Language preservation in strangely familiar places:
How traditional skills have helped preserve Shaetlan

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This chapter is dedicated to the memory of my mentor and dear friend Gunnel Melchers

1   Introduction

It is in the safe, intimate, familiar environments that we are best able to acquire skills and knowledge. Where we are immersed in a task with an elder who shares his or her lifetime of experiences. Where the teaching is slow and gentle, and the learning is allowed to take its time. We grow into the knowledge and integrate it, we merge with it. And the way we received it is how we then pass it on. The way my grandmother taught me to knit and sew and crochet is how I pass it on to a younger person. The way my grandfather taught me to trim, prune and fell trees, to plant saplings and cuttings, to chop wood and build a fire and keep it safe, that's how I pass on the love of wood and the respect of fire. And I do it in the language in which I learned these skills.

Shaetlan is the autonym for the indigenous language which pre-dates English in Shetland, the northernmost part of the UK. It is of a mixed ancestry, with Norn and Scots as its main input languages, but with a linguistic history shaped by intense contact with the Low Country Germanic languages. It has seen severe stigmatisation over the last few centuries, and is now in an endangered state with dwindling intergenerational transmission. The prevailing attitude over the last two hundred years of universal schooling has been that it is a lesser and coarser version of English. However, the structure of the language has remained remarkably resilient and still shows its unique Mixed Language ancestry not only in the vocabulary but also in its grammar.

This resilience is to a large extent due to the safe, intimate and informal environments of skills transmissions that have been handed down over generations, initially as a matter of survival, but subsequently as a matter of pride and identity, perhaps even defiance. Skills such as crofting, small scale fishing, boat building, peat cutting, stone building, weaving and knitting. These are skills that were vital for the survival of the community, but which modern society, and thus the dominating but numeric minority culture, does not respect: at best they are considered quaint and picturesque artistic hobbies, at worst they are considered backwards and a hindrance to social and economic advancement. In actual fact they embody a sustainable symbiosis with the place and environment, as well as a historical continuity.

The language of Shetland knitting is a testimony to how the intimate setting of knowledge transmission can act as a language preserver despite extreme societal pressure. The knitting language, in fact the language of the whole cycle from the sheep, to the process of wool and eventually to fabric, is a blend of Norn, Scots and Dutch terminology framed in its own grammar. It is the skills that have been transmitted in safe and familiar places which have allowed the language to remain resilient and intimately connected to its environment, and which have allowed it to make it into and claim a place in the digital era, despite the widely internalised and perpetuated stigmatisation.

2   Setting the scene

Shetland is an archipelago consisting of over a hundred islands, holms and skerries located roughly halfway between Scotland and Norway. It is the northernmost part of the British Isles, and is battered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the North Sea to the east. In 2021 Shetland had a population of 22,940 inhabitants, spread unevenly over 16 islands and with just under 7,000 in the capital Lerwick (60°20N, 1°20W).
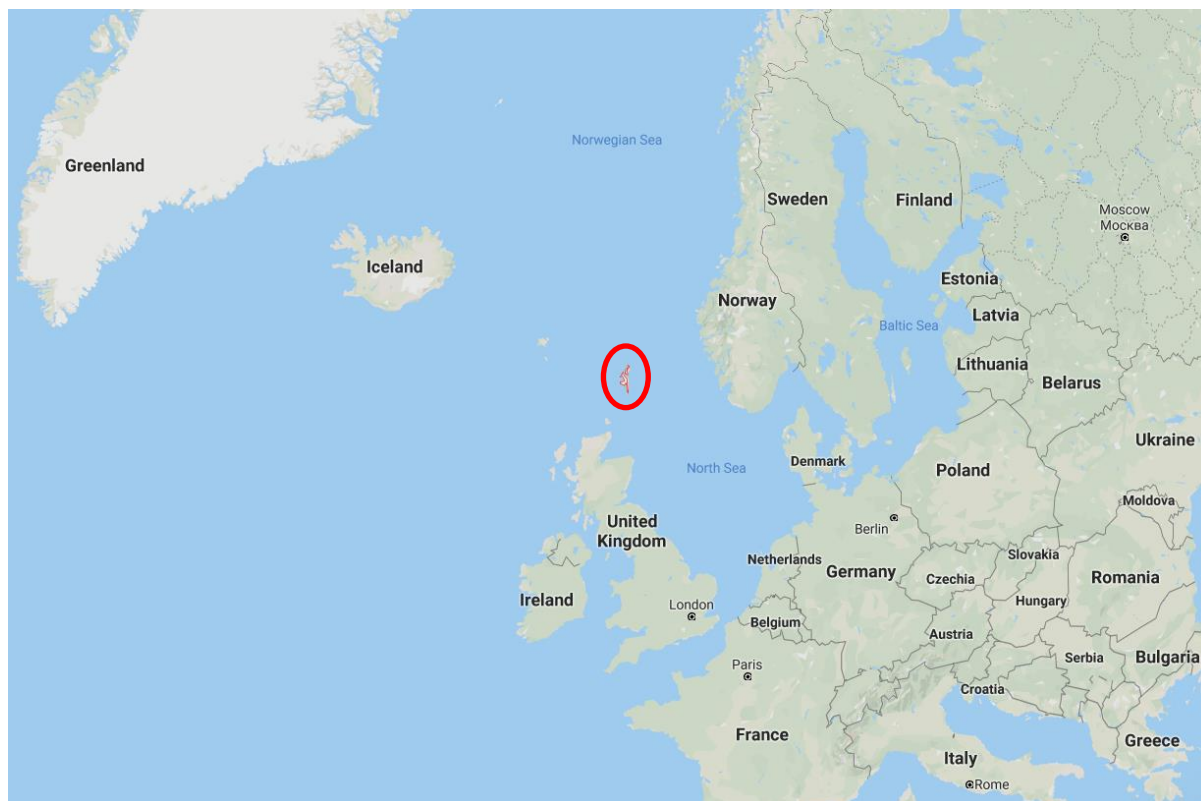
Figure 1.   Shetland on the map.

Its location far out in the sea is by today's urban land-based standards in the middle of nowhere. However, for centuries, if not millennia this location has been a central place, because for most of humanity's history trade and travel was done by sea or other waterways.[1] Figure 1 shows that Shetland was and is an obvious stopover for any trade and migration routes between Iceland, western Scandinavia, the British mainland and the lowlands of north-western continental Europe. This centrally maritime location has in every way affected the environment, history and linguocultural identity of Shetland.

       The archipelago has been inhabited for some 6,000 years (Montgomery & Melton 2014), if not longer. By the time the Western Norse expansion started in the

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[1] It is in fact still a place of contact: Shetland is an extremely popular destination for tourists. Not only do cruise liners with several thousand passengers dock in Lerwick on a daily basis from March to October, sometimes several at the same time, but also a huge amount of long term tour visitors. Shetland also draws huge amounts of international visitors for the winter fire festivals (*Up Helly Aa*), the spring music festival, the autumn film festival (*Screenplay*), *Shetland Wool Week* and the literature festival (*Word Play*). Furthermore, throughout the year there will at any given time be ships in from the high seas for various reasons (refuelling, rough weather, etc). Shetland is thus still a place of contact in that the wider world still keeps coming to its shores for various reasons.

late 8th century, the islands had been populated by a Celtic-speaking population. The majority were most likely part of the Pictish linguistic and cultural sphere. However, Gaelic-speaking Christian missionaries did migrate to Shetland from the 6th century onwards and might also have been part of the linguistic landscape when the first Norse travellers arrived. It is not known when the Norse seafarers first came to Shetland, but evidence suggests that the first settlements were as early as about 790-800 AD (Wainwright 1962a, b; Barnes 1998). With that, the beginnings of a Norse speaking population started in Shetland. In 875 king Harald Hårfagre of Norway claimed the islands, together with Orkney and Caithness, and fused them into the administrative unit of the Earldom of Orkney (*Orkneyinga Saga*; Crawford 2013, Donaldson 1983). With this, Western Norse became the dominant administrative language. This version of Old Norse would eventually evolve into its own variety, later referred to as Norn in the literature, which would remain spoken in Shetland for another 8-900 years.

It is not known what happened to the pre-Norse population; there is no mention of them in the Old Norse sagas, and very few linguistic traces of them have remained.[2] There are no identified substratal traces in Norn (Barnes 1998, but cf. Lindqvist 2015) and almost all early placenames are Norn, with a gradual increase of modern Scots and English placenames. It is possible that the catastrophic climate events of the 6th century, which affected a large part of Eurasia, may also have led to depopulation of Shetland through famine and/or migration (Fraser 2024). However, Pictish did survive at least a century after Norse settlement (Barnes 1998), even if in potentially reduced numbers, as also evidenced by two known Ogham inscriptions in Pictish from the 9th or early 10th centuries (Forsyth 1996). Furthermore, it is possible that the names of the three northernmost larger inhabited islands – Fetlar, Yell and Unst – might be pre-Norse (Andrew Jennings, p.c.), in which case Pictish would be

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[2] The indigenous livestock, however, remained and fused with any livestock that was brought by the Norse: the native Shetland cattle and sheep breeds were brought here by the Neolithic farmers more than 5,000 years ago, probably no later than 3,600 BC (Fenton 1978: 446, Johnston 1999: 114, Bond 2009: 14), while the horse was brought in during the equivalent of the Bronze age some 4,000 years ago, ca 2,000 BC (Russell 2003: 44). It is likely that the Norse settlers also brought livestock with them that would have interbred with the indigenous livestock, especially sheep and horses, although we do not know in which numbers that may have been.

the most likely source (Coates 2007, but see also Coates 2019 on the problematic nature of the name Fetlar).[3]

The seat of the Norse earldom was in Orkney (Crawford 2013), but in 1195 the Shetland archipelago was placed directly under the Norwegian king (Donaldson 1983: 9) and with that "Shetland's links with Orkney, strong until then, diminished" (Ballantyne & Smith 1999: xi), even if the links between them remained in the ecclesiastical sphere: the archipelagos shared a bishop and "Shetland's archdeacon remained a senior figure in Orkney's chapter until 1544" (ibid.). From now on Shetland was a tributary province of Norway and paid tax to the Norwegian king. The islands were ruled by Norse law through the king's *sysselman* (approx. 'governor').

The linguistic ecology of the two archipelagos thus gradually diverged and "[i]n 1469 Shetland was still essentially Norse, in race, in language and in institutions, whereas in 1468 Orkney was already very largely Scotticised" (Donaldson 1983: 8), probably partly because the Earldom of Orkney had been populated by Scots houses from the middle of the 14th century and onwards (cf. also Ljosland 2012, McColl Millar 2018). Another point of diversion between the archipelagos is that while the Hansa and Dutch trade in the "fish lands" between Bergen, Iceland, Faroe and Shetland was intense (see below), there was much less of a Low Germanic trade presence in Orkney in the late medieval and early modern period (Holterman 2020).

The early 15th century saw increased settlement in the southern areas of Shetland by immigrating Lowland Scots speakers (McColl Millar 2007, 2008; Knooihuizen 2009). This influence was to a large extent related to the Church: Shetland belonged to the diocese of Orkney (where the bishop was Scots), and the archdeaconry of Shetland was Scots, as was the clergy to an increasing degree (Donaldson 1983). However, the Scots settlers were also landowners, administrators, traders and craftsmen. Documents from the early 16th century show some landowner families who, interestingly, used both local Shetland patronymics and Scots surnames (Ballantyne & Smith 1999: xv), and that some "relatives of ecclesiastics who had come from Scotland to Shetland" in the 15th and early 16th centuries occasionally became law officials in Shetland (ibid.: xv-i). With this, the Lowland Scots language

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[3] Pictish [xpi] is currently thought to have belonged to the Celtic languages, possibly the Brittonic branch. This is primarily based on onomastic evidence (Watson & Taylor 2011; Rhys 2015).

increasingly started to establish itself in Shetland, in what seems to have been a top down spread.[4]

In the early 15th century, from about 1415 onwards, there was also sustained contact with the Low Germanic languages (predominantly varieties of Middle Dutch and Middle Low German) through the Hanseatic trade (Mehler & Gardiner 2013), which was initially via Bergen, but then directly with the islands, as the subsequent Dutch herring trade would be (Friedland 1983, Ballantyne & Smith 1999: xiii, Holterman 2020). The Hansa merchants were interested in butter, fat, wool, feathers, wadmal and above all fish, and traded this for grain-based food and drink (beer, malt and flour), manufactured goods (fabrics and leatherware, as well as metal tools, various kinds of luxury goods), and also raw material like tar, wax, timber and Swedish raw iron (Friedland 1983: 92f, Mehler & Gardiner 2013, Smith: 2013a, Nedkvitne 2014, Helle 2019, Holterman 2020: 55-57).[5] This regularly brought merchants, sailors and traders from the northern European Low Countries to the islands. It is worth noting that this contact was not only at the actual boats in the harbours, but also that the Hansa merchants, for example, had numerous trading stations of various sizes dotted all over Shetland, some large enough to have the character of a small settlement, where the merchants and their crew would stay for varying lengths of time, sometimes over the entire winter (Holterman 2020). In other words, there was a steady language contact between the Shetlanders and speakers of Low Germanic languages, predominantly Dutch and Low German.

With the union of Norway and Denmark in 1380, Shetland came under Danish rule. In May 1469 Christian I of Denmark pawned Shetland to James III of Scotland

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[4] It should be noted that the Scots spoken at the time is likely to have diverged more from English than what contemporary Lowland Scots does from contemporary Standard English after centuries of intense contact with and dominance of Standard English (cf. McColl Millar 2018, 2020 and subsequent studies on the concept of *dialectization*).

[5] The Hansa trade was largely similar for Iceland, Faroe and Shetland, but a peculiarity of Shetland was the import of tobacco and guns:

> Custom records for Shetland in the late seventeenth century show an almost identical range of products with the addition of tobacco, which shows the growing influence of colonial trade on European consumption patterns. Finally, a peculiarity of the Shetland trade was the import of guns. In 1557, a merchant of Leith in Scotland bought "munitioun" and "thre peces of artalyeary callit doubile barsis with vj chalmeris pertenand therto" from Bremen merchant Henry (Henrick) Schroder in Shetland. Moreover, guns are known to have been accepted as payment for customs fees by the officials in Shetland.   (Holterman 2020: 57)

as the second part of his daughter Margaret's dowry (Orkney had been pawned a year earlier, in 1468), and "wrote to his subjects in Shetland and Orkney, instructing them to pay scat [tax] to the king of Scots until he [the King of Denmark] or his successors redeemed the pledge" (Ballantyne & Smith 1999: xiv).[6] With the gradual administrative shift to Scottish rule, the Scots language steadily gained socioeconomic value. Furthermore, the Lowland Scots settlement pattern mentioned above would increase, with Scots speakers concentrated in the south of the archipelago (Donaldson 1983, Knooihuizen 2009, Crawford 2013). However, the shift to Scots was gradual and Shetland remained a multilingual place. Contemporary testimonies bear witness to the stable multilingual language ecology of Shetland during this early period:

> The Inhabitants of the South Parish are, for the most part, Strangers from Scotland & Orkney, whose Language, Habit, Manners & Dispositions are almost ye same with the Scotish. ... Their Language (as I said) is the same with the Scotish: yet all the Natives can speak the Gothick or Norwegian Tongue. ... by reason of their Commerce with the Hollanders, generally they promptly speak low Dutch. The Inhabitants of the North Parish are (very few excepted) Natives of the place ... All the inhabitants of this Parish can speak the Gothick or Norwegian Language, & seldom speak other among themselves; yet all of them speak the Scotish Tongue both more promptly & more properly, than generally they do in Scotland
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> (James Key, minister of Dunrossness (S Shetland) 1680s: Bruce 1908: 43f)

> English is the common language among them, yet many of the people speak Norse or corrupt Danish, especially such as live in the more northern isles; yea, so ordinary is it in some places, that it is the first language their children speak. Several here also speak good Dutch, even servants, though they have never been out of the country, because of the many Dutch ships

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[6] "[King Christian] gave the king of Scotland his letter of confirmation [*følgebreff*] to his subjects [*undersaatterne*] in Orkney and Hetland, [to the effect] that after the negotiations which he had had with the king of Scotland, they should be obedient and dutiful to him, and give him scat annually, until such time as he [the king of Denmark] or his descendants, kings of Norway, should pay to the kings of Scotland the money for which the said lands and islands were mortgaged." [Copenhagen, 28 May 1469]. The original letter is not known to exist; this account is translated by Ballantyne & Smith (1999: 18) from the following account given by Arild Huiltfeldt in his *Historiske Beskriffuelse*:

> Ḥuor paa ḥand gaff Kongen aff Skotland sic Følgebreff til Undersaatterne paa Orckenør oc i Ḥetland / at de effter saadan Forḥandling / ḥand met Kongen av Skottland giort ḥaffde / ḥannem skulde vere ḥørig oc lydig / oc Aarligen deris Skat giffue / indtil saa lenge ḥand / eller ḥans Effterkommere / Konger udi Norge / betalde Kongerne aff Skotland saadanne Penninge / ḥuorfaare samme Lande oc Øer / effter Breffuens Liudelse / vaare pantset.
> Actum Kiøbenḥaffn / 28 Maji, Anno 1469.
>
> (Huitfeldt 1599: 190)

> which do frequent their ports. And there are some who have something of all these languages, English, Dutch and Norse.
>
> (John Brand, Scottish missionary 1700; Brand 1701: 69)

> Many of them are descended from the Norwegians and speak a Norse Tongue, corrupted, (they call Norn) amongst themselves […] and because of their Commerce with the Hollanders, they promptly speak Low Dutch. […] The Incommers [sic] (whose residence in these Isles is not above a few Centuries of years) […] speak the Scots Language as well as the Norse.
>
> (Various informants no later than 1710; Sibbald 1845 [1711])

Towards the end of the 16ᵗʰ century, in the 1580s, a large-scale knitwear trade with the Dutch fishing vessels started. It is likely that this was what was meant by the "Commerce with the Hollanders" in the quote above. The fishing vessels would arrive in the hundreds (Smith 2013b) to trade especially for stockings and mittens, and many of them would dock on the east side of the main island. This was the "gem which gave rise to the town of Lerwick" (Smith 2013b: 52). Such an intense trade, as well as that with German merchants, which went on until the French and Napoleonic wars (Smith 2013b), meant continued stable and intense language contact with Dutch and Low German speaking traders.

Norn remained spoken in Shetland for at least another 250 years, meaning that there was Norn/Scots bilingualism in Shetland until at least the early 18ᵗʰ century. However, it is not likely that it was a balanced contact situation, given that Scots was the language of the new power holders (cf. Faraclas 2021). Ljosland (forthcoming) has shown how Scots law and administrative officials in Orkney were either not able or not willing (or both) to recognise the speech of the local population (Norn), which could even lead to cases of fatal misunderstandings, for example when a woman, Jonet Rendall, was accused of witchcraft and association with the devil and sentenced to death, whereas Jonet kept saying that the witchcraft was not done by her but by Walliman (a male elf). Ljosland sees this as "a clash between Norn and Scots and between folklore and book learning" where the Sherriff, who does not speak Norn and who is "informed by teachings on the Devil's conspiracy with witches as seen for example in King James VI's *Daemonology* […] failed to listen to or understand Jonet's voice in this matter (ibid: pXXX). It is likely that this kind of unwillingness as well as contempt on the part of the new ruling class also occurred in Shetland, as various documented complaints also indicate (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 1999).

The spread of Scots seems to have followed a south to north tendency, with Norn surviving for longer in the northern and remoter areas of Shetland (cf. e.g. Donaldson

1983, Knooihuizen 2009). Walter Sutherland of Skaw in the far north of Unst, who passed away in 1850, was the last known speaker, or possibly rememberer, of Norn (Jakobson 1928-32: xix).

This long drawn and stable bilingualism in Shetland resulted in a very distinct linguistic blend of Norn and Lowland Scots, with a noticeable contact influence of Low Germanic languages (Middle Dutch and Middle Low German); see e.g. Robertson & Graham (1952/1991), Graham (1993), Barnes (1998), Melchers (2004a/b), van Leyden (2004), Knooihuizen (2005), McColl Millar (2007), Melchers & Sundqvist (2010), to mention only a few. It is thus a distinct Contact Language by any definition in that it **emerged** due to contact as opposed to, for example, English, Scots and Swedish, which have **undergone** a high degree of contact (but which did not emerge due to some specific contact situation; cf. e.g. Grant 2019, Velupillai 2015; Bakker & Matras 2013, Michaelis et al. 2013, Matras & Baker 2003 among many others for the concept of Contact Language). Specifically, Shaetlan fits the framework of the **Mixed Language** type, with a formation history that bears close similarities to that of Michif in Canada (cf. Bakker 1997) and a linguistic structure that very closely fits the framework of G-L languages [Grammar-Lexicon languages] as defined by Bakker 2017 (see also e.g. Smith & Grant 2019, Velupillai 2015 and Meakins 2013 with further references), where the bulk of the grammar comes predominantly from one source language, while the bulk of the lexicon comes predominantly from the other source language. In fact, Shaetlan now serves as a case study for Bakker's 2017 model. A very close parallel to the Shaetlan situation and linguistic structure is Bildts, a Mixed Language spoken in the province of Fryslân in the north of the Netherlands (van Sluis et al. 2016). In Bildts the grammatical system is predominantly Frisian (the language of the original locals) and the lexicon is predominantly derived from a combination of the varieties of Dutch Hollandic from the South Holland province (the varieties of the new settlers).

English would gradually increase in sociopolitical dominance and prestige in mainland Scotland (see e.g. McColl Millar 2020, 2023 with further references; see also Young 2023). With the Union of the Crowns in 1603 James VI/I moved to London and promoted English (not Scots) as the language of the Church and administration. In fact, "[t]he king himself altered his writing practice in the direction of Standard English; even translating/transcribing earlier works into his new working language" (McColl Millar 2020: 91). The printed word would in the 17th century gradually, and

by "piecemeal attrition" (ibid) shift away from Scots and towards English (cf. also e.g. Meurman-Solin 1993 and Devitt 1996).

> Nonetheless, the ambiguous linguistic status of Scots throughout the late medieval and Early Modern periods, combined with the foregrounding of Standard English by the Presbyterian victors in the strife that convulsed the country in the second half of the seventeenth century, whose adherence to the English Bible involved memorisation – and replication – of large amounts of text, meant that switching preferred written (and, for some, spoken) variety, was advanced.
>
> (McColl Millar 2020: 91)

This sociopolitical dominance and prestige of English (over Scots) would eventually also spread to Shetland.

Beginning in the 18th century, with the introduction of organised education and especially the SSPCK (Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge) school system, English has been the socio-politically dominant language in Shetland and the language considered "proper". The first such school opened in Waas (Walls) in 1734 and from 1765 parochial schools were set up; "English became increasingly predominant as the formal and, by implication, the more correct mode of speech" (Graham 1993: xv). By 1827 every parish had its own school (Graham 1998) and "[m]ost of the new schools were staffed by teachers from outwith Shetland who had little or no knowledge of the local speech and, more often than not, tended to regard it as a threat to their educational ideals of formal English and a broadly based culture" (Graham 1993: vxi-vxii). In 1872 elementary education became compulsory (Wiggen 2002). Education, administration and governance has thus by default been conducted in English for the last two centuries, with Shaetlan at best seen as an imperfect version of English and at worst seen as rude slang. The two languages consequently stand in an imbalanced diglossic relationship to each other, with English as the High Language (HL) and Shaetlan as the stigmatised Low Language (LL). Shaetlan is today in an endangered state, with dwindling intergenerational transmission and an increasing number of Shaetlan-speaking adults choosing to communicate with their own children monolingually in Shetland English. This even includes Shaetlan speaking parents who themselves actively engage in 'promoting' the language for entertainment purposes, but are vehemently opposed to its recognition or, for example, to its use as a medium of instruction in education (cf. Section 5 below).

There is thus an increasing proportion of Shetlanders who are monolingual speakers of Shetland English. And there is no longer any monolingual Shaetlan

speaker: any mother tongue speaker of Shaetlan today is bilingual in Shaetlan and Shetland English (cf. also Karam 2017). Yet despite this intensely imbalanced diglossic contact situation with English as the socio-politically dominant language on all societal levels, Shaetlan has retained its distinctive linguistic characteristics both phonologically, morphosyntactically and lexically.

3   The language ecology during the knitting trade

We do not know when knitting started in Shetland (Smith 2013). By 'knitting' I mean rows of intermeshing loops from a thread of unlimited length using two or more needles, or, later, a machine (Turnau 1991: 6). In other words, I am here not referring to crocheting, knotless netting, or any other forms of early mesh fabrics. While we do not know when knitting as defined above started, it is reasonable to assume that it was widespread enough in the 1580s to supply the demand by the high number of Dutch fishing vessels, mentioned in the section above, that docked en masse at what would become Lerwick to trade for knitted stockings and mittens. It is therefore also reasonable to assume that the local knitting skills were already established in Shetland before a trade of such a scale started, and furthermore, established well enough and long enough to be known as a worthwhile commodity to the overseas tradesmen.

If we assume that knitting was already well established before the 1580s – and here it seems reasonable to assume that it had been established at least a generation before the trade started, bringing us to around the 1550s – we find ourselves in a bilingual Norn/Scots Shetland with some 150 years of intense contact with Continental European Low Germanic languages, such as Middle Dutch and Middle Low German, through the Hanseatic trade and later the herring trade. Scots will by then also have had some 150 years to gradually spread and establish itself in Shetland. Furthermore, by the 1550s, Scots would have had some 100 years of High Language status as the administrative language of the ruling apparatus as well as the language of the Church and clergy. However, contemporary testimonies indicate that Norn was still widely spoken at the time. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that the Shetland knitting knowledge was established at the very latest in a bilingual Norn/Scots setting, very possibly with the Low Germanic language contact as part of the linguistic ecology. It is reasonable to assume that the linguistic ecology varied for the different areas of Shetland, as well as for the different social groups, as mentioned above. It seems plausible that a larger proportion of potentially monolingual Scots

speakers would be concentrated in the higher strata of society, such as clergy, lawmen and other kinds of administrative functionaries, as well as the actual lairds and rulers (cf. Faraclas 2021). It also seems plausible that a larger proportion of potentially monolingual Scots speakers would be found in the southern parts of the Shetland mainland. Conversely, it is reasonable to assume that potentially monolingual Norn speakers would be found in the lower strata of society, as well as in the northern and/or more isolated areas of the archipelago. However, onomastic evidence tentatively indicates a fair number of mixed marriages, which seem to indicate an uneven bias towards a Scots husband and a Norse wife (Knooihuizen 2008: 33). Irrespective of which of the partners was Scots or Norn, it is fair to assume that such mixed households were bilingual.[7] Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that the Low Germanic language contact would be concentrated around the trading centres. Even so, the picture we get of the middle of the 16th century is one of a fairly stable multilingual linguistic ecology in Shetland. However, as shown in Section 2 above, English was not part of that ecology: it would be 150 years or so until English would, starting in the early 18th century, arrive to the islands on a large and socially dominant scale (cf. also Section 5 below).

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[7] It goes without saying that basing assumptions on language use in a household several centuries ago on onomastic evidence is extremely tentative at best, and that any such data should be and is taken with great caution – my own Tamil surname, for example, does not reveal that my two mother tongues from a balanced bilingual household are Swedish and English. However, to presume that a mixed household would be monolingual in the language of the husband (cf. e.g. Knooihuizen 2008) does not conform with what we know about multilingualism and mixed households typologically or historically, but rather reflects an anachronistic, 20th century viewpoint of monolingual nationhoods in nationalised standard languages as reflected predominantly, but not exclusively, in the WEIRD [Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic; initially coined by Henrich et al. 2010] world (cf. also Nic Craith 2000, Velupillai 2015, Faraclas 2021, Lim 2021, among others). See also Treffers-Daller & Sakel (2012) as well as Ortega (2012) on how the monolingual biases continue to be built into research. In reality, however, a majority of the world's population is bi- or multilingual even today: in a survey based on available census data, which covers just under ¼ of the countries in the world, Mikael Parkvall (p.c.) found that about ⅓ of the global population is monolingual, while ⅔ are bi-/multilingual (cf. also Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 25-26). It is not farfetched to propose that similar proportions would have been likely in previous centuries – in fact it is likely that there were even higher proportions of bi-/multilingualism in the past.

4   The transmission of skills

Skills like crofting, boat building and maintenance, fishing, stone building, knitting and weaving, cooking, etc – i.e. precision-based crafts and labour – tend to be transmitted in private, immersive settings. These kinds of skills tend to centre around environmentally based cultural knowledge and tend to form the core of basic survival in any given environment. In Shetland highly relevant traditional survival skills were crofting, fishing and any kind of maritime traditions, boat building and maintenance, peat cutting, stone building, and the production of wool based fabrics, which includes everything from shearing, scouring, carding, spinning to weaving and knitting. Cooking would also be one of these universal kinds of environmentally based cultural knowledge that is passed on in a slow and immersive way from elder to younger. More often than not, these kinds of skills are transmitted on a personal basis, either in a one-on-one setting or in small groups, where one person (usually an elder) teaches and instructs another person or a small group of persons (usually younger). More often than not there is a generational gap between the teacher and the learner, in that the elder belongs to the grandparent generation (or equivalent) and the learner belongs to the grandchild generation (or equivalent). The setting is immersive in that the child or young person grows into the skill by accompanying the elder in the task, and the elder keeps showing and explaining what s/he is doing as well as guiding the child or young person to follow suit. We grow into our tasks.

This kind of private and informal setting for skills transmission encourages an informal type of language, as opposed to a more formal setting of centralised and standardized education. More often than not, the private and informal type of skills transmission is likely to be in a more conservative form of the language, and terminology that the teacher learned when starting out him- or herself is likely to be passed on to the next generation in a fairly seamless manner: there was a reason why the grandfather of my friend Geordie, one of the last independent salmon farmers in Shetland, taught him not to grip the *gunnels* in a certain way when approaching a pier (or you'll lose your nails), for example, and why he taught him to read the *baas* of the sea (or you might ground on them) and the various *meids* (where you are likely to find fish). The linguistic code used to pass this knowledge on is likely to be the code in which the knowledge was gained, which means that it harks back to the teacher's own elder, who was likely of the grandparent generation at the time. Geordie then

passes on that same knowledge to the younger generations, and he does it in the language that he learned it in.

In other words, these kinds of domains might in a sense act as linguistic bulwarks, slowing down potential shift from a lesser recognised (or even stigmatised) language variety to a more sociopolitically dominant variety. That is, while in general there has been a heavy pressure on Shaetlan, for long seen as a variety of lesser value and use than Standard English, skills like crofting, boat building, fishing, peat cutting, stone building, and the wool world, which have been transmitted in this more informal, immersive and personalized manner, are more likely to have been transmitted in Shaetlan than in Standard English for the various reasons listed above, and as such may have acted as language preservers.

4.1 Makkin in Shaetlan

In Shaetlan I *makk* (not knit) socks, mitts, shawls, jumpers etc. The first thing that I have to do is to

(1) *lay up*   *mi*   *sok*
     lay up   1SG.POSS   piece_of_knitting
     'cast on my piece of knitting'

This phrase will be very transparent to any Scandinavian knitter; in Swedish, for example, I would *lägga upp min stickning* ('cast on my knitting' lit. "lay up my knitting").[8]

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[8] It should be noted that there are areas where it is taboo to lay up your *sok* on a Friday. It is fine to makk on a Friday, but the actual laying up has to be done before midnight, as in by 11:59pm on the Thursday. Alternatively the laying up could start at 00:01am on the Saturday. But it has to be done before or after the span of the Friday. I am very grateful for Adaline Christie-Johnson for bringing this fact to my attention.

Figure 2.   *Layin up mi sok* by laying up *loops* of my *moorit wirsit* on my *wire*.

In Figure 2 we have my *kloo* ('ball of yarn') of *moorit* ('Shetland brown') *wirsit* ('spun wool, yarn') and I am *layin up mi sok* by laying up *loops* ('stitches') on my *wires* ('knitting needles'). Speakers of the continental Germanic languages will recognise *kloo* in, for example, the Dutch *kluwen* and German *Knäuel* ('ball of yarn; tangle [of something]'). This general West Germanic etymon is cognate with English *clew*, which at one time did denote a 'globular body; a ball (formed by coiling together or conglomeration)' and by extension then 'a ball formed by winding thread; a ball of thread or yarn' but those meanings are now obsolete except for in Scots and Northern English varieties (OED: sv. *clew*).[9]

The term *wirsit* ultimately derives from the place name *Worstead* in Norfolk,[10] which was "notable for the manufacture of woollen cloth since at least the early 12th cent[ury]" (OED: sv. *wirsit*). This indirectly dates the term: to use a place name as a general term for yarn is only likely to have become common after that place has become well associated with wool and woollen products. However, it is questionable

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[9] In this and the following two sections, etymologies will be given in brackets, where "sv" indicates the relevant entry word in the dictionary. For dictionary abbreviations, see the list of abbreviations below.

[10] Earlier attested forms are *Wrðestede* (11th C), *Wurthestede, Wursted, Worthsted, Worsted, Wirthstede,* etc. (13th C).

whether the term entered immediately into the Shetland context: the early 12th century, by which time Worstead had gained its woollen fame, Shetland was still some 350 years away from the impignoration to the King of Scotland. It seems more likely that the term entered into the Shaetlan lexicon somewhere in the 15th or first half of the 16th centuries, when Scots had become a larger part of the linguistic ecology.

That which is carried on the knitting needles is in English called 'the stitches' but in Shaetlan is referred to as *loops*, which, strictly speaking, is more descriptive, given that knitted fabric consists of intermeshing loops. This too is a pan-Scots term for a stitch in knitting (cf. DSL: sv. *loop, loup*). Figure 2 shows *moorit* yarn, one of the natural colours on the native Shetland sheep. As with a number of terms related to sheep and crofting, *moorit* is directly inherited from Norn and ultimately derives from Old Norse *mórauðr*, a compound consisting of the components *mór* 'moor' and *rauðr* 'red', i.e. literally 'moor-red' (Heggestad et al. 1993: 301).

