Recent sociolinguistic research in the British Isles has demonstrated ongoing dialect attrition in traditional varieties of English spoken in peripheral areas (e.g. Britain 2009, Smith & Durham 2011). Whilst in some cases it is assumed that dialect attrition will lead to complete dialect obsolescence, an alternative scenario to dialect death is bidialectalism where rural communities have access to both a local and a supra-local variety in their linguistic repertoire. Dialect speakers from the Shetland Islands in the north of Scotland have, for generations, considered themselves to be bidialectal. Speakers in this community use both the local dialect and a more standardised English in their everyday speech; but how much control do they really have over these two dialects? Are they aware on a conscious level which dialect they are using during conversation, just as bilingual speakers are aware of which language they are speaking? A switch from the local dialect to a standard form is, in Shetland, known as Knappin and in the past this was certainly a very clear and distinct shift between Shetland dialect and an affected Standard English; mostly used when talking to outsiders. Over time, however, the how, when and why regarding the use of the two varieties has become somewhat blurred and there is evidence to suggest that something more complicated is subconsciously occurring.

I will present research on this insular variety of Scottish Standard English that aims to go some way towards establishing whether Knappin occurs to such an extent that the traditional dialect is no longer in common use and therefore may be showing signs of moving permanently towards a standard variety. I will also use quantitative and qualitative linguistic data to present an overview of language perceptions in Shetland: something that is often discussed, rarely agreed and even less so documented.

Keywords: Dialect Attrition, Speech Modification, Language Perceptions.