

*For NANSWC talk:*

### **Loops on wires: How traditional skills have helped preserve Shaetlan**

Shaetlan pre-dates English in Shetland, the northernmost part of the UK. It is of a mixed ancestry, with Norn and Scots as its main ancestors, but shaped by intense contact with the Low Country Germanic languages. It has seen severe stigmatisation over the last few centuries, and is now endangered, with dwindling intergenerational transmission. The prevailing attitude over the last two hundred years has been that it is a lesser and coarser version of English. However, the structure of the language has remained remarkably resilient and still shows its unique ancestry, not only in the vocabulary but also in its grammar. This resilience is to a large extent due to the informal transmission of traditional skills that have been handed down over generations. The language of Shetland knitting, in fact the language of the whole cycle from the sheep, to the process of wool and eventually to fabric, is a blend of Norn, Scots and Dutch terminology framed in its own grammar. It is the traditional skills that have allowed the language to remain resilient and intimately connected to its environment, and that have allowed it to reach and claim a place in the digital era, despite the widely internalised and perpetuated stigmatisation.

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