



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindadeild

Norn elements in the Shetland dialect

A Historical and Linguistic Review

B.A. Essay

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**September,
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Abstract

The languages spoken in Shetland for the last twelve hundred years have ranged from Pictish, Norn to Shetland Scots. The Norn language started to form after the settlements of the Norwegian Vikings in Shetland. When the islands came under the British Crown, Norn was no longer the official language and slowly declined. One of the main reasons the Norn vernacular lived as long as it did, must have been the distance from the mainland of Scotland. Norn was last heard as a mother tongue in the 19th century even though it generally ceased to be spoken in people's daily life in the 18th century. Some of the elements of Norn, mainly lexis, have been preserved in the Shetland dialect today. Phonetic features have also been preserved, for example is the consonant's duration in the Shetland dialect closer to the Norwegian language compared to Scottish Standard English. Recent researches indicate that there is dialectal loss among young adults in Lerwick, where fifty percent of them use only part of the Shetland dialect while the rest speaks Scottish Standard English.

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1. Introduction

Shetland's coat of arms shows an obvious connection with the Scandinavian countries. It has a Shetland pony on the left side, a Vikingship's shield in the middle, an unicorn on the right side and a ribbon beneath with the words: *Með lögum skal land byggja* 'by law shall the land be built' (Hartemink, 2013).

According to Gunnel Melchers (2012), who has done several studies on the Norn language and its influence on the Shetland dialect, Norn derives from the adjective *norrænn* meaning Norwegian and its noun *norræna* meaning the northern Norwegian language (p. 217). Robert McColl Millar (2008), the author of *Northern and Insular Scots*, describes Norn as a Scandinavian dialect, a West Norwegian dialect continuum, related to Icelandic and Faroese (p. 240). Norn is related to West Scandinavian languages i.e. Norwegian, Icelandic and Faroese which stem from the North Germanic language family. Furthermore another division of the Scandinavian languages has been proposed separating the insular Scandinavian group that includes Icelandic, Faroese and Norn from the continental group that consists of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. The Norn language is considered to be closer to the Faroese than Icelandic (Heddle, 2009, p. 49). The Norn language became extinct in the 19th century even though some of the words survived (Jakobsen, 1928, p. xix). Geographically Shetland Islands are a close neighbour to the Faroe Islands and West Norway. Some of the Shetland archipelago lies far from the main land e.g. Fair Isle and Foula and it has influenced the local dialect in these islands. Norn was the dominant language in Shetland from the 12th to the 18th century and the inhabitants were mostly illiterate farmers and fishermen so very little of their language has been preserved (Heddle, 2009, pp. 49-51).

It took several centuries for the language to change from Norn to Shetland dialect. From the late 15th century Standard English was the prestige language in the areas, used in the educational system, churches and in other official places (Sundkvist, 2010, p. 169). Around 1850 approximately 67 percent of the Shetland dialect was composed of the Norn vernacular (Barnes 1984, p. 355). Jakobsen's dictionary is composed of 10,000 words, but it has been estimated that the older generation in Shetland recognized only approximately 1500 words (365).

Shetland dialect is spoken in the islands but the islanders change to Standard English when they talk to an outsider (Smith & Durham, 2012, pp. 68-71).

In this thesis I will investigate the Norn language from two viewpoints, historical and linguistic. From the historical viewpoint I will analyse how the Norn vernacular started to form, its heyday, its final stage and interethnic marriages between Scots and native Shetlanders. From the linguistic viewpoint I will describe the language shift which occurred in the Shetland Islands from 17th to 18th century when the Norn vernacular declined and Shetland Scots took over. The aim of this thesis is to analyse this language shift in the Shetland community, which was bilingual and even trilingual when the Shetlanders spoke Norn to each other, Dutch or Low German to the Hanseatic merchants and Scots to the Scottish settlers. I will examine where the Scottish settlers came from, and if it had any influence on the Shetland dialect. Then I will investigate the lexical borrowing of Shetland dialect from Norn, sometimes with narrower or extensive meaning. Nouns that take grammatical gender marking and Scandinavian pronouns will be described, including the perfective aspect of the verbs, the consonant duration and syllable structure of the Shetland dialect. Finally I will discuss how the Shetland dialect is declining from one generation to another i.e. the Shetlanders are gradually changing their speech completely to Scottish Standard English.

2. The origin of Norn

According to Millar (2007), Pictish inhabitants lived in the Shetland Islands until the 9th century A.D. when the Pictish culture came to an end. After the Vikings arrived from 800 onwards, the Picts most likely became assimilated into the Viking culture (pp. 123–4). Michael Barnes (1998), one of the scholars writing about the Norn language, assumes that the Picts used a pre-Celtic non-Indo-European language and from this presumption it can be concluded that the Picts language had no influence of the development of Norn since there is no observable pre-Celtic substratum in Norn (p. 7).

The Latin adjective *Hetlandensis*, meaning ‘from the Shetlands,’ is the oldest form of the name of Shetland Islands, first recorded in 1190. From that time the name has changed a little, in the 15th century it was Hetland (Gammeltoft, 2010, p. 21) and in the 16th century it was Hjaltland (p. 22). When the Scottish administration took over the islands the name gradually changed to Ȝetland with the letter Ȝ (yogh), which had the same sound as /j/ (Macafee, 1997, p. 210). The letter Ȝ was discontinued in the alphabet and the name of the islands changed to Zetland County which became Shetland Islands in 1975 and Zetland County Council became Shetland Islands Council (Citizendia, 2009).

