A Phonological Comparison of Scots Dialects

By Andy Eagle
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Dialects of course gradually pass into each other so that a mixture of dialects occurs where one dialect merges into another. A whole series of tables would be necessary to represent the distribution of sounds accurately. Only the main dialect differences between the areas mentioned are illustrated. The descriptions make no claim to be exhaustive.

1. South, Central & Ulster Dialects
2. Northern and Insular Dialects
3. Bibliography

Abbreviations

S = Southern
SEC = South East Central
NEC = North East Central
WC = West Central
SWC = South West Central
Ulster = Ulster
SN = South Northern
MN = Mid Northern
NNa = North Northern
NNb = North Northern
I.Ork = Orkney
I.Sh = Shetland

Adj. = Adjectival
Adv. = Adverbial
C = Consonant
Dim. = Diminutive
Ex. = Except
Fin. = Final
Gen. = Generally
Inter. = Interrogative
Init. = Initial
Med. = Medially
NA = Not applicable
Occ. = Occasionally
Unstr. = Unstressed
Verb. eng. = Verbal endings

The phonetic transcriptions are broad, for narrower transcriptions consult the literature mentioned in the bibliography.

Consonants

Consonants usually have the same phonetic values (pronunciation) in Scots, as in English except where shown in the tables.

/b/ <b>, /d/ <d>, /f/ <f, ph>¹, /g/ <g>, /h/ <h>², /dʒ/ <j, dg(e)>³, /k/ <c,k,ck>³, /l/ <l>, /m/ <m> /n/ <n>, /p/ <p>, /r/ <r>⁴, /s/ <s, c, ce, se, ss>, /t/ <t>, /v/ <v>⁵, /w/ <w>, /ɛks/ <x> /j/ <y> /z/ <z, s, se>⁶.

The letter <ʒ> (yogh) /j, ɲ/ or /ŋ/ as in capercailzie, senzie and Menzies is sometimes used though now usually written <z>.

Glottal Stops

Glottal Stops /ʔ/ often occur for /t/ and sometimes /k/ and /p/, between two vowels.
Vowel Length

Vowel length is not shown in the tables. Most Scots dialects follow the Scots Vowel–Length Rule.

The following vowels are usually short: /ə/ (in unstressed positions), /ɪ, ʌ, ɛ, a/
The following vowels are usually long: /e, i, o, u, ø, ɵ, y, Y/
In stressed syllables before /v, ð, z, ʒ/ and /r/.
Before another vowel and
Before a morpheme boundary.

The following vowels are usually long in most dialects: /ɑ, ɔ/.

Footnotes

1. In Southern Scots may be voiced to /v/ in some words e.g. caff(chaff), staff, sheaf.
2. Usually /ç/ before the semivowel /j/.
3. In South East Central and Insular Scots palatalization may occur before front vowels.
4. The proximity of /r/ final after the long vowels, except <a>, and diphthongs, and in the collocations <-rl-, -rm-, -rn, shr->, often produces a glide or svarabhakti vowel.
5. On the Moray Firth coast (Mid Northern Scots) initial, and occasionally medial, <v> may be realized /w/.
6. Initial <z> may be /dz/.
## 1. South, Central & Ulster Dialects

### Vowels & Diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>In words such as</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>Vowel</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>jɑ⁶</td>
<td>(j)ʌ</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>After w &amp; wh oft.</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>18</td>
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## Consonants

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<th>Ulster</th>
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## Suffixes

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<td>–fu</td>
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<td>fe</td>
<td>fə</td>
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<td>le~li</td>
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</table>

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Footnotes

Southern

1. Also e, particularly before /t/ and /θ/.
2. In some areas /ta/. After /h/ may be /(h)j1/.
3. The <f> in frae may be /θ/.
4. May be initial /wʌ/ in open, orchard and ort etc.
5. Also /e/ or /æ/, however, the South East Central Scots pronunciations are now very prevalent.
6. Also /e/ or /iu/.
7. In some areas /ɪə/. After /h/ may be /(h)jɪ/.
8. May be /əi/ before /g, ŋ, x/ and /x/. In North Roxburghshire may be /e/ in some words.
9. May be /uə/ in words such as coal.
10. Medial <d> may be /ð/ in a few words such as ledger, poudre, shouder and sowder.
    Final <d> may be /t/ in words such as cupbuird and orchard, and /dʒ/ in words such as curmud, daud and fud. Final <t> may be /d/ after /l, r, m, n, ŋ/ or a vowel in a monosyllable e.g. telt and selt. In the cluster <tw>, /w/ may be vocalized in words such as twilt [tolt], twin [ton] and twinty [tunti]. A /j/ before /i/ may be elided in words such as year.
11. Usually /x/ after back vowels and /ç/ after front vowels.
12. May be /ʒ/ after <n>.
13. To the west, simplification to /l/ occurs finally and when the next word begins with a consonant.
14. To the West simplification to /n/ occurs in all positions.
15. Older speakers may have /mx/. May be /h/ in some words.
16. May be /d/ after /l, r, m, n, ŋ/ or a vowel in a monosyllable.
17. Now the present participle and gerund are /1n/.

SEC

1. May be /ʌ/ before /l, /kl/ and /tl/.
2. Also /ə/, especially before /n(d)/ and /ŋ/.
3. In West Lothian <tw> may be realized /kw/ in words such as atween, twa, twal and twinty.
4. In Churnside may be /ʃ/.
5. May be /d/ after /l, r, m, n, ŋ/ or a vowel in a monosyllable.

NEC

1. In eastern parts of Fife older speakers have /ø/ and towards Perthshire /y/.
2. Also /a:/.
3. Also /ʌ/ towards the Highland line and before /l, kl/ and /tl/.

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4. Also /a/, especially before <n(d>.
5. <l> may be pronounced /j/ in words such as blue [bju:], laik [jek] and plou [pju:]. In Perthshire <tw> may be realized /kw/ in words such as atween, twa, twal, twinty and twist.
6. Between vowels usually simplified to /l/ and otherwise /ld/.
7. To the west also /i/.
8. In East Perthshire, if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, z or z/, it is /l)i/, otherwise /l)ɪ/.

WC

1. In and around Campbeltown it may be /e/ before /k/.
2. May be /ʌ/ in body and mony.
3. In and around Campbeltown it may be /ʌ/.
4. In and around Campbeltown the cluster <auld> may be /ʌul(d)/.
5. May be /o:/, especially before /k/.
6. May be /ʌ/ before /kl/ and /tl/.
7. An <l> may be realized /j/ in words such as blue [bju:], laik [jek] and plou [pju:] etc.
8. May be simplified to /l/ when the next word begins with a consonant.

SWC

1. The West Central Scots pronunciations are spreading.
2. May be /o:/ before /k/.
3. Initial /g/ and /k/ often /gj/ and /kj/ before /a, e, i, y, j/.
4. Simplified to /l/ when a consonant begins the next word.

Ulster

Ulster Scots is subdivided into:
- Western Ulster Scots in County Derry and Donegal
- Central Ulster scots in County Antrim
- Eastern Ulster scots in County Down and the Ards

1. May be /aɪ/ after /w/ & /w/.
2. May be /i/, for example deave, or /ɛ:/ before <r>.
3. May be /e:/ in bleize, eleiven, screich and seiven.
4. Sometimes /ɛ:/ before <r>.
5. In Antrim, when initial, may be /jɪ/ or /jɪ/ and ae may be /je/.
6. Occasionally /y/.
7. Or /ɛ:/ before <r>, and in Co. Donegal, Mid Ards and west of Strangford Lough Co. Down /i:/.
8. Otherwise /ɛ:/ or /ɛ:/ before <r>in North Antrim and points in north east Londonderry and in Co. Donegal, Mid Ards and west of Strangford Lough Co. Down /i:/.
10. Usually /ɔ:/ or /ɑ:/ in eastern and central dialects and /a:/ in western dialects, in
    words such as *haund, saund* and *slaughter*, however, before <ld> that may be /ʌu/.
11. May be /o:/, especially before /k/.
12. Also /i/ in Antrim and /ɛ/, especially in Donegal.
13. Usually /a/ in eastern dialects, /α/ in central and western dialects, and generally /ɛ/
    before or after /k/ and before /g/ and /ŋ/.
14. A <d> before <r> may be interdental. A <t> may interdental or be glottalized
    between vowels and finally in words such as *beast* and *juist* etc. An <f> may be /φ/
    and <v> may be /β/.
15. May be elided medially or realized interdentally before <er>.

2. Northern and Insular Dialects

Vowels & Diphthongs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Unstress.</th>
<th>Vowel</th>
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<td>SN</td>
<td>MN</td>
<td>NNa</td>
<td>NNb</td>
<td>Ork</td>
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<td>o</td>
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In words like

- awa, ahint, aboot, the, oxter, smeddum, bannock
- cry, fire, hlive, kye
- bield, chiel, dreich, eetem, elld, freet, heich, jeelie, keep, meet, scrive, shielin, skeich, weel, weet, wheech
- beast, beat, cheap, east, heap, hear, meat, ream
- beir, deave, deid, heid, meidae, peir, spreid, teir, thread
- alblins, aik, alt, ale, drave, face, hame, lade, Pace
- ane, ance, bane, gane, nane, stane, alane, mane
- ae, brae, frae, gae, sae, tae, wae
- boss, box, cod, common, on, rock
- dochter, thocht
- aboot, allou, bok, brou, broun, coum, coont, cou, cour, dou, doun, dout
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>$\varnothing$</th>
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For 7-8, use $\varnothing$ for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 7-9, use $\varnothing$ for voiceless or unvoiced sounds.

