well.
Teach them English!
- Personally i dont reallly like the dialect, it sounds rather stupid.
- Well, i'll be honest. I think the shetland dialect is hugely retarded.
- Shetland Dialect is horrible and teaching it will make it harder if a Shetlander wants to move away.

Non-Shetland

Finally, there is a category of comments, which while not wholly negative, situated the respondent as not belonging to the dialect community or not seeing the dialect as that different from Standard English.

14 *Real-time Attitude Change and Stability in Shetland*

- this person thinks we all speak shetland. he/she is very wrong.
- the questions assume i am from sheland when i am not
- You should understand that quite a lot of people in Shetland don't speak in dialect any of the time.
- I don't feel that it is that different from regular english.
- IM ENGLIISH!!! RAGE!

The fact that students in this final group felt the need to point out (and in such a way) that the dialect is not used by everyone and not all the time is not anodyne and shows that some students must be confronted with questions about the dialect often and are possibly fed up with them. The “rage” of the English student is a particular case in point.

In themselves, these comments cannot be taken as evidence of a general shift in attitudes, but they are nevertheless very revealing about attitudes towards the dialect in 2010. Whereas some children shared the pride older generations had for the dialect, others could not be said to. The comments were partially distributed according to the children's origin; it was primarily those from Shetland and with Shetland roots whose comments were strongly in favour of the dialect, while the children with no Shetland background were those whose comments were the most negative. I will return to differences in attitudes according to students' backgrounds below since it is an important explanatory factor in understanding the change in attitudes and use over the past 30 years.

Language Choice

One of the most important questions to do with language attitudes and self-reported use asked the children to select which of five statements they agreed with and gave them the following options¹²:

- a) I always speak Shetland dialect no matter whom I talk to or what I talk about
- b) I speak Shetland dialect in certain connections and English in others, but I always try to keep them apart
- c) My speech is always a mixture of Shetland dialect and English. However, in certain situations the dialect element is more dominant, in others the English element
- d) I do not keep Shetland dialect and English apart at all, but usually mix the two
- e) I always speak English (perhaps with a Shetland accent), no matter whom I talk to or what I talk about.

Obviously, the three ‘middle’ answers show some overlap, and students who, in fact, used the Shetland dialect and English in the same way might have answered differently. For the purposes here, however, the main interest is the increase of speakers stating that they always use English (other than in terms of accent). Note that the situation described in b), where both varieties are used but in different situations and with different people, basically describes the diglossic process of ‘knapping’ (Melchers 1985)¹³. c) and d) could be said to represent perhaps a slightly further stage in code-mixing, in that the varieties are sometimes used together. The fact that many speakers in Shetland are known to ‘knap’ also means that a) was not likely to be selected very often as most speakers would use a standardised variety at least sometimes. Its selection then would demonstrate strongly positive attitudes towards the dialect. Figure 15.1 presents the

overall distribution in 1983 and 2010 for all the children together, while Table 15.2 provides the total Ns as well as the percentages.

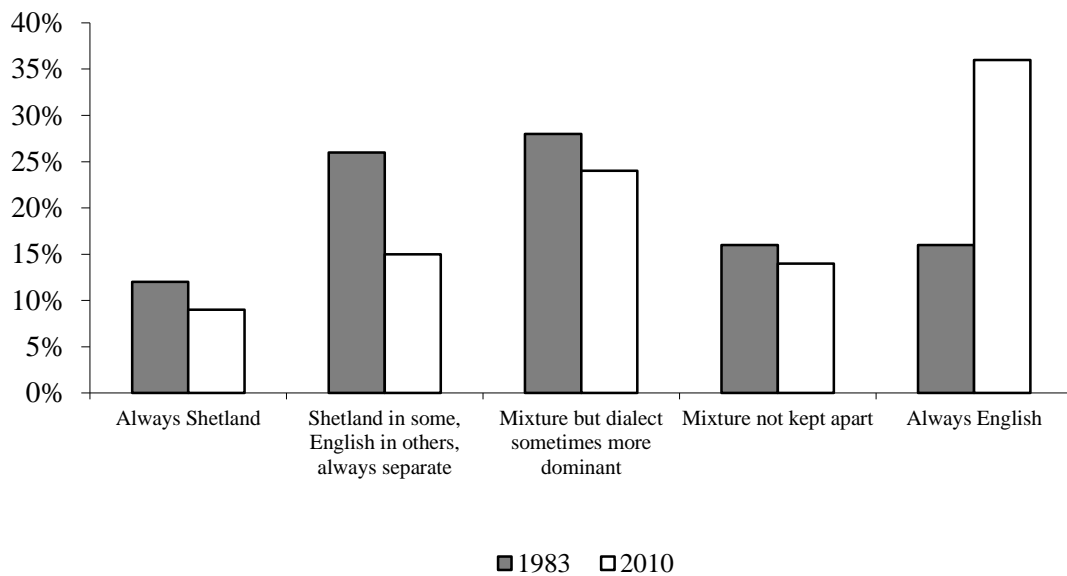


Figure 15.1 Comparison of responses to self-reported language use between 1983 and 2010

