



On the Icelandic Language in North America

Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir
Professor of Second Language Studies
Department of Language , Literature and Linguistics

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North American Icelandic



Winnipeg Icelanders


Ég fór o'n í Main street með fimm dala cheque
Og forty-eight riffil mér kaupti
Og ride út í country með farmara fékk,
Svo fresh út í brushin ég hlaupti
En þá sá ég moose, út'í marshi það lá,
O my - eina sticku ég brjótti!
Þá fór það á gallop, not good anyhow,
Var gone, þegar loksins ég skjótti.

Guttormur Guttormsson



Overview

- Icelandic language enclaves in North America
- A few examples from the lexicon and syntax of NA Icelandic
- Examples from phonology
 - Flámæli (Vowel Mergers)
- Examples from morphology
 - Impersonal Verbs “Psyche Verbs”



Icelandic Immigrants in North America

- Immigration from 1870's – 1914
- Approx. 15.000 Icelanders emigrated
- Settlements mainly in N. Dakota in the US, Winnipeg and 'New Iceland' in Manitoba.
- No clear number of Icelandic speakers
- Data collected in 1986

The Distribution of Informants in this Study by Locality, Age and Sex

Location	- 50 yrs	50 – 70yrs	70 +	# by sex
New Iceland(F)	3	4	3	10
No. Dakota(F)	2	4	4	10
New Iceland (M)	5	3	3	11
North Dakota (M)	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>
Total by age	12	13	13	38 informants



North American Icelandic

- NA Icelandic as a separate, geographically defined dialect of Icelandic
- NA Icelandic has several regional subvarieties, familylects and idiolects
- Certain grammatical and lexical features are consistently found in the speech of a cross-section of NA Icelandic speakers.



Hvar var vestur-íslenska töluð?

- <http://www.halfdan.is/vestur/settlers.htm>



North American Icelandic: Lexicon

Total integration of Icelandic **names** into English morphology and phonology

- *Erla* → /ərla/
- *Árborg* → /arboʔrg/
- Bardal (Bárðardalur), Oddstead (Oddstaðir), Ruth (Hrútafjörður), Strong (Strönd)
- Halldóra Jónsdóttir → Dora Anderson



Multiword Borrowings

Það var *í endanum á maí*.

'It was at the end of May'

Við tölum íslensku *mest af tímanum*

'we speak English most of the time'.

Vatnið var fljótt að *frjósa upp*

'the lake was quick to freeze up'



Expressions not considered to be Standard Icelandic 25 years ago

Hvurnig er ég að gera?

'How am I doing?'

Hluturinn er að það er búið að eyða...

'the thing is...'

Koma upp með

'come up with'

að hafa band við Ísland

'to have ties to Iceland'



'It is...'

Það er_ alltaf fimm spil

[Það eru alltaf fimm spil)

'It is always five cards'

Það var mest talað íslenska

[Það var aðallega töluð íslenska]

'Icelandic was mostly spoken'



Pronouns

‘Ef þú hefir verið hér lengi, og þér líkar vel í þessu landi, þá fer það oftast svo, að þú flytur ekki heim aftur’

If you have been here for a long time and you like it in this country, then it is usually so that you do not move back home’



Case Assignment by Prepositions

...eins og þeir gátu borðað af fisk_ (acc.)

[eins og þeir gátu borðað af fiski (dat.)]

'...all they could eat of fish'

Þegar ég var búin með University þá fór ég til Evrópu fyrir tíma

[þegar ég var búin með University þá fór ég til Evrópu um tíma]

'when I had finished University then I went to Europe for a while'

...það var ákaflega mikil hjálp fyrir þeim

[það var ákaflega mikil hjálp fyrir þau]

'that was a great help to them'



Other Phenomena: Reflexives

Hún hafði börnin í kringum sig
'She had the children around 'herself''.

Maður gerði vel að halda í sér bara lífinu .
'one did well to keep oneself alive'

Hann bjó hjá ömmu sína og afa og langafa hans
[Hann bjó hjá ömmu sinni og afa og langafa sínum]
'He lived with 'self's' grandmother and his grandfather'



Subjunctive

Hann skrifaði þeim að hann mundi ekki vera (yrði ekki) kallaður í herinn.

'he wrote to them that he would not be called into the army'

Þeir vildu nú ekki trúa mér að ég kom (kæmi) frá Kanada

'they would not believe me that I came from Canada'

Sumir sögðu að hann hafði (hefði) átt að keppa

'some said that he should have competed'

Ég hélt að það var (væri) miklu kaldara

'I thought it was much colder'



Adverb Placement

Hún var fjórtán ára þegar hún fyrst kom frá Kanada
[hún var fjórtán ára .þegar hún kom fyrst frá Kanada]
'she was fourteen when she first came from Canada'

Doris stundum talar íslensku
[Doris talar stundum íslensku]
'Doris sometimes speaks Icelandic'

..við aldrei notuðum...
[við notuðum aldrei...]
'we never used ...'



Phonology: Flámæli

Loss of distinction between [I] og [E]

viður 'wood' and *veður* 'weather'

Loss of distinction between [Y] og [ö]

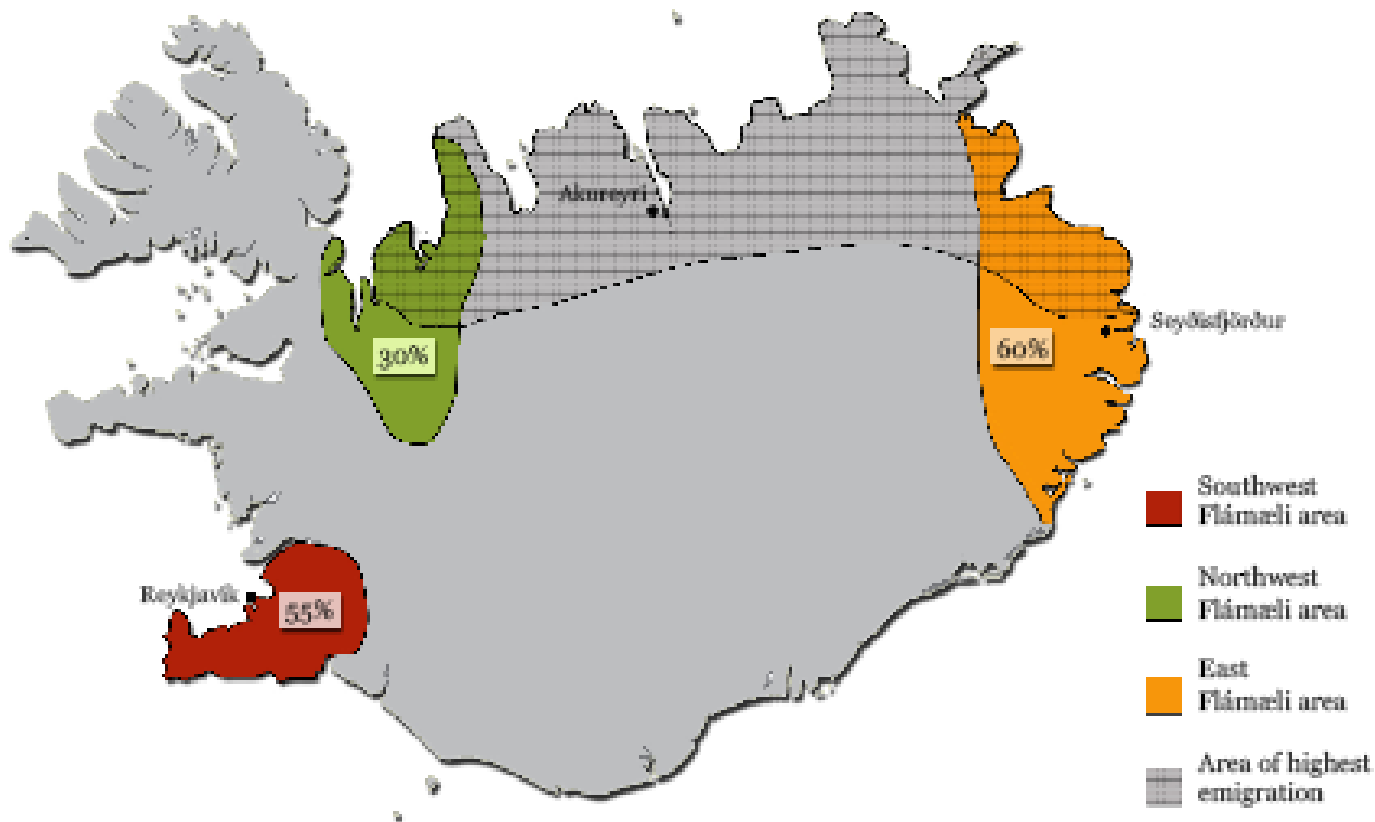
flugur 'flies' and *flögur* 'chips'



Björns Guðfinnsson's Studies of Flámæli

- Research for the purpose of language “beautification” in 1941-1949
- 6250 speakers or 20% of Icelanders
 - All in all: every 12th Icelandic
- Children from the age of 10-13 years
 - 93% of all children in this age group in Iceland
- Tried to elicit natural spoken language and warned against written language as a source.

Flámæli found in three areas in Iceland in 1941-1946





Flámæli Stigmatized

- Flámæli considered corrupt Icelandic ('sound mistake', 'cape talk')
- Would lead to confusion in reading and writing
- Proposed that pronunciation be improved through the education system
- “the only feature of pronunciation which has been systematically opposed at all levels of instruction with the result that it has been claimed that it is losing ground in the youngest generation ...”(Hreinn Benediktsson 1959)
- In 1986, Flámæli almost non-existent in Icelandic in Iceland (RÍN 1984)



Flámæli in North American Icelandic

- Confined to long vowels
- Flámæli increases the younger the informant
- Women are more likely than men to have Flámæli
- Informants in N. Dakota are more likely than informants in “New Iceland” to have Flámæli.



The Spread of Flámæli in NA Icelandic: Linguistic Spread

1) quantity; short or long vowel

vika viska

2) preceding segment; pause, consonant or vowel

3) following segment; pause, voiced consonant, voiceless consonant or vowel

Only quantity affected the occurrence of Flámæli



The Spread of Flámæli in NA Icelandic: Social Spread

- 4) locality of informant; N Dakota or "New Iceland"
- 5) sex of informant; male or female
- 6) age of informant; -50, 50-70, 70+



Impersonal Verbs: Three Processes

- Unrest in the case assignment by impersonal verbs (psyche verbs)
- Result of semantic and thus categorical shifts in verbs and preposition which have retained their Icelandic forms but have acquired the functions of their English cognates.



I. Dative Bias: Langa

Henni (dat.)langaði

[Hana (acc.)langaði]

'She wanted'

Mér (dat.)langar til að tefla

[Mig (acc.) langar til að tefla]

'I want to play chess'



I. Dative Bias: Vanta

Svo vantaði henni (dat.) náttúrulega að vita hvað það væri
[Svo langaði .hana (acc.) náttúrulega að vita hvað það væri]
'Of course she wanted to know what it was'

...þeim vantaði að vera þar sem var nógu mikill viður
[þeir þurftu að vera (vildu vera?) þar sem var nógu mikill viður]
'...they needed to be where there was enough wood'



II. Impersonal Verbs become Personal

Þeir (nom. plur.)voru (past plur.)illa við úlfana
[þeim (dat. plur)]var (past sg.) illa við úlfana]
'they did not like the wolves'

Pabbi (nom.)var nú alltaf illa við það
[pabba (dat.)var nú alltaf illa við það]
'dad never liked that'



II. Impersonal - Personal

... mamma og pabbi (nom.) þótti voða gaman
[mömmu og pabba (dat.)þótti voða gaman]
'mom and dad liked it'

... unga fólkið (nom.) þótti þetta erfitt
[...unga fólkinu (dat.)þótti þetta erfitt]
'...the young people thought it was difficult'



III. Relexification and Categorical Shift

Ég (nom.) mundi ekki vanta að vera... (NAI)

[ég (nom.) mundi ekki vilja vera] (I)

'I would not want to be'

Maður gerði það sem maður(nom.) vantaði (NAI)

[maður gerði það sem maður(nom.) vildi] (I)

'one just did what one wanted'



Three Processes Interacting?

- A preference for dative subjects where accusative subjects are found in standard
- Two processes caused by transfer from English:
 - a semantic shift which causes a recategorization of impersonal verbs as personal verbs.
 - The second is the relexification of several verbs into one-*vanta* 'want' which has now become a personal verb in North American Icelandic. .



North American Icelandic

Further research ...