The term *sok* 'piece of knitting' is interesting: both the Old English *socc* and the Old Norse *sokkr* meant 'stocking' and ultimately derived from Latin *soccus* 'light low-heeled shoe/slipper' (OED: sv. *sock*). Now, recall that the main knitwear items that the Dutch fishing vessels traded for were stockings and mittens. By way of analogy and semantic shift the term for socks seems to have evolved to mean just any piece of knitting. Thus the expression

(2) *tak*   *dy*   *sok*
     take   2SG.FAM.POSS   piece_of_knitting
     'Bring your knitting along.'

means 'Bring your knitting along', irrespective of what precisely the project is (whether a hat, scarf, shawl, jumper or any other piece of knitting). However, the term is gradually shifting meaning again: for some speakers the term specifically refers to 'a sock' (i.e. that which you wear on your foot). This is likely due to the increasing influence of Standard English.

The tools for the craft are the *wires* ('knitting needles'); the specialised meaning of this long, slender, circular rod to specifically mean knitting needle, originally typically the needles used for knitting stockings, is again pan-Scots (OED: sv. *wire*; DSL: sv. *wire*). In Shaetlan, the term has by extension come to refer to the tool used for any kind of knitting (not just stockings).

Figure 3.   My *sok*, with visible *riggies*, being *sprettit*.

In Figure 3 the *riggies* of my sok are clearly visible. These are the lumpy ridges that are formed by garter stitch knitting. The term *riggie* is a diminutive of *rigg* 'spine, backbone; or thin stripe, ridge' which is an inheritance from Norn and derives from the Old Norse *hryggr* 'back, ridge' (Jakobson: sv. *riggie*). The modern equivalent in all Scandinavian languages is *(h)ryg(g)(ur)* 'back' (ISLEX: sv. *hryggur*).

The observant reader will notice that in Figure 3 the yarn is actually being pulled. The knitter's dread is to have to *spret* their *sok*. This term, like the colour term *moorit* is chiefly found in Orkney and Shetland (OED: sv *spret*). It is again an inheritance from Norn: *sprett* derives from Old Norse *spretta* 'to tear apart, rip up' (Heggestad et al 1993: 405) and is still a (dreaded) knitting term in the Scandinavian languages, for example Swedish *sprätta*. It was when my friend and mentor, the linguist and knitter Gunnel Melchers encountered *sprett* in a Fair Isle knitting course in the early 1980s that she sat up and took notice – and that was the starting point for her decades' long and invaluable linguistic research on Shaetlan (*The Scandinavian Element in Shetland Dialect*; cf. also Melchers 2004a, b, 2010; Melchers & Sundkvist 2010 with further references). It is fair to say that Gunnel Melchers was of equal importance to Shaetlan as Jakob Jakobson had once been. It was Melcher's research that brought academic awareness of the linguistic situation in Shetland in the post-oil era.

4.2 The sheepy world in Shaetlan

While the terms for the animals in the Shaetlan sheepy world are predominantly Scots derived, the distinguishing features of the animals are predominantly Norn derived. Thus we have sheep, rams, yowes ('ewes') and lambs. The *huggs* are castrated males ('wethers') and the *gimmers* are mature female sheep who have not yet lambed.[11] The native Shetland sheep are, by their nature, multicoloured and patterned. The distinguishing features are predominantly Norn derived. For example, a *shaela* (< ON *héla* 'hoar-frost') sheep is typically a dark colour shade (esp. dark grey or bluish grey) with a lighter tinge at the fleece tips, giving a kind of frosted look; a *moorit* one is brown (cf. above). A *sholmet* sheep has a dark body and a white face, from ON *hjalm-óttr* (lit. helmet-y). A *yuglet* sheep has a colour around the eyes that is different from the colour of the rest of the body (< ON *auglit* < *auga* 'eye' + *glit* 'shimmer'). A *gulmogit* sheep has a light belly and a dark back, from ON *gul-mogi* (lit. yellow-belly), while a *katmogit* sheep is the opposite: dark belly and a light back.[12] An *aalmark* is a rogue sheep that jumps over or through fences; the suggested origin is ON **allmarka sauðr* 'sheep which breaks into land which is common property' (Jakobsen 1928-32: 11) and an *aalielam* is a caddie lamb, i.e. a bottle fed lamb that has been rejected by the mother (*aalie* < ON *ali-*; used in compounds for tame animals or animals used for breeding, cf. e.g. *alidýr* 'tame animal, domestic animal').[13]

Once the sheep have been *caa-ed* ('herd-PST') they will be taken into the *krø* ('sheep pen'), where they can be *waeled oot* ('separated') according to need – for example, the rams might have to be *waeled oot* because the *tuppin* ('mating') season is over. The specific form and meaning of *caa* as in 'to drive, move, gather (animals)' is chiefly Scots and northern English. The etymon *call* is probably an early Scandinavian loan into both English and Scots (OED: sv. *call*), and it might be worth noting that the cognate in Swedish (*kalla*), for example, also has an archaic meaning of 'to urge'. It is likely that an original Norn form *kalla* was reinforced by the Scots *caa*. The verb (*tae)*

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[11] *Gimmer* ultimately derives from Old Norse *gymbr* 'ewe-lamb', but is an early loan into the northern English and Scots lexicon. Its use in Shaetlan is thus reinforced from both ancestor languages.

[12] The origin of *kat-* is debated; suggestions to the effect that it derives from ON *kǫttr* 'cat' to form a compound 'cat-bellied', because some kinds of cats have a belly with a different colour from the rest of the body, seems unconvincing in light of the mirror term *gulmogit,* where the first element specifies the kind of colour.

[13] All etymologies and lexical data here are sourced from Jakobsen (1928-32), deVries (1977) and Heggestad et al. (1993), sv. the respective entries.

wael 'to choose, select, pick out, sort' is also chiefly found in Scots and northern English, and ultimately derives from Old Norse *val* 'choice' (OED: sv. *wale*); it is still found in all Scandinavian languages as *val(g)*. Again it is likely that the Norn and Scots forms would have reinforced each other. *Tup*$_N$ 'ram' or *tup*$_V$ 'of the ram: to copulate; of the ewe: to admit the ram' is again found chiefly in Scots and northern English, but its origin is unknown (OED: sv. *tup*). The term for sheep's pen, *krø*, is unusual and seems to be of Celtic origin, with cognates in e.g. earlier Welsh *creu/crau* 'pen, sty', Cornish *crow* 'sty, hovel, hut', Breton *kraou* 'stable, stall, sheep-cote' and Irish Gaelic *cró* 'pen, hut, hovel'. The Icelandic *kró* and Norwegian *kru* 'pen, fold, small enclosure' seem to be a loan from Irish Gaelic *cró* (Marwick 1929: 96; de Vries 1977: 331); apparently the Scots forms (*crue/cro*) in turn derive from the Scandinavian forms (DSL: sv. *crue*). It is thus not unlikely that a cognate would have existed in Norn, in which case we would once again have a case of reinforcement from both ancestor languages.

Hentilagets are tufts of wool that have fallen off the sheep while they graze. Due to the very nature of the native Shetland sheep, with their double coated fleeces, the wool tends to fall or rub off on fences and branches. It is even possible to pluck the wool off of the sheeps' backs (to *roo* them < ON *rýja* 'pluck wool off of sheep's backs', cf. NyNo. *rua*; Nynorskordboka 2022: sv.). *Hentilagets* is a compound of *hent-* < Old Scots *hint* (< OE *henten*) 'to seize, grasp' (DSL: sv. *hent*) + *laget* < Norn *lag(e)d* < ON *lagðr* 'tuft or wisp [of something]' (Heggestad et al 1993: 258). This is thus a truly mixed heritage compound, with each of the two components derived from each of the two main ancestor languages, and neatly sums up the origin of Shaetlan.

