

The interplay of language shift and new-dialect formation: the development of Shetland Scots

Remco Knooihuizen

In recent years, much theoretic work has been done on the question of how migrants from different areas negotiate their new dialect, e.g. Kerswill & Williams 2000 on Milton Keynes or Trudgill 2004 on New Zealand English. Crucially however, these theories presuppose a 'tabula rasa' situation, where no speakers of the language were present in the area before, or where the original speakers are vastly outnumbered by the migrants. But how does new-dialect formation work in situations where the migrants have to negotiate their new dialect not just with themselves, but with other groups as well?

The Scottish archipelago of Shetland presents us with such a case. A 16th-century migration of Scots speakers into the area triggered a rapid language shift away from the islands' Scandinavian vernacular Norn, while the Scottish immigrants were still negotiating their new dialect.

I will present data on early Shetland Scots, based on historical documents, meta-linguistic comments and linguistic reconstruction, and compare these to the migrants' original Lowland Scots varieties and to Norn. Following Trudgill's theory of new-dialect formation, and looking at the socio-historical background and the mutual interference of L1 and L2 in second-language acquisition, I argue the data suggest that new-dialect formation in Shetland proceeded according to Trudgill's model, and that the native Shetlanders' L2 variety of Scots participated as an input variety in this process. This implies that the Scandinavian influence on Shetland Scots may have been transferred indirectly via the L2 variety.