For 8, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 9, use ai for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 10, use ai for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 11, use i for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 12, use a for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 13, use l for consonant sounds.

For 14, use j for consonant sounds.

For 15, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 16, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 17, use a for all sounds.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Before r</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ju</td>
<td>ju</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fin.</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Before k, x</td>
<td>ju</td>
<td>ju</td>
<td>ju</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
<td>$\varnothing$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For 7-8, use $\varnothing$ for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 7-9, use $\varnothing$ for voiceless or unvoiced sounds.

For 8, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 9, use ai for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 10, use ai for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 11, use i for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 12, use a for unvoiced or voiceless sounds.

For 13, use l for consonant sounds.

For 14, use j for consonant sounds.

For 15, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 16, use e for voiced or voiced sounds.

For 17, use a for all sounds.

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| 18 | Gen. | o | o₁⁶ | o | o | ò~o | ò~o | boat, coal, hoast |
| 19 | Gen. | ò | ò | ò | ò | ò | ò | bund, burn, drunken, fund, grund, truff, tung, unce, wund |

### Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>In words like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SN</td>
<td>MN¹⁷</td>
<td>NNa⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>Med. &amp; Fin.</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>Init.</td>
<td>tf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dge, ge</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>d₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gn</td>
<td>Init.</td>
<td>gn⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kn</td>
<td>Init.</td>
<td>tn⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ld</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>l(d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nd</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ng, nk</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>n̥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>kw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>Occ.</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tch</td>
<td>Med. &amp; Fin.</td>
<td>tf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>ʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>ð</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wh</td>
<td>Inter.</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wh</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>m~f⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wr</td>
<td>Oft. Init.</td>
<td>vr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Suffixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>In words like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SN</td>
<td>MN</td>
<td>NNa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ae</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ie</td>
<td>Dim.</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-fu</td>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>fɛ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in</td>
<td>Pres. Part.</td>
<td>ɪn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in</td>
<td>Gerund</td>
<td>ɪn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Footnotes

SN

1. May be /e/ in the North, to the south more so, often in association with a front consonant.
2. Usually /i/ in West Angus, /i/ in Kincardineshire, and /e/ along the coast. However, the Central Scots pronunciation is spreading.
3. May be /ɔ:/ in Angus.
4. May be /ɛ/ before /b/ and /g/ from Dundee to Arbroath.
5. Older speakers otherwise /n/.
6. Usually /f/ with interrogatives otherwise /m/.
7. Usually /i/ if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, z/ or /z/, otherwise /l/ or alternatively /e/.
8. Usually /i/ if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, z/ or /z/, otherwise /l/ or alternatively /le/.

MN

1. In Buchan may be /ɔi/ in long environments.
2. May be /e/, particularly in coastal dialects, Moray and Nairn usually have /e/. May also be /ai/ or /i/ before /v/ and /z/. In some areas /ai/ occurs, usually after /w/ and /a/ dark /l/, and sometimes after other consonants.
3. In Coastal dialects, Moray and Nairn it is usually always /e/. However, may be /ai/ or /i/ before /v/ and /z/. May be /i/ before /k/ and in some areas /ai/ occurs, usually after /w/ and a dark /l/ and sometimes after other consonants.
4. In some areas /ai/ occurs, usually after /w/ and /a/ dark /l/, and sometimes after other consonants.
5. Moray and Nairn usually have /e/.
6. Away from Aberdeen /ø/ may also occur.
7. The cluster <cht> is sometimes pronounced /θ/.
8. May be /wI/ after initial /k/.
9. In Moray and Nairn usually /jɨu:/ before /r/.
10. In some areas /ai/ occurs, usually after /w/ and a dark /l/, and sometimes after other consonants. May be /ja/ after /k/ and /n/.
11. In Buchan fishing villages may be rounded to /ɔ/ before a nasal.
12. May be /av/, often having /j/ before the preceding vowel (except cognates with St.E. -alh).
13. May be /jo/ before /k/.
14. May be /ei/ in coastal villages.
15. May be /æ/ or /ɪ/ before /n/.
16. May be /wai/ after initial /k/.
17. Initial <f> is often /f/. Initial <g> is often /gj/, in Buchan that may be /dj/. In Moray and Upper Banff /r/ may be elided before /s/. On the Moray Firth coast <v> may be pronounced /w/.
18. Older speakers otherwise /n/.
19. Reversal of /d/ and /l/ may occur in words such as world [wɔːrd] and field [fiːld] etc.
20. Medial <th> before /ɔr/ may be /d/.
21. May be /w/ in some words, for example, wheel.
22. Usually /i/ if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, the pronunciation is /i/, otherwise /ɪ/.
23. Usually /li/ if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, otherwise /lɪ/.

