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Changing domains of dialect use: A real-time study of Shetland schoolchildren

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Abstract

This paper considers the degree to which large-scale shifts in dialect use can be correlated with changes in domains of use. This is done by examining over 850 attitudinal questionnaires completed by Shetland schoolchildren in 1983 and in 2010. The longitudinal perspective is especially valuable here as there has been a widespread move away from the dialect in Shetland by the youngest generations in recent times. Comparing the data from the two periods makes it possible to examine the extent to which the dialect is concretely being used less and in what domains in particular this shift has taken place, but also whether the dialect is in fact more acceptable (even if not always used) in a wider range of domains than it was previously.

1. Introduction

1.1 Dialect levelling and shifting domains of use

Increased geographical and social mobility at the end of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first century, as well as an ever growing sense of connectedness due to recent technological advances, have had wide-reaching consequences on regional and local language varieties. In the United Kingdom, for example, numerous regional dialect features are said to be giving way to supralocal forms and in some cases the dialects themselves are falling out of favour in the use of young speakers who prefer to use forms that index a more generally British youth identity (Britain 2005, 2009; Foulkes & Docherty 1999). Similar processes are underway in various parts of Europe (e.g. Auer, Hinskens & Kerswill 2005; Pharao et al. 2014) and numerous studies have examined the processes of dialect levelling to uncover how informal local forms lose out to more formal Standard forms and to informal supralocal forms.

What has not been examined in as much detail, in the United Kingdom at least, is what happens in cases where speakers were not simply on a continuum of local-supralocal or informal-formal varieties, but were in fact bidialectal, i.e. users of two distinct dialects, and were known to use them in different domains and with different people (making it a

partly diglossic situation). Although it has been shown that relic dialects are more resistant to outside influence in some situations (Smith 2000, Tagliamonte 2012), it is nonetheless useful to examine domains in which a local variety (with the associated phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical features) is shifting towards Standard use. Strictly speaking, the situation in Shetland is closer to dialect shift than to dialect levelling, but the processes are likely to be related.

Focussing on a bidialectal situation where the two varieties are further apart may make it possible to pinpoint more clearly in what contexts the shift towards the non-local forms occurs first. Situations that are bidialectal (or diglossic) are substantially different from those in which speakers could be said to be in a stylistic continuum between the local dialect and the Standard (Ferguson 1959, Gal 1978). As will be discussed more fully in 1.3, the Shetland Islands' almost unique language situation within the UK makes it an ideal place to examine the interplay of dialect shift and bidialectalism because previous research on the Islands has already demonstrated that speakers are bidialectal (Melchers 1985, Smith and Durham 2012) and that a shift towards Standard English is underway (Smith and Durham 2011, Durham 2013, Sundkvist 2011, van Leyden 2004).

Another aspect which research on dialect levelling cannot often examine is the diachronic perspective: using the precepts of apparent time studies, older speakers can be taken to reflect the state of language use in an earlier period (Bailey 2002). However, this may not be fully appropriate in cases where speakers use two distinct varieties: speakers may be more easily able to shift their 'preferences' about which of two varieties to use in a given context, than to shift their use of a single variety along a continuum. This study attempts to mitigate this issue by using a longitudinal perspective and by examining the same community at two points in time.

1.2 Shetland

The Shetland Islands are the northernmost part of the United Kingdom (see figure 1), at equidistance from Aberdeen and Bergen. Although they were for a long time linguistically and to some extent culturally distinct from mainland Scotland, the discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1970s led to increased contact with the rest of the United Kingdom and to an influx of incomers to the Islands.



Figure 1: Map of the United Kingdom with the Shetland Islands highlighted (Google 2015)

Some of this contact was transient, with oil workers coming to work on the Islands (or offshore) for weeks at a time and returning home, but an examination of demography changes within the school population over nearly 30 years (Durham 2014:307) demonstrated that the number of children born on the Islands to non-locals had increased from 4% in 1983 to 14% in 2010 (this will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3). This underlines the extent of contact with people from outside of Shetland since the late 1970s in general, but more importantly for the present discussion, the extent of linguistic contact as well.

1.3 Shetland dialect

Traditionally, the local Shetland dialect¹ is said to be one of the most distinctive varieties of English spoken in the United Kingdom (Millar 2007, Melchers 2004a, 2004b, Melchers and Sundkvist 2010)². It shares a number of features with North-East Scots and other insular Scots varieties, but its cultural and linguistic history means that a number of Scandinavian influences are present in the dialect as well (Barnes 1998, Knooihuizen 2005, Robertson and Graham 1991, van Leyden 2004). Extract 1 between a younger and an older local speaker (from Smith 2007-2009) provides a flavour of the dialect:

Extract 1³

¹ There are a number of related dialects spoken on the Islands, but for the purposes of the present chapter they are discussed as a single variety.

² See Corbett, McClure & Stuart-Smith 2003 and Macafee 2004 for discussions about the extent to which varieties of Scots can be considered to be dialects of British English.

³ Gloss:

Interviewer – And what about you and the dialect, do you always speak it at home, you and your mum?

[Interviewer] And what about dee and de dialect, do you aye speak it at home, dee and dy mam?

[Joanna] Yeah, yeah. And wi' me pals, dey were sayin' about me and Valerie, she's just- me and her's just likely the broadest ains oot of the lot of wis. Cos my other pals, dey bide in Ler'ick and their mother and father is fae Shetland but dey just dinna hae de accent at all. [...]

[Interviewer] Well, does du fin' dat sometimes it's difficult to translate a Shetland- a dialect word into English?

[Joanna] [...] I notice a few- some words dey dinna ken and it takes me a start to ... try and think 'Noo what is yon?' Just de peeriest words dat you think's just nothin' and dey're- dey hae nae idea what you're speaking about.

Although the extract shows a young speaker using the dialect, this is not the case of all younger speakers nowadays and to fully understand the way the dialect is spoken in Shetland now and in the past, two interlinked factors need to be discussed further: first of all, the situation of bidialectalism (and possible diglossia) mentioned above and secondly the move away from the dialect by young speakers in Shetland.

The use of a more Standard variety alongside the dialect is not a new situation on the Islands: practically all the speakers of the Shetland dialect would use a more standardized variety in some domains (primarily with outsiders who do not speak the dialect). In fact, Shetlanders have a specific term for this practice: *to knap* (Melchers 1985, 1999). The Shetland Dictionary (Graham 2004:45) glosses it as "to speak with affectation, especially Shetlander trying to speak 'proper' English", which underlines that it is not necessarily viewed in a favourable light, but in practice, as noted by Melchers (1999:333), "it may simply signal a neutral comment on the use of the standard variety in certain contexts, especially in showing politeness to outsiders". Although speakers often call the variety they switch to when they knap *English*⁴, it is more precisely a form of Scottish Standard English (SSE) with some local features retained (Sundkvist 2011). In practice, this means that Shetland dialect speakers are all bidialectal and can use both varieties, but in different situations (see Anderson 2011 and Smith & Durham 2012 for a further discussion of bidialectalism). This could be compared to a diglossic situation, particularly because formal situations, such as school, are domains where SSE would be expected, but the tradition of

Joanna – Yeah, yeah. And with my friends, they were saying about me and Valerie, she's just – me and her are just likely the broadest ones out of the lot of us. Cos my other pals, they live in Lerwick and their mother and father are from Shetland, but they just don't have the accent at all.

Interviewer – well, do you find that sometimes it's difficult to translate a Shetland- a dialect word into English?

Joanna – I notice a few- some words they don't know and it takes me a while to... try and think 'Now, what is that?'. Just the littlest words that you think are just nothing and they're- they have no idea what you're speaking about.

⁴ As is clear in the questionnaire responses discussed below.

writing in dialect and a partial acceptance of its use in some aspects of school, mean that it is not completely so (Ferguson 1959).

Alongside this, another factor is affecting the dialect: its use is said to be fading in the youngest generation of speakers (Tait 2001, van Leyden 2004) which means that they are no longer bidialectal, but solely SSE speakers. The situation is slightly more complicated than this: Smith and Durham (2011) found that while not all the youngest generation had stopped using the dialect, the extreme degree of interspeaker variability in its use did point towards future obsolescence of the dialect, as had been found by Dorian (1994) in her research on Scottish Gaelic.

Research by Smith and Durham (2012) confirmed that the increase of Scottish Standard English contributed to a shift away from bidialectalism for some speakers. To verify this, they recorded the young speakers from their previous research with different interviewers. Those who had used the dialect in the first interview (with a local, but older, speaker) were reinterviewed by a non-local (to see to what extent they shifted towards a standardized form) whereas those who did not use the dialect in the first interview were reinterviewed with a friend from Shetland and by a dialect speaker of their own age (to establish whether this might be a more natural dialect situation for them). While the speakers who used dialect in the first interview were clearly bidialectal and able to use both the local dialect and a SSE, the others only had SSE even when speaking to Shetland dialect users of their own age, underlining that they no longer had the dialect in their productive repertoire. Many of course would have some receptive competence, but as extract one demonstrated this is not necessarily the case.

Because the research by Smith and Durham was conducted at a point when the shift was already well underway, the above findings cannot shed light on when exactly the shift away from the dialect for some speakers began to take place and which traditional domains of the dialect it might have happened in at the start.

1.4 Current aims

The present chapter will attempt to address this by establishing which domains the shift from dialect to SSE took place in first. It will do this by examining schoolchildren's reported use of the Shetland dialect in 1983 and 2010 across a range of different contexts. This will enable me to establish more precisely which domains might be particularly sensitive to shifts from the local variety to a Standard one and which ones are more resistant. It would be expected that the domains showing the most change across the two time periods will be those that are the most susceptible to dialect shift, whereas those where SSE was common already will not show as great a shift.

As well as the schoolchildren's reported use, the analysis will also examine the shift in perceptions about when it is and is not appropriate to use the local over the Standard and

vice versa. Although this will not focus solely on domains, the broader examination of children's views of appropriateness can also provide clues in terms of how the use of the dialect might have shifted and might be shifting.

2. Data

2.1 Real time study

The analysis in this chapter is based on material from a real-time study of Shetland school children (see Durham 2014 for further details). The material comprises questionnaires collected at two points in time (1983 and 2010) asking children aged 13-16 about their attitudes and reported use of the dialect. The 1983 questionnaires were collected by Professor Gunnel Melchers at Anderson High School⁵ in Lerwick as part of a broader study of the Shetland dialect (see Melchers 1985). Out of an original 350, 348 paper questionnaires remain and have been analysed in this chapter. The 2010 material was collected via an online questionnaire across the six schools on the Islands that now have facilities for senior secondary students. The questions in the 2010 online questionnaire are identical to the 1983 ones to allow for a direct comparison between them⁶. There were 484 responses spread across the six schools (see table 1).

Table 1: Distribution across schools of the 2010 questionnaires

School	Number of questionnaires
Anderson High School	297 (62%)
Brae	99
Aith	49
Whalsay	29
Yell	5
Baltasound	5
Total	484

The disparity in the number of responses between the schools is due, not to poor response rates, but rather simply to the fact that some of the schools have very few students in the classes polled. The distribution is nonetheless important, because, while Anderson High School is in Lerwick, which is thought to be more affected by possible dialect shift than smaller communities, some of the other schools are in places where the dialect is thought to be still used more robustly. Whalsay, for example, is held by nearly all in the Islands to have a different and stronger dialect than the other parts.

⁵ At the time this was the only school on the Islands which catered to senior secondary students. This means that students from other parts of Shetland had to commute to Lerwick or stay in town during the week.

⁶ One question about the written use of the dialect was updated to include texting, e-mailing and use on social media, but otherwise the questions are the same in 1983.

The responses from the children in 1983 will be compared to those in 2010 in order to establish the extent to which the shift away from the dialect is apparent in their reported use and to see which domains have been most affected.

2.2 Questionnaire

The entire questionnaire covered a range of linguistic topics, although the main focus was on what varieties the students used and what situations they used them in. For the purposes of this chapter, the emphasis will be on three subsets of questions examining specific domains of use and the appropriateness of dialect and Standard use in general.

The question sets examined are as follows:

- A. What do you speak? (in section 3.2)
- B. How would you speak to a) your parents b) your friends (from Shetland) c) your English friends d) during group work e) your headmaster (asking for a week's holiday) f) giving a talk to the whole class g) a tourist h) at a job interview in Lerwick? (in section 3.3)
- C. Are there situations when it is not proper to speak the dialect? Are there situations when it is not proper to speak the Standard? (with the option to expand the answers to list specific situations) (in sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively)

Set A, which comprises a single question, will help gauge the extent to which the children see themselves as dialect speakers.

Set B, which asks about 8 different domains, will make it possible to examine language choices with respect to two dimensions: one focussing particularly on the level of acquaintance and one on the level of formality. The division is partly to do with best presenting the results within the chapter, but also because these groupings are in line with the reasons Shetlanders have given to use or not use the dialect.

For the level of acquaintance, it could be assumed that the likelihood of dialect use was strongest in cases where students knew the interlocutors well and shared a local background, whereas those cases where students knew the interlocutors less and/or did not share a local background could be assumed to have a higher likelihood of non-dialect use. For level of formality, the likelihood of dialect use is stronger in more casual situations. I have broken the 8 domains into these two dimensions.

For level of acquaintance, the hierarchy from highest level of acquaintance and shared background to lowest level would be expected to be:

Your friends from Shetland > Your parents > Your English friends > A tourist

For level of formality, the hierarchy from most casual situation to most formal would be expected to be:

group work > talk in class > your headmaster > job interview in Lerwick

It is worth noting that the three latter contexts are all on the formal side of the scale. However, a job interview can be expected to be more formal than asking the headmaster for a week's holiday and a talk in class, while there will be a degree of attention to speech, is not as likely to trigger *knapping* as much as the other two contexts for speakers who use the dialect regularly.

Finally, set C focusses on the more general acceptability of the dialect (and the Standard). The analysis of these responses will establish, first of all, the extent to which some domains were seen to be dialect or standard specific and, secondly, whether this view has shifted from 1983 to 2010.

3. Analysis

3.1 Overall points

Before embarking on the analysis proper, it is important to discuss the ways in which the children should be grouped: not all the children are local to the Islands and as such would not necessarily be dialect speakers. The non-local children can nonetheless also provide an idea of how the perception and use of the dialect has shifted through their attitudes, so they will also be considered in the analysis. It is important, however, to separate children with different backgrounds to see what differences there are.

Among the other questions, students were asked to give their place of birth, as well as their parents' place of birth. This was used to establish change in the school demographics over nearly 30 years. As detailed in Durham (2014), the children's origins can be grouped into three main categories:

- Shetland Heritage: Students who have at least one parent from the Islands and who grew up there
- Shetland Born: Students with neither parent from the Islands but who nevertheless grew up there
- Non-Shetland: Students with neither parent from the Islands and who have not spent the majority of their life on the Islands

The proportion of children across these categories has changed considerably from 1983 to 2010 (figure 2) and, as discussed in Durham (2014), the demographic change was undoubtedly one of the triggers in the shift away from bidialectalism to use of Scottish Standard English only for some speakers in Shetland⁷.

⁷ It is conceivable that some of the 1983 students might have had children who were surveyed in 2010; this is not possible to establish because the questionnaires were anonymous. It is also worth noting that any children of the 1983 Shetland born children would have counted as Shetland heritage in 2010.