Table 15.2 Comparison of responses to self-reported language use between 1983 and 2010

	Always Shetland (a)	Both Shetland and English, but always separate (b)	Mixture but dialect sometimes more dominant (c)	Mixture not kept apart (d)	Always English (e)
1983	12%	26%	28%	16%	16%
2010	9%	15%	24%	14%	36%
Total N 1983	40	87	92	64	51
Total N 2010	42	71	117	68	175

In 1983, the main responses were options b) and c): students used a mixture of Shetland and English, but felt that the dialect was more dominant (28 per cent) or that a mixture was used and the two were always kept separate (26 per cent). This underlines the extent of bidialectalism found on the island. The percentage of children using only the

dialect, (option a), was 12 per cent while that of children using only English (option e), was 16%. Overall, 84 per cent of the children report using the dialect to some extent.

By 2010, the situation had significantly changed. The highest percentage is that of students who report that they only use English (36 per cent), and the percentages of a), b) and d) have decreased (to 9 per cent, 15 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). Values for c) have only dropped slightly (24 per cent), showing that many children feel that their language use is mixed, but that they are still dominant in the dialect. The number of students reporting they only use English has more than doubled since 1983, and this confirms previous findings that the dialect is used less on the islands than it was previously. The results underline that the dialect and English have always both been used alongside each other: in 1983 and in 2010, answers b), c) and d) together have the highest proportion of responses.

What this answer does not reveal at this stage is which of the children were using only English and which ones still used the dialect, and whether the increase of English is due to changes in terms of the children's origins. Both the children's and their parents' place of birth need to be taken into account to examine whether there have been changes in the demography of Shetland classrooms and whether this can be ascribed to the increase of the oil industry on the islands. Ultimately, the children's place of birth is less important than their parents' origins, as parents from the islands are more likely to use the Shetland dialect than parents who come from elsewhere¹⁴.

According to their parents' origins, children were grouped into three categories:

- children with Shetland heritage¹⁵;
- children born on Shetland but without a Shetland heritage;
- children with no Shetland heritage (either through birth or family ties)¹⁶.

Although the Shetland born and outsider children provided information about specifically where their parents were born, this was not relevant to the analysis. Figure 15.2 and Table 15.3 below present the results across the two data collection points.



Figure 15.2 Breakdown of children's origins

Table 15.3 Breakdown of children's origins

	% in 1983	% in 2010	N 1983	N 2010
Shetland heritage	77	65	266	313
Shetland born	4	14	13	68
Outside Shetland	19	21	65	102
Overall	100	100	344	483

Most children have Shetland origins, both in 1983 and 2010, but the number of children born in Shetland to parents with no familial ties to the Islands has increased from 4 per cent to 14 per cent over the past 30 years. This is a statically significant difference, and when taken alongside the fact that the rate of 'outsiders' has remained relatively stable from 1983 to 2010, it demonstrates how the (school) population has changed. Far from being transient, it seems that many of the incomers to the islands because of the oil industry over the past 30 years have settled long enough for their children to be born in Shetland and to pursue their entire schooling there.

There are implications for this demographic change: not only with respect to the Shetland born children's responses (i.e. they will be less likely to use the dialect than the Shetland heritage children), but also because overall the mix of children likely to speak Shetland at home will be lower than it was in the past. Whereas in 1983 nearly 80 per cent of children could be expected to have spoken the Shetland dialect at home, now only 65 per cent might. This is similar to the actual rates found for children choosing one of the categories which included the use of the dialect in the first question. Responses of a), b), c) and d) represent 82 per cent in 1983 and 62 per cent in 2010. The increase in Shetland born children in the schools might then explain the large shift in reported language use.

The decision to classify the students by origin in this way is mine, and may not reflect the way that the Islanders view themselves. As the results show, however, it nevertheless provides meaningful results and, as the discussion of Butler's short stories above showed, appears to have some reflection in reality.