NNa (The Black Isle)

1. In short environments when final also /oi/.
2. Also /ø/ or /y/. May be /jʊ/ before /r/.
3. May be /jɔ/ in words such as eneuch.
4. May be /a/ before /l, n, r, x/.
5. In the Black Isle and Easter Ross may be /ai/ before /n/ and /ŋ/.
6. In Avoch and Cromarty initial <h> may be elided and wrong insertion of /h/ may also occur.
7. Older speakers otherwise /n/.
8. May also be /kr/ for older speakers in the Black Isle and Easter Ross, otherwise /n/.
10. In Cromarty /w/ prevails and in some words in other areas. In the Black Isle and Easter Ross <wh> may be omitted or /h/ in interrogatives.
11. Usually /i/, however, If the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, it is /i/, otherwise /ɪ/.
12. Usually /li/, however, If the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, it is /li/, otherwise /lɪ/.

NNb (Caithness)

1. Also /ø/ or /y/.
2. May be /jɔ/ in words such as eneuch.
3. May be /a/ before /l, n, r, x/, the cluster <auld> may be aul(d).
4. Final <k> and <ck> are often /g/. Initial <j> is usually /ʧ/.
5. Older speakers otherwise /n/.
6. Often silent in pronomininals.
7. Usually /i/, however, if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, it is /i/, otherwise /ɪ/.  
8. Usually /li/, however, if the preceding vowel is /i/ or /ai/, or the preceding consonant is /b, d, ð, g, v, ʒ/ or /z/, it is /li/, otherwise /lɪ/.

Ork

1. May be /ɛ/ before /k/.  
2. May be /ai/ after /w/ and in North Ronaldsay may be /ɛ:/ before /r/.  
3. In some dialects /i/ and occasionally before other consonants.  
4. Occasionally /i/.
5. Usually /ø/ in words such as dule, hure.  
6. Also /Y/, may be /jju/ before /p/. On the island of Stronsay may be /ɪ/ in short positions and /e/ in long positions.  
7. Also /Y/. On the island of Stronsay may be /e/.  
8. Also /Y/ or /jju/.  
9. May be /æ:/ before /p, t, k, tʃ, f, s/ and /ʃ/. Occasionally may be /i/ in baith and laich.  
10. In North Ronaldsay /ai/.  
11. In North Ronaldsay may be /ɛ/ before /r/. The cluster <auld> may be /ʌul(d)/.  
12. Occasionally /ɔ/.  
13. On Mainland may be /ʌu/.  
14. May be /i/ before /g, k/ and /m, ɛ/ before /l/, /ai/ before /x/ and a preceding /k/ may be /kj/ or /tʃ/.  
15. May be /e/ before /l/ in some areas.  
16. Initial /d/ before a vowel may be /dj/ or even /dʒ/. Initial /f/ may be /ʃ/. In North Ronaldsay /tʃ/ for initial /k/. Final <et> may be /td/ in words such as lempet and packet.
17. Older speakers otherwise /n/.  
18. Usually /nd/, syllable final simplified to /l/.  
19. Usually /nd/, syllable final simplified to /n/.  
20. After /s(w)/ may be /m/.  
21. The cluster <shr> may be realized /sr/.  
22. May be /d/ and /ad/ in south east Orkney.

Sh

1. May be /ɪ/ or /ɛ/ in short environments before /k/.  
2. In the northern isles and in West Mainland may be /ɛ:/ before /r/. On Whalsay may be /je/ after /k/ and /g/.  
3. In the northern Isles and Fair Isle may be /i/ before /n/.  
4. On Yell may be /au/ before /x/.  
5. Usually /ø/ in words such as dule, hure.  
6. Also /Y/.  
7. Also /Y/, /ju/ or /jɔ:/.
8. In the northern isles and in West Mainland may be /ɛ(ː)/ before /r/. On Whalsay may be /je/ after /k/ and /g/.
9. Also /æ:/ in some areas. May be /a:/ before /l/. On the Fair Isle may be /ɔ(ː)/ before /x/.
10. Also /u/ or /ɑ/ in some words.
11. May be /ai/ or /ae/ before /ʃ/ and /x/.
12. In the outer isles may be diphthongized.
13. Also /ɔ/ and /æ/ in some areas.
14. Initial <d> before a vowel may be /dj/ or /ʤ/. Initial /f/ may be /fj/. Initial <j> is usually /ʧ/.
15. Older speakers otherwise /n/.
16. Syllable final may be simplified to /l/.
17. Syllable final may be simplified /n/.
18. In Southern Shetland may be /ʍ/ after /s/ and /sw/.
19. May be /θ/ after a final vowel.
20. Around Lerwick may be /kw/.

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