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Ari Páll Kristinsson

Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies

**Standards and style: On language-internal
variation in Modern Icelandic**

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Abstract

While Icelandic is often described as relatively homogeneous as concerns linguistic forms, in geographical as well as social terms, investigations have indeed revealed patterns of grammatical and lexical variation in language use which correlate with factors such as age, education, and, in particular, with different communication settings, such as planned vs. less planned texts, formal/informal, different styles of written and spoken language, and standard vs. non-standard use. There are also recent studies into speaker evaluation of texts in different styles, and of attitudes to speakers of foreign-accented Icelandic. I intend to report on a few of these studies, in order to throw light on language-internal variation in Icelandic, and discuss some potential language policy implications.

Introduction

- a single variety of Icelandic (in Iceland)
- some internal variation:
 - ✓ phonetics
 - ✓ (morpho)syntax
 - ✓ style, lexicon
- forms ~ norms
- planned... vs. less planned...
- implications for lg. policy: lg. beliefs, corpus management

Phonetics

- Björn Guðfinnsson (1946, 1947)
- changes 1940s–1980s (e.g. Thráinsson & Árnason 1992)
- hard speech (Northern accent) vs. soft speech (Southern accent)
- awareness
- stereotyping

Intervocalic /p,t,k/

[p ^h , t ^h , k ^h]	“hard speech”	/ <i>láta</i> /	[lau:t ^h a]	‘let’
[p, t, k]	“soft speech”	/ <i>láta</i> /	[lau:ta]	‘let’

Word-initial /p,t,k/ /tala/ [t^ha:la] ‘speak’ (no variation)

- Guðfinnsson (1946):
soft speech = 92% of Reykjavik children (10-13 years)
- Guðfinnsson (1947):
pupils throughout the country should be taught to use hard speech

“nú á síðustu árum hefur verið allmikil tízka linmæltra manna, fullorðinna, hér í höfuðstaðnum að reyna að *temja sér harðan framburð*, og þekki ég ýmis dæmi þess, að þeir hinir sömu menn *leitast við að hafa áhrif á framburð barna sinna*”

“in recent years it has become quite customary among soft speech-adults here in the capitol to *try to acquire hard speech*, and I know that a number of them *try to influence the pronunciation of their children*”

(Guðfinnsson **1946**:159 (his italics), transl. APK)

“hard” ~ formal ...
“soft” ~ informal ...

Attitudes, recent studies:

(Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, Kristín Ingibjörg Hlynsdóttir 2016, 2018)

people from all over Iceland:

hard speech more *beautiful*

hard speech more *attractive* (matched guise)

immigrants 10% of population

Attitudes to foreign accents

verbal guise (Bade 2018):

accents perceived as “Western” (American, German, Danish)

preferred to

accents perceived as Eastern European & Asian

Morphosyntax

- normative attitudes
- “dative sickness”
- folk-linguistic observations

standard

Hana langar í ís
She-ACCUSATIVE wants ice cream
'she wants some ice cream'

vs.

non-standard

Henni langar í ís
She-DATIVE wants ice cream
'she wants some ice cream'

standard

Henni þykir góður ís (She-DATIVE considers good ice cream = 'she likes ice cream')
Henni finnst góður ís (She-DATIVE feels good ice cream = 'she likes ice cream')

“dative sickness” more frequent:

- younger
- less well educated mothers
- countryside
- eastern Reykjavik suburbs

Standard, traditional:

Hann býr enn hjá foreldrum sínum

(“He lives still with parents his”)

‘He is still living at his parents’ house’

Non-standard, innovation:

Hann er enn að búa hjá foreldrum sínum

(“He is still to live with parents his”)

‘He is still living at his parents’ house’

Style, lexicon

- Written, planned, formal...
- Spoken, less planned, informal...

Example

Scripted radio news vs. unscripted radio talk shows (Kristinsson 2009)

For example: choice of relative clause conjunction: *sem* vs. *sem að*

- sem*
 - any text*

- sem að*
 - only*** *in unscripted radio talk*

Frequency of borrowings

Negative correlation with “formal~planned~written...”

Example

dánlóda ‘download’ ~ *hlaða niður* (calque, “load down”)

junk food ~ *ruslfæði* (calque, “garbage + food”)

hacker ~ *hakkari* (phonologically, orthographically and morphologically adapted)

- the more formal situations and texts require avoiding foreignisms
Qualitative investigation (Óladóttir 2009)
- borrowings (particularly if less adapted) not appropriate for textbooks, printed reports, newspapers;
younger participants (18-21 years) more OK with borrowings in Facebook & blogs
(Kristinsson & Hilmarsson-Dunn 2013, 2015)

Conclusion

variation, style

- relatively few examples of correlation with geography, age, education
- frequently linked to perception of standard vs. non-standard usage
- ✓hard speech – Northern accent; prestige, formal reading style
- ✓dative tendency – non-standard, stigmatized
- ✓borrowings – less formal, spoken; linguistically adapted if written

Spolsky's (2004, 2009, 2018) revised theory has explanatory value

- ❖language practice
- ❖language beliefs
- ❖(self)management