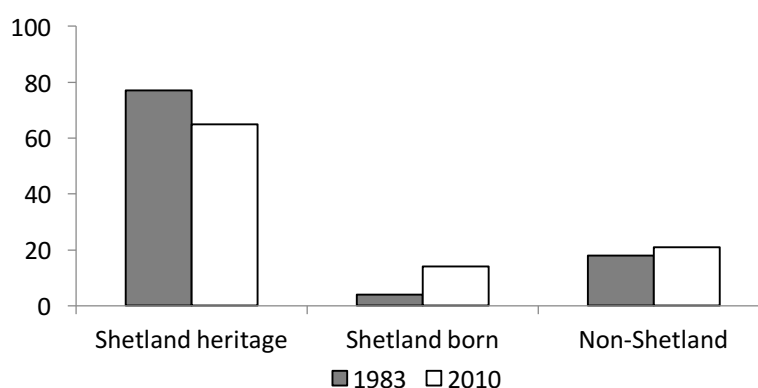


Figure 2: Distribution of children's origins in 1983 and 2010

The focus in this chapter is not to further discuss who triggered the change, but rather to look more closely at the process of shift by examining the extent to which the choice of domains of use in 1983 could be seen to demonstrate bidialectalism and possibly diglossia and to compare this to the way that students in 2010 see themselves choosing to use the dialect or not (if they in fact use the dialect at all). Nevertheless, it is important to consider how the three origin groups may view use differently.

It is worth noting that, as mentioned previously, the students in 2010 are not all at Anderson High School, but instead some attend schools at different parts of the Islands. The distribution of origin is important to consider in this respect as well and table 2, below, provides the breakdown of the origin responses by school (Yell and Baltasound are not considered because of their low number of responses).

Table 2: Percentage of children's origins by school (2010)

	Shetland origin %	Shetland born %	Non-Shetland %	Total N
Anderson	68	12	20	297
Whalsay	79	10	10	29
Brae	54	20	25	99
Aith	55	16	29	49
Overall (inc Yell and Baltasound)	65	14	21	484

Although not completely identical, the mix of students of various origins is roughly similar across the schools: Shetland origin students are always in the majority, even if the proportions of other students vary. What is perhaps interesting is the fact that Anderson High School is not the school with the most students who do not have Shetland heritage: both Aith and Brae have higher rates (compare 32% to 45%). Whalsay has the highest

proportion of Shetland origin students (79%) which is not completely surprising given that it is seen to be more isolated (one of the reasons that the dialect is thought to be more distinctive). Due to the partial similarity between the schools and due to the overall low numbers in some cases, the further analysis will not provide the results broken down by origin and by school as the results were not substantially different and because in most cases it was impossible to test whether the differences found were genuine or an effect of the token numbers. It is nevertheless worth mentioning that the perceived better preservation of the Whalsay dialect might be due to the fact that there are fewer incomers there and that these incomers are consequently more likely to adapt to the dialect in a way that people in the other areas are less likely to.

3.2 Question Set A: What do you speak?

The first question discussed here is the relatively straightforward “What do you speak?” and students were asked to select from five options:

- 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.

Although the responses are not completely geared towards examining the presence of diglossia or language shift, some of them point towards it: answer b clearly reflects a diglossic situation and answer c has elements of it (with mixing however). Although there is not a straightforward progression of Shetland dialect use from a) to e), it could be said that there is nonetheless a perceived shift from high use of the Shetland dialect to lesser use and this is what will be focussed on in the subsequent analysis. With respect to attitudes rather than reported use, the selection of the first two responses certainly signals a stronger feeling towards the dialect than the last two. It is also worth mentioning that the responses of a) are in some ways slightly unlikely to be a true representation of language use given that most people in Shetland are known to shift between Shetland and SSE as discussed above; nonetheless, the choice of that response demonstrates that some students strongly identify with the dialect. Responses c) and d) are difficult to distinguish in terms of how the dialect is used, but d) could be said to signal stronger likelihood of

non-dialect use, while c) is a somewhat intermediary response between dialect and English-use.

It is worth considering what is meant by the term *English* as it is used here. It is of course rather difficult to assess exactly what students meant when choosing to reply with the Shetland dialect or with English, but based on other responses in the questionnaire and discussions with Shetlanders for other projects, it is clear that English is the term used by many of the children to designate the Scottish Standard English variety they use on the Islands when not using the dialect.

Figure 3, below, presents the results in percentages separated by year and by origin. The bar graphs have been stacked as this allows to compare the rates of responses that favour and disfavour the use of the dialect together.

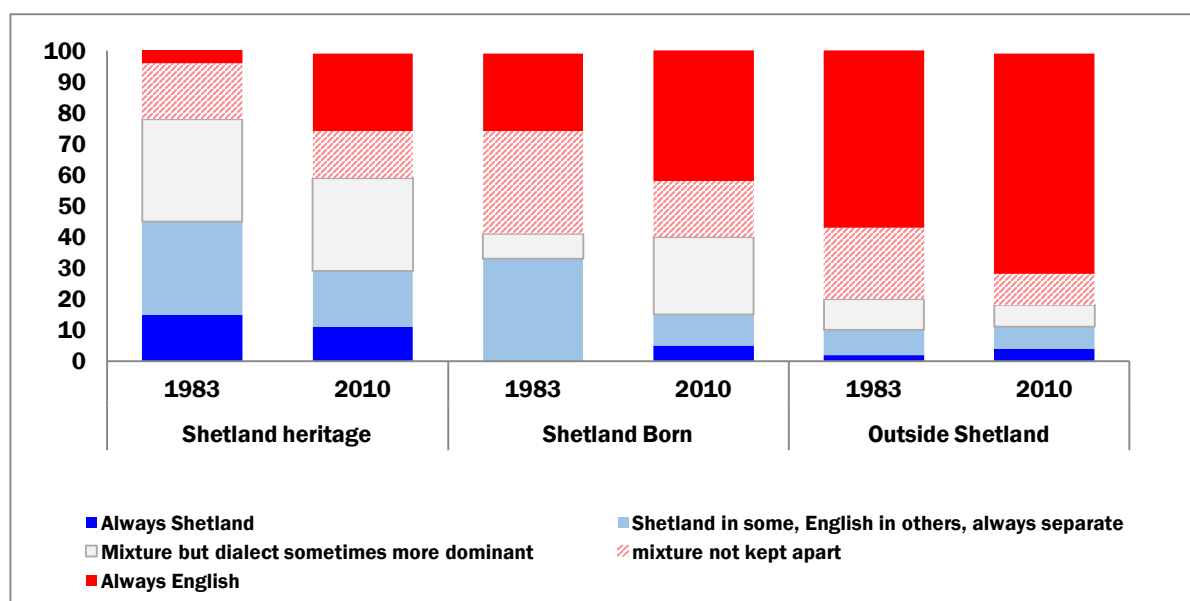


Figure 3: Percentage of answers to first question broken down by year and origin

Because the figure is relatively 'busy', the discussion will be broken down to first focus on what each of the three groups was doing in 1983 and then to examine how responses have shifted in 2010.

For 1983, there are clear divisions between the three origin groups⁸: the Shetland heritage children, as expected, claim to use the dialect far more than the other two groups. Very few in this group chose the Standard only option (5%) and the three answers which would tend to suggest a high use of the dialect or a favourable view of the dialect represent nearly 80% of the overall responses. The Shetland born children use a considerable amount of the dialect and 33% report using both varieties in in different contexts, but a fair

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all differences across origin and across year groups were tested using a chi-square test or a Fischer's exact test.

proportion report they use only the Standard (25%) or a mixture of the two varieties. Finally, the non-Shetland children predominantly report that they use the Standard: a full 57%. Those that use the dialect mainly or exclusively represent only 10%.

It could be said that the 1983 data represents three different ways of language use on the Islands: the heritage children use mainly the dialect, the newcomers use mainly the Standard and the Shetland born children represent the midpoint between the other two groups. While not all Shetland born children report they use the dialect, it is still an option that is frequent enough to demonstrate that it is relatively natural for Shetland born children to become dialect speakers.

The picture is very different in 2010, where the Shetland born children pattern much more similarly to the non-Shetland children, albeit with a slightly higher use of the dialect. The rates of English use have gone up across the groups ranging from 25% for the Shetland heritage children to 71% for the non-Shetland children. As discussed in Durham (2014), this underlines the extent to which the past 30 years has seen a shift in language use in Shetland: the dialect, while still used, is clearly not the default for all local children and some of them have completely shifted towards the Standard. Because there has been an increase in children who have no familial ties to the Islands and these children are now less likely to report using the dialect, the shift away from the dialect for the local children may be partly due to these children speaking to outsiders more often (as the school demography has shifted).

Interestingly, although the rate of reported English use has increased considerably in the Shetland heritage children, the choice of the 'Shetland always' option has only gone down slightly. The main shift here is in children choosing option b). This may signal a change in the domains of use of the dialect as this is the answer which most closely reflects that.

The next questions, although they also are divided into various categories of dialect use and non-use, can help provide further insight into what the true situation was in terms of language choice across domains: even if we cannot know exactly what students meant when choosing one response over another, we can certainly examine how their responses shift in situations of varying formality and acquaintance. Shifts in use here will signal differing use across domains.

3.3 Domains

While the possible responses for this set of questions are similar to the first one, they are not completely identical. Here the transition from more (or all) dialect to English is much clearer, with children choosing from:

- Shetland dialect
- More dialect than English
- A mixture of Shetland dialect and English

- More English than dialect
- English

Note that the phrasing of the answers here means that, unlike the previous question, there is a genuine cline of use from full Shetland dialect use to Standard use, with each point in between showing more or less use of the dialect.

For ease of discussion, the presentation of the responses will be broken down as follows:

- Each of the origin groups will be presented in turn, comparing the data from 1983 to that of 2010.
- The domains will be divided into two categories: those linked to level of acquaintance and those linked to level of formality.

Each figure will be discussed on its own, with an overall discussion following the presentation of all the figures. Figure 4, 5 and 6 below present the results for three sets of children with respect to level of acquaintance.

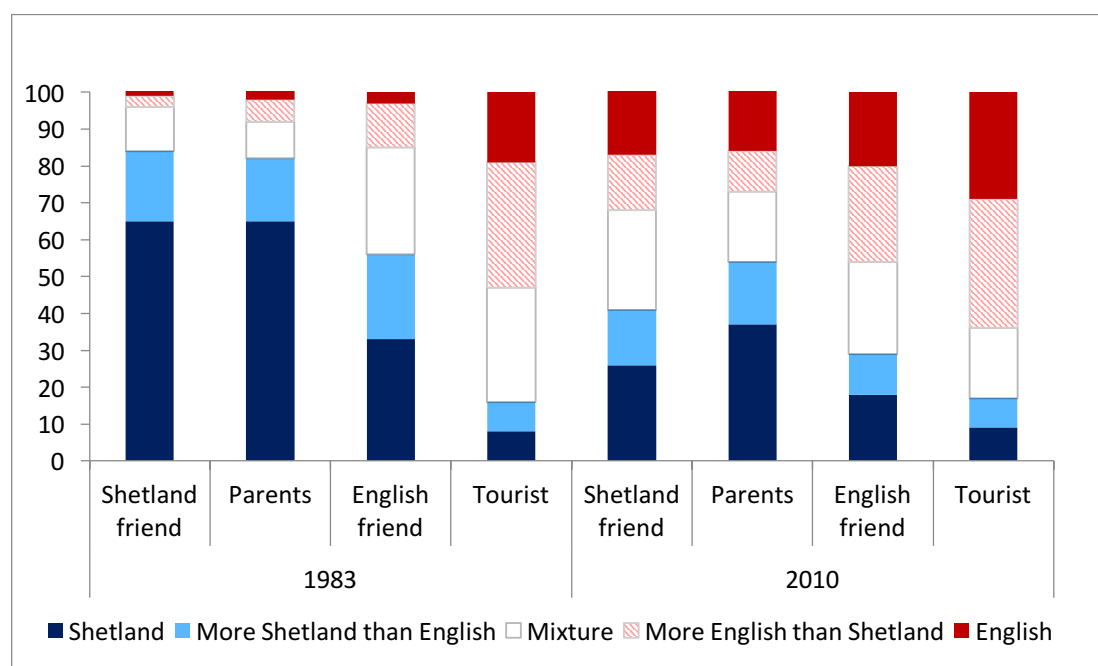


Figure 4: Shetland heritage children's rates of use according to level of acquaintance

In 1983, the Shetland heritage children show a very clear difference between the two domains where they are speaking with others who use the dialect and the two domains where their interlocutors would not be expected to speak, or understand, the dialect. There is almost no difference between the use with Shetland friends and with parents. The responses for use with an English friend still comprise a high use of the dialect with 56% using either just or mainly the dialect, but considerably lower than the first two categories.

The final domain in 1983 underlines the extent to which students modulate their language use according to the speaker: most of them would not use the dialect with a tourist.

The situation is quite different for the 2010 heritage children: while there is still a difference between the two local domains and the other two, it is not as sharply divided. The rates of English (and more English than dialect) have increased in every single domain and the difference in use between the Shetland friends and the English friends is less marked than it was previously, which may signal that the friend's origin is not a factor in the choice to use the dialect or not. This means that the change from 1983 and 2010 can be seen most clearly in the domains where use was highest originally: with Shetland friends and with parents. Although half of the children would use just the dialect or a mixture with more Shetland than English in 2010, this is much lower than in 1983 where these represented 85% of use in both contexts. The language choices with the tourist have hardly shifted at all: as in 1983 this is a context of English rather than Shetland use.

This underlines that the shift from Shetland dialect to a broader use of English is taking place in the key domains where the dialect once had a stronghold: it is not merely that children are speaking more often to people who do not use the dialect, but that they are using the dialect less also with traditional dialect users.

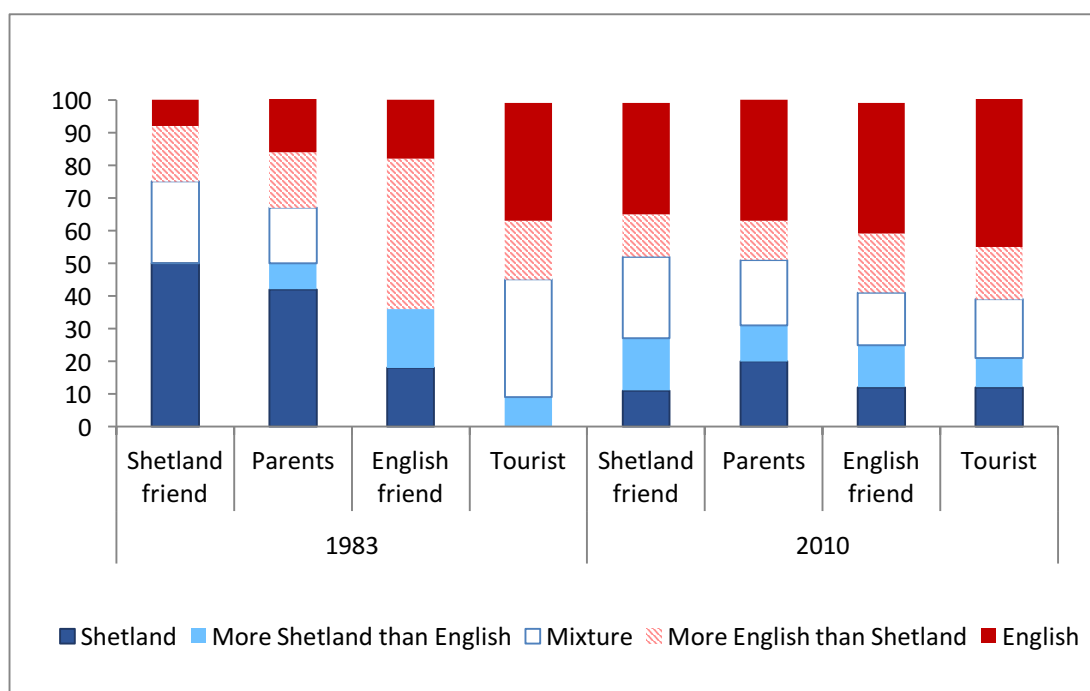


Figure 5 Shetland born children's rates of use according to level of acquaintance

