

Changing Tendencies in the UK: Teaching Dialects in Schools and Standardization

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the case of diglossia in Shetland, northern Scotland: the use of dialect and its implementation in pre-school and school educational curriculum. In particular, this article is aimed at revealing methodology and educational programs used in teaching the dialect in order to protect the local language traditions. The article examines teaching materials used in pre-school and school curricula in Shetland to establish in what ways teaching dialect is carried out and what methods are used to involve children most effectively in the dialect learning process. The current article is based on the research project carried out on the territory of the Shetland Islands, therefore, all the data and materials used are authentic and up-to-date. The results of the research presented in the article argue that while in some areas of the British Isles dialects are dying out, the local citizens of the Shetland Islands have found a way to protect and spread their local language variety. Moreover, the Shetland language case study demonstrates that the Shetland dialect implementation in pre-school and school curricula has, first of all, proved the bottom-up management effective and, secondly, revival and standardization of a local variety possible.

KEYWORDS

Standardization, dialects, norms, diglossia, teaching dialects, Shetland

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Introduction

It was only recently that regional varieties (dialects) were seen as non-standard, geographically limited varieties which were striving to preserve its oral traditions (Kerswill, 2006; Britain, 2005) and used in writing only as tools to serve 'humorous purposes' or to draw on stereotypes of local setting. However, the language situation in the Great Britain is undergoing considerable changes: while some insist on the levelling and the loss of local language variety features (Kerswill, 2003; Britain, 2005; Trudgill, 1986, Milroy, 2002), others demonstrate dialect revival (Siarl, 2013; Gachelin, 1995). Much of this strand is driven by the change in the language situation across the UK which was a result of the public fear that there might be a shift in dialects towards British English Standard which would for many regions in the UK mean the loss of their historical

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heritage and identity. The great upheaval of national identities and their language varieties started in the UK in the mid XIX century when the Welsh Not (Welsh and 19th century education, 2014) was still used at schools to punish children by lashing if they were overheard to speak Welsh. However, hardly could anyone imagine then that due to the Welsh Language Act 1993 and Government of Wales Act 1998 the Welsh would be recognized as a minority language and included in the National Curriculum.

Such an advancement in the revitalization of a language or dialect would be impossible if not for the persistent and well-organised 'bottom-up' management. 'Bottom-up' management in this case would mean that decisions for changes come and are being implemented not from the above (the upper administration) but from the executives (local citizens and institutions of Scotland and Wales). Local institutions in the UK today obtain the power to establish local language policy as long as they don't breach any government laws or regulations. The Welsh local government, being run by Welsh nationalist party, established Welsh Language Tribunal and Welsh Language Partnership, Welsh Language Commission. Scots and Scottish Gaelic have also been introduced to the national curriculum only recently with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and Scots language policy (2015) launched.

The Shetland Dialect is a particularly suitable locale for the study of dialect revival as it has only recently started its way to standardization and serves a good example of 'bottom-up' language policy management, which in case of persistent hard work may bring to the establishment of the official status of the Shetland dialect. Following a number of the successful examples of the language or dialect revival, the Shetlanders very quickly came to the understanding that the drive for a great shift in management of educational institutions, its functions and language varieties promoted, can be initiated and controlled not by the governmental bodies but by local institutions. Therefore, the current research is devoted to investigation of a dialect revival project which was initiated by the Shetland ForWirds and the Shetland Council in cooperation with all local institutions such as BBC Shetland, Shetland Museum, etc. As I will demonstrate below, a number of educational programs have been developed by the project coordinators to help teachers in primary and secondary schools to hold classes in the Shetland dialect and teach children the dialect grammar and vocabulary.

As a result, the development of educational programs and establishment of written norms then, I argue, can lead to standardization of the regional variety, like it happened to the British English language back in the XIII c., when the first printing machine appeared and book printing brought up the necessity in standardizing the Wessex dialect (Southern dialect) (Crystal, 2004).

Theoretical Background

Diglossia has been characteristic of the UK for a major part of its history and can reach as far back as the first dialects and dialect contact was taking place. The most vivid examples of diglossia in the UK are a great number of dialects coexisting first along with the French and Latin languages as a result of the Norman invasion, then with the Standard British English. Diglossia became a matter of wide discussion after Ferguson's seminal article on diglossia where he defined diglossia as the situation when 'two or more varieties of the same

language are used by some speakers under different conditions' (Ferguson, 1959). J. Ferguson (1959) pointed out a number of variables to define diglossia, however, the major criteria which are of special interest to us are as follows:

Functionality: each language variety has its function or appropriacy, when in some cases only H ('high' variety/usually a standard) can be used by the speakers, whereas in the other cases, only L ('low') variety can be used. In our case, the H is the Standard English and the L is the Shetland dialect. Unlike the offered by Ferguson classification of H/L usage, where the dominance of H over L is clearly stated, in the case of the Shetland Islands the preference is given to the local dialect (See Table 1).

Table 1. The Shetland Dialect case study applied to Ferguson's classification of H/L usage. Source of the Data: J. Ferguson, 1959; own analysis

Situations	Ferguson's theory		Shetland dialect case	
	H	L	H	L
Sermon in church or mosque	x			x
Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks		x		x
Personal letter	x			x
Speech in parliament, political speech	x		x	x (in case of speeches given locally)
University lectures	x			Not valid. No Universities in the Shetland Islands
Conversation with family, friends, colleagues		x		x
News broadcast	x		x	x (BBC Shetland can use the dialect as well)
Radio 'soap opera'		x		x
Newspaper editorial, news story, caption on picture	x		x	x
Caption on political cartoon		x		x
Poetry	x			x
Folk literature		x		x

Therefore, as stated in the Table 1, the use of the Shetland dialect is not limited by certain social classes or situations. What is more, there is a book of the Shetland translation of some pieces of the Bible, which, as the authors believe, makes the Shetlanders feel more comfortable and connected as they hear the religious ceremonies held in the Shetland dialect.

- **Prestige:** when H is defined as a superior. H alone is regarded as real and L is reported 'not to exist'. In the case of the Shetland, despite the fact that Standard English is obligatory all around the Great Britain, there are people in Shetland who can be speaking Shetland but suffer from the lack the knowledge of the Standard English (it is mainly common for off-mainland islands).

Literary heritage: there is no literature in L variety, but all is in H variety. When it comes to written traditions, it's important to mention that this is one of those aspects that differ Shetland dialect from other dialects. In other words, the number of literature, prose and poetry, detectives, for kids of different ages, translations (among many is 'Alice's Adventirs in Wonderlaand' by Laureen Johnson) is greatly increasing.

Acquisition: if according to Ferguson, only H variety is seen as a 'language' and acquired at schools, then in the Shetland Islands L variety is equally acquired at pre-school and school.

Standardization: there are grammars and dictionaries and all necessary attributes for standardization in H variety, whereas, according to Ferguson, 'descriptive and normative studies of the L form are either non-existent or relatively recent and slight in quantity... and carried out chiefly by scholars OUTSIDE the speech community' (Ferguson, 1959). It used to be the case with the Norn (language spoken in Shetland until the XIX c.), whereas today the dialect norms are being established and offered to Shetland dialect teachers along with the Teacher's Handbook for pre-school and school educational programs.

As Ferguson introduced a wide discussion around the case of diglossia, various scholars developed various terminology to describe its notion. J. Fishman (1967) introduced cases of 'extended' diglossia when the condition of two H/L varieties being genetically related was no longer valid. For example, Latin in Medieval Europe when it had its specific areas of function coexisting with other Standard languages and their dialects, providing each was exploited within its function areas. According to C.M. Scotton (1986) there are no pure diglossic communities, as in order to be called the one, 2 conditions should be considered: (1) everyone should speak the Low variety as a mother tongue and (2) the High variety shall be never used in informal conversations. We argue that the case of the Shetland dialect is the closest to the pure diglossic society.