4.3 Boating in Shaetlan

The typical fishing boat used in Shetland would have been the *fourareen* or the *sixareen*. A fourareen (< ON **feræringr* < *fer-* < *fjórir* 'four' + *æringr* < *ár* 'oar', i.e. lit. a four-oarer) had four oars with two men rowing, each man on two oars while a sixareen, a six-oarer, was a lot larger and had six oars with one man per oar. Both types had a square sail. It would mostly have been sixareens that would have been used for *haaf* fishing, i.e. fishing on the high, open seas, the *haaf* (< ON *haf* 'sea'). For safe passages a proper *kæb* or *keb* ('thole pin' < ON *keipr* 'rowlock') would have to be securely placed at the right intervals on the *rimwol* ('gunwale strake' < ON *rim* 'rail' + *wale*). The sail is hoisted on the *stong* ('mast' < ON *stǫng* 'pole'). Essential tools are, for example, the *auskerrie* or *owskerri* ('scoop/bucket for bailing out water'

< ON *ausa* 'to bale' + *ker* 'tub'), the *tully* or *tolli* ('large, wooden handled sheath knife used to split fish'; < ON *tálguknifr* 'carving knife' < *tálga* 'to cut, carve' + *knifr* 'knife'), the *dorrow* or *dorro* ('handline with several hooked lines attached to it') along for the shallow waters (< ON *dorg* 'trailing fishing line'), the *tomes* or *tombs* ('lighter fishing lines with which you attach hooks to your long lines for the deeper waters'; ON *taumr* 'rein/string/cord'. Another useful tool is the *huggistaff* ('gaff'), a large hook with a stout handle, which is needed for landing individual large fish. This is another one of those neat Shaetlan compounds that carries one element from each ancestor: *huggi-* <ON *hǫgg* 'a blow/stroke' + *-staff* < Old Scots *staf* 'staff'. Notice that the internal ancestry of the compound elements for *huggistaf* is reversed from that of *hentilagets*: in the former the first element is Old Norse and ultimately goes back to a verbal root (*hǫggva* 'to strike, chop, cut, hew'), while the second element is an Old Scots noun. In the latter the first element is an Old Scots verbal root, while the second element is an Old Norse noun. In both cases, however, the internal syntax is the same, with a V + N compound.[14]

Traditional knowledge will pass on information about fishing *meids*, or landmarks that triangulate the location of a particular fishing bank (< ON *mið* 'landmark'; Heggestad et al 1993: 295, possibly via or reinforced by Old Scots *myth* 'to mark a spot; to measure' and/or *meith* 'to delimit, bound'; DSL sv. *meith*). At the fishing meid, one or a couple of rowers will be *aandooin* while the others deal with the actual hooking, sinking and pulling of the lines: *to aandoo* is to keep a boat in position by slowly rowing against the tide (< ON *andøfa* 'ibid.').

Once back on shore the boat would be pulled up into the *noost*, the shelter for a boat (< ON *naust* 'boat shed'), while the loose tools would be stored in a little *bød* ('hut/shed'), a term cognate with Scots *buith*, English *booth*, as well as Old Norse *būð* (now *bod* in Swedish), all of which mean 'hut/shed' and nicely encapsulate the intricately mixed linguistic history of contact, change and continuity in Shaetlan.

For a beautifully captivating audio portrait of the journey of a replica of a traditional *eela* boat (used for rod fishing) back to its ancestral home Unst, the

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[14] All etymologies and lexical data here are sourced from Jakobsen (1928-32), De Vries (1977) and Heggestad et al. (1993), sv. the respective entries.

northernmost inhabited island of Shetland, see *The story of Georgie McDonald* by boat builder Gail McGarva, narrated in (acrolectal) Shaetlan by Christine De Luca.[15]

4.4   Afore wir very een (or hidden in plain sight, lit. 'before our very eyes')

The terminology and expressions exemplified above have of course all been transmitted within a morphosyntactic code. It is often implied, and sometimes overtly stated, that the grammar of Shaetlan is "mainly English" (cf. Graham 1993: xix, cf. also e.g. Sundkvist 2021). The implied position is that the default grammar is Standard English, and any deviation from Standard English is merely colloquialisms (at best). However, the data summarised in Velupillai & Mullay (2022) belies this assumption. The study is based on 37.5 hours of spoken archival data (in the form of oral history interviews from the 1980s and 1990s by and with local Shetlanders), as well as contemporary interview data and participant observation spanning over 7 years (see further the details in Stewart et al. 2022). Velupillai & Mullay (2022) show that Shaetlan has a number of distinct and stable features that have received little or no attention, or, as for example in the case of the *be*-perfect (ex. 7), have been claimed to be obsolete (Smith & Durham 2011, 2012), despite such prevalence that it is even used with tourists.[16] The following illustrates a few examples of highly prolific features that are not found in Standard English.

Shaetlan has phonemic front rounded vowels /y, ø/ (ex. 3 below), which are absent in English, and a pragmatically motivated falling intonation for morphosyntactically unmarked polar questions (i.e. where the morphosyntactic structure of the utterance is identical to that of a statement, without e.g. *do*-support, other word order inversions, tags, or any other interrogative marking; ex. 4):

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[15] Available at https://soundcloud.com/gail-mcgarva-844168618/the-story-of-georgie-mcdonald/s-U7X5kCotsxm (last access 15 September 2023). The audio portrait also features a fragment of the Unst boat song, one of the very few remnants of Norn (cf. Jakobsen 1928-32: cxiii-cxiv for three versions of the Norn sea song). The original meaning of *eela* is 'an anchor stone (for a rod fishing boat)' (< ON *íli* 'anchor stone (for boat used for rod fishing); line to bind anchor stone with'; De Vries 1977: 284), but it has also acquired the meaning of 'a fishing place (for rod fishing with an anchored boat)' which then has further got transferred to 'rod fishing (from an anchored boat)'.

[16] The latter is probably a misunderstood code-switching phenomenon, where the researcher thought s/he heard Shaetlan when the consultant was politely speaking English with a Shetland accent, given that it is near impossible for the Shaetlan speaker to use Shaetlan with a non-Shaetlan speaker or to use Shaetlan in a formal situation (such as an interview situation). See further Velupillai & Mullay (2022: 27-28).

(3)   /leː/ <lay> 'lay'   ~ /løː/ <lø> 'listen intently'
      /ʃɪn/ <shin> 'shin'   ~ /ʃyn/ <shün> 'soon'
      /ɒn/ <on> 'on'   ~ /øn/ <øn> 'odour; stuffy atmosphere'

<div align="right">(Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 38)</div>

(4)   *Dy   faider   wis   a   fysherman* ↘
      2SG.POSS   father   be.PST.SG   INDF   fisherman
      'Your father was a fisherman?'   (participant observation)

Shaetlan differentiates between the second singular (cf. ex. 4 above) and plural forms, as well as between the polite and informal 2SG address forms, where the familiar form is *du* while the polite 2SG form is *you*. The latter is used with elders (often including parents) and both new and known acquaintances, while the former is used with intimate friends (typically peers), siblings and younger persons (especially children) (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 81). There is a number-invariant demonstrative with a three-way distal system:

(5)   *A=m   clipp-it   **dis**   /   **yun**   /   **dat**   ram-s*
      1SG.SBJ=BE.1SG.PRS   shear-PST   DEM.PROX   DEM.DIST   DEM.REM   ram-PL
      'I've shorn these/those/those rams.'   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 95-97)

The default dichotomy is between *dis* ('this' i.e. proximate) and *yun* ('that', i.e. distal), while *dat* is marked for remoter distance in place and/or time (i.e. 'that.REM'), also metaphorically. English only has two distinctions: *this/these* (proximate) and *that/those* (distal), and they inflect for the plural.

There is systematic grammatical gender (masculine [6a], feminine [6b], neuter [6c]), which are realised pronominally:

(6)   a. *I   tocht   I   haed   a   pendrive   bit   noo   I*
         1SG.SBJ   think.PST   1SG.SBJ   have.PST   INDF   pen_drive   but   now   1SG.SBJ

         *can-na   fin   **him***
         can-NEG   find   3SG.M.OBJ
         'I thought I had a pen drive, but now I can't find it.'

      b. *Da   phone=s   ring-in   is   du   gyaan   tae   pick*
         DEF   phone=BE.PRS.SG   ring-PROG   be.PRS.SG   2SG.SBJ   go.PROG   to   pick

         ***her**   up   or no*
         3SG.F.OBJ   up   or NEG
         'The phone's ringing, are you going to pick it up or not?'

c. *Yun=s*   *da*   *oo*   *aa*   *bagg-it*   *up,*   *hit=s*   *fine*
DEM.DIST=be.PRS.SG   DEF   wool   all   bag-PST   up   3SG.N=be.PRS.SG   fine

tae   *see*   *da*   *back*   *o*   **it**
to   see   DEF   back   of   3SG.N
'That's all the wool bagged up, it's good to get rid of it.'

                                                   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 71-72)

Velupillai (2019) has shown that concrete count nouns belong to the feminine or masculine gender, and abstract nouns and mass nouns are neuter. This also holds for new vocabulary, so that, for example concrete count nouns like laptop, pendrive, phone, etc, are assigned either masculine or feminine gender.

Shaetlan has a universal *be*-perfect as well as an associative plural (7), and a mirative copula (8):

(7)   *Is*   *du*   *seen*   *John*   **an dem**
      be.PRS.SG   2SG.SBJ   see.PTC   PN   APL
      'Have you seen John and his friends/family?'   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 73-74)

(8)   *Shø*   *cam tae be*   *a*   *cusheen*   *o*   *mine*
      3SG.F.S   COP.MIR   INDF   relative   of   1SG.POSS
      'It turns out she was a relative of mine.'   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 128-129)

Some features have been hiding in plain sight in that they have been assumed to reflect local "mispronunciations" of a Standard English feature. Examples of that are the appellation names (9) and the differentiation of the verbal particle and the directional preposition (10):

(9)   *Dere=s*   *Gibbie*   *a*   *Okrabister*
      there=be.PRS.SG   Gibbie   on   Okrabister
      'There's Gibbie of Okrabister.'