For the discussion of the 1983 Shetland origin children, it is important to remember that the number of students in this group is in fact quite low (14 responses) and that some of the apparent effects are due to this rather than to actual differences. Nonetheless, it is clear from the 1983 data that their use of the dialect was similar to the Shetland heritage children with respect to the domains they used it in even if their rates are all substantially

lower. The dialect is acceptable with Shetland friends and with parents, but not so much so with English friends and tourists.

From 1983 to 2010, the degree of shift towards the Standard for the Shetland origin children is similar to the Shetland heritage children. However, an important difference is the almost non-differentiation between the four domains in 2010. While English is the main choice across the four domains, what is most striking is how similar the rates are across the local and non-local domains. The Shetland origin children in 2010 no longer tailor their language according to domain. This was not the case in 1983, where it is clear that in the context of talking with Shetland dialect users (i.e. Shetland friends) many of the children would have used the dialect themselves. The results show that these children would also have used the dialect with their parents in 1983: this is revealing as these are parents who were not from the Islands. It is possible that in 1983 the strong dialect use on the island would have meant that those who settled – old and young – found it necessary or useful to use the dialect in casual situations.

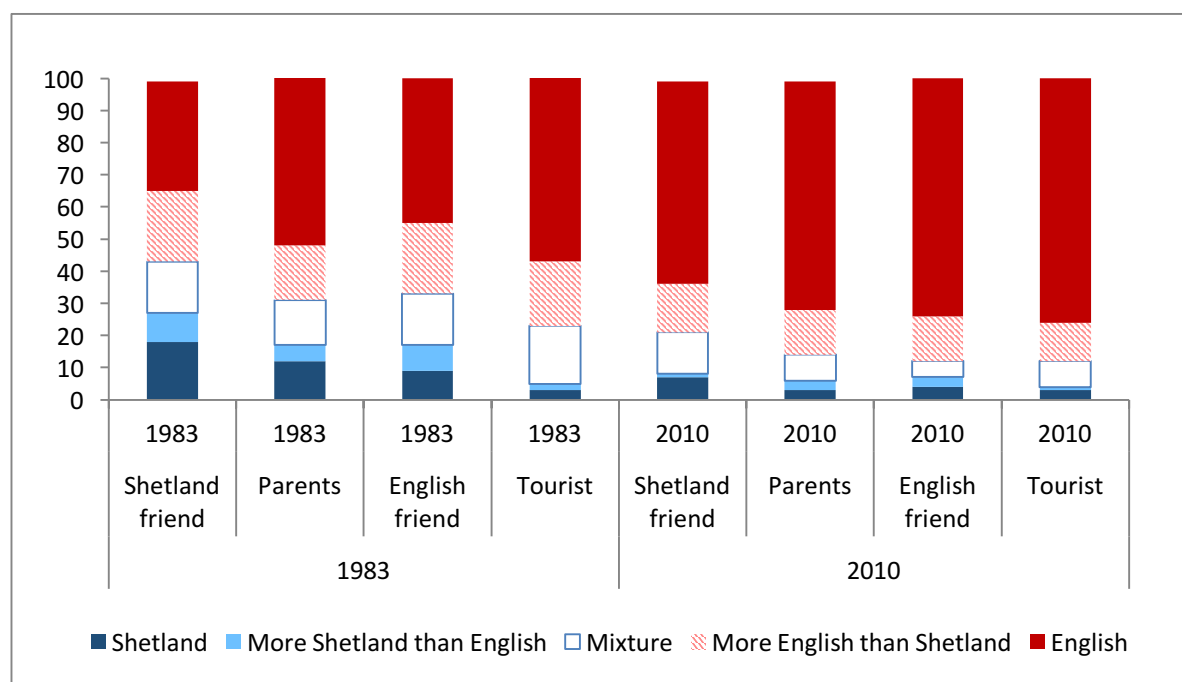


Figure 6: Non-Shetland children's rates of use according to level of acquaintance

The linguistic choices of the outside children are seemingly not related to level of acquaintance in 1983 or in 2010: although there are slight differences according to domain, none of these are statistically significant⁹. The rates of Shetland dialect use are substantially lower in the more local domains than for the other students in 1983 and also in 2010.

The results for level of formality need to be considered alongside the local and non-local domains as the former represent the domains where the dialect would be expected to

⁹ The values for 'Shetland' and 'More Shetland than English' were combined to analyse this in both sets as the numbers were too low for a chi square test otherwise.

be used less. Language use in the classroom is however an interesting case, as it is the one situation where the analysis of the questionnaires revealed that children in 2010 feel that it is more acceptable to use the dialect than it was in the past. This means there may be a difference between group work which is relatively informal and giving a talk in front of the class which would be more formal. Figures 7, 8 and 9 present the data for the Shetland heritage, Shetland born, and non-Shetlanders respectively.

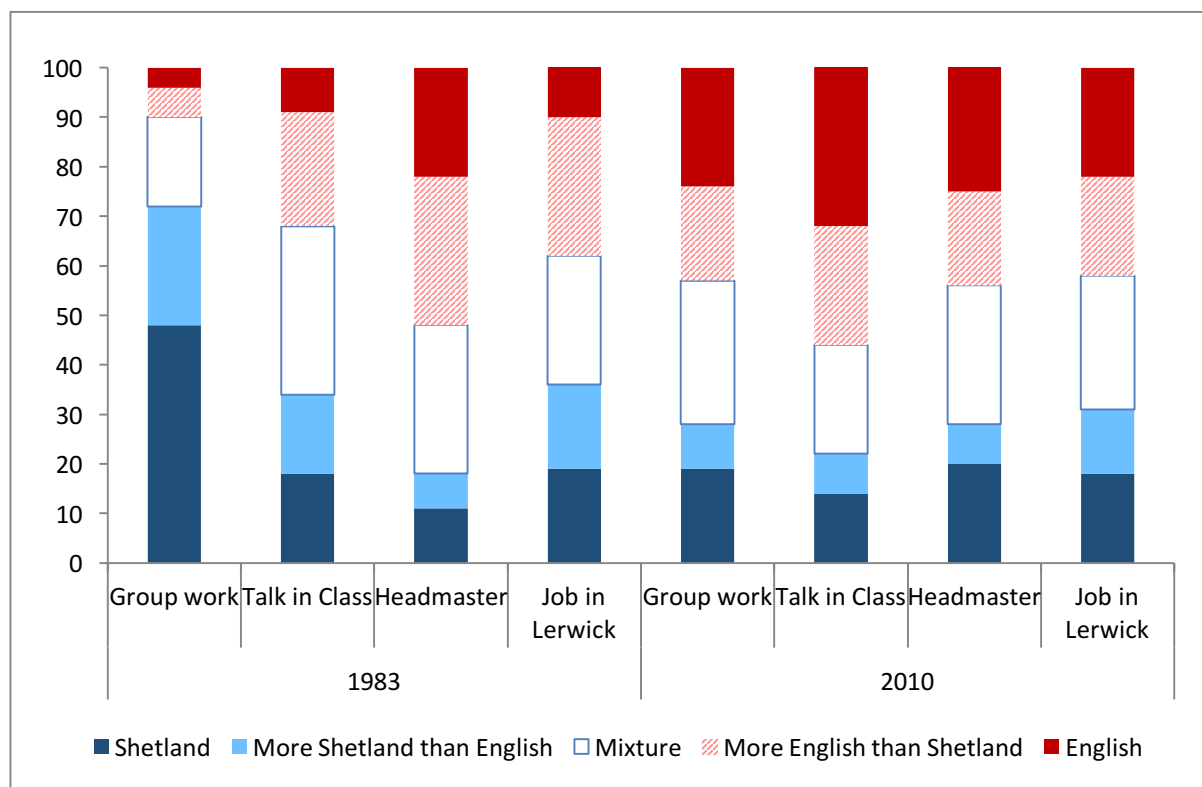


Figure 7: Shetland heritage children’s rates of use according to level of formality