The Vikings came from Norway where King Harald Harfagri reigned from approximately 865 to 933 (Norseng, 2013). According to Michael Barnes (2004) the Norwegian Vikings did not contribute much writing in the beginning. First they spoke Old Norse, but after a while the Old Norwegian language became known as Norn. The indications investigators have of the existence of Norn include runic scripts, scaldic poems, documents in the Latin alphabet, names of places and Norn records when Norn was a living language (pp. 54-5).

3. The heyday of Norn

There are only a few stones with seven runic inscriptions from the tenth century that have been found in the Shetland Islands. Three scaldic poems in Norn have been found in Iceland, but they were written too long before the Vikings' invasion to be able to shed any light on the development of Norn (Barnes 2004, p. 56). Ballantyne and Smith, the authors of *Shetland Documents*, found only eleven documents in the Norn vernacular dated from 1195 to 1579 (pp. 14-6). These documents were written in the Latin alphabet and most likely by authors who studied in Norway, because there were no schools in Shetland before 1611 (Barnes 2004, p. 55).

Barnes (2004) compared Norn to the Norwegian writing at that time and found only a few differences. They were changes in spellings that may have some phonological significance. Example of this are traces of monophthongization: "ustan" for austan, "sode" for sauði. Another example is <m> and <n> confusion as in the final position as in "son" for som, and "skyldem" for skyldin which means deferred payment (p. 57). Records of spoken Norn consist of the Shetland Lord's Prayer, a list of thirty words, the Cunningsburghen phrase (see below) and a thirty-five stanza ballad called Hildina-ballad. These were all collected by George Low, a theologian from North East Scotland, who visited the islands in 1774. The Cunningsburghen phrase was a proverb that people in Cunningsburgh village on the mainland recited for Low. The Shetlanders used this proverb to scare away unwelcome guests (p. 62).

The Cunningsburghen phrase according to Rendboe (1987) is as follows (p. 10):

Myrk in e Liora

Luce in e Liunga

It's dark in the chimney

but it's light throu' the heath

Tim in e
Guest in e geungna

it's still time for the
stranger to be gone

Low met an old man named William Henry of Guttorm on an outlying island of Foula (Knooihuizen 2005, p. 106). He recited the thirty-five stanzas of Hildina-ballad after a “dram of gin” (Barnes 2004, p. 62). The Hildina-ballad contains 260 different words, where approximately 97% of them are originally Norn words (p. 62). Interestingly, Knooihuizen’s (2005) research shows that William Henry did not translate the ballad correctly for Low; whether it was because of the “gin” or just that he did not understand Norn remains uncertain (p. 106).

Rendboe (1984) a Danish linguist, describes how Low got the Lord’s Prayer from an old woman who had only heard Scots spoken in church. The prayer contains 46 different words and six of them derive from Scots. It has been speculated that the Norn vernacular might have been more in use than Low realized, it played a big role that Low did not know the Norn language (p. 65). An old saying that could describe the Shetlanders’ attitude against Low goes: *A’ the guid we ever got frae Scotland wis dear mael an’ greedy ministers*, which means ‘all the good we ever got from Scotland was an expensive flour and greedy ministers’ (Spence, 1899, p. 232).

Jakob Jakobsen, the Faroese scholar who visited the islands in 1890s, was able to publish an etymological dictionary and fifty short texts (Rendboe 1984, p. 60). He found approximately ten thousand words that he considered originated from Norn (Hedde, 2009, p. 52). According to Barnes (2004) Jakobsen found some features in Norn that are not found in Icelandic, Faroese or West-Norwegian. For example in the sentence *Ja’rta bodana komana ro’ntana Komba* ‘my heart, the boat has come round ‘de Kaim’ (p. 65) in which the endings are levelled to *-ana* which is not a familiar ending in the West Scandinavian languages. On the other hand some place names are almost completely Scandinavian e.g. the typical island names *Sanday*, *Westray* and *Whalsay*; the districts *Holm*, *Sandwick* and *Stennes* the farm names *Houseby*, *Kirbister* and *Stovabreck*, and the landscape names *clett*, *voe* and *nev* (p. 65). It is noticeable how much information from a considerable number of Shetlanders, Jakobsen could gather approximately a century after the death of Norn, which is in relation to Millar (2008) approach (p. 252).

4. King James III and the Reformation

As stated by Barnes (2004) tremendous political changes started in 1469 when Shetland was mortgaged to King James III as a marriage dowry of King Christian's daughter Margaret (p. 67). In 1472 the Scottish Parliament added the Shetland Islands to the English Crown and they have stayed under the Crown since then (Ballantyne & Smith, 1999, p. xiv)

In the 1560s the Reformation reached the Shetland Islands with clergymen that spoke Scots (Hnolt, 2006-2012). Millar (2007) states that the Scottish authorities introduced the Calvinist form of Protestantism to the islands. The Scots language was used by the authorities: the administration, the upper classes, church and the courts. Norse Lutheranism and Norse common law, which had been in force in the islands, were ignored. In the year 1611 Norse law was replaced by Scottish law. The Protestant Reformation was adopted and the English Bible was introduced (p. 127). As reported by Knooihuizen (2005) prior to the abolishment of the Norse law, Latin was used in churches to some extent (p. 109).