Appellation names, i.e. names where a person is identified by a place (such as *Anne of Green Gables*), are in Standard English expressed with the possessive *of*. However, the Shaetlan preposition *a* reflects an older reduced form of *on*. The construction resembles that of Scandinavian appellation names, where someone is *X on* PLACE (e.g. *Anne på Grönkulla* 'Anne of Green Gables', lit. Anne on Green Gables). Shaetlan speaker have thus been "corrected" to **Gibbie **of** Okrabister,* even leading to hypercorrections with an apologetic apostrophe, as in **Gibbe o' Okrabister.*

(10) *Pat=s*   *gyaan*   **tae**   *ging* **til**   *da*   *posst office*
      Pat=be.PRS.SG go.PRS.PTC to_{PART} go   to_{PREP} DEF   post_office
      'Pat's going to go to the post office.'   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 116-118)

Standard English no longer differentiates between the verbal particle (*to*_{PART}) and the preposition (*to*_{PREP}). Shaetlan speakers thus get "corrected" when they use the directional *til*, in the assumption (based on Standard English) that it is a "mistaken" use of Standard English *till* ('until'). Here it should be noted that the directional functions of *til* had already started to merge with the verbal particle form *tae* when Jakob Jakobsen was doing his fieldwork in Shetland in 1893-95, which he puts down as a contact effect with Standard English (Jakobsen 1928-32: 942). Whether there is any patterning that might correlate with higher access to Standard English (such as access to education and/or to trading centres), remains to be investigated.

Another interesting case of reanalysed hypercorrection is the existential marker in Shaetlan:

(11) a. *Look, **de'r**   *a*   *dratsi inna da   gairden.*
          look EXIST.PRS INDF otter in   DEF   garden
          'Look, there's an otter in the garden.'

      b. ***De wir**   *a*   *dratsi inna da   gairden   dastreen.*
          EXIST.PST INDF otter in   DEF   garden   yesterday
          'There was an otter in the garden yesterday.'   (Velupillai & Mullay 2022: 129-130)

The existential forms, which are not formed with any form of adverbial *dere* ('there') – which is also quite audially evident in any spoken data – have in later times been reanalysed to the grammatically illogical Standard English "they are" and "they were", especially by the literary classes. However, far more grammatically logical and therefore convincing is that they are actually fossilised forms of Norn *de* (< ON *þet*, the weak ablaut N.SG.NOM/ACC form of the demonstrative *þat*, which became *det* in all Continental Scandinavian languages; cf. Iversen 1994: 86) plus the Norn *er* 'is' and *vera/vesa* 'be'. These forms are phonetically very close to the Scots forms *ir* 'are' and *wir* 'were', which could explain the hypercorrection to a construction that does not make grammatical sense in either Standard English nor Shaetlan.
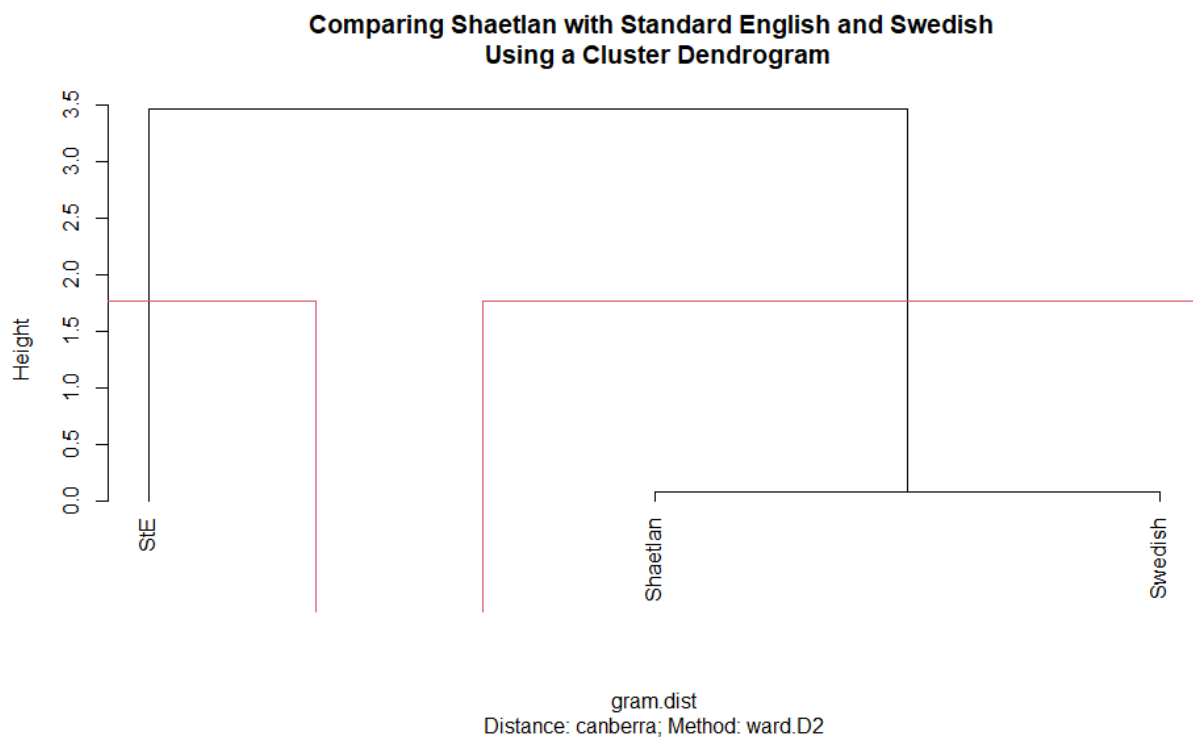
Velupillai & Mullay (2022) combined the features of Shaetlan with the major features listed for English in the *Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al. 2021) and for Swedish in *Svenska Akademiens grammatik* (Teleman et al. 1999). There were two reasons for this: (1) because the grammar of Shaetlan is often described as

being 'mainly English'; and (2) because Swedish is genetically as closely related to Shaetlan as Standard English is. As shown above, the ancestors of Shaetlan are Scots (not Standard English) + Norn (not Swedish) + (Middle) Dutch/Low German. Scots is not and never was a dialect of English any more than English is or was a dialect of Scots: Scots descends from Northumbrian Old English, while Standard English descends from Mercian Old English. And Norn was never a dialect of Swedish any more than Swedish is or was a dialect of Norn: Norn descends from Western Old Norse while Swedish descends from Eastern Old Norse. In other words, the genetic distance between Shaetlan, Standard English and Swedish is roughly the same, though Shaetlan has been in an imbalanced diglossic contact situation with Standard English for some 200-250 years, whereas there has not been any significant contact between Shaetlan and Swedish.

Some features were identical. For example, both languages have the same basic constituent order (AVO/SV), but so do 35.4% of the languages of the world (Velupillai 2012: 284). Some features were similar but not the same. For example, both languages have regular and irregular verbs (as do all other Germanic languages), but they differ in which verbs are regular or irregular. Some features had no overlap between the languages. For example, Standard English has relative pronouns (*who/which*), but Shaetlan does not. On the other hand, Shaetlan, as has been shown above, has an associative plural and a special form for the 2sg (*du*), but Standard English has neither. We weighted the features as follows: identical (total overlap) = 1; similar but not the same (partial overlap) = 0.5; different (no overlap) = 0.

We used the `hclust` function in R to plot a Cluster Dendrogram, where the algorithm clusters data based on how similar or dissimilar they are.

Comparing Shaetlan with Standard English and Swedish Using a Cluster Dendrogram

gram.dist
Distance: canberra; Method: ward.D2

Figure 4.   Cluster Dendrogram of a comparison of grammatical features between Standard English, Shaetlan and Swedish.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the branches and boxes show that Shaetlan and Swedish cluster together while Standard English sits on its own. In other words, despite the intense pressure on Shaetlan from Standard English, but with little systematic contact with Swedish, the grammar has remained much closer to the Scandinavian grammar than to the Anglian grammar.[17]

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[17] See Velupillai & Mullay (2022: 15-17) for a phylogenetic network on the Swadesh 100-list for Shaetlan, Scots, Standard English, Dutch, Swedish, Bokmål Norwegian and Nynorsk Norwegian. The network shows that Shaetlan clusters with Scots and Standard English, but is much further removed from them than Swedish is from either of the two Norwegians. The network also shows that there has been more cross-influence between Scots and English than between either of the two and Shaetlan. This conforms with the G-L Mixed Language profile: the grammar is essentially Scandinavian, while the lexicon is essentially Anglian, albeit further removed from the Anglian ancestry than the grammar is from the Scandinavian ancestry. And again this is very similar to Bildts, where the grammar of the original local language (Frisian) has essentially remained, while the lexicon is essentially a blend of the varieties of the new settlers (Hollandic Dutch); cf. van Sluis et al. 2016.

5   Traditional skills as an act of identity

It is worth noting that the skills and knowledge base outlined in the section above would historically, and maybe still does, represent skills of lower social strata. The higher social strata, such as lairds or landowners, clergy or tradesmen would themselves not have engaged in these skills, but would have profited from them in the forms of taxes and/or trading goods. Taxes to lairds from their tenants, for example, were paid in kind (fish, butter, cereals, wadmal), and knitwear was until the 20th century part of an exploitative truck system, a kind of debt bondage, where knitters were paid in kind for finished garments, very often at a disadvantage. The system was officially abolished in the UK in 1831, but carried on, especially in remoter areas, and despite various reforms and commissions in the late 19th century it didn't actually end in Shetland until the Second World War (Johnson 2022).[18] These kinds of skills therefore acquired a stigma in themselves, and were seen as adverse to social and economic advancement. The language associated with them was consequently tainted by the same kind of stigma.

The socioeconomically dominant culture, despite its numerical minority, would thus increasingly look down upon both the skills and the language. The language of the Church in Scotland gradually shifted from Scots to English, a process which was accelerated by the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the subsequent translation of the Bible into English (not Scots) by James VI/I. This development also gradually spread to Shetland. Organised and eventually universal schooling spread to all areas of Scotland (including Shetland), and the language of the classroom was English (not Scots). Children were told to speak 'proper' (i.e. English) in the classroom, an admonition which has persisted until today. It was very common until recently that children were punished, also physically, for using Shaetlan in the classroom. The notion that the language associated with such base occupations as the most menial ones of society would actually be a language in its own right, with a structure and a value in its own right, was, if it was even voiced, dismissed or ridiculed. This kind of attitudinal bias is not uncommon in contact situations, especially in situations with an displacive contact, where the register of a minority of power holders is seen as more valuable than the register of the majority local population (cf. e.g. Velupillai

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[18] Cf. also *Recent history* at https://www.scallowaymuseum.org/recent-history.html (last access 7 August 2023).

2015 and Faraclas 2020, with further references). It is especially common in colonial situations, or situations where a minority of power holders seek to exploit the resources of some environment through the efforts of a majority labour base (ibid.).

As is common worldwide in these kinds of displacive contact situations, the stigma of the local language is internalised and then in fact actively perpetuated by the speakers themselves (cf. Aikhenvald 2006). It is seen as backward, crude and undesirable, but yet there is a fondness for it because it is the language of the home. Consequently it may acquire a kind of token value as a kind of code for entertainment, for comic relief and for nostalgia, appropriate for songs, comic and satirical stories, and poetry, but not for the daily running of a modern society, and not for education or administration. In short it becomes a plaything for the literary elite, who on the one hand enjoy and promote a well-defined niche place for the language, but on the other hand deny (quite vehemently) its value in its own right as a perfectly ordinary and systematic language. By extension the communities for whom the language is the mother tongue are then also devalued as backwards. This in turn shapes potential language policies: because the language is not actually valued in its own right, any kind of policy risks engaging in token – but costly – programmes that promote the entertainment value of the language in the arts sector, but not the educational or administrative value of it. For example, education curricula may be put forth, but they will be firmly based on the socially dominant language as the default, where the minoritised language is possibly offered as an optional (and very often occasional) additive – but rarely, if ever, as a medium of instruction. Instead the default medium of instruction remains the socially dominant language, and the minoritised language is seen through that prism. The effect of such costly token policies has been thoroughly documented by Ó Giollagáin et al. (2020), Ó Giollagáin & Caimbeul (2021) and Ó Giollagáin, C. & Ó Curnáin (2023), whose data show that the mother tongue speaking community of Gaelic in the Western Isles of Scotland is largely neglected, while costly promotional programmes are concentrated on the urban context, largely dominated by the interests of middle class elite L2 speakers of Gaelic. It is not until a bilingual society gives equal time to both languages as, for example, a medium of instruction, so that students are exposed to both languages to the same extent and in parallel for the entire schooling, that a society can claim genuine promotional and balanced language policies. In the Shetland context this point has been argued repeatedly by poet laureate and mother tongue Shaetlan speaker Christine De Luca (e.g. De Luca 2018, 2022).

However, Shaetlan does enjoy a covert prestige status, and is also used as a language of subtle subversion, where register divergence is used as a marker of social distance indicating disapproval (cf. e.g. Bourhis & Giles 1977 and subsequent). For example, in a situation or meeting where Standard English would have been the default, the Shaetlan speaker might shift more and more into Shaetlan the more annoyed s/he gets at the interlocutors. Most typically this kind of distancing happens when the interlocutor treats the Shaetlan speaker in a haughty manner, or similar such situations. Furthermore, Shaetlan has acquired a noticeable street cred, possibly as an anti-establishment marker, particularly among teenage males (of varying linguistic backgrounds).[19] In a similar way, to a large extent the skills under discussion have in Shetland now moved from survival skills to skills that embody acts of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985; see also Forni 2007 on the role of pots for the Babessi of Cameroon as social and cultural markers, and on the language associated with pottery production). They represent a historical continuity of identity and sense of place, and in fact have become unique selling points for Shetland as a whole. However, there is a still a noticeable ambivalence between seeing these skills as quaint hobbies appropriate for tourism entertainment on the one hand, and on the other hand respecting them as essential and biocultural skills and knowledge that not only embody a sustainable symbiosis with the place and environment, but that also embody localised solutions to a global climate crisis. Regarding the latter, see, for example Course & MacMillan 2021 on how the Outer Hebrides Gaelic encodes and embodies care, custodianship and sustainability of maritime health, and as such forms part of the solution to a growing climate crisis; see also the global work done by Terralingua to protect and promote biocultural diversity, where the languages of the custodians are inextricably bound together with the solutions to stable and healthy biodiversty.[20] In any case, the fact remains that these skills have survived centuries of stigma and exploitation, as well as cultural repression. And with them their transmittal language has also survived to a large extent.

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[19] I have repeatedly observed both of these phenomena through participant observation spanning over 7 years.

[20] The global work and research output of the organisation is available at https://terralingua.org/ (last access 7 August 2023).

6   Conclusion: Language preservation in strangely familiar places

This chapter has used Shaetlan as a case study for how traditional skills can act as language preservers of marginalised or stigmatised codes. Shaetlan is a Mixed Language of Norn and Scots ancestry, with a noticeable historical contact influence from the continental Low Country Germanic languages. Its primary formation period was between the 15th and 17th centuries, i.e. before English became a sociopolitically dominant language in the archipelago. For the last 250 years or so, English has been seen and valued as the 'proper' language, as projected by the Church, the education system and the administrative system. Shaetlan, on the other hand, has throughout been identified as highly distinct linguistic code, but never recognised as valid in its own right. Instead it has at best been seen as a quaint and quirky brogue, or, with more hostility, as rude and backward gobbledygook that should be eradicated. It has since its formation period been associated with the traditional skills and knowledge of the lower social strata, such as fishing, boat building, peat cutting, crofting (including slaughter), the wool industry (including knitting), stone building, etc – skills and knowledge which the higher social strata (such as landlords, law and administrative officials, as well as Church and, later, education officials) depended on for tax and trade revenues, but which they themselves did not engage in.

These skills have been transmitted in intimate, familiar and immersive settings. They have been, and still are, imparted by an elder, typically of the grandparent generation, to a younger, typically the grandchild generation. Due to the intimate setting, it is the informal language of the home that is used: in an imbalanced diglossic situation that typically means the Low Language (which in the Shetland context means Shaetlan) while the High Language (which in in this context is Shetland English) is reserved for the school, the office and formal public spheres. These skills have thus acted as language preservers during this long period of intense stigmatisation of Shaetlan, preserving not only terminology and lexical expressions, but also the unique grammar of the language. It is thanks to the transmitters of these skills that Shaetlan has made it into the digital era, which in turn opens up new possibilities for acceptance and recognition.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person	OBJ	object
APL	associative	OED	Oxford English Dictionary
COP	copula	ON	Old Norse
DEF	definite	PART	particle
DEM	demonstrative	PL	plural
DIST	distal	PN	proper name
DSL	Dictionaries of the Scots Language	POSS	possessive
		PREP	preposition
EXIST	existential	PROG	progressive
F	feminine	PROX	proximate
FAM	familiar	PRS	present
INDF	indefinite	PST	past
ISLEX	(see list of References)	PTC	participial
M	masculine	REM	remote
MIR	mirative	S	subject
N	neuter	SG	singular
NEG	negation		

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