Methodology and Research Design

To examine the language situation in the Shetland Islands, the field research was carried out in the stated area. Empirical method of research was applied. Over 100 locals of the age 18 and over from all around the Shetland agreed to give interviews and fill in questionnaires, including the Shetland Council employees, project creators and coordinators of the educational programs for Shetland children, writers and poets, organizations like ShetlandForWirlds, Radio BBC Shetland, Shetland Museum and many others who contributed to the legitimacy of the carried out research and its results. Moreover, the authors of prose and poetry, A Shetland Bible (Greig, 2009) gave interviews, shared their professional opinion on the language situation in the Shetland Islands and shared their books as a contribution to the current research. The data had been collected and quantitative and qualitative analyses carried out.

Teaching materials for pre-school and school programs were provided for the current research by the ShetlandForWirlds and the Shetland Council. Moreover, educational programs coordinators shared detailed information on the process of project execution, the tradition of storytelling, how it is implemented in the teaching process and other methods that Shetland dialect teachers use in

order to encourage interest among children in the learning process, as well as the challenges they had to face while working out and realizing this project.

Results and Discussion

Great Britain has always been known for its conservative traditions and been a forerunner bringing around new views, tendencies and approaches. Language situation management is not an exception in this case: while some other countries ignore the existence of dialects, the UK has come to understanding of the importance of the latest and developed a way to secure their functioning within the spoken areas. The present case study is carried out on the Shetland dialect revival strategy which is leading to its standardization.

There have been relatively few studies of the changing role of a dialect in the society or even less on its standardization. Much more attention the scholars drew to the development and change of dialects, processes of convergence and divergence and variation at the lexical, morphological and phonological level in the linguistic varieties of the UK.

Standardization is a long process and, therefore, it would be not correct to claim that the process of Shetland dialect standardization is complete. However, a lot of work is being done which is considerably speeding this process up. Standardization as a process consists of several major stages: selection, acceptance, elaboration and codification. Selection implies the selection of norms at all linguistic levels; acceptance stage comes after the norms of a language variety have been agreed upon; elaboration takes place when a language variety is covering more and more functions as a 'language'; codification means design of dictionaries and learning materials to support norms and rules of a language variety. All stages are covered by various organizations and institutions, individuals. Norms and rules of the Shetland dialect are being automatically worked out and implemented in pre-school and school education. For example, there are the following suggestions enumerated in Tinder Box resources:

How to spell some words;

Use of the apostrophe. Don't use an apostrophe for taking a letter off the end i.e. leave it as "greetin" for crying, or "wi" for with, or "o" for of, or "goin" for going;

Poetry and prose writing tips. Story-starts: 'Jack wisna at da hoose. Naebody wis at da hoose. Da only thing at wis at da hoose wis a muckle broon dug, sittin on da step, tied ta da door haandle, blyde an freendly an waggin his tail. I wis niver seen him afore in me life' (Tinder Box resources, 2016).

Shetland dialect dictionaries, glossaries, etymological dictionaries and Shetland idiom dictionaries have been long available and updated since back in the XIX c. The last edition of the 'Shetland Words: a dictionary of the Shetland dialect' dates 2014. The number of available resources in the dialect are immensely increasing year after year.

Shetland Islands lie north-east of the island of Great Britain and form part of the United Kingdom. It's a territory with a well-developed infrastructure and high living conditions with population over 23, 000 inhabitants. The linguistic situation in the Shetland Islands can be characterized as diglossic, where English, as an official language of Great Britain, is obligatory and Shetlandic (a

synthesis of Norn, Scottish and English) is used all around the Islands. Shetlandic is a 'language variety' that according to the Scots language Centre (Shetland, 2016) is a form of a Scots dialect, whereas others consider that 'the view, supported by various authors, that the Shetland dialect is merely English with some few Norse terms for tools and objects in common use is quite false, for there (is)... a whole mass of words which penetrate the whole language, in every case the language of the older generation and those who live away from the main centre' (Jakobsen, 1893).