5. Scottish settlers and Hanseatic merchants

Barnes (2004) states that the Scottish settlers migrated to the Shetland Islands from the 15th century, and in the 16th century there was a large-scale immigration of Scots to the islands. The documents that were written on the islands indicate that the first document in Scots appeared in 1488 (p. 67). According to Knooihuizen (2009), the Shetland dialect does not only derive from Norn: it can also be traced back to the dialect from Angus, Fife and Lothian Scots from north-east part of Scotland, which indicates that Scottish settlers came from these places (p. 489). In Millar's (2007) opinion lexicons from Angus, Fife and Lothians are a proof of that the Scottish settlers came from east central part of Scotland (p. 132). The negativiser *no* instead of *nae* comes from this area and has been borrowed into the Shetland dialect e.g. *A'll no dö dat* 'I won't do that' (Millar 2008, p. 247), on the other hand *nae* is used in the north-east part of Scotland. Other example of lexical items that have been borrowed into the Shetland dialect from east-central Scotland are *en'wye* 'progress' and *nochtife* 'disparage' (p. 247). There is also evidence in the Shetland dialect that the settlers came from other areas e.g. *clamp* 'a stout, heavy shoe or clog' come from Stirlingshire, central Scotland, and *leap* 'flush with blushing or with skin rash' is found in Roxburghshire, south-east Scotland, *key* 'fasten with a key,

lock', *prickle* 'a prickling or stinging sensation', *wan* 'one' are found in the western and southern part of Scotland (p. 248).

From 15th to 18th century Shetland sold fish to German merchants from the Hanseatic League (History of the Shetland Islands, 2007-2013). There is evidence in the late 15th century and early 16th century that the Shetlanders were trilingual, they spoke Low German market words to the Hanseatic merchants, Scots to the Scots and Norn to each other (Barnes 2004, p. 69). For example is the adjective *plat* 'flat' a Low German word in the Shetland dialect (Barnes 2010, p. 31).

6. The parochial schools, literacy and the school system

In the late 18th century the Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge established parochial schools in the islands. At first there were only two parochial schools with only a few children, but the numbers increased as the years went by. An early 19th century survey reveals that children over eight years showed, in seven out of twelve parishes, only 24% English illiteracy rate (Graham, 2009-12). In the 1820s when the English Bible had been available for some time, an approximately 90% literacy rate was reported on the islands. However, the execution of that survey is not reliable. For example a person who owned the English Bible and knew the difference between English and other languages was considered literate (Knoolhuizen 2005, pp. 109-10). The parochial schools emphasised that English was the official form of communication. In 1872 with the Scottish Education Act these schools became compulsory (Graham 2009-12). In Wiggen's (2002) opinion these schools were one of the main causes for the language death because the teachers only taught English not Norn (pp. 61-9).

According to Melchers (1999) the school system encourages dialect writing which is a part of the school policy in Shetland (p. 335). She observed high school children all over Shetland, who were given an assignment to write in Shetland dialect for their English class. Unfortunately there are no fixed spelling rules in Shetland dialect, nevertheless the school children wrote their dialect assignments without any difficulties (p. 336).

7. Shetland Norn in its final stage

Norn was uncorrupted as long as the Shetlanders spoke it to each other states Laurits Rendboe (1984) in his article about Shetland Norn in its final stage (p. 80). Norn began to deteriorate in the 17th century when the Shetlanders spoke a "hybrid" language that was

half Norn and half Lowland Scots, which later developed into the Shetland dialect (pp. 61-80). When Jakobsen visited the island two centuries later it took him some time to collect all the Norn words and phrases. Nothing had been written about Norn since George Low's visit approximately a hundred years earlier. Jakobsen recorded a poem in Unst, north of Shetland which was from the 18th century. It shows an interesting social message from this time. It is about a proud parent whose son went to Caithness and could speak a few words in Scots when he came back. Jakobsen recorded it in (Graham, 2009 – 2012).

Də vāre gūə tī
when sonə min guid to Kadanēs:
hän kän ca' rossa mare
hän kän ca' big bere
hän kän ca' eld fire
hän kän ca' klóvandi taings
 (Rendboe 1984, p. 69)

When Jakobsen recorded this rhyme the islands grammatical structures like conjunctions, abstract nouns and everyday verbs had disappeared from the language. In this rhyme Norn has not quite disappeared: the pronouns *də*, *hän* and *min*, the verb *vāre* and the nouns *Kadanēs*, *rossa*, *big*, *eld* and *klóvandi* are all Norn words (Graham, 2009-2012). This poem roughly translates: It was a good time when my son went to Caithness, he can call rossa mare, - big bere, - eld fire, - and klóvandi taings. The pronouns *də*, *hän* and *min* mean it, he and my/mine. The verb *vāre* means was. *Kadanēs* means Caithness, *rossa* means mare/mear, *big* means bere/barley, *eld* fire and *klóvandi* tongues. These Norn words are slightly different from the Old Norse words. The Scots words are when, guid, ca', mare, bere, fire and taings. This poem shows that in the 18th century the Scots influence had already started in the northernmost part of Shetland (Rendboe 1984, pp. 70-5).

