

A grammar of Shaetlan – Pre-oil and contemporary

Transcription orthography

for a systematised analysis of the spoken data

Archival and contemporary

Based on the typological principles set out in

SIL FieldWorks Language Explorer (FLEx) 9.0

as well as on the general conventions of the speech community

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Article 4.3

States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.

UN Commission on Human Rights

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Adopted by General Assembly resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992



It is a fundamental human right to receive schooling in your mother tongue. Yet despite their rich literary tradition, Shetlanders have never been granted this right. On the contrary, the use of Shaetlan was, until recently and without any linguistic justification, not even permitted in schools.

One of the main obstacles for a language to be accepted as a medium of instruction is the lack of a standardised spelling system. We mean to address that potential concern by here providing a linguistically motivated, pragmatic orthography. The basic principle for this transcription system is to orthographically render the

phonemes of Shaetlan to the closest equivalent of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol, while keeping the orthography meaningful for speakers both in terms of legibility and in terms of keyboard uses. It should be noted that the graphemes to a large extent represent phonemes, i.e. meaning distinguishing sounds, which means that small differences are not captured, but rather the general sound that is commonly understood across the speech community. This mirrors every other orthographic system in the world, where significant sound differences between and within varieties of any given language are left uncoded in the spelling. For example, there are significant differences in the sound of the speech between speakers of Standard English across the UK: the voice of someone from Belfast speaking Standard English differs noticeably from the voice of someone from Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow or Kent speaking Standard English. But the spelling system remains the same. Similarly, the voice of someone from Hamburg speaking Standard German differs considerably from the voice of someone from Köln, Stuttgart, Leipzig or München speaking Standard German. But the spelling remains the same. And this holds for regional accents and voices in every speech community.

The purpose of this transcription system is thus to focus on **commonalities** rather than differences. In other words, while there will only be one consistent spelling for one word, in real speech that particular word will be uttered differently in different areas, between different speakers and indeed by the same speaker at different points in time. These absolute physical variations will not be captured in a systematised transcription system. Rather, what will be emphasised here is that, despite the fact that a given word will be uttered differently in different regions and by different individuals, it is universally understood across the speech community as that same word. For example, *spindrifft* may be pronounced /spɪn:drɜft/, /spɪn:dræft/, /spɪn:drɜft/, /spɪn:dræft/, /spɔn:drɜft/, /spɔn:dræft/, etc. However, it is universally understood to refer to the word meaning ‘sea spray whipped and blown by heavy winds’ even if not every pronunciation variant is captured in a systematised transcription system. Similarly, in *An etymological dictionary of the Norn language in Shetland* (Jakob Jakobsen, 1928-32), there will be one entry word in one orthographic spelling (referred to as ‘normalised’ by Jakob Jakobsen), but the actual way it is pronounced across Shetland may vary radically, as indicated by the phonetic transcriptions listed for it. Yet all speakers understand it as meaning the same thing and referring to the same word, such as the single entry *sandilu* ‘ring-plover’, which lists the following pronunciations (in Jakobson’s own transcription system):

[sanˈdiluː], [sanˈdiɫuː], [sānˈdiluː], [sanˈdilūgː], [sanˈdiɫūgː], [sānˈdilūgː]. The fact that there is both regional and individual variation for each and every word is thus not the task of a systematised transcription system to capture. Rather, the task is to **unify** in a meaningful way.

It is important to keep in mind that Shetland is a bilingual community. All speakers of Shaetlan are bilingual in Standard English. However, it is also important to keep in mind that while all speakers of Shaetlan have received a minimum of nine years' formal schooling and training in reading and writing **Standard English**, they have received virtually no training in reading and writing Shaetlan. It is a mistake to think that literacy is innate: nobody is born with the ability to read and write in their language. All speakers need training in literacy of their own mother tongue, and it is, as mentioned above, a fundamental human right to receive such a training. Swedes receive a minimum of nine years of training in literacy in their own language, as do speakers of German, Italian, Korean, Japanese, etc. The fact that speakers of Shaetlan exclusively receive systematic training in Standard English (and not Shaetlan) will by necessity affect the orthographical (i.e. spelling) intuitions of the community. In other words, the influence of Standard English is highly noticeable in the intuitive community conventions of both published and *digitalk* material. This is reflected in our suggested transcription system, for example by taking into account the intuitive silent letters – especially the silent *es* and *ws* – that reflect the intuitions of a writer trained and well versed in Standard English orthography (see further below).

The principles for this transcription system primarily follow those set out in *Grammar and usage of the Shetland dialect* (T. A. Robertson & John J. Graham, 1991 [1952]), in combination with the principles set out in the exceptionally well-researched *Shetland words* (A & A Christie-Johnston with Neil Anderson, 2014), which in turn to a large extent follow the principles set out in *An etymological dictionary of the Norn language in Shetland* mentioned above. We are also following the current general community practices that can be seen widely emerging in community *digitalk*. The few modifications that we have done boil down to a consistent system. Thus, while *-mogit* is consistently pronounced /mɔːgət/ in John Graham's *Shetland dictionary online* (<https://www.shetlanddialect.org.uk/john-j-grahams-shetland-dictionary.php>), with a long initial vowel, which, according to the principles set out in *Grammar and usage of the Shetland dialect*, should be followed by a double consonant to indicate this vowel length, it is spelled *-moagit* in *catmoagit* but *-moget* in *gulmoget* (different initial vowels followed by a single consonant – which according to the principles set out in *Grammar and usage of*

the Shetland dialect would indicate a short vowel – and different end vowels). We have chosen to streamline this to one and the same spelling of *-mogit*. We have also chosen to, as much as possible, streamline several renderings of the same sound into one and the same symbol, while still keeping the transcription meaningful to the current speech community. A third consideration for the choice of transcriptions is, as mentioned, current general conventions, especially as manifested in *digitalk*. For example, the sound /u/ is variously, but quite consistently, rendered as either *u* (e.g. *du*) or *oo* (e.g. *noo*); we have therefore chosen to keep this orthographic variation, which shows indications of standing in complementary distribution to each other (the unstressed function words tend to be rendered as *u* while the stressed as well as the long /u:/ tends to be rendered as *oo*). As mentioned above, it should be kept in mind that this is a high-contact variety where all speakers have received intense schooling in Standard English. A large proportion of the lexicon overlaps with the English lexicon and tends to retain the English spelling. Furthermore, a fair amount of the community convention is clearly rooted in intimate familiarity with the Standard English orthography, where, for example, the diphthong /aɪ/ is rendered variously as <i> (e.g. *wife*), <ye> (e.g. *bye*), <ui> (e.g. *quite*), etc. We have also chosen to keep this orthographic variation, since it seems widely established, as evidenced through not only published material but also spontaneous *digitalk*. In other words, the purpose of this system is **pragmatic** rather than purist.

Here we would like to point out that the tendency to regard Standard English as the norm from which other things deviate is linguistically unjustified, and to regard it as the base form for anything written in Shaetlan is misguided. Standard English historically developed from the Mercian dialect of Old English, while Scots developed from the Northumbrian dialect of Old English. The two languages are thus very closely related, but emerged from two different branches of Old English. This is very similar to Swedish and Norwegian, where the former developed from Eastern Old Norse and the latter from Western Old Norse. Scots is therefore no more a dialect of English than English is a dialect of Scots, just as Swedish is no more a dialect of Norwegian than Norwegian is a dialect of Swedish. For this reason it is thus also unjustified to consider close cognate words as ‘English’ simply because that is the form taught in schools. A word like *plaess* ‘place’ is a late Latin loan (*platea*, later in Anglo-Norman *plas*) into Old English. The Northumbrian forms would have been the forms that Scots inherited, while the Mercian forms would have been the ones inherited in what would become Standard English. It is therefore historically justified to indicate that this is a Scots form rather than an

English one, especially since English started dominating in Shetland several centuries after Scots had been established here. In this case a differentiated spelling, which follows the general community intuition, is not only historically justified, but also linguistically so, since the two forms are in fact pronounced with slight differences by bilingual speakers: *plaess* has a short vowel and a long final consonant (/plɛs:/) while *place* has a longer vowel and a short final consonant (/plɛ:s/) (both of which are different from RP and GA /pleis/ with a diphthong). An approach that “English words should be spelled the English way” would thus obscure the fact that these kinds of words are no more exclusively English than they are exclusively Scots – it is merely that the Standard English forms are the most familiar ones because Standard English is the socio-politically dominant language and is the language used as the default medium of instruction in schools – as well as the fact that they are not actually pronounced the same way in the bilingual Shetland community.

A successful orthography also helps illustrate the underlying structure of a language. For example, pronunciations will vary according to whether a word is in a stressed position or not, and this is especially true for such function words as pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries and other semantically bleak words that primarily have a grammatical function in the clause. Thus the verbs *can* and *be*, which also function as auxiliaries, are frequently reduced in their pronunciation in various contexts. But to render that as, variously *can*, *cen*, *caen*, *cin*, *cun*, *cøn*, *cün*, etc would obscure the fact that these forms all boil down to the same functional unit, namely the auxiliary *can*. Likewise to, for example, have separate spellings for negated forms and tags, such as *can* ~ *caenna* ~ *cinnen*, rather than *can* ~ *canna* ~ *cannen*, would obscure the regularity and predictability of the structure of the language: what we have is not several different forms, but the very regular system of *can* + the auxiliary negative suffix *-na* and *can* + the tag negative suffix *-(e)n*. To obscure the structure of a language, especially one that has seen long stigmatisation, risks perpetuating the widespread but mistaken assumption that it is some kind of haphazard idiosyncratic speech and not a structured language that is perfectly viable and valid in its own right. In other words, making the orthography predictable according to the structure of the language helps show that this is a variety with its own viable grammar. This increases the predictability and therefore the teachability of the written form of the language.

In accordance with the internationally widespread convention, sound length (quantity) is indicated with a doubled grapheme. For example, a long vowel is indicated with the vowel grapheme doubled, as in *waar* /wa:r/, *maak* /ma:k/, *taak*

/tɑ:k/. Long or stressed consonants are indicated with a double grapheme, such as in *tell* /tɛł/, *bigg* /bɪg/, *brünnie* /bryni/. With the long or stressed velar sound we have chosen the internationally common system of rendering it with <ck>, as in *puckle* /pɔkł/, *muckle* /mɔkł/, *back* /bak/. As with any transcription system, there are a few exceptions to this, which have established themselves through frequency of use, e.g. <fokk> for /fɔ:k/ (with a long vowel).

We have therefore chosen the following graphemic representations for the sounds of the language, both phonemes and allophones (major and minor phonemes). Notice that the example words are not necessarily Shetland specific, but merely serve to illustrate the relevant sound. Thus, for example, neither *pech*, *bairn* nor *chuffed* are Shetland specific, with *pech* being a pan-Scots word, *bairn* being both pan-Scots and pan-Northern English and *chuffed* being found widely in both Scots and English varieties. Given that Shaetlan is a high contact variety which is also in current close and intense contact with Standard English, a vocabulary of mixed origins is to be expected, and these above mentioned types of words form a stable part of the contemporary vocabulary.

Sound	Description	Representation	Example	Pronunciation (in <i>Shetland dictionary online</i>)
Consonants				
p	voiceless bilabial stop	p	pech	/pɛ:x/
b	voiced bilabial stop	b	bairn	/beərn/
t	voiceless alveolar stop	t	taekit	/tɛkɪt/
d	voiced alveolar stop	d	damoarn	/dɔmoərn/
k	voiceless velar stop	k/c ¹	kishie/caa	/kɪʃi/; /ka:/
g	voiced velar stop	g	gluff	/gɫɔf/
f	voiceless labiodental fricative	f	foy	/fɔɪ/
v	voiced labiodental fricative	v	voar	/voər/
θ	voiceless dental fricative	th	ithoot	/əθu:t/
s	voiceless alveolar fricative	s	sook	/suk/
z	voiced alveolar fricative	z/s	guizer/bosie	/gaɪzər/; /bɔ:zi/
ʃ	voiceless postalveolar fricative	sh	shaald	/ʃɑ:lɔd/
ʒ	voiced postalveolar fricative	sh	dereeshion	/dəri:ʒən/
x	voiceless velar fricative	ch	pech	/pɛ:x/
h	voiceless glottal fricative	h	helly	/hɛɪ/
ts	voiceless alveolar affricate	ts	hentilagets	/hentɪla:gɛts/
tʃ	voiceless postalveolar affricate	ch/tch	chuffed², ploodch	/tʃɔ:f:d/, /plu:tʃ/
m	bilabial nasal	m	meyfloer	/ˈmɛɪfluər/
n	alveolar nasal	n	noost	/nust/
ɲ	palatal nasal	ny	nyaaf	/ɲɑ:f/
ŋ	velar nasal	ng	swingkl	/swɪŋkɫ/
r	alveolar trill	r	roog	/ru:g/
l	alveolar lateral	l	blyde	/blɑɪd/
ɭ	voiced alveolar lateral approximant (“thick l”)	l	shaald	/ʃɑ:lɔd/
ɱ	voiceless labiovelar approximant	wh	whit	/mɪt/