Figure 15.3 below returns to the question on language use, broken down by children's origins.

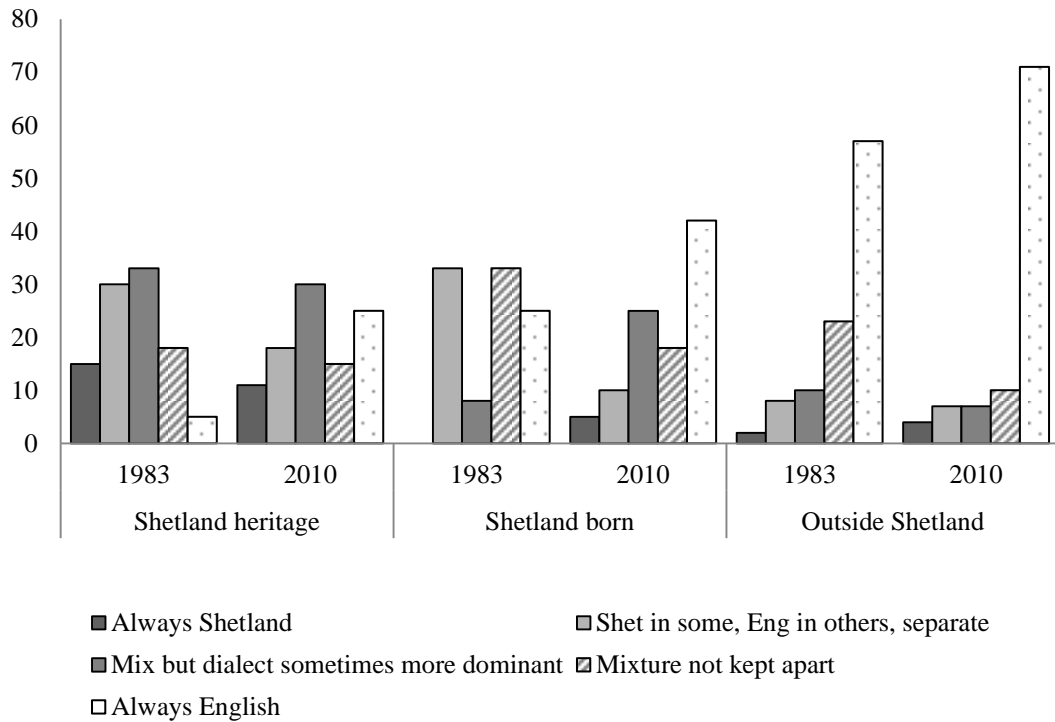


Figure 15.3 Self-reported language use by origin

Figure 15.3 shows that the students from outside Shetland have always been most likely to state that they only use English. Moreover, although there are clear differences between 1983 and 2010, in that all three groups show an increase towards English, the differences among the groups are more important than those between the two time periods.

Between 1983 and 2010 the Shetland born children have shifted towards English, with option e) being selected by nearly 50 per cent of the children in this group, whereas it was only around 25 per cent in 1983¹⁷. In 1983, the Shetland born children were most likely to claim to use a mixture of dialect and English: a third selected option b) and a third option d). By 2010 the ‘knapping’ option has dropped although the percentage of those choosing c) has increased. This is also the most frequent response for the Shetland heritage children both in 1983 and 2010. As noted earlier rates of a) are low, and even in 1983, only 15 per cent of Shetland heritage students report that they use the Shetland dialect all the time. This is not surprising given the bidialectal situation on the Islands

and in light of the fact that other answers on the questionnaire revealed that in the 1980s the children were likely to be marked down or corrected for their use of the dialect in class.

These results underline the extent to which Shetlanders were in a partial diglossia situation in the twentieth century and now are in the twenty-first. Standardised English and the dialect have always been in a situation of contact, but it is only recently that a true ‘tipping point’ (see Dorian 1994; Smith and Durham 2011) has been reached and that now the scales are clearly in favour of English, even within the local community (as 25 per cent of the Shetland heritage children now report they always use English).

Although, in 2010, the Shetland heritage children use the dialect or a mixture of the dialect and English over three quarters of the time, 71 per cent of those born outside of Shetland use English exclusively. These results, taken alongside the fact that the overall rate of children born in Shetland to parents with no Shetland heritage has increased from 4 per cent to 14 per cent, can help us understand the shift in reported and actual language use and supports findings of earlier researchers on how weak ties can affect a community (Milroy and Milroy 1992). This is a concrete example where the transmission of a specific dialect is hindered by weaker ties and a non-local community presence. Payne (1980) and Trudgill (1986) both found that children born outside the community often never fully acquire the local norms, a fact which is matched by the results here. Furthermore, the proportion of outsiders is such that they also influence the local children and they too have begun to use the dialect less.