8. Inter-ethnic marriages and patronymic surnames

In Knooihuizen (2008) article "Inter-ethnic marriage patterns in the late sixteenth-century Shetland" he investigated inter-ethnic marriages and its contribution to the language shift. In this century a large number of Lowland Scots mainly from Angus, Fife and Lothian moved to the Shetland Islands. Knooihuizen studied exogamy i.e. "the rates

of intermarriage between members of the different ethnic groups” (p. 22). This plays a role in the language shift as the next generation often has better skills in the dominant language. The Norwegian Vikings came mainly in the 9th century and the Scottish settlers mainly in the 16th century. According to court books from around 1600 approximately one-third of the population in Shetland were Scottish descendants. A bilingual community stops being bilingual when the parents stop teaching their children the heritage language and only focus on the dominant one. When this happens a Primary Language Shift occurs. The Register of Testaments from the 17th century is the main record for inter-ethnic marriages from this time. Interpretation of the Register can be difficult when based solely on the names. Some people changed their names according to the document, for instance in the Norwegian documentation the surname was Sigurdsson and in the Scottish documentation they were Stewartson or Stewart (pp. 23-9). The result of Knooihuizen’s research was that the mixed marriages between Scots and native Shetlanders amounted to approximately 35%. The rest were mono-ethnic marriages where approximately 37% were Shetlanders and 23% were Scots. Women from Shetland were more likely than men to marry Scots. Knooihuizen explains that this could be because of a surplus of Scots men on the islands. This research shows us that the Scots played a big role in bringing Scots to the family homes. Scots was no longer just the official language of Shetland, but also the common language (pp. 35-6).

From the Viking age until the beginning of the 19th century the Shetlanders used patronymic surnames -daughter and -son, for example John Thomasson, where John was the son of Thomas. Other patronymic surnames referred to farms, for example Andrew a Hamar. Patronymic surnames lasted until the beginning of the 19th century, but the farm surnames are still used in speech (Stewart, 1964).

9. Linguistic aspects of Shetland dialect

9.1 Language shift

According to Hammers and Blanc (2000), diglossia becomes unstable when one language starts to assimilate the other language. The second language is used in certain areas of society e.g. in schools, marketing, court, and church etc. The internal cohesion of the first language group is affected when the other language spreads out into all corners of the society. Functions, roles and forms are transferred from the first language

group to the other. Language shift occurs when the first language group finally rejects its first language. The process ranges from monolingualism in the first language to monolingualism in the second language and in between there is bilingualism where there is word borrowing, semantic loans, code-mixing among other things. In the bilingual community the first language becomes simpler in form. Hammers and Blanc point out that stigmatised attitude towards the first language group can accelerate language shift e.g. the peasantry in Shetland was not as well educated as the Scotsmen (pp. 296-9). Barnes (2010) describes Shetland as a bilingual community in the late 17th century, where both Scots and Norn were used to some extent (p. 16). After that Norn was gradually replaced by Scots.

Millar (2007) describes three separate hypotheses to explain why Norn was replaced by Scots. The first hypothesis comes from Barnes where Scots elements gradually took over the Scandinavian elements in the Shetland dialect. The second hypothesis comes from Rendboe where the Scots took over the language rather harshly with some rejection from the native speakers of Norn. The third hypothesis states that the Shetlanders started losing their identities in the 17th century because of the Scots settlement and their communication with the Hanseatic League. After the Hanseatic League trade and the language shift was over, the Shetlanders used English in writing and Scots in speech (pp. 129-30).

Millar (2007) points out that language shifts and language death have occurred all over the world. In Shetland the language shift started in the 15th to 16th century. The loss of Norn began in the south of Shetland and spread to the north and outlying islands. The Norn language survived longest far up north in Unst and in islands like Foula that were far from the mainland, and at the beginning of 19th century Norn was dead with a few exceptions (pp. 127-8). These exceptions, according to Jakobsen (1928) were the last surviving speakers of Norn. One was known by the name of Walter Sutherland, who died in Unst of old age around 1850 and a few native speakers of Norn, not mentioned by name, lived a little longer in Foula (p. xix).

9.2 Shetland dialect today

Bilingualism and bidialectalism are two different cases, in the case of bilingualism the person uses two sets of grammars where in the case of bidialectalism, which is used in Shetland, the person uses only one grammar with “mixing of variants” (Smith & Durham, 2012, p. 80). In Robert Millar’s (2008) opinion, Norn had already disappeared when it

started acting as a “feedback loop” where Norn got reproduced in the Shetland Scots after the language shift in the 18th century. One of the causes of this “feedback loop” was Jakobsen’s visit a century later (p. 253).

The present day dialect of Shetland is not easily comprehensible to other English or Scottish speakers, it has many features derived from Norn i.e. lexis, grammatical forms and some phonetic evidence (Melchers, 2004). A Swedish student, Greger Nässén (1989) wrote a B.A. essay about 323 meteorological terms found in Jakobsen’s etymological dictionary and their use in the Shetland dialect. Nässén’s paper about Norn weather words showed that the Shetlanders, who participated, recognized more than 83% of the old weather words. These words were mostly about clouds, wind, mist, snow and rain. Sometimes the meaning had regional variation and sometimes these words were used as metaphors (pp. 1-28).

For foreigners that want to hear the Shetland accent, radio Shetland broadcasts regularly in Shetland dialect. For instance is Mary Blance a popular dialectal speaker in radio Shetland, who presents local information and news (Melchers 1999, p. 340).

9.3 Perfective aspect of verbs

Melchers (1991) describes in her article that according to Shetland dictionary by John Graham, the use of the verb to *be* (*am, is, are*) in Shetland dialect, could be viewed as an Old Norse relic. The verb is used as a perfect auxiliary verb, which takes a past participle, in the same sense as have e.g. in Old Norse *ek em kominn* ‘I have come’ (p. 473). This grammatical feature was already in use when Jakobsen visited the islands but he did not consider it as a Norwegian. He found out that this was a rather recent change and this confusion of *be* and *have* could be caused by the same pronunciation of *is* and *has*, referring to third person singular pronoun (p. 474). Klaske van Leyden (2004) points out that this perfective aspect of the verb *be* could be a Norn substratum (p. 1) and Millar (2007) calls this aspect an “active perfective constructions (p. 75).

According to Pavlenko (1996), this perfective aspect of *be* can be used with transitive and intransitive verbs i.e. with or without direct objects. Pavlenko refers to three senses of be-perfective. The sentence *he is changed*, could firstly be sensed as ‘he is different’ with *is* as a linking verb between subject and a complement, secondly it could mean ‘he has become different’ with *is* as an intransitive and perfect auxiliary verb, and thirdly it could mean ‘he has been made different’ with *is* as a passive transitive verb (p. 75).

Pavlenko (1997) suggests that be-perfect is not only derived from Norn, it was created in Shetland's bilingual community (p. 95). Today the Shetland dialect uses both *be* and *have* as an intransitive and/or transitive verb. This homonym grammatical feature can be traced back to central Scotland i.e. Lothian, Angus and Fife (p. 94).

9.4 The vowel System

Considerable Norn influences have been found in the syllable structures of the Shetland dialect. A word that contains only one stressed syllable has either a short vowel (V) when the consonant is long (CC) or long vowel (VV) when the consonant is short (C). This inverse structure between vowel and following consonant is called Scandinavian syllable structure and was first measured by J. C. Catford (1957) about half a century ago (pp. 71-6). For instance *bad* is pronounced "badd" because of the short vowel and long consonant (VCC), *fault* is pronounced "faat" with a long vowel and short consonant (VVC). This happened because of "the great quantity shift" that occurred in Scandinavia in the middle of the 13th century, but in Shetland it occurred later or after 1450 (Melchers, 1991, pp. 464-5).

Klaske van Leyden (2003) tested this Scandinavian syllable structure on Shetlanders who read a list of over a hundred different single syllable words while she measured the vowel and consonant length. She also tested this syllable structure on Norwegian, Orkney and Edinburgh speakers. Van Leyden's finding proofed that the Shetlanders have the same vowel length as Orkney and Edinburgh speakers but different consonant length. Unlike Orkney and Edinburgh speakers, the Shetlanders still have the Scandinavian syllable structure, pronouncing a long vowel with a short consonant and a short vowel with a long consonant (pp. 4-7).

According to Melchers (2004) the [ø] vowel among Shetland dialect speakers is believed to be a Norn relic. It is a recessive trait of words that still have [ø] vowel, e.g. *löff* 'palm of the hand' and the present day word *poor* (p. 44).

9.5 Consonant phonology

According to John C. Wells on the Shetland dialect, TH-stopping occurs when a voiceless dental fricative /θ/ lost its significance and is now pronounced with voiceless dental plosive /t/ e.g. *thin* is pronounced /tɪn/. The voiced dental fricative /ð/ also lost its significance and becomes a voiced dental plosive /d/ e.g. *this* is pronounced /dɪs/ (Wells,

1982, p. 399). Leyden (2004) considers TH-stopping a language development because of the loss of these fricatives in Norn (p. 20). Knooihuizen (2009) considers this a Norn substratum (p. 484). Melchers's (2012) research concludes that this is not only a Norwegian feature, but also an English factor, found for instance in Irish English (p. 226).

Melchers's research (2012) mentions a 'palatalization' of /t/, /d/ and /n/ consonants followed by front vowels as evidence of Norwegian feature (p. 217). Wells (1982) also mention a similar Norwegian phenomenon where in some occasions /d/, /n/ and /l/ are palatalized consonants (p. 399). Melchers (2012) describes this feature as perhaps *sub-phonemic*, but it is definitely a *coarticulation* in her opinion (p. 225). This phonetic feature was already in the dialect when Jakob Jakobsen visited Shetland, because he also mentioned these changes of consonants in the introduction to his dictionary (p. 225). An example of this would be the pronunciation, spoken in Shetland dialect, of the following words: *snitter* 'severe cold weather' and *flukra* 'snowflake' (Nässén, 1989, appendix 5:4).

Millar (2007) describes the kw-/wh-confusion, i.e. Shetlandic speakers combining the pronunciation of /kw/ and /w/ into /w/, so words written <qu> were pronounced as /w/, for example *queen* and *when* 'great many' would be both pronounced /win/. On the other hand most speakers from northern Shetland would combine the kw/ and /w/ pronunciation into /kw/, so these two words would both be pronounced /kwɪn/ up there. This /kw/ and /w/ combination fits directly to West Norse continuum (p. 62).

In John J. Graham *Shetland Dictionary* (1984) a few words are given with double letters to emphasise their consonant quality. These are words like *winnd* 'wind', *kann* 'can', *blinnd* 'small degree of light' and *wadder* 'weather', which have Scandinavian structure (Melchers, 1991, p. 467).

9.6 Gender marking, pronouns, nominative endings, question word, verbs and adverb that derive from Norn

When Shetlanders refer to certain nouns they use gender marking, for instance they use *shö* 'she' for the *kirk* 'church' and *he* for the weather (Millar 2007, p. 67). Millar (2008) describes weather expressions with a sex-specific pronoun, e.g. *he's a braa day* 'it's a fine day' (p. 254). This is like the Icelandic phrase that goes *hann er kaldur í dag* (literally "he is cold today") with reference to the weather.

Leyden (2004) describes a regular usage of the Scandinavian second person singular pronoun *du* in amongst friends and family. It is a non-formal pronoun in the Shetland dialect and used in everyday situations, the formal pronoun on the other hand is *you* (p. 19).

A sentence directly from Norn is in Jakobsen source *my midder kaller o me* ‘my mother calls upon me’ where the Norn possessive form *min* has changed to *my*. Some of the nominative endings have been preserved from the old language, like the verb ending –er/-ar as in *kaller* and masculine noun endings such as –er as in *shalder* ‘an oyster catcher’ and *gouster* ‘gusty wind’ and –i endings such as *hegri* ‘heron’ and *skori* ‘the gull’ (Graham 2009-2012).

The interrogative word *whar* ‘who or where’ comes directly from Old Norse *hverr*, e.g. *whar’s that* means where/who is that (Heddle, 2009, p. 55).

The verbs *snug* ‘push’ is related to Norwegian *snugga* and *ball* ‘roll together, put in disorder’ is related to Old Norse verb *ballrast* (Millar, 2007, p. 99). The adverb *der* ‘there is / there are’ derives from Old Norse *þat er* (p. 364).

9.7 Lexis derived from Norn

When one language takes over as it did in the Shetland Islands, the new language, in this case Shetland Scots, borrowed words from the older language, but the meaning can change. It is found in certain areas. Today the main sources of lexical items used in Shetland are found in the *Scottish National Dictionary* (Grant & Murison, 1929-76) and the *The Shetland Dictionary* by John Graham from 1993. Half of the vocabulary in Graham’s dictionary also occurs in the *Scottish National Dictionary*, but the other half is just pure Shetland dialect. The time that has passed by between Jakobsen’s dictionary and Graham’s dictionary is not long, but both dictionaries show the Shetland language almost century apart. Jakobsen’s etymological dictionary is very popular, especially among Shetlanders. In his book Jakobsen divides Norn words that survived the language death mainly into six classes or groups (Graham, 1993) (Rennie, 2004).

- I. The first group describes visual commonplace objects, tools, food and places. The visual objects could be tools, materials or food (Barnes, 1984, p. 365). The place names of the islands play a major role in this group. In 1901 Jakobsen wrote a book called *Shetlandsøernes Stednavne* with all the place names derived from the Old Norwegian language (Fenton & Pálsson, 1984, p. 282). *Foula* derives from the Old Norse word *Fuglaey* ‘birds island’ and *Scalloway* derives

from the Old Norse word *Skálavágr* ‘a bay with a house’ (p. 154). *Sulem/Sullom* derives from ON *sólheimr*, *Roe* derives from *rauð-ey*, *Lamba* from *lambey* and *Whalsay* from *hvals-ey*. *Evrabigords*, *Midbigards* and *Ustabi* are farm names in Shetland, where *evra-*, *mid-* and *usta* are originally from *øfra-*, *mið-* and *ysti-*, *bi* from *bær* (p. 157) and the last place mentioned here is *Bousta* which derives from *bústaðr* or *bólstaðr* (p. 159). Lexical items indicate flora and fauna on the islands belong to this group (Heddle, 2009, p. 52). For examples of *bonxie* ‘the great skua’ derives from the Old Norse word *bunki*, and a *piltick* ‘a second year coalfish’ derives from *piltr* (Millar 2007, pp. 84-6).

- II. The second group comprises names that are jeering, comical and silly, such as pet names (Melchers, 1981) (Rennie, 2004). These are the names of an individual, pet or an object that would stand out and be different in some way (Pavlenko & Pavlenko, 2010).
- III. The third group describes unstable state of mind, e.g. emotive words, especially adjective that have something to do with wrath or quirky behaviour (Pavlenko & Pavlenko, 2010) (Barnes, 1984, p. 365). Some of these adjectives have phone-aesthetic patterns such as *fjosket* ‘slovenly, untidy’ which can easily be used as swear word (Melchers 1991, pp. 471-2) (Hnolt, 2006-2012).
- IV. The fourth group refers to different shade and colours of the domestic animals in Shetland (Rennie, 2004). This is a range of colours especially of sheep that can have wider meanings; for instance *moorit* colour of a sheep is a yellowish brown tinge (Fenton and Pálsson 281). *Iset/isket* has many meanings, it can mean ‘bluish-grey’, ‘iron-grey’, ‘having reddish or bluish tinge’, ‘dirty red’ or ‘dirty white with yellow or greyish brown tinge’ (Melchers, 1991, p. 472).
- V. The fifth group describes the weather and the sea (Rennie, 2004). Some of these words are mentioned above in Nässen’s (1989) project. Examples of Norn original weather words from his project are *mur/mura/muri(n)* ‘a very dense snowfall or thick snowstorm’ and *murikav/murakav etc.* ‘a fine dense snowfall or snowstorm’ (appendix 5:5). The weather has always been a major factor for the

Shetlanders because of their lifestyle. The Shetlander's main occupation, as mentioned before, was fishing and farming for many centuries (Cowie, 1874).

- VI. The sixth group refers to fishing and the taboo words of the fishermen. After the language shift, Shetland fishermen spoke mainly Shetland dialect. At sea they used taboo language, words that were Norn origins, about the weather, ship parts, fishing tools, all sorts of fish and dangerous creatures and circumstances etc. According to the myth the name of the fish could scare it away and the names of whales, shark and sea birds could attract them. Therefore the fishermen used taboo words instead, these words survived longer compared to some other Norn words (Knooihuizen, *Fishing for Words*, 2008, pp. 100-7). Just to mention a few examples the word *roost* 'a whirlpool' derives from the Old Norse word *rósta* (Heddle, 2009, p. 52) and the verb *drock* 'drench' which is related to the Old Norse word *drukna* (Millar, 2007, p. 86).

Melcher (1981) mentions the additional group of words that have survived death of Norn i.e. words for holidays and seasons. For example *voar* 'spring' derives from the Old Norse word *vár* (Heddle, 2009, p. 52). The names of daily activities also survived the Lowland Scots according to Jakobsen (Fenton & Pálsson, 1984, p. 281) and so did the words that describe qualities (Barnes, 1984, p. 365).

Some phrases that are of Norn origin do not belong to any group, e.g. the phrases in *Minds du* 'do you remember' and *kens du* 'do you know' (Barnes, 1984, p. 364). These two phrases lack the main auxiliary verb *do*, they use the pronoun *du* in this case with the imperative. In the same manner did Melchers (2012) a research on an old word order that exists in Icelandic, Faroese and Shetland dialect as the "overt-subject imperatives" *geng du my boy* (p. 227).

Millar (2007) declares that there are large amounts of Old Norse lexis in all Scots dialects since the Vikings arrival in the north of England in the Middle Ages, for instance Scots words such as *kirk* 'church' and *brigg* 'bridge' derive from Viking era and are known all over Scotland (p. 99).

9.8 Extensive and narrower meaning of lexis derived from Norn

Melchers' (1986) article describes the narrowing and extension of meaning of lexis with Norwegian origin. In the case of extension the words *lupi/lupek* meant originally 'a small spoon', means today also 'a heart-shaped crab' (p. 113). *Dollek* meant 'pail' in Jakobsen's dictionary and today it also means 'a stout, clumsily-built woman' (p. 113). *Dim(m)* is used for 'dusk', especially as *simmer dim* referring to midsummer's nights, but *dim(m)* is also used as metaphor in the sense of 'troublesome' in *dim o' dirt* (p. 113). *Hammer* a 'single projecting rock in a mountain' is also a place name in Unst as Erns Hammer (p. 113). *Bjart* meant 'bright' or 'shining' in the old days, means 'cold and dry' or 'keen' nowadays (p. 114). *Snell* has changed from 'bright and cold' to "an indication of white colour" (p. 114). The verb *lunk* used to apply to a part of a boat, but today it also means 'walking slowly and unsteadily' (p. 114). *Sprett* means to jump and it also means to sprout, in connection with knitting it means to undo or tear up (p. 115). The word *drums* went through syntactic changes when this noun was also used as a verb. The noun means 'gloomy, peevish mood' or "gruff, peevish person" and the verb means 'to sulk' (p. 115). The Shetlanders often use the adjective *blithe/blide* which is related to the Old Norse word *bliðr* 'gentle', the adjective is often used with the Old Norse meaning although it is also associated with joy (p.116).

In the case of narrowing the word *hent* means 'collecting wool shed by sheeps on hills' and has been further narrowed by some Shetlanders as 'digging small portion of potatoes'. It is originally from the Old Norse word *heimta* which means 'fetch, bring home' (Melchers, 1986, p. 117). *Met* which derives from the Old Norse word *matr*, which is only preserved in the word *ferdimet* which means food for a journey (p. 118), which is probably *ferðamatur* in Icelandic.

Dagdwälj/dagdwel can be seen as both narrowing and extension of meaning. It is both a noun and a verb. The extensional meaning of the noun is 'lounging' or 'fruitless occupation', the narrowing meaning is 'toys for pastime' (Melchers, 1986, p. 115). Even narrower meaning is 'toys that require mental activity', which has narrowed further into 'wooden frame with three cross-pins and a thread that is twinned and untwined again' (p. 117). The verb meaning is to pass time idly and indolently or 'to work continuously with poor result' (p. 115).

According to Melchers (1986), the Shetland dialect has kept some words from the dead language. The Shetland dialect is sensitive to narrowing and extension of the words

meaning, but the meaning rarely changes completely. Therefore Melchers compares the Norn vernacular to a sinking ship where the pieces are “floating away from the sunken hulks (p. 118).”