w	voiced labiovelar approximant	w	wirset	/wərsɪt/
j	palatal approximant	y	Yøl	/jøl/
Stressed monophthongs				
i	high front unrounded vowel	ee ³ , ie	steekit, birsie	/stikət/, /bɪrsi/
y	high front rounded vowel	ü	shün	/ʃyn/
e	mid front unrounded vowel	ai	maillishon	/me:lɪʃən/
ɛ	lowered mid front unrounded vowel	ae	taekit	/tɛkɪt/
ɛ	mid-low front unrounded vowel	e	pech	/pɛ:x/
ø	mid front rounded vowel	ø	Yøl	/jøl/
a	low central unrounded vowel	a	hentilaagets	/hɛntilɑ:gəts/
u	high back rounded vowel	u, oo	du, sook	/du/, /suk/
o	mid back rounded vowel	o	gyo	/gjo:/
ɔ	mid-low back rounded vowel	u	gluf	/gɫɔf/
ɑ	low back unrounded vowel	a	stand	/stand/ (regionally occurring pronunciation)
ɒ	low back rounded vowel	o	anyoch	/əɲɔ:χ/

¹ The choice of grapheme has where possible been made based on available etymological information. The exception to that is the contact induced convention from Standard English to tend to interpret <ci-, ce-, cy-> as indicating “soft” s-sounds (palatal fricatives or sibilants). Because of that we choose to render “hard” k-sounds (velar plosives) before /i, e, y/ (high front vowels) with <k>, as in *kerry* ‘carry’.

² This word is found both in Scots and English varieties. However, the transcription system is of course meant to cover all words of a given spoken utterance, including those that Shetland shares with other varieties.

³ This is an anglicised spelling, but probably intuitive for most speakers by now.

Unstressed monophthongs				
ɪ	near-high near-front unrounded vowel	i	taekit	/tɛkɪt/
ə	mid central unrounded vowel (schwa)	i, e, a ⁴	steekit, guizer, damoarn	/stikət/, /gairzər/, /dəmoərn/
ɐ	near-low central unrounded vowel	a	swaara	/swa:rɐ/
Diphthongs				
oɐ		oa	voar	/voər/
ɛɪ		ei	meyflooer	/ˈmɛɪfluər/
ɔɪ		oy	foy	/fɔɪ/
eɐ		ai	bairn	/beərn/
aɪ		i/y/ye/ui ⁵	grice, blyde, wye, guizer	/grais/, /blaɪd/, /waɪ/, /gairzər/
eɜ		ai	kaird	/keɜrd/
au		ow ⁶	trowie	/traui/

Front rounded vowels

Shaetlan has two front rounded vowels: /y/ and /ø/. They are meaning distinguishing sounds and should be distinguished in spelling. For example, *shin* is pronounced /ʃɪn/ and means ‘shin (front of lower leg)’ while *shün* is pronounced /ʃyn/ and means ‘soon’ and *shun* is pronounced /ʃun/ and means ‘small loch’. Likewise, *on* is pronounced /ɔn/ and means ‘on’ while *øn* is pronounced /ø:n/ and means ‘odour, stuffy atmosphere’. To use the spellings <u> and <o> for these sounds would be misleading.

Because the symbol <y> now has come to indicate an /i/-like sound in Shaetlan, through influence from English, it makes sense to use the symbol <ü> for the front rounded vowel /y/. There are two graphemic options available for the front rounded vowel /ø/: either <ø> or <ö>. Both are equally valid and stand in free variation to each other. We feel that this variation should be accepted, much like the variation in spelling of the /ɔr/-ending between the Standard Englishes in the world (-or/-our), as long as each text is internally consistent. We have chosen <ø> because it is the same as the symbol in the International Phonetic Alphabet. It is also the same

⁴ When in doubt, use <e>, otherwise go by known convention.