Language use by addressee

Further questions examined the children’s responses about their use of language with specific people. As with the question focusing on students’ overall self-reported use, the

children were able to give answers along a continuum from ‘only Shetland’ to ‘only English’ and were asked about their use with a tourist, with their headmaster (when asking for a week’s holiday), when out with friends, with a friend from school who speaks (Standard) English¹⁸, during group work in class, when giving a talk to the whole class, to their parents, when applying for a job in London, and finally when applying for a job in Lerwick.

The phrasing of the possible responses was slightly different than in the previous question, but close enough to the earlier question to allow for comparability. The options for these questions were:

- a) Shetland dialect
- b) more dialect than English
- c) a mixture of Shetland dialect and English
- d) more English than Shetland
- e) English

The situations above clearly conflate two rather different factors: style and ‘island’ identity. While asking one’s headmaster for a week’s holiday will put children in a formal situation, students are more likely to use the dialect with the headmaster than a tourist, for example. Space constraints preclude me from analysing each of these contexts in detail, so the results of three (use with a tourist, with local friends and with English speaking friends) were chosen as they consider different aspects of style and local identity.



Figure 15.4 Self-reported use with a tourist

In terms of self-reported use with a tourist, high rates of English or a mix of dialect and English would have been expected. Figure 15.4 demonstrates that the main shift is in the Shetland born group: use of the dialect or of a mixture where the dialect is dominant has always been low in this situation, as would be expected. But between 1983 and 2010, the Shetland born children report far less use of any kind of mixture, shifting towards primarily English use. The heritage children, on the other hand, still generally report that they would use some Shetland dialect in this situation.

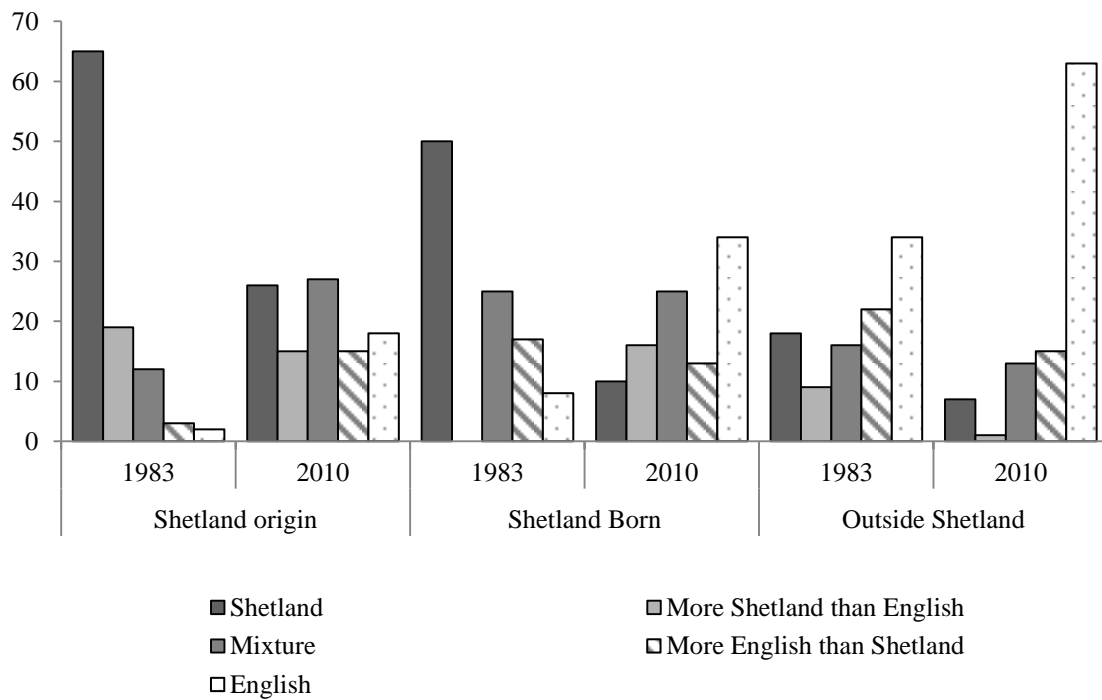


Figure 15.5 Self-reported use with a local friend

Figure 15.5 shows the shift in terms of reported use with a local friend and is striking for a number of reasons: even in the Shetland heritage group, the use of English or of a mixture with more English than Shetland is on the increase. This is the context where the strongest use of the dialect would have been expected. Throughout, the use of only the Shetland dialect has dropped, from around 65 per cent to 28 per cent for the Shetland heritage children, from 52 per cent to 10 per cent for the Shetland born ones, and from 20 per cent to 8 per cent for the children born off the Islands. It is clear from this that the language used with peers (local or not) is no longer likely to be the dialect but either a mixture or simply English.