The 1983 data shows that there is a difference across the domains in terms of formality: group work in class has much higher uses of the Shetland dialect than the other domains. The use of dialect is still considerable throughout, but it is clear that the two most formal situations do trigger more English use. Interestingly, speaking to the headmaster triggers higher rates of only English than the job interview. In 2010, the domains are not differentiated in the same way: English (along with the more English than Shetland option) is used at high rates across the board. One shift seems to be in the use of dialect with the headmaster; here the rate of dialect has gone up slightly. This is possibly due to a more relaxed approach towards the use of dialects in schools in the 21st century, but also because of possibly different attitudes of towards the dialect of the headmasters themselves (this was mentioned in during data collection of a previous project).

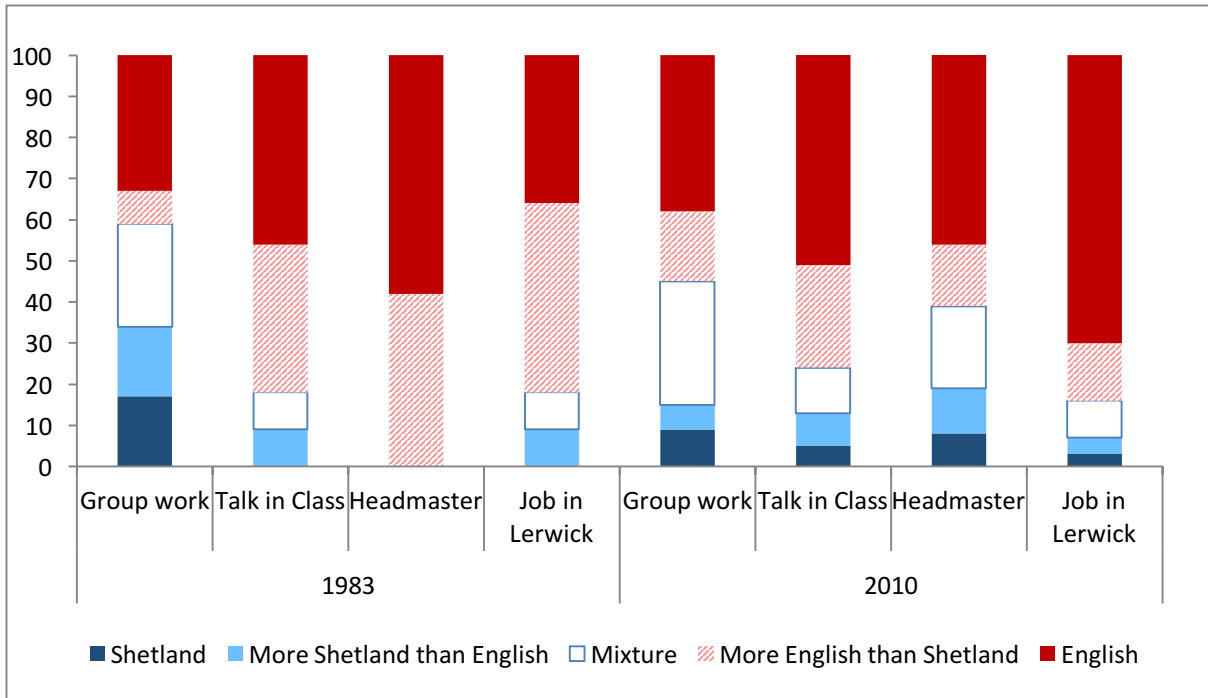


Figure 8: Shetland born children's rates of use according to level of formality

The reported use of Shetland born children is substantially different from that of the Shetland heritage children in 1983. Unlike the heritage children, the only context where some report using the dialect (or mostly dialect) is in group work. In all the other domains, the use of English or a mixture where English is dominant is the only option. The 2010 results appear to show a shift with respect to this, in that the rates of dialect use have gone up slightly in three of the domains (This may be due to low Ns for 1983). There is also a difference between group work and talking to the headmaster and the other two domains, in the sense that they have higher rates of Shetland use.

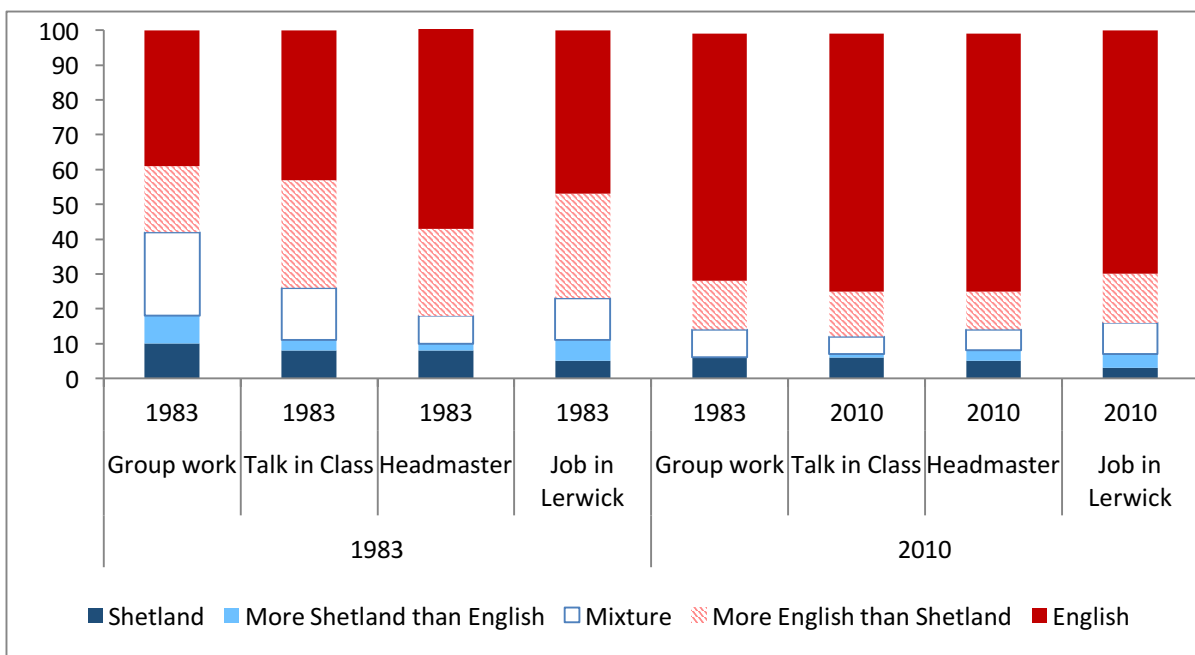


Figure 9: Non-Shetland children's rates of use according to the level of formality

The non-Shetland children have slightly higher rates of the dialect in 1983 than for the other categories, showing that there is a partial domain distinction, but their use of dialect is low overall. In 2010, the domain distinction is not as visible and the rates of the Shetland options have not increased.