⁵ All of these are anglified spellings but, as mentioned above, seem to be fairly established. There does not seem to be any immediately discernible complementary distribution; streamlining to <i> with exceptions for <y> and <ui> would probably be closest to the community intuition.

⁶ Contact induced anglified spelling.

symbol as both Old Norse and Old English used, the two main ultimate ancestors of Shaetlan. Furthermore, it is the symbol for the front rounded vowel used in all the descendants of Western Norse (Norwegian, Icelandic and Faroese), and as such neatly captures the linguistic affinity of Shaetlan with the wider North Atlantic cultural area.

The velar plosive (“hard” k-sound)

As mentioned above, we have chosen to spell words with either <k> or <c> for the velar plosive (the “hard” k-sound). The choice rests on the etymology of the word: words that descend from the Scandinavian and Low Germanic area are spelled with <k> (such as *krø*) while words that descend from Old English, Latin or the Romance area are spelled with <c> (such as *caa* or *corbie*). The exception is Latin or Romance words that have an /sk/- or /k/-sound before front vowels (“soft” vowels), where <(s)c> implies a soft sound, as in *science* and *century*. Here we have chosen to spell the words with a <k> to indicate that the consonant is hard, as in *skül* ‘school’ and *kerry* ‘carry’.

A note on loanwords

In accordance with general international orthographic conventions, loanwords, whether from English or any other language, keep their original spellings. Thus *Kensington Gardens*, *Piccadilly Circus*, *champaign*, *rioja*, *sputnik*, *tagliatelle*, *schadenfreude*, etc. remain in their original spellings. So do older loans, mainly from Latin and Greek, such as *declaration*, *documentation*, *variation*, *psychology*, *archaeology*, etc.

A note on silent letters

As mentioned above, Shetland is a bilingual community formally schooled and trained in Standard English literacy and spelling. The conventions of the Standard English orthography, in many ways antiquated and opaque by now, are therefore deeply rooted in the intuitions of Shaetlan speakers. It is extremely widespread to use silent <e> and <w> characters in the community conventions, for example *blyde* /blaɪd/, *wrocht* /rɔxt/, *writin* /raɪtɪn/, etc. See the sample text below (*writin*, *wrot*, *happened*).

A note on contractions

There is a deeply ingrained intuition to indicate contractions with the apostrophe <'>, which parallels a number of other orthographic conventions internationally (cf., for example, French *j'ai* 'I have' for *je ai*, Italian *c'è* 'there is' for *ci é*, German *gibt's* 'there is' for *gibt es*, etc). We reserve this for contractions of two words, such as *du's* (for *du is*), *de'r* (for *de ir*), *we'll* (for *we will*) etc. It should be noted that this is for Shaetlan contractions only, and not situations where the Shaetlan expression is different from English. For example, to write <'oo'> implies that sounds have been contracted, but that is not the case: the Shaetlan word for 'wool' (in Standard English) is *oo*, so the full word is <oo>. Likewise, the Shaetlan suffix for the present participle is /ən/, spelled *-in*, which means that a word like *winnin* does not contain any contractions and should therefore not be spelled with any apostrophe. For the verbal paradigm of *be* the contractions are as follows:

	FULL FORM	CONTRACTED FORM
1.SG	I am	A'm (see note below)
2.SG	du is	du's
3.SG	he/shø/(h)it is	he's/shø's/(h)it's
1.PL	we ir	w'ir ⁷
2.PL	you ir	y'ir
3.PL	dey ir	d'ir ⁸

A note on *-(o)cht* versus *-(o)wt*

Past tense forms such as *bocht*, *wrocht*, *tocht* etc, was originally for so-called weak verbs with a weak Germanic *t*-ending. The Old English form *bohte* (*boh-te*) reflects the Proto-West-Germanic *boh-ta* 'bought', where the Germanic *u*-stems regularly get lowered to an *o*-vowel with a *-ta* ending (such as *worh-ta* 'worked' from *wurkjan* 'to work'). Similarly, the Standard English word *daughter* and the Scots word *dochter* go back to the Proto-West-Germanic word **dohter*. The Scots forms *bocht*, *wrocht*, *tocht* (< Old English *ðohte*) and *dochter* reflect the older pronunciation (/axt/ for *-ocht*) and are attested since the 16th century. The alternative *-owt* ending (as in *bowt*, *towt*, *dowter*)

⁷ It is fairly common to spell the contracted form of *wi ir* ('we are') as <wir>, but that confuses the form with the possessive form *wir* 'our'. We would like to avoid that confusion.

⁸ It is fairly common to spell the contracted form of *dey ir* ('they are') as <der> but that risks confusion with the locative adverbial, which we choose to spell *dere* 'there'. We would like to avoid that confusion by this double differentiation.

reflects a newer pronunciation /ʒʊt/ influenced by the English varieties after the Great Vowel Shift (ca 1400-1700) and has entered through contact. The Great Vowel Shift started in southern England in the 15th century and gradually spread northwards, but was never an internal change in the Scots varieties.

We propose the original forms with -(o)cht as a parallel to the original *-icht* forms (as in *licht* ‘light’), even if there is a pronunciation variation for them. This would mirror the fairly archaic Standard English *-ought* and *-ight* forms, none of which have the /ʒ/ sound that the <gh> in *-ought* and *-ight* reflect, so that *bought* is pronounced /bɔ:t/ and *light* is pronounced /laɪt/.

The small *d*-words

It makes sense for an orthographic system to differentiate between different function words, i.e. those kinds of words that in themselves do not carry much semantic meaning but rather just have grammatical functions in the sentence. For example, *they’re*, *their*, and *there* are all pronounced in the same way. But to have one single form for them would obscure their grammatical functions; a sentence in Standard English like *There over there lifting there potatoes* is nearly impossible to comprehend. The different forms in fact not only give a clue to the different etymologies of the words, but also to their functions. To that effect we have chosen to differentiate between the definite article *da* ‘the’, the locative adverbial *dere* ‘there’, the third person plural *dey* ‘they’, the third person plural possessive pronoun *dir* ‘their’, the contracted form for the third person plural + BE *d’ir* ‘they’re’, the existential dummy *de*, and the present tense existential form *de’r* ‘there is’ based on the table below:⁹ To have different forms that are simply used randomly would be even more irrational; something like *Their over they’re lifting there potatoes* makes no sense at all. Speakers of English all over the world are perfectly capable of distinguishing between the different Standard English forms *the/there/their/they’re/there’s/theytheirs/there’s* according to their functions, especially when given schooling. It would be quite unreasonable to not assume the same capability for Shaetlan speakers.

⁹ The existential ‘there is’ is commonly spelled <der> by contact induced analogy to the English *there*, especially in modal constructions such as in *Der canna be ony left* for ‘There can’t be any left’, which shows a complete analogy with the Standard English existential expression. This also potentially confuses it with *dey ir* and *dere* (see footnote above), which is again why we opt for differentiation.

FORM	PRON.	DEFINITION	FUNCTION	SPELLING MOTIVATION
<i>da</i>	/də/	definite article ('the')	serves to point out a specific item	Common usage, especially in <i>digitalk</i> , has made this form the most intuitive for the definite article.
<i>dere</i>	/der/	remote locative adverbial ('there')	serves to indicate a remote location	Reflects the pronunciation of the locative adverbial with a dental plosive (rather than fricative); the vowel is a centralised diphthong. A final silent <i>e</i> is meaningful for orthographic differentiation.
<i>dey</i>	/de/	3pl ('they')	serves to refer to a group of people/entities	Reflects the pronunciation of the third person plural pronoun with a dental plosive (rather than fricative); the vowel is a close-mid one. The final silent <i>y</i> is meaningful for orthographic differentiation.
<i>dir</i>	/dər/	3pl possessive ('their')	serves to refer to the fact that a group of people/entities own something	Reflects the pronunciation of the locative adverbial with a dental plosive (rather than fricative); the vowel is a mid-high central one. Serves to orthographically differentiate from the locative adverb (above).
<i>d'ir</i>	/dər/	3pl + BE ('they're')	contracted form of the third person pronoun and the inflected form of the verb <i>be</i>	Serves to differentiate from the present tense existential (below).
<i>de</i>	/de/	existential dummy	the place holder in an existential construction. An existential construction serves to indicate that something exists or is present.	Derives from the Norn <i>de</i> 'it'.
<i>de'r</i>	/dər/	present tense existential ('there is')	Contracted form of the present tense existential construction.	Derives from the Norn <i>de</i> 'it' + <i>er</i> 'is'. Grammaticalised into a fossilised existential marker, no longer meaningful to parse. Contracted form <i>de'r</i> . By analogy and hypercorrection reanalysed to <i>dey/they ir/are</i> , though the phrase never reflected the 3rd plural pronoun, nor any plural form of the verb BE.

The building blocks of words

Shaetlan has a systematic set of derivational affixes, that is, building blocks that attach to words in order to form new words, as well as inflectional affixes, that is, building blocks that attach to words to specify some grammatical information. It makes sense for an orthographic system to differentiate between these building blocks in a meaningful way. For example, the following two affixes create new words:

-een: makes nouns out of verbs, e.g. *biggeen* ‘structure’ (from *bigg* ‘to build’ + *-een* ‘nominalizer’);

-lins: makes adjectives or adverbs out of nouns or verbs, e.g. *backlins* ‘backwards’ (*back* + *-lins* ‘adverbializer’)

and the following affix provides grammatical information:

-in: marks a verb for the progressive aspect or the present participle (e.g. *bigg-in* ‘[to be] building’)

These three affixes derive from different sources, and have never been pronounced the same way in Scots: the nominalizer *-een* derives from Old English *-ing/-ung*, and has in Shaetlan retained its high fronted pronunciation /in/ and fronted its velar nasal /ŋ/ to the alveolar /n/; the present participle/progressive marker *-in* derives from Old English *-ende* (< Proto-Germanic *-*andz*), and has in Shaetlan retained its weakened central pronunciation /ən/ with an alveolar /n/ (the velar nasal /ŋ/ Southern English hypercorrect merging with the OE *-ing/-ung* form); the adverbializer/adjectivizer *-lins* derives from Old English *-ling(a)/-lung(a)* (< Proto-Germanic **ling-/lang-/lung-* ‘to extend, reach’) + Old English *-es* ‘adverbializer’ (< Proto-Germanic **-as/*-is*). It therefore makes sense to differentiate these affixes orthographically.

A note on *-ly* versus *-li*

There are two origins to the *-ly/-li* endings: Old English *-líc* and Old English *-líce*. By the 15th century both forms had got reduced to *-li/-ly* (probably due to influence from Old Norse). This means that both forms are equally justified, a bit like the verbal endings *-ize* or *-ise* which have been equally acceptable in British English since the 16th century – Oxford University Press traditionally used *-ize* spellings on both phonetic and etymological grounds (*-ize* is closer to the original Greek *-izo*).

We propose to allow for the *-ly/-li* variation in spelling in Shaetlan, making e.g. *laekli* and *laekly* equally acceptable, as long as the choice is consistent within the same text.

The personal pronouns

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	I, ¹⁰ me, ¹¹ my/mi ¹²	we, wis, wir
2	du, dee, dy/di	you, ¹³ you, yir
3M	he, ¹⁴ him, his	
3F	shø, her, her	dey, dem, dir
3N	hit, hit, hits	

Sample text

I git texts an mails fae fokk writin as dey spaek wi aa kinds o spellin but hit's aisily understød. Fokk nivver wrot letters in dialect except fir pittin in da odd wird if dey cudna tink o an English equivalent. Dis happened tae me knappin on da phone tae someen sooth. Tinkin in Shaetlan an writin in English doesna wirk as you ken but social media is a Godsend becis fokk can pit whit d'ir tinkin ithoot budderin wi grammar. Hit's good at young eens ir usin dialect in dis wye. Fokk ir fairly usin Wir Midder Tongue on Facebook an I aafen pick up wirts I dunna ken.

(By native speaker [69 F] in email to VV; adjusted to above transcription system by VV)

¹⁰ Community intuition based on contact induced anglification as well as the sense of distinction between Shaetlan and Lowland Scots varieties: speaker perception, not entirely justified by the data, is that 1st person sg is pronounced /aɪ/ and not /a/. The anglified spelling thus seems to be an important identity marker. However, community practice has established a habit of graphically rendering the contracted form *I'm* (*I am*) as <A'm> to indicate the perceived weaker pronunciation of the first person singular in the contracted form.

¹¹ Contact induced anglified form.

¹² The 1st and 2nd person sg both have an emphatic possessive form (*my/dy*) and an unemphatic possessive form (*mi/di*). This is not found in any of the other persons/number.

¹³ Contact induced anglified form.

¹⁴ Contact induced anglified form.