Diglossia in the region is secured by the fact that unlike many other dialects, the Shetland dialect has a long lasting oral and written tradition: folklore, myths, songs and proverbs. Among modern writers there are Joseph Gray (1869 – 1934), Basil R. Anderson (1861 – 1888), Laureen Johnson (1949) and many others. Today the development of the Shetlandic is secured by the activities and projects initiated by several local organisations: the Shetland Council, ShetlandForWirlds, Shetland Museum, BBC Shetland, Shetland Folk Society. With the common effort, they developed educational programs for pre-school and school learners to literacy in the Shetland dialect. According to the ShetlandForWirlds, 'the material can be used to supplement or replace Standard English material as considered appropriate. The aim is to value the language children bring into nursery, playgroup and school, encourage children to feel at ease using the Shetland dialect if they wish, with confidence, and to encourage them to respect each other's cultural and linguistic differences' (Secondary School, 1996; Dialect Project Resources, 1996).

It is essential to remember that Shetland dialect case is a perfect example of a 'bottom-up' language policy management. The introduction of the Shetland Dialect in pre-school and school curriculum and all the similar projects launched have been initiated by the locals upon their own will, believe and support. It was a string determination to bring positive changes in the society and shape the future generation in the way they believe will be beneficial for the Shetland Islands. The Shetlanders have realised that in order to secure the historical heritage and protect their identity and the language, they had to work out a very effective strategically language policy inside of the Islands which would satisfy both the official Curriculum for Excellence in the UK and the need for a national identity feeling and unity of the Shetlanders who feel that, due to their Scandinavian (Norwegian and Danish) background, they differ greatly from the rest of the British Isles.

In fact, the case of Shetland dialect revival and standardization is a very vivid and incredible for the reason of how the whole process of revitalization started. Traditionally, the one responsible for language policy in the country is the government. The government sets aims and goals to achieve. As an example, the government of Catalonia which introduced the Catalan back in schools and encouraged the local population to get away from the Spanish language and identity to the Catalan language and identity. As a result, within several decades the Catalan government made the world recognize Catalan as a separate identity in opposition to the Spanish language and culture. In case of the Shetland dialect neither the British government nor the Scottish government did anything in particular to encourage the local Shetland population to protect their culture, identity or the 'language'. On the contrary, the Standard English or Scots have been spread around in the Shetland

Islands, especially since the mid of the XXc. when immigration into the Islands boomed because of oil resources found out around. Under the fear of losing their identity, the Shetlanders put their efforts together and initiated a number of projects like ShetlandForWirlds, Storytelling, designing teaching resources for pre-school and school education, etc.

Greatest project launched ever since is incorporation of the Shetland Dialect at pre-school and school curriculum. A number of educational programs have been developed for children of different ages.

The educational programs consist of several stages:

Early Years (nursery and P1);

Dialect in Nursery/pre-school and Primary 1;

First Level (P2-4);

Material for Primary classes 2-4;

Second Level (P5-7);

Primary 1-7;

Currently available across the range of primary classes;

Secondary;

Dialect in secondary schools;

Further Education.

Dialect course for nursery/preschool kids was initiated in 2006, as a result of a research carried out in 2005-2006 which studied the demand for dialect and educational requirements to kids under-fives. The course includes the use of such materials as the Dialect Ditty Box, place-mates, books for kids (by Iris Sandison, Valerie Watt, etc.) and other rhymes, songs and stories for kids. Dialect Ditty Box is a resource pack, 'used purely for enjoyment, but all relate to common topics and are carefully matched to modern curriculum requirements, and backed up by supporting Activity Sheets and additional resources' (Secondary School, 1996; Dialect Project Resources, 1996), was created by ShetlandForWirlds members Christian Tait, Laureen Johnson and Iris Sandison working together with Frances Tait, SIC Creative Links Graduate, and Noelle Henderson, Creative Links Officer.

Early years materials were followed by the First level resources (A Daer Box) designed in 2007 by Frances Tait (SIC, Dialect Assistant), working together with ShetlandForWirlds members Laureen Johnson, Iris Sandison, Christian Tait and teacher Jean Ramsay and updated in accordance with the Curriculum for Excellence in 2011 by Schools Dialect Co-ordinator Bruce Eunson, working together with the Shetland ForWirlds Education Group, and in consultation with teachers.

For the Second Level, which includes Primary School (P5-7), there is a Tinder Box resources (2016) which also include more advanced learning materials and books to read. Special resources for music and drama classes have been designed for Primary 1-7 school. Music workshops were carried out by a famous singer Maria Barclay Millar (Evergreen, 2011-2012) in blocks of 6 weekly workshops in order to encourage dialect signing at Shetland schools, whereas drama classes were a part of a 'Play in a Box' Project aimed at providing school teachers with a pack of ready to use ideas, class texts, teacher's

notes, CDs and even costumes in order to develop drama skills among Shetland children.

Secondary school education implies a much more advanced level of dialect awareness: greater number of books (Dancin wi da Mune, by Grace Barnes, Bright Pebbles, eds Blance and Johnson, 2010 which is a must-have for those interested in Shetland poetry) and others. The 1996 Dialect Project specially designed materials for P1-7 pupils, “The Kist/A'Chiste: sccc” (1996), provided with all supplying materials for teachers including a glossary along with a Teacher’s Handbook, information on the texts used and the background information (Secondary School, 1996; Dialect Project Resources, 1996).

All teaching materials are available and downloadable on the official webpage of the ShetlandForWirds (2009-2016).

However, along with active and interactive work, there have been challenges that the project coordinators had to face, i.e. Shetland dialect teachers. Teaching dialects also means that the demand and requirements for teachers of Shetland dialect is also growing. To tackle the challenge, the teachers and the working staff received great support from the project developers, as well as local population. School teachers have been offered workshops and additional supporting materials for Teachers where it is explained in details how the dialect functions, major rules and exceptions in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, etc. For example, the Dialect Ditty Box includes a lesson in numbers where the teachers can also find Teaching Tips which explain the difference between ‘een’ and ‘twa’ (Dialect Ditty Box, 2007):

When do we use ‘een’ or ‘twa’?

We can use ‘een’ on its own, like this: ‘Does du hae a fitba? I hae een.’ (Or ‘I hae wan.’)

If ‘one’ comes before the name of an item, we can say ‘wan’ or ee but not ‘een’: e.g. wan problem or anidder ee problem or anidder.

We can use ‘twa’ and ‘two’ interchangeably in all situations, except when counting aloud as above: e.g. twa meenits or two meenits Does du hae ony sisters? I hae twa.’

The current project is still ongoing on the Shetland Islands which means that new materials are being introduced over time, more books and sources in the Shetland dialect are being developed. The effort put in the project brings the challenge of the norm: what is correct to say, to write, to pronounce.

Conclusion

Dialect standardization is not a new process if seen historically, however, it’s rare and outstanding today. One of the reasons for such processes taking place now is globalization. People who are used to living in small communities, like the Shetlanders do, are afraid of losing their national identity, traditions, language and culture. They agree to scold and ignore their kids speaking English at home in order to remind them of their ‘Scandinavian’ background which is still being reflected in the Shetland dialect. The current research project has revealed that the more north you go off the mainland, the more Scandinavian people feel.

As the Shetland dialect research project went on, it became very clear that the Shetland dialect teaching project had accomplished 3 major goals:

1. they set and fulfilled a 'bottom-up' language policy management strategy and proved local organisations and institutions strong and effective;
2. they managed to achieve the revival the dialect and secured its use around the Shetland Islands for another generation or more;
3. they initiated the process of the Shetland dialect standardization.

The results of great job done by the Shetlanders were above the expected: the educational projects have proved to be of great success and interest to kids and teenagers. The interviews of the younger Shetlanders confirmed that they would not want to leave the Island as they liked everything there: the unity, the language, the culture, the historical heritage. Therefore, if it was the goal to develop the national identity feeling through the language among the younger generation in Shetland, then it can be considered achieved.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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