Figure 15.6 Self-reported use with a Standard English speaking friend

The results in Figure 15.6 are similar to those showing how the schoolchildren reported they would talk to a tourist to the islands in that the use of the dialect is low. Over the past 30 years English only has steadily increased in this context and even the Shetland origin children now use *English only* around 20 per cent of the time.

These three examples underline the extent to which the situation of language use is perceived to have changed. Breaking down the results by origin has made it clear that while some of the rise in English use comes from incomers to the islands, it cannot be ascribed solely to them: Shetland heritage children with Shetland parents are also using the dialect less than in previous generations. The decrease in dialect use in the Shetland heritage children is in line with previous findings (van Leyden 2004; Sundkvist 2011; Smith and Durham 2011, 2012). Nonetheless, it is clear that when Shetland born children were in the minority, they by and large shared the uses and attitudes of the Shetland heritage children, but as the classroom demography changed, they shifted closer to the outsider group in both their attitudes and use. As a whole, the children are

moving away from a diglossic use of the Shetland dialect and English towards a more mixed use. The dialect is not used in some contexts and English in others, but many children use a mixed dialect in all situations. This mixed dialect may be related to the localised variety of Scottish Standard English (Sundkvist 2011). Alongside this, the number of speakers using no Shetland features is growing.

Written use of dialect

Having examined contexts where the dialect was used less in 2010 than in 1983 and those where students had polarised attitudes, the discussion will now turn to a set of questions which present a different picture. The 1983 survey included a question about the written use of the dialect. It asked whether the children used the dialect *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely* or *never* in letters and postcards. Classified by a two way distinction (whether children used the dialect in either of these contexts or not), the overall rate of dialect use in writing is 73 per cent. Table 15.4 below provides the breakdown by origin.

Table 15.4 Percentage of writing in dialect by child origin

Origin	Percentage of writing in dialect
Shetland heritage	82
Shetland born	61
Outside	37

The use of the dialect in some forms of writing appears acceptable even by the children with no Shetland heritage as over a third of them use the dialect at least sometimes. They were, however, more likely to report using it *rarely* compared to the other two groups.

For the 2010 data, the question was expanded to include more modern types of communication in social media. Students were asked whether they used the dialect or

not (rather than focusing on frequency) across a range of contexts (Facebook, e-mails, texts, and so on). Low rates then do not necessarily signal non-dialect use, but rather might simply show non-use of one of the media. E-mail, text messages and Facebook are the contexts students are most likely to use, however, so the rates for them can be expected to be more accurate.

Figure 15.7 presents the results from 2010. It charts the percentages using lines rather than bars unlike previous figures as this better shows the situations where the dialect is used more (or less). The results demonstrate that some media are acceptable with the dialect even by students who reported that they did not generally use it otherwise.

