

Icelandic Youth Language: Collection of Conversational Data

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Objectives

The project *Icelandic Youth Language: An Empirical Study of Communicative Resources* puts the focus on young people in Iceland and their way to communicate with their peers and other people. The aim of the project is to analyze empirical data using three methodological approaches: **interactional studies** focusing on sequentiality and discursive contexts, **vocabulary studies** focusing on word-formation, semantic shifts and borrowings, and **variationist studies** comparing youth language with the language of other age groups. The goal is to integrate the findings to further our understanding of Icelandic youth language and youth language in general.

Background

In recent years, there has been an increasing concern among teachers, linguists and the general public about the future of the Icelandic language (see e.g. Johannessen 2015; Hreinsson 2017). In particular, the focus has been on the language of children and teenagers. Young Icelanders encounter more English than ever before, for example through social media and websites such as Youtube and Netflix. In this project, we would like to contribute to this debate by presenting research that is based on authentic conversational material.

The present study will be the first comprehensive research on Icelandic youth language. The research is important for several reasons, theoretical as well as practical. First, we have very little knowledge about youth language in Iceland and a documentation and description of the language spoken by Icelandic adolescence will broaden our understanding of the way young people express themselves and communicate with each other.

Second, studies on youth language are sometimes criticized for focusing too much on isolated aspects of youth language instead of looking at it as a matrix of age-specific characteristics (cf. Androutsopoulos 2006). In this project the goal is to integrate different approaches in order to convey the complexity of human interaction and to show how different features of youth language are interrelated.

Finally, knowledge of youth language, and authentic data on the speech of young people, is important for the development of language technological tools and solutions, such as speech synthesizers and tools for speech recognition (Nikulásdóttir et al. 2017)

Research questions

1. What characterizes Icelandic youth language from a pragmatic, lexicological, syntactic, morphological, and phonological perspective?
2. How is Icelandic youth language affected by the increased language contact, e.g. through digital technology, tourism, international business, and immigration?
3. Does Icelandic youth language show the same trends as youth language in other European languages such as German, Swedish, and Finnish?
4. Do characteristic features of youth language, compared to the language of younger and older speakers of Icelandic, reflect age-grading and/or language change in progress?

Data collection

- Three types of spoken interaction will be sound recorded and transcribed:
 - A) Semi-moderated group conversations with four participants (28 h)
 - B) Everyday conversations recorded at home (ca 10 h)
 - C) Telephone conversations (5 h)
- Data is collected in Reykjavik/capital area (8 schools), Akureyri (4 schools), and Ísafjörður (2 schools).
- The participants are in the 8th grade of grammar school (13-14 years old) and 2nd grade of high school (17-18 years old). In total, there will be approximately 112 participants.

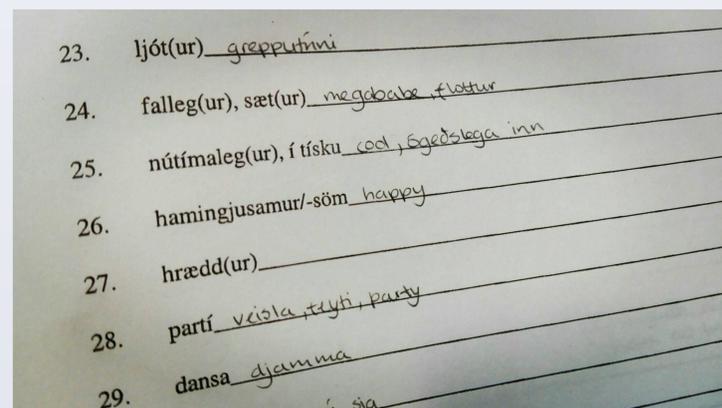


Fig: Icelandic slang survey from 2000

Preliminary topics of interest

A) Interactional studies:

- The function of discourse particles and pragmatic borrowings in conversation
- Code-switching in conversation
- Greetings, farewell-sequences and other ritualistic sequences

B) Vocabulary studies:

- Word formation and semantic shifts
- Borrowing of lexical items

C) Variationist studies:

- Syntactic age-specific patterns (cf. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2015)
- Stylistic variation

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