Taken as a whole, these various results confirm previous findings about the direction of shift in Shetland and also the fact that children of different backgrounds are using language differently. As shown in table 3, they also offer clear suggestions in terms of how (and with whom) the dialect was used in the past and how this is shifting.

Table 3: Summary of key findings in terms of different domains of use

	Highest rate of Shetland + More Shetland responses	Highest rate of English + More English responses	Local non-local vs. split	Informal vs. formal split
1983				
Shetland heritage children	84 (Shetland friend)	53 (tourist)	Yes	Yes
Shetland origin children	50 (Shetland friend/parents)	100 (headmaster)	Yes	Yes
Non-Shetland origin children	27 (Shetland friend)	83 (headmaster)	No	No
2010				
Shetland heritage children	54 (Parents)	64 (tourist)	Yes	No
Shetland origin children	31 (Parents)	84 (interview in Lerwick)	No	No
Non-Shetland origin children	9 (Shetland friend)	88 (tourist)	No	No

In 1983, dialect use was clearly dictated both by level of acquaintance (and ability of the interlocutor to speak the dialect) and level of formality. This is exactly what would have been expected in a bidialectal situation such as the one found in Shetland. Between 1983 and 2010 however, as well as the dialect being used less overall, the way that it is used has shifted. While speakers are still more likely to use the dialect with others who are dialect speakers, the distinction with respect to the level of formality has been eroded. This may have to do with the lower use of the dialect overall, but it is nonetheless revealing in terms

of the way that specific domains become less important as the number of speakers who do not use the dialect increases.

To what extent are these findings backed up by the students' own reports about the 'appropriateness' of using the dialect and Standard English? Sections 3.4 and 3.5 examine this in more detail and make it possible to assess to what extent students' choices are dictated by what they see they should do.

3.4 Appropriateness of dialect use

Figure 10, below, examines students responses to the question focussing on whether there are situations in which it is not appropriate to use the dialect.

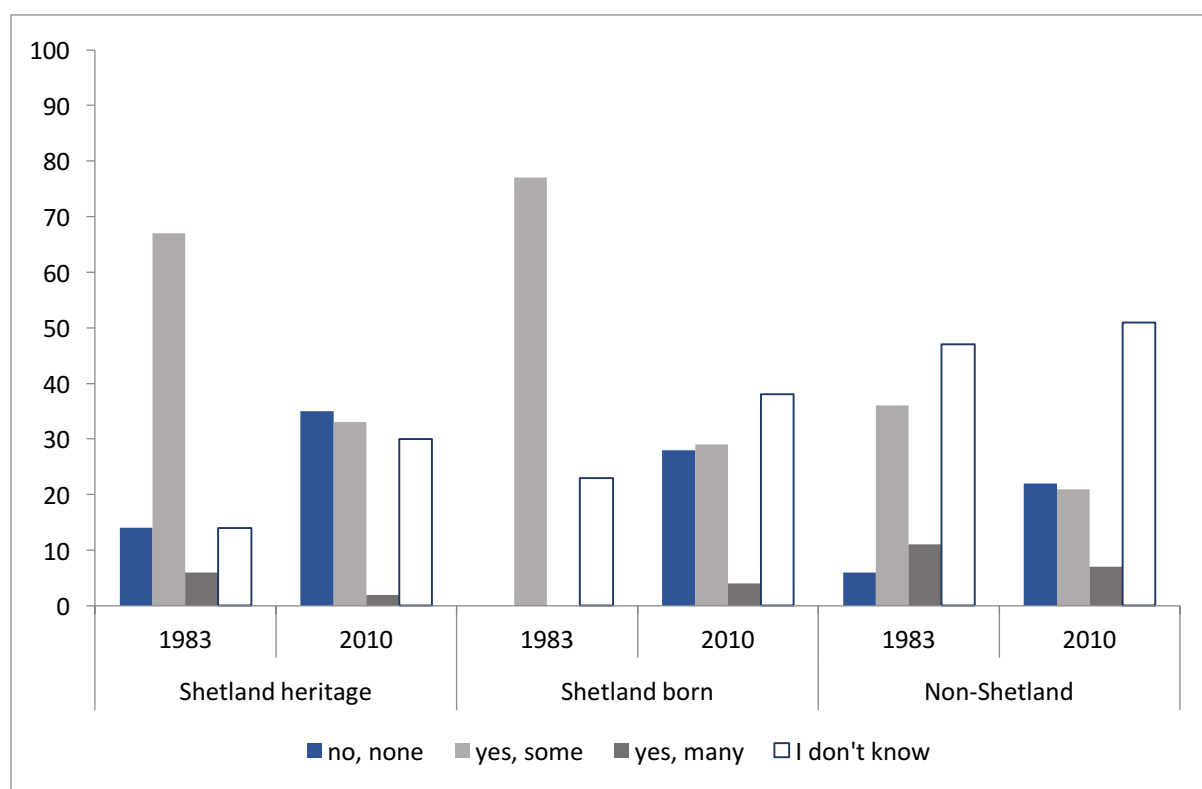


Figure 10: Students' reports on whether there are situations where it is not appropriate to use the dialect

Before turning to a discussion of the results, it is necessary for this question and for the results in figure 12, to underline the high rate of students who chose not to answer the question, simply ticking 'I don't know'. While this may be a genuine sentiment the children have, the fact that the highest rates of this response come from the non-Shetland children suggests that they may not feel comfortable dictating how the dialect should be used.

The most striking fact here, compared to the previous section is that the shift here is towards a greater acceptance of dialect use. In 1983, children were much more likely to consider that there were situations where the dialect would not be acceptable :73% for the

heritage children and 77% for the Shetland born ones (the Shetland outsiders are lower but this is because of their high rate of 'I don't know') and few felt that the dialect was fully acceptable in all situations. This contrasts with the 2010 results which shows a reversal in both of these responses. In 2010, 35% of the Shetland heritage children, 28% of the Shetland born ones and 22% of the non-Shetland children answered that there were no situations where the dialect would not be appropriate and conversely the responses that there are situations it is not acceptable went down in all the groups.

The changing responses can be accounted for in two ways, one related to the shift away from a diglossic situation and one related more closely towards children's attitudes and sense of the dialect. With respect to diglossia, the responses in 2010 underline that there is no longer a sense in most children that the dialect should be used in some situations and not in others. This matches the findings in 3.2. With respect to attitudes, the shifting responses can be interpreted in two ways. First of all, they demonstrate a greater acceptance of the dialect on the Islands (this is linked to the shift away from diglossia). Secondly, it may signal that what the students define as dialect is no longer the same as it was previously and they may be grouping the dialect with a locally inflected variety of Scottish Standard English.

The main cause of the shift can be clarified by examining the additional comments which students gave to this response. This was intended to allow them to provide examples of specific situations where they felt that the dialect would not be appropriate. 63% of the children in 1983 provided examples and 24% of the 2010 children did. The lower rate for the 2010 can be explained through the lower rate of yes responses: lower rates of non-acceptance means students will not have as many ready examples of situations it is not acceptable in. Figure 11 below provides their responses broken down into the main categories found. Note that the children here are all grouped together as the numbers and distribution made it impossible to ascertain whether there were in fact differences between them.

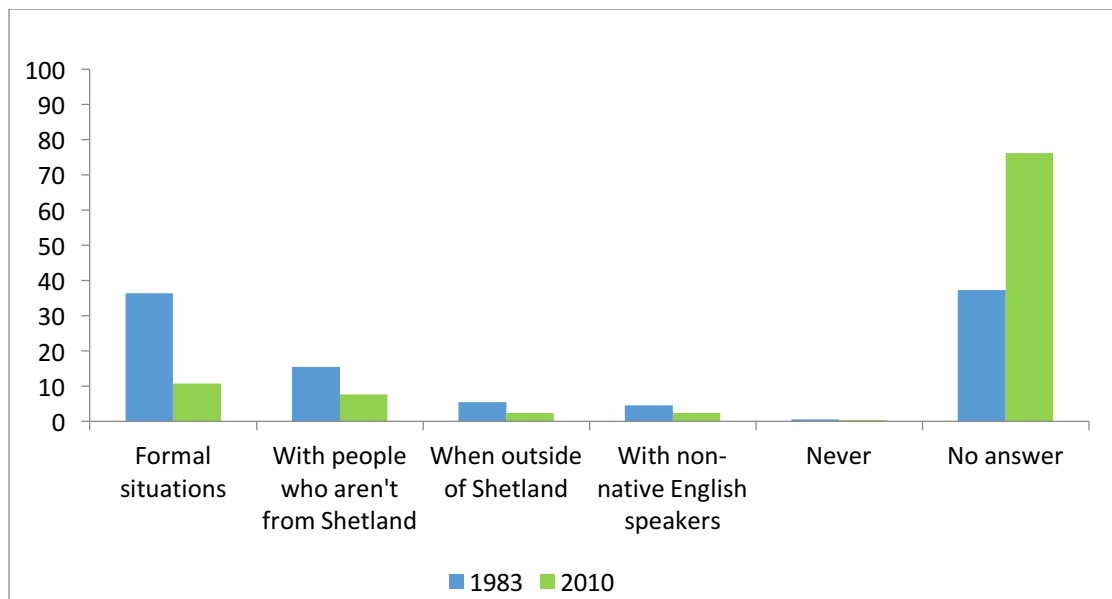


Figure 11: Specific examples of when it would not be acceptable to use the dialect

As noted, the responses for the 2010 children are lower across the various situations because of higher rates of non-response. The overall hierarchy is very similar: while some children provide examples that focus on the non-use of the dialect with people who are not from the Islands, most of the examples are related to formal situations (job interviews and such like). This again underlines the dual situation that the dialect and English are in on Shetland: the dialect is used in casual situations while English is used in more formal situations. This is less the case in 2010, but for some children at least the distinction is still seen to be there.

3.5 Inappropriateness of English use

This section considers the opposite: situations in which it would be inappropriate to use English. Figure 12, below, presents the results by year and by student group.

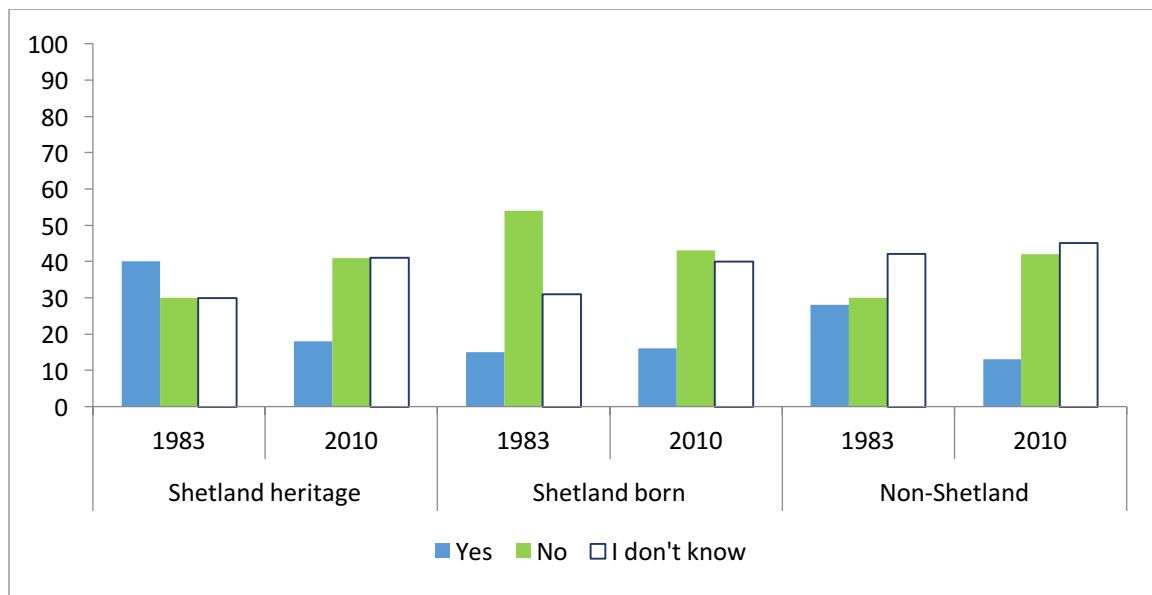


Figure 12: Student responses to whether there are situations in which English is not acceptable

Here the shift is towards greater acceptance of English in all situations. This is particularly marked for the Shetland heritage children as in 1983 they would have been the main group who had a formality distinction in their use. Clearly the move towards a greater acceptability of English is linked to the overall increase in English use across all situations as noted in the previous sections.

In this question as well, students were able to provide examples of specific situations. There were fewer responses to this than for the previous one, with only 105 students commenting in 1983 and 46 in 2010. The main examples here were ones noting it would not be appropriate to use English with other Shetlanders, once again focussing on the importance of interlocutors when deciding whether to use the dialect or not.

Overall, as the figures have underlined, it is clear that both English and the dialect are reported to be acceptable in all situations more frequently in 2010 than in 1983. One point that merits addressing in this discussion is whether what constitutes 'dialect' and 'standard' for the children has shifted. Fewer students in 2010 feel that they use the dialect, but they nevertheless state that there are almost no situations where the dialect is not appropriate to use. How to align these opposing statements? It may be that because fewer people use the dialect it is less stigmatized when it is used, but some comments point towards the conclusion that in some cases it is simply that what some students view as dialect is in fact a localized form of Scottish Standard English and not the traditional variety. This is what makes it more generally appropriate rather than demonstrating a greater acceptance of the dialect itself.

4. Discussion and conclusion

While the overall shift away from the dialect was evident from the outset, the analysis of the three question sets has provided insight into the way that the supposedly diglossic or at least domain restricted system has broken down from 1983 to 2010. Some children continue to use the dialect, but their sense of when it is appropriate to and when it is not is now dictated primarily by the ability of the person to whom they are talking to understand the dialect and not down to specific situations or domains. The increase of non-Shetlanders in the school population and more generally will have played a part in this: with an increase in the situations where English is more appropriate given their interlocutors, the context specific domains of use become less important than the identity of the interlocutor. This shift away from clear domain differentiation has no doubt contributed to the loss of bidialectalism for some of the Shetland speakers: as it no longer becomes important to distinguish between the two varieties in different situations, using one in all situations becomes more common and fewer are able to use the two varieties.

For Shetland, the use of the dialect with other dialect speakers is still present and this may help preserve the dialect particularly in the areas where it is still used more and where incomers learn the dialect themselves. It is conversely possible, however, that the loss of a clearly defined separation of when to use the dialect and when not to may ultimately mean that the dialect's share decreases further on the Islands.

If we extrapolate these findings to non-bidialectal situations where dialect levelling is also taking place, it seems likely that the divided effects of interlocutor identity and shift in domains will be present as well. In other situations, an increase in speakers using a supralocal or non-regional feature in an area (either through moving into the area or through early adoption of it) will mean that local speakers will find themselves in an increasing number of situations where the local variant is not appropriate or not necessary and consequently will use it less. This will ultimately even be the case with speakers for whom the local variant would have been expected and goes some way towards explaining how and why dialect levelling may spread. Local variants are not necessarily at risk at the point when an external variant enters the system (as evidenced by the fact that the Shetland heritage children in 1983 were fully proficient in using the dialect in some contexts and English in others), but the local forms are definitely at risk when the external variant begins to be used in contexts where only a local and/or informal one would have been acceptable at one point.

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