10. Dialectal death

Jennifer Smith and Mercedes Durham (2012) have published research on bidialectalism in Lerwick, the capital of the Shetland Islands. In their previous findings they tested three generations of Shetlanders and used six traditional dialectal forms, for instance *be* perfect as a morphosyntactic feature, and TH-stopping as a phonetic feature. They found out that the older generations used the traditional forms more frequently than the young generation (pp. 60-3). They also investigated the dialectal form used by young Shetlanders today. These young adults, age 17 – 21 (p. 61), were interviewed twice, first by an outsider in a formal situation, and then by an insider, who was their old classmate, in more casual situation. This study showed that only half of these young adults used some of the traditional dialectal forms, while the other half used Scottish Standard English in both of the interviews. Those who used the dialectal forms preferred to use standard variants when they talked to the outsider (pp. 68-71). This result is an indication that there is a dialect shift going on in the Shetland Islands where the traditional dialect is disappearing and Scottish Standard English is taking over (p. 57). “The *generation of choice* may well become generation of no choice (p. 76).”

Leyden (2004) described similar phenomena in Lerwick where the local dialect had undergone levelling especially with the young generation who mainly used Standard English (p. 18).

In a same manner Melchers (2004) points out that the “young people are losing some of the traditional-dialect indexicals ...” (p. 37). According to this, there is a possibility that in the nearer future, there is going to be dialect obsolescence in Shetland.

11. Text and a sound sample in Shetland dialect

A sound sample of Shetlandic (George Jamieson, Unst, October 2005) is accessible on the following web site: <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/dialects/nis/1.wav> (Jamieson, 2005).

This is how Millar (2007) transcribes this excerpt (pp. 149-50):

*When A wis born here an brought up here on i croft – ma father wis a
crofter all his life, came here in twinty-eight....*

*/ʌɪn a wɪz bɔrn hir ən brɔt ʌp hir ən ə krɔft ma ˈfɑðər wɪz ə ˈkrɔftər ɔl ɪz
ləɪf kem hir ɪn ˈtwɪnti et/*

The text roughly translates: I was born and brought up here in this small farm. My father came to this farm in 1928 and he was a tenant farmer all his life. George Jamieson's pronunciation is closer to Scottish Standard English than Shetland dialect. He is a former head-teacher and that may have influenced his speech. He probably spent some time on the mainland of Scotland to get his education. He uses /ʌ/ instead of /kw/ which is Scottish Standard English. Still he has some known Unst features such as /ð/, this is an old feature, /ð/ has changed to /d/ in the Shetland dialect (p. 150).

12. Nornomania

The other side of the coin is a term called 'nornomania'. The historian Brian Smith from Shetland, describes 'nornomania' as "alleged obsession with the Scandinavian ('Norn') heritage in research on the dialects of Orkney and Shetland" (Melchers, 2012, p. 213). He criticizes the obsession of the Norn vernacular by Jakob Jakobsen and Laurits Rendboe (p. 214). In Smith's opinion Jakobsen and Rendboe valued it more than the living language in Shetland and since then, this 'nornomania' has passed on to the public. For example when Jakobsen's dictionary was republished in 1985, it reached the best-selling list in Shetland (p. 215). Melchers admits that she also became affected with 'nornomania' when she first visited the islands in 1979 (p. 215). Miller on the other hand views the Shetland dialect as Shetland Scots which is not entirely based on the Scandinavian language, but also on Scots which originated from different part of Scotland (p. 222). However in Knooihuizen's view, the Shetland dialect is a new variety of Scots with indirect Scandinavian influence from the native Shetlanders (p. 223). Melchers concludes that the term 'Norn' should be used carefully compared to other factors that have influenced Shetland dialect i.e. English, Scots and German (p. 227).

13. Conclusion

Approximately five hundred years ago Norn slowly faded away with each passing generation, Lowland Scots took over and today Norn is a substratum in the Shetland

dialect. Jakobsen spent a rather short time on the islands approximately a century after the death of Norn, and his research conclude that lexical items derived from Norn and associated with places in Shetland, emotions, plant and animal names, weather and fishing words are particularly well-preserved in the Shetland dialect. A study done approximately three decades ago showed that the Shetlanders were very familiar with the weather words that originated from Norn. The islands have such rich knowledge of the Scandinavian heritage, one has to be careful not to become influenced with 'nornomania'.

The Shetlanders tend to speak Shetland dialect to each other and luckily for foreigners, the inhabitants are able to speak and write Standard English. One of the phonetic features that stand out is the syllable structure of the accent. Shetlanders pronounce a long vowel with a short consonant and a short vowel with a long consonant, which is very similar to Norwegian syllable structure. The school system in Shetland has encouraged children to write in Shetland dialect in their English class and they do it without difficulties. Today the Shetland dialect is used particularly among the older generation. Recent studies show that young individuals in Lerwick use mainly Scottish Standard English and at least half of them know very little about their traditional dialect. This is the status of the vernacular only about hundred years after Jakobsen's visit to the islands. What will happen after twenty years or so when these young inhabitants have children? Will they be able to teach them their old dialect of heritage? What the future holds in store for this dialect is unknown, hopefully it will survive.

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