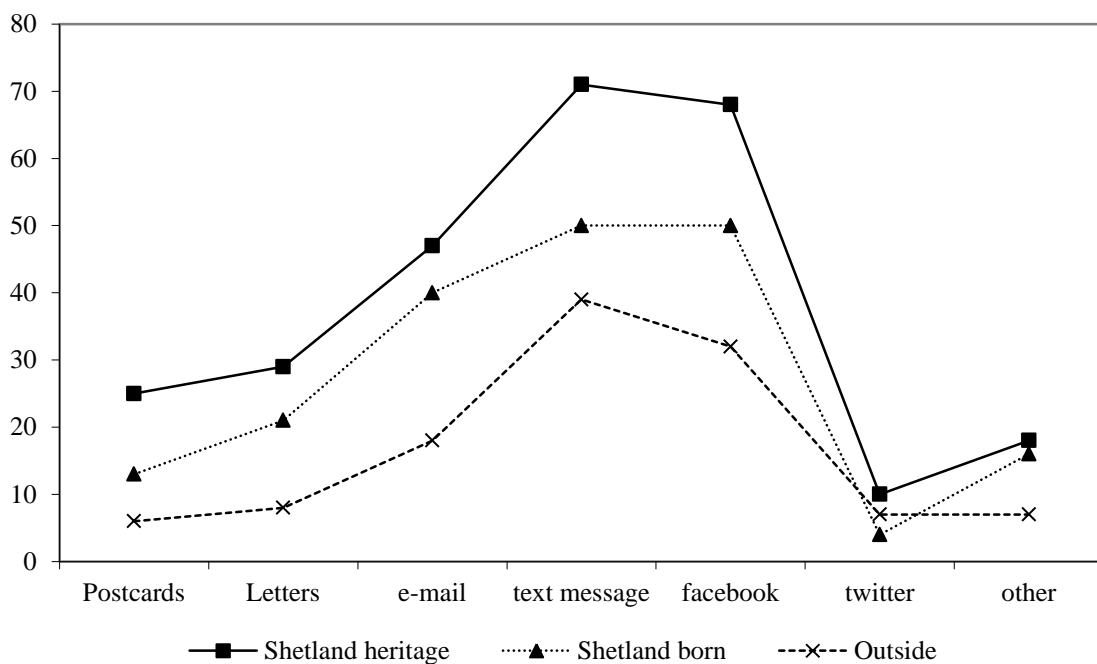


Figure 15.7 Use of dialect across various social media

The high rates for e-mail, texting and Facebook across the three groups substantiate the idea that the schoolchildren simply do not use some media outlets (such as Twitter), rather than showing that these are domains where the dialect is not used. The results also demonstrate how robust the use of the dialect still is in some contexts. Texting is

the place where children are most likely to use the dialect at rates of 61 per cent overall, followed by Facebook with a rate of 58 per cent. As expected, the Shetland heritage children have the highest rates of use and the children born off the islands the lowest. Nevertheless, nearly 40 per cent of the latter group report that they use the dialect at times when texting and 32 per cent when on Facebook. The vitality of the dialect in these written contexts is in opposition to its decline in oral domains. The rates of use in speech and in informal writing are in fact similar, even if writing in the dialect would have traditionally been seen as much more marked than speech. The Shetland schoolchildren, however, do not appear to view the use of dialect in writing to be marked. The high rates of dialect use across social media may indicate that it indexes a particular written/online identity which is shared not only by the Shetland dialect users, but also by the other children as well. Although some children may not speak the Shetland dialect much, it seems that they still use it in writing to underline aspects of their local identity.

The questionnaire does not reveal who the Shetland dialect use is directed at, but it stands to reason that it most likely to be used with their local friends rather than people off the island. Moreover, the responses do not tell us how exactly the dialect is being used across these media and it is likely to be restricted to specific lexical terms (in fact, in a response to another question one student mentioned that he only used ‘du’ – the local form of second person singular – in text messages). A fruitful avenue for further research would be a more detailed examination of the online linguistic practices of Shetland children as it would be able to reveal which forms and features were most frequently used.

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of a small selection of the answers to the questionnaire has revealed three main points. First, overall self-reported use of the dialect is falling in most contexts and attitudes towards the dialect appear to be far more polarised than previously. Secondly, that the decrease in Shetland dialect use is particularly prevalent in the Shetland born students who do not have local roots. Finally, the results for social media demonstrate that there are still contexts where dialect use is robust and able to fulfil social functions for most of the children, be they local or not.

The comparison of the two data sets was particularly valuable to establish which contexts were most likely to be subject to an increase of the Standard and which were still seen as strongholds of the dialect. Moreover, the real-time comparison of schoolchildren in 1983 with those in 2010 provides a much more detailed picture of how the linguistic situation has changed than could have been obtained by examining a single point in time. This is partly to do with the fact that the project was able to examine linguistic attitudes at two key stages; in the first instance, at a time when the Shetland dialect was very robustly used by nearly everyone in the community (as attested by the fact that 43 per cent of the children born outside the community report using the Shetland dialect, or a mixture of dialect and English, in some situations), and in the second instance when, in the main town at least, the dialect is used less by the youngest generations, even when they are of Shetland origin (25 per cent of children born in Shetland to Shetland parents state that they do not use the dialect). Examining data from the later period only would have revealed clear differences between the three groups, but on its own, would not have been able to establish that the attitudes of the Shetland born group had changed. This underlines that while attitudinal data from one point in time is useful, a more longitudinal approach, when possible, allows for a more

in-depth understanding of the process of shift. The analysis revealed that, in Shetland at least, the increase in standardised English over the Shetland dialect was concomitant with a shift in attitudes.

The increased contact with non-Shetland speakers in school and elsewhere is a partial, but important, explanation of why fewer Shetland speakers are using the dialect nowadays. This is tied to some non-Shetlanders' apparently negative views of the dialect, but also to more general processes of transmission: children with parents from outside the community do not fully acquire either the attitudes or the language of their local peers, and as their numbers increase so will their influence on the Shetland 'natives'. This could be extrapolated to explain some aspects of dialect levelling found in other parts of the UK. As people have moved around the country, the balance of local and non-local children in the classrooms may have tipped in some places and rather than non-local children (mostly) acquiring the local variety, they may trigger a shift towards a less localised and more levelled variety, much in the same way that children in new towns such as Milton Keynes formed new dialects where there were no local models (Kerswill and Williams 2002). Because of Shetland's longstanding bidialectal diglossic situation, this may have been an even easier transition, as many people already used a standardised variety alongside the dialect.

Overall, the changes found in self-reported dialect use and in terms of attitudes are similar to actual changes in dialect use (as established in previous research, Smith and Durham 2011, 2012). This underlines how shifts in attitudes may indeed be precursors to shifts in language use and also how data from earlier periods can be used to pinpoint where the biggest shifts in attitudes and use may be. Not only can the results of reported dialect use confirm that a shift is underway, but it provides clues about how the shift is linked to demography changes. Attitudes of Shetland born children have changed as

their number increased and rather than aligning with the local children linguistically, the results suggests that they currently view themselves as non-dialect users.

Notes

* The author would like to acknowledge the support of the British Academy for a Small Research Grant and the help provided by Shetland ForWirds (particularly Bruce Eunson and Laureen Johnson) and the Shetland Islands Council School Board when collecting the data. She would also like to thank Gunnel Melchers who very generously sent over the 1983 data for further analysis. Thanks also go to Jennifer Smith, Robert Lawson, the anonymous reviewers and audiences at UKLVC 8, Sociolinguistics Symposium 19 and the Regional Varieties, Language Shift and Language Identities conference for helpful comments and suggestions, and to Beth Cole for the preliminary analysis of the data. Finally thanks to the many children in Shetland who completed the questionnaires.

¹ And this fellow was standing on the pier and I was there, and we were helping them ashore and they were coming with their bits and pieces and he seem to have nothing, like and I pointed to these boys' case and sort of-, kind of motioned that like where was all his stuff and he kind of looked and then he beamed from ear to ear and he trifled in his pocket and he came out with a toothbrush and he held this toothbrush up with a big smile and put it back in his pocket. And I thought 'yeah, well, poor soul, you're- you're here, you're alive, so likely a toothbrush to you is the best thing'. He had managed to salvage it before he jumped like.

² The website associated with the society is: <http://www.shetlanddialect.org.uk/>

³ Soothmoother (= Southmouther) is the, sometimes derogatory, name given to people who are not from the Shetland Islands.

⁴ Allowing for a few updates where relevant.

⁵ About half the population of the Shetland Islands lives within 10 km of Lerwick.

⁶ Thank you to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out to me that the hostel was at the school rather than more generally in town.

⁷ In fact, some of these schools are currently under threat of closure due to low numbers of students. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-19606514>

⁸ While the overall analysis did find some differences with respect to responses across the schools, they were not relevant for the questions examined here and all six schools will be presented together throughout.

⁹ A few referred to Sweden in their comments (I love/hate Abba, I love Volvo), no doubt because the heading of the questionnaire showed that the research was based at Stockholm University.

¹⁰ As mentioned, this was a new question, however, none of the responses to any of the questions in the 1983 questionnaire showed anything along these lines.

¹¹ NB: All spelling kept as in original.

¹² This is the phrasing of the original 1983 questionnaire.

¹³ Although not used in the questionnaire, the local use of the term would have been known by most children.

¹⁴ In any case, overwhelmingly, children with local roots, on their mother or father's side, or both, were also born on the Islands.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this analysis a single parent born in Shetland was sufficient to be counted as Shetland origin, as children could have been expected to have other local relatives.

¹⁶ For the tables these will be referred to as Shetland heritage, Shetland born and Outside Shetland

¹⁷ The apparent increase in Shetland origin children selecting option a) is most likely due to low Ns in 1983 rather than an actual change in use.

¹⁸ This is the phrasing of the original question. From other questions it is clear that this can be taken to mean Scottish Standard English or Standard British English.

References

- Anderson, Vicki (2011). Bidialectalism in intense language variety contact: An ‘unexpected’ development in the death of Pennsylvania Dutchified English. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University.
- Bailey, Guy (2002). Real time and apparent time. In J. K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill and Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds.), *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, 312-332. Oxford: Blackwell. .
- Barnes, Michael (1998). *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland*. Lerwick, U.K.: Shetland Times.
- Beal, Joan (2009). Enregisterment, commodification and historical context: ‘Geordie’ versus ‘Sheffieldish’. *American Speech*, 84 (2): 138-156.
- Buchstaller, Isabelle (2006). Social stereotypes, personality traits and regional perception displaced: Attitudes towards the ‘new’ quotatives in the U.K. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10 (3): 362-381.
- Butler, Neil (2011). *The Roost*. Argyll: Thirsty Books.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn (2009). The nature of sociolinguistic perception. *Language Variation and Change*, 21 (1): 135-156.
- Coupland, Nikolas and Bishop, Hywel (2007). Ideologised values for British accents. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 11 (1): 74-93.
- Dorian, Nancy (1994). Varieties of variation in a very small place: Social homogeneity, prestige norms and linguistic variation. *Language*, 70 (4): 631-696.
- Eckert, Penelope (1997). Age as a sociolinguistic variable. In Florian Coulmas (ed.), *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, 151-167. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, Peter (2010). *Attitudes to Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnstone, Barbara (2009). Pittsburghese shirts: Commodification and the

enregisterment of an urban dialect. *American Speech*, 84 (2): 157-175.

Kerswill, Paul and Williams, Ann (2002). Dialect recognition and speech community focusing in new and old towns in England: The effects of dialect levelling, demography and social networks. In Daniel Long and Dennis Preston (eds.), *A Handbook of Perceptual Dialectology*, 178-207. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Knooihuizen, Remco (2005). The Norn-to-Scots language shift: Another look at socio-historical evidence. *Northern Studies*, 39: 105-117.

Labov, William, Sharon Ash, Maya Ravindranath, Tracey Weldon, Maciej Baranowski and Naomi Nagy (2011). Properties of the sociolinguistic monitor. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 15 (4): 431-463.

Lippi-Green, Rosina (2011). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge.

Melchers, Gunnel (1985). 'Knappin', 'Proper English', 'Modified Scottish' – Some Language Attitudes in the Shetland Isles. In Manfred Görlach (ed.), *Focus On: Scotland*. 87-100. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Melchers, Gunnel (2004a). English spoken in Orkney and Shetland: Phonology. In Bernd Kortmann and Edgar Schneider (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Vol. 1 Phonology*, 35-46. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Melchers, Gunnel (2004b). English spoken in Orkney and Shetland: Morphology, syntax and lexicon. In Bernd Kortmann and Edgar Schneider (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English, Vol. 2 Morphology and Syntax*, 34-47. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Melchers, Gunnel and Sundkvist, Peter (2010). Shetland and Orkney. In Daniel Schreier, Peter Trudgill, Edgar Schneider and Jeffrey Williams (eds.), *The Lesser-Known Varieties of English*, 17-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Millar, Robert McColl (2007). *Northern and Insular Scots*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Milroy, Lesley and Milroy, James (1992). Social network and social class: Toward and integrated sociolinguistic model. *Language in Society*, 21 (1): 1-26.
- Payne, Arvilla (1980). Factors controlling the acquisition of the Philadelphia dialect by out-of-state children. In William Labov (ed.), *Locating Language in Time and Space*, 143-178. New York: Academic Press.
- Smith, Jennifer (2007-2009). Obsolescence vs. stability in a Shetland dialect: Evidence from three generations of speakers. ESRC grant number RES-000-22-2052.
- Smith, Jennifer and Durham, Mercedes (2011). A tipping point in dialect obsolescence? Change across the generations in Lerwick, Shetland. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 15 (2): 197-225.
- Smith, Jennifer and Durham, Mercedes (2012). Bidialectalism or dialect death? Explaining generational change in the Shetland Islands, Scotland. *American Speech*, 87 (1): 57-83.
- Sundkvist, Peter (2011). 'Standard English' as spoken in Shetland's capital. *World Englishes*, 30 (2): 166-181.
- Tait, John (2001). What is Shetlandic? *Lallans*, 58: 7-16.
- Trudgill, Peter (1972). Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich. *Language in Society*, 1 (2): 179-195.
- Trudgill, Peter (1986). *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- van Leyden, Klaske (2004). Prosodic characteristics of Orkney and Shetland dialects: An experimental approach. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Leiden, Germany: Leiden University.