
REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL INFLUENCES

FEARING THE KNOWN: ENGLISH AND THE LINGUISTIC RAMIFICATIONS OF GLOBALIZING ICELAND*

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Globalization has brought English language to all corners of the globe. English is the pervasive language of international connectivity and even penetrates borders to assume roles within other language communities. Iceland, like its European neighbors, feels this force. The community worries that the local prominence of English as a global force is detrimental to the health of Icelandic – their own small but ancient language. Even worse, fears are expressed that English may take over, inspiring a flurry of imperatives to stop English in its tracks. This paper assesses to what extent fears that Icelandic is at risk vis-à-vis English are indeed justified. It finds these fears are overstated because domestic communication remains firmly Icelandic, English is confined to international interests, and the globalization process – coupled with ideologies that link Icelandic identity to linguistic protectionism – has worked to strengthen Iceland's resolve to protect its language.

Keywords: *Iceland, English language, language policy, language and globalization.*

Introduction

English is beyond doubt the predominant language of the globalization process and creates a heavy footprint on the international language environment. Iceland – a small community at Scandinavia's fringe – is anxious about the local repercussions of this global language phenomenon. The Icelandic public, with echoes from academia and politicians, voices a fear that the force of English as the language of globalization – and Iceland's own internationalization – endangers the ongoing vitality of Iceland's own language. With barely more than 300,000 speakers, Icelandic pales in size and reach when compared to English. This undeniably makes Icelandic a minority language from a statistical perspective in the global arena. Add to this the generally very advanced English language proficiency of Icelanders and the expanding role English plays in local technology, media, business and tertiary education, and alarmist claims ensue about the likelihood of Icelandic remaining the predominant language. As Icelanders have explained to the Icelandic print media:

While the prospect of losing aspects of one's own language to foreign influence is a valid one, the fact is that English does have an important place in Iceland (Robert 2008);

The media's influence on the English language in Iceland penetrates quite deeply into the voices of the younger generation (Guðbjartsson 2007);

Living in modern day Iceland, I have been influenced. When I slam the car door on my knee, I catch myself blurting out curse words in English (Þorvaldsdóttir Bachmann 2006).

Concerns are, however, not only voiced by the public. In 2011, Iceland's then Minister of Education and Culture, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, offered a sombre warning that 'Iceland is a language spoken by few and there is always a risk of it losing its territory' (ESA 2011). Academia also contributes, such as Arnbjörnsdóttir's commentary that 'as in all of the Nordic countries, there is wide exposure to English in Iceland and there is increased pressure to use English in all walks of life' (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2011: 2) and Hilmarsson-Dunn suggests that 'Icelandic requires continued strong support from the state and a positive attitude from its citizens to prevent it succumbing to market pressures' (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 309). These are but a few examples of Iceland's English-apprehensive commentary, and rarely do voices to the contrary arise. A notable exception, however, is Icelandic linguist Svavarsdóttir (2008: 455) who, in offering a pragmatic reflection of Iceland's language situation, suggests that apprehensions are unjustified because Icelandic enjoys local pre-eminence, a strong corpus, and a vibrant literary tradition. So, is Icelandic really as endangered by English as Icelandic commentary might commonly have us believe? Through a review of primary and secondary literature, this paper reviews Iceland's concerns about the state of its language and assesses the legitimacy of fears that Icelandic's future is precarious vis-à-vis the rise of English in the globalization process.

A Culture of Concern

Current apprehension about the state of the Icelandic language adds to Iceland's long and passionate culture of concern for its language. Icelanders have engaged in the politics and careful planning of their language since the Norwegian settlement in the Middle Ages. This is in no small part a result of Iceland, and the international community, celebrating the grandeur of Iceland's Golden Age of literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the celebrated works this produced, such as Snorri's *Edda* and Iceland's Skaldic poetry (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 212). The literature can be fairly tagged as Iceland's most applauded cultural treasure, not in the least because it captured interest from Scandinavia and further afield (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 213). Icelandic, as it was expressed through its Golden Age literature, became decorated as the proto-Scandinavian language and, with its accounts of Nordic kings and mythology, an essential window to the history of the region. By the seventeenth century, the language and its literature counted as the redeeming assets of what was otherwise disregarded by the continent as an impoverished, barbarian Danish province (Hálfðanarson 2005: 58ff). Back in Iceland, reading the literature would remain a popular past time throughout Icelandic history (Kristinsson 2000 as cited in Holmarsdóttir 2001: 387).

The Golden Age therefore became the basis of Iceland's 'national glory' (Sæmundsson 1835 as cited in Hálfðanarson 2005: 57), and was harnessed as reason for fervent linguistic purism and protectionism. A keen interest transpired domestically and internationally to see the ancient form of Icelandic stay intact so that the Golden Age literature, and through it Nordic history, remained accessible (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 213). This has been largely successful, as Icelanders today can, by and large, still read the literature. The advent of the nineteenth-century Icelandic na-

tionalism worked to further strengthen linguistic purism and protectionism. Under Denmark's colonial rule, the threat of Danish contaminating the proto-Scandinavian language – and therefore distancing modern Icelandic from its ancient form – became potent (Friðriksson 2009: 62). Iceland's demands for independence were commonly premised in assertions that Danish rule was unequivocally unnatural because languages are markers of unique nationhood and Iceland's language was clearly unlike Denmark's. This meant that nationalist propaganda harnessed Iceland's linguistic culture to inspire and vocalize demands for independence, and that nationalism accented Icelandic discourses about language. Denmark's own endorsement of Icelandic as the proto-Scandinavian language soon rendered Iceland's move to independence in 1918 relatively smooth (Hálfðanarson 2003: 195). For Iceland, its language – and a willfulness to retain its ancient linguistic form – became the basis of the nation's independence and, consequently, its national ideology. In fact, ideas of *Icelandic-ness* have since become so contingent on the pure form of Icelandic that the language is commonly referred to as the *egg of life* (Kristmannsson 2004: 59–60) because 'if the language changes, then the national compact will automatically dissolve' (Hálfðanarson 2005: 56). Reverence for the glorious Golden Age of literature, along with linguistically-inspired nationalism, has ensured that a culturally-sited concern for preserving Icelandic, for the sake of the national identity, continues today.

English and Globalization in Iceland

The world has never been as globalized as today, and English is the vastly predominant language of that globalization. The globalization process has fostered a 'tidal wave of English that is moving into almost every sociolinguistic repertoire' (Spolsky 2004: 220) and this tidal wave is globally expansive: English is pervasive, for example, in popular culture, education, technology, and also in finance and business. It is also a significant force in processes of democratization and international development. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996: 437–438) describe English as the most triumphant language of the current age and the language of capitalism, science, technology, post-colonial modernization, and the internationalization of public and private domains. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 24ff.) stresses that 90 per cent of the world's languages will disappear or become moribund this century if the world's largest languages, where English is on top, continue to spread. Attempts to explain this phenomenon are plentiful, because the expansion of the British Empire alone cannot account for the language's success. Baker explains that a complex framework of influences – such as political agendas and influence, the advent of mass media, and emigration – established English as the language of globalization and that its continued use has served to validate the prestige it enjoys (Baker 2011: 84). An alarmist suggestion is a theory of a coordinated attempt at linguistic genocide by the United States and Great Britain (Phillipson 1998: 102; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 25) to see English conquer and homogenize the global language environment. De Swaan (2001: 186), on the other hand, suggests the diffusion of English was not premeditated but a result of decisions that were oblivious to their impacts on linguistic diversity. He explains that the world is comprised of language constellations, including an array of *peripheral* languages used only in a spoken form, around 100 *central* languages that generally appear as national languages, and a handful of *supercentral* languages (De Swaan 2001: 20). In this framework, English is *supercentral* because of its international role as a lingua franca between speakers of the smaller, central languages. For

De Swaan (2001: 20), this works to only further motivate acquisition of English as a foreign language.

Iceland has felt the full force of English. English in Iceland initially evolved with the diffusion of Anglo-American culture (Svavarsdóttir 2008: 442) and English therefore becoming a contender in Icelandic media and entertainment (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2009: 49). While foreign language education had historically targeted Danish, this focus began shifting in the 1940s in favor of English (Rasmussen 2002: 29) as English became Europe's primary lingua franca (Cogo and Jenkins 2010: 271ff.). English is now the first foreign language to be taught in Iceland, and schools often begin English instruction before it becomes compulsory in the fourth grade (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture [MESC] 2007 as cited in Hilmarsdóttir 2010: 15). The English curriculum appears to enjoy ideological support: Icelandic government research of 23 teachers and 788 students found that learners and educators value English highly, with the vast majority of students agreeing English is important for international communication, useful for the media and the internet, and enjoyable to learn (Lefever 2006: 10). The effectiveness of the curriculum has ensured the Icelanders are, in general, highly proficient users of English as a foreign language.

This proficiency has created an avenue for English to attain a significant domestic status. English has become so prominent in Iceland that it has even been described as Iceland's second domestic language, rather than a foreign language (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2007: 52). Businesses often favor English or bilingual cultures because as a small economy, corporate expansions are necessarily international (Foreign Affairs 2008: 13). Jónsdóttir's (2011: 20ff.) cross-sector research found that 74.7 per cent of working Icelanders use English daily, especially for reading documents and writing emails. This may be especially relevant to businesses that routinely communicate beyond Iceland's borders, or locally with expatriates and tourists or in multinational companies where participation in cross-border corporate cultures requires English as a lingua franca. English is therefore an important skill in the Icelandic labor market. Nonetheless, Kvaran reports that Icelandic employees are committed to using Icelandic as much as possible and reserve using English for interaction with foreigners (Kvaran 2010: 118–119). By the same token, Kvaran also explains that 'an Icelandic company that would start using English or another foreign language to communicate with Icelanders would not enjoy respect or popularity' (*Ibid.*: 120).

Like elsewhere in Europe, English is also increasingly bonded to academia. The Icelandic researchers commonly publish in English to compete internationally (Holmarsdóttir 2001: 385) and to ensure their contributions can be adequately peer reviewed. The more these researchers produce English texts, however, the more likely they become unfamiliar with domestic Icelandic terminology (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 265–266). This renders Icelandic increasingly unlikely as an academic language of choice. The diversification of university populations, such as through Europe's Bologna Process (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency 2009: 13), also prompts a shift to English. The University of Iceland (2011: 5) premises itself on international collaboration and publication, and hosts 1,100 international students: this creates a growing bias for English-medium tuition. Professors of Icelandic-designated courses are even said to entertain requests to shift to English (Robert 2011), and the government has criticized universities for preferring English 'to the detriment of Icelandic' (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 262). The shift is exacerbated by Icelanders generally being willing and able to pursue English-medium studies (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2010: 1). At the post-

graduate level, it is reported that three-quarters of doctoral dissertations are in English (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 264).

Media and popular culture, other than Golden Age literature, are predominantly in English. First broadcasts were even in English, under the Marshall Aid program from the American military base to promote American ideology (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2010: 12). Iceland embraced English media as it represented advancement at a time when Iceland was technologically inferior (Kristmannsson 2004: 65). The persistence of American broadcasts prompted a policy to require subtitling (Kristmannsson 2004: 61ff.), except in the case of young children's programs which remain dubbed (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2010: 13). However, it appears Iceland's youth often feel subtitling is unnecessary and it is also known that they download un-subtitled movies directly from the internet (*Idem* 2006: 304). Icelandic film and television is expensive and also less popular than English media amongst young Icelanders, with channels televising up to 88 per cent in English (*Idem* 2010: 252). In addition, satellite technology facilitates direct access to broadcasts from English-speaking countries either side of the Atlantic (*Idem* 2010: 13–14). English language music is popular (*Idem* 2003: 17), along with modern English literature, rather than native or translated books, especially with the immediacy of online books (*Idem* 2006: 305).

English plays a particularly dominant role in information technology (IT). Computer programs are generally purchased with pre-installed English software (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 371), meaning schools and homes mostly use English language versions. Even Icelandic computer programmers develop software in English, as this is often the language of their training (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 307). Interest groups have sought to translate open-source software (Rögnvaldsson 2008: 2), which is easily modified for Icelandic purposes (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 363), and the government actively supports local IT initiatives. However, the success of such programs is doubtful as English-medium technology evolves quicker than Iceland can keep pace. Around 95 per cent of Icelanders are online (META-NET 2011: 15) where Icelandic holds little ground against English beyond domestic web pages. Consequently, young Icelanders, for example, willingly research English websites because they Icelandic web pages alone are insufficient for their purposes, and commonly use English for online entertainment (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2005 as cited in Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 368).

It is possible English competes as a preferred language of communication between Icelanders and many immigrants. Einarsdóttir (2011: 66–67) found that out of 11 migrants, only four claimed to speak Icelandic and that a common impediment is that Icelanders switch to English when immigrants attempt to speak Icelandic, potentially owing to an Icelandic intolerance for incorrect grammar. Þórarinsdóttir (2011 cited in Berman, Lefever, and Woźniczka 2011: 3) identified that 40 per cent of Poles, who make up the largest minority group in Iceland, view their residence in Iceland as temporary. This has been made possible by Poland's accession to the European Economic Area, which in effect opens the Icelandic labor market to the Polish nationals. For the language situation, many Polish migrants may have minimal motivation to embark on Icelandic language acquisition, especially if they can instead rely on English as a lingua franca during their temporary stay. The Filipino and Thai communities are believed to primarily favor English (Bissat 2008: 41; Skaptadóttir 2010: 23), and it is also possible English is preferred by the refugee community, 50 per cent of which finds Icelandic rather difficult or very difficult (Ministry of Social Affairs 2005: 5–6).

Fearing the Known

Despite Iceland's embrace for English language proficiency and its endorsement of the perceived benefits this provides, Iceland fears that the influx of English endangers the survival of Icelandic. It is important to see this fear comprising two distinct themes: a purist concern about the impact of English on Icelandic vocabulary, and a concern about the domestic status of Icelandic vis-à-vis the global force of English.

English and the Icelandic corpus

Managing the influx of English loan words – known as anglicisms – into the Icelandic corpus is the cornerstone of contemporary Icelandic language management. The Árni Magnússon Institute of Icelandic Studies, along with around 50 voluntary committees (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 367), works to replace anglicisms that arise in the media, society, science, and technology by creating native Icelandic alternatives – known as neologisms – that apply Icelandic morphology. Official corpus planning is also often complemented by individuals as they confront vocabulary dilemmas, such as journalists and advertisers who seek to avoid English influences (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 222). This work to combat English influences is described as ‘widely supported, both officially and among the general public’ (Svavarsdóttir 2008: 455) and it appears that ‘Icelanders are extremely proud of their language and are extremely determined to continually develop it’ (Holmarsdóttir 2001: 391). Graedler (2004: 16) quantified these sentiments by finding that of all Scandinavians, Icelanders are the most exposed to English but also most skeptical of it, with 63 per cent agreeing neologisms are appropriate.

However, creating neologisms is not a response to English per se, but at least in part a typical Icelandic reaction to any foreign language influence. In fact, as an outcome of European history, the influences of Latin, Greek and Danish were previous preoccupations of Iceland's language purists (Holmarsdóttir 2001: 387). As such, further research might examine Icelandic views today about anglicisms relative to influences from other sources, such as the traces of Danish that remain in the Icelandic vocabulary. This would show whether the concerns of Icelanders today mirror traditional interests in linguistic purism, or whether the apprehension about anglicisms is stronger or otherwise somehow unique under the globalization process. Insights do not appear in the literature reviewed, but this is an important query because English is not simply an addition to Iceland's list of historic linguistic threats, but the victorious language of globalization. It bears noting, however, that English is not the only focus of linguistic purism in Iceland. Maintaining a linguistic link to the Golden Age and thwarting gradual language change – including those unrelated to the influence of English – remains topical today. Linguistically-oriented entertainment programs have been popular, including the radio program *Íslenskt Mál* (Icelandic language) where linguists discuss language matters with the public, and the *Orð Skulu Standa* (Words Shall Stand) quiz show on Icelandic lexicon and phraseology (META-NET 2011: 13).

English and the status of Icelandic

Secondly, the fear of English also concerns its status in Icelandic society and perceptions that if it continues to claim domestic language domains, the survival of Icelandic will be jeopardized. Hálfðanarson (2005) suggests that popular alarmist concerns arise within the Icelandic community itself premised in perceptions of Icelandic holding a minority status ‘at a time when English is penetrating linguistic communities’ (Hálfðanarson 2005: 55). This, he adds, is ‘part of the existential angst of the age of globalization’ (*Ibid.*: 56). However, Iceland is especially concerned that if the Icelandic language

disappears, then Iceland ‘will cease to be a nation’ (Morgunblaðið 2005 as cited in Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 367). This is because, as already discussed, Icelandic national ideology is so squarely premised on Icelandic – as the catalyst of heritage, independence and *Icelandic-ness* – that Iceland would simply no longer be Icelandic without its language. The influx of English is seen to threaten Icelandic nationhood as it is understood through traditional notions of what Iceland is and what being Icelandic means. Academic literature also tends to frame Icelandic as vulnerable: for example, Holmarsdóttir groups Icelandic with other minorities that ‘suffer stigmatization as a result of the removal of the language from areas of social, economic and political power’ (Holmarsdóttir 2001: 391). Hilmarsson-Dunn discusses the precarious status of Icelandic under ‘the ubiquitous influence of English’ (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 293) and proposes that ‘Icelandic requires continued strong support from the state and a positive attitude from its citizens to prevent it succumbing to market pressures’ (*Ibid.*: 309).

A Legitimate Fear?

It is clear then that English is a potent force in Iceland and Icelanders fear the linguistic ramifications of globalization. The question remains, however, whether such fears are well-founded. Turning our attention back to the fear that English is contaminating the ancient proto-Scandinavian language, the dedication and relative success of Icelandic corpus planning can only seem impressive. Graedler and Kvaran (2010: 33) analyzed the language used in Icelandic newspapers between 1975 and 2000 found that only 17 out of 10,000 words in Icelandic newspapers were foreign loanwords, compared with 111 and 109 in Norway and Sweden. This was confirmed once again by Graedler (2004: 10) four years later, when finding that only 0.2 per cent of words in Icelandic newspapers were loanwords. Of course, as is predictable in situations of language contact and especially given the significant role English plays domestically, corpus planning cannot always plug the influx of anglicisms. Loanwords do at times enter the Icelandic vocabulary, such as *dilíta* (delete) and *seiva* (save) from the English IT vocabulary (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 298). An impediment to plugging loanwords is the time required to invent neologisms, assign grammatical properties, and publish new words (*Ibid.*: 298), compared to the spontaneity of loanwords from English (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 368). Interestingly, and despite traditional ideology, loanwords can also carry some prestige (*Ibid.*), especially in domains ‘traditionally associated with the higher echelons of society’ where anglicisms are often acceptable even among proponents of Icelandic purism (Pálsson 1996 as cited in Friðriksson 2009: 106). It is important to consider the historical context of language contact in Iceland. English is not the only influence: Danish loanwords have especially been normalized into Icelandic vocabulary, and only around 72 per cent of loanwords that appear in print are actually from English (Graedler and Kvaran 2010: 33).

On balance, however, Iceland's commitment to corpus planning is keeping the influence of English at bay. This is above all because Icelanders are seemingly loyal to language planning efforts. The frequency of any loanwords that enter the Icelandic vocabulary usually decreases once an Icelandic neologism is promulgated, such as *tölva* (computer) which may have virtually replaced its preceding anglicism (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 368). This creates consensus that corpus planning has been successful in keeping Icelandic fit-for-purpose and countering the influx of English words (*Idem* 2010: 267). Secondly, other than in domains of higher echelons, loanwords are mostly confined to informal speech, SMS and emails (*Idem* 2010: 222) and deemed

inappropriate in formal registers (Kvaran and Svavarsdóttir 2002: 87). Icelandic's structural complexities frequently filter out anglicisms in a natural way, because loanwords are only feasible if they can comply with Icelandic's complex phonological, morphological, syllabic, and orthographic rules. If it does not, the word is otherwise unlikely to fully enter the Icelandic vocabulary (Kvaran 2004: 146). It is therefore often easier to create neologisms (Árnason 1999 as cited in Friðriksson 2009: 103). Ultimately, it seems that corpus planning to date is effective and if it continues with the community's support, then Iceland's fears of English contaminating the ancient language need not be realized.

If we consider the fear of English as it concerns its status vis-à-vis Icelandic – the fear that Iceland will move from usually speaking Icelandic to usually speaking English – then this can be seen as a fear of language shift. Language shift refers to ‘a reduction in the number of speakers of a language, a decreasing saturation of language speakers in the population, a loss in language proficiency, or a decreasing use of that language in different domains’ (Baker 2011: 72). Central to the idea of language shift is that the mounts on a linguistically marginalized or minoritized group to abandon one language in favor of a majority's and eventually, in subsequent generations, adopt the majority language. Language shift can be seen as comprising three phases: pressure on a minority to use the language of the majority language, a period of bilingualism where the minority uses the minority and the majority languages concurrently, and finally replacement of the minority language (May 2006: 258). This describes, for example, the process of language shift experienced by the Māori in post-colonial New Zealand where ongoing European settlement cornered the Māori population as a minority group on its homeland. This minoritization, coupled with a Crown-sponsored program to eradicate the Māori language and instill a hegemonic prestige for English, resulted in language shift by the Māori to English to the extent that barely a handful of Māori speakers remained by the 1960s.

It is because language shift is generally a concern for minority groups that Svavarsdóttir questions the alarmist discourse about the state of Icelandic vis-à-vis English. She argues that fears that Icelandic is under siege are unjustified because Icelandic is ‘a majority language in most respects: it is the national language of an independent state, the native language of the absolute majority of the population, it has a standardized form and a long literary tradition *etc.*’ (Svavarsdóttir 2008: 455). Indeed, given it is calculated that only around 6.6 per cent of Iceland's population is foreign-born (Statistics Iceland 2012), it is difficult to view Icelandic as a minority language or in the process of losing its domestic saturation. Instead, Icelandic is, without a doubt, the vastly predominant language of Iceland and Icelanders. Furthermore, Icelandic is not fractured by dialects (Karlsson 2004: 64), which makes the language particularly unique. This means that even within the confines of the Icelandic language itself, no power struggles or minoritizing political movements between dialects have arisen, simply because dialectal differences have never truly existed. Instead, Icelandic, in the form it is used today, has always dominated Iceland's sociolinguistic landscape.

Of course, a broader gaze to consider language in its international context renders Icelandic a distinct minority. It has never enjoyed a high international status and Iceland's international relationships have never assumed Icelandic as their medium. The only exception seems to be any decision to speak Icelandic in the international arena but employ an interpreter, which was the preferred approach of Iceland's former Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir (Fontaine 2012). Instead, Iceland's relationships with Europe and beyond are chiefly in English. Within Scandinavia, Icelanders had tra-

ditionally used Danish as lingua franca for regional dialogue on the basis of assumed mutual-intelligibility between Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 259). However, even this domain now shows a bias towards English. The assumed mutual-intelligibility of the Scandinavian languages is questioned by second language speakers (such as the Finns who use Swedish but complain they cannot understand Danish) and Scandinavian cooperation has also expanded to include the Baltic states (*Ibid.*: 259–260) where Scandinavian languages are less prominent. Young Icelanders are also reported to commonly feel that no country should be advantaged by using their first language (Kvaran 2010: 120). Consequently, even intra-Scandinavian relations often resort to English (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 259), but it should be remembered that the absence of Icelandic in international dialogue is not new.

Although Icelandic is an international minority, it is by no means internationally marginalized. Rather, despite its relative size, Icelandic packs a tangible punch beyond its shores. It appears that a reflexive self-awareness of Icelandic as a global minority has motivated a keen pursuit to remove perceived discrimination against Icelandic as an international minority, especially in supranational language policies. Iceland mounted a successful case against Microsoft when it refused to develop Icelandic-medium software (Holmarsdottir 2001: 390), arguing that the size of the Icelandic market did not justify its investment and that Icelanders were sufficiently proficient in using English-language versions (Walsh 1998). The case, spearheaded by the Icelandic Language Institute and the Prime Minister, ended in Iceland's favor in 1999 (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006: 306). An Icelandic language interface has also since been introduced by Google, including a limited capacity to conduct Icelandic-language searches that recognize Icelandic's rich inflectional system and associated morphology (META-NET 2011: 21). Since 2012, Icelandic also features in Google's Voice Search and was added at the same time as much larger languages, including Norwegian, Swedish, and Portuguese (Robert 2012). LingoWorld, a language-learning application for iPads and iPhones, also recently added Icelandic as one of only ten languages in which it teaches basic phrases and vocabulary (IceNews 2013). Icelandic is also enjoying an increasing profile in international education: META-NET reported that the number of foreign students learning Icelandic at the University of Iceland 'increased by almost 100 per cent between the years 2005 and 2007 and in 2008' (META-NET 2011: 15). In 2011, it was also calculated that some 85,000 learners worldwide have registered to the University of Iceland's *Icelandic Online* web-based language course and that Icelandic can now be studied at 100 universities outside of Iceland (Fontaine 2011). Icelandic's international presence is, consequently, significant relative to the size of its native community.

Assessing language shift in domestic domains

It is arguably within discourses about English increasing in presence and status in Iceland, and that this may indicate a general trend of language shift, that Iceland's fears are most pronounced. Researchers of the language situation in Iceland, such as Hilmarsson-Dunn (2003, 2006, 2009, 2010), Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson (2009, 2010), Kvaran (2010) and Rögnvaldsson (2008) have very comprehensively identified the domains where English is on the rise and which, consequently, prompt concern that Iceland may be shifting to English. These domains, as already presented in this paper, are business (where bilinguality is crucial to the modern Icelandic labor market), media (where English plays an especially prominent role on Icelandic televisions), academia (with its increasing preference for English-medium teaching and research), IT (where investments in Icelandic-language solutions cannot keep pace with English), and, possibly, engagement with

migrant groups (especially if a significant portion of the largest migrant group have only temporary economic ambitions in Iceland). It is now important to examine, based on the literature available, to what extent Icelandic fears of a shift to English are justified.

To begin, it is noteworthy that in most of these domains, the primary role of English when it is used by Icelanders is not as a medium of communication with other Icelanders. Instead, the role of English is primarily as a lingua franca for communication with speakers of other languages, no doubt because English 'is currently recognized as the most widely used lingua franca within Europe and in many other parts' (Cogo and Jenkins 2010: 271). This is an important observation to make: firstly, it suggests there are no signs that Icelandic is under threat as the language of domestic culture and community life or for interaction for day-to-day affairs between Icelanders. Secondly, it shows that English in Iceland retains a distinctly international, and non-Icelandic, orientation. For example, the bias for English under the internationalization of Icelandic academia is to maximize the impact of Icelandic research within the global community. While not advantageous to the Icelandic language, English enormously broadens the reach of Icelandic academia. It is also especially obvious in the case of Icelandic businesses. Many businesses work across national borders or engage expatriates and tourists, which necessitates using English. For more domestically-oriented businesses however, Icelandic still holds significant ground against English. Kvaran (2010: 118) has found that Iceland's 50 largest domestic businesses – including those with export and service interests – only four claim to write emails exclusively in English, only seven claim to write bilingually, and 47 speak only or mostly Icelandic in meetings. In these cases, it is hard to be convinced that Iceland is shifting to English for domestic purposes beyond employing English as a facilitator of Iceland's international engagement.

The use of English with migrants is difficult to perceive as a shift from Icelandic when it is unlikely Icelandic had ever truly claimed this domain. Instead, it seems likely that when immigration to Iceland accelerated in the 1990s, English would have immediately assumed a lingua franca role with the new arrivals and those who did not acquire Icelandic. This is especially the case with the significant cohort of temporary migrant workers in Iceland while Icelanders remain so proficient in English. However, Kvaran (2010: 118) notes that Iceland's financial crisis has had linguistic impacts on sectors that had attracted migrant workers from Eastern Europe. In the construction industry, English had been used as a lingua franca between Polish workers and Icelandic employers, but with the return of many migrant workers during the financial crisis, these workplaces have reverted back to Icelandic. For migrant groups who stay in Iceland in the long term, it seems there may even be significant pressure to abandon migrant languages and shift to Icelandic, rather than the reverse. To manage the arrival of migrant languages in Icelandic schools, education legislation requires schools to implement reception plans that ensure all immigrant children learn, and are only taught, in Icelandic (Alþingi 2008b). This creates an environment of linguistic assimilation for immigrant children. Immigration law requires permanent residence applicants to demonstrate completion of Icelandic language studies (Alþingi 2003) and applicants for Icelandic citizenship must pass an Icelandic language examination (Alþingi 2008a). Publicly-funded interpreter services are limited to health care, courts, deportation and asylum matters, and above all these services are often criticized as being mediocre in quality (European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance 2011: 21). Icelandic language policy has, therefore, delivered hegemonic interventions to promote Icelandic at the peak of Iceland's linguistic hierarchy in response to growing concerns that Ice-

landic is at risk. Local ideologies and practices also add to this by also encouraging quick linguistic assimilation among migrants. For example, without commanding advanced Icelandic, immigrants are reportedly marginalized in the labor market (Icelandic Human Rights Centre 2011: 12), creating an economic motivation to acquire advanced Icelandic proficiency. This minoritization situation, therefore, seems ripe for language shift to Icelandic, rather than away from it, where it concerns Iceland's permanent immigrant communities.

The reign of English in IT especially attracts apprehension because it 'has become an important and integrated feature of the daily life of almost every single Icelander' (Rögnvaldsson 2008: 4). With English systems and software being the norm, English features prominently not only in Icelandic businesses and institutions, but also in Icelandic homes. Investments in Icelandic language technology have fallen short of creating a sustainable Icelandic-medium IT environment, especially because the cost of tailored products for a small market inhibits government's capacity to sustain investments or keep pace with English-medium technological developments. Added to this, Icelanders are largely competent in English-language technology to the extent that they can remain technologically-competent without Icelandic language support. Nonetheless, some Icelandic innovations do emerge, as have been noted. It is also important to remember English is *a means to an end* in that it serves as a platform for Icelandic users to engage in a computer-based activity. Where that activity is, for example, creating documents, internet banking, social networking, reading the news, or sending an SMS, English need only be a pathway to a language domain that prescribes Icelandic as its medium, not the language of the activity proper. In other words, even though systems and software may be in English, these are used to bring the user to a specific language activity which may very well be Icelandic. Ultimately, the linguistic outcome for IT in Iceland may be 'some sort of a bilingual situation', rather than language shift, as will likely be the case in any other society battling the force of English (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2009: 374).

The alleged shift to English in the media also warrants special attention because it is clear that English is pervasive in this domain. It is important here to again recognize that the English-language media is a foreign, rather than domestic product and the importance of this distinction. There are no indications that Icelandic-media, such as news programs, talk shows or other local productions – even where these are overshadowed by the influx and popularity of English alternatives – have shifted to English as their preferred medium. Instead, Holmarsdottir (2001: 386) has noted that Icelandic cultural life, including media and entertainment, is thriving, despite the influx of English-medium programs. Icelandic is also still the main language used in journalism (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 248) and legislation requires broadcasters to 'strengthen the Icelandic language' (Broadcasting Act no. 53/2000 Article 7). The pervasiveness of English is therefore confined to Anglo-American television, music and movies. In that regard, it is useful to recognize that engagement with English, as it appears on the television, is not interactive because it does not directly invite productive English competency amongst its listening audience. It is, of course, a risk that English vocabulary is taken from these programs and borrowed into Icelandic, especially by youth who engage in Anglo-American popular culture; however, we have already seen that Icelanders are generally unwelcoming to English loanwords and that Iceland's corpus planning is robust and successful. Furthermore, the legislative requirement for subtitling means an Icelandic medium is always available. It therefore seems that domestic

media remains firmly Icelandic, supported by accompanying protectionist laws, and the influx of English is passive and confined to specific types of telecasts. As has been predicated for the IT domain, media in Iceland may remain predominantly bilingual, to varying degrees, on account of it comprising both local and international products, rather than necessarily shifting to English.

This brings me to a second salient point that none of these domains, albeit they prompt speculation that Iceland is shifting to English, are responsible for Icelandic being transmitted from one generation to the next. This is reassuring because the transmission of language from one generation to the next is central to optimizing the vitality of a language: where a community's language is no longer transmitted in this way, a process of language shift is underway. Should this shift continue without benevolent interventions from governments, communities and linguists, then the language may simply shift into extinction. It may be possible for a language to survive without intergenerational transmission, especially in the interests of heritage and culture (Romaine 2006: 465); however, stable intergenerational transmission is beyond a doubt the ideal starting point for optimizing language vitality (separate, of course, to any social, cultural or political nuances and constraints about the roles a language may play locally). As such, Fishman (1991: 396) views the intergenerational transmission of a language as a critical step to reversing language shift, and a necessary precursor to minority language literacy and the opportunities that underscores for a language's status. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) lists intergenerational language transmission as an indicator of language vitality and particularly notes that where a language is used by people of all ages, and intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted, it can be considered safe. In this state of vitality, however, and where 'multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) has usurped certain important communication contexts' (UNESCO 2003: 7), then stability starts to become threatened. While this can be argued in the case of Iceland, there are nonetheless no indications that intergenerational transmission of Icelandic is in itself threatened.

This is because, based on the literature reviewed, the domains that facilitate intergenerational transmission amongst the native Icelandic population, such as homes, schools, and community groups, appear to remain robustly Icelandic. Native Icelanders are not reported to favor English as a second language over Icelandic as the language of Icelandic homes (although it is, of course, likely that inter-language parents determine their own preferred familial language environment with reference to language proficiencies, social networks and their own language beliefs). It therefore seems that Icelandic is unchallenged as the predominant language of Icelandic homes as it pertains to language between Icelandic generations, distinct from the confined role English plays in Icelandic homes through IT and the media. The school system can also be influential in transmitting language to the young, and this domain is also reliably Icelandic, as evidenced by the strict Icelandic language laws in place to mandatorily keep classrooms Icelandic-speaking. By the same token, there is no evidence that English, or any other second language, is encroaching upon Icelandic as the language of Icelandic community life, such as the language of local sporting teams, festivals or religious services as they are frequented by Icelandic children and families. This should instil confidence amongst Icelanders that the domains most pivotal to ensuring language vitality are currently safe.

The role of Icelandic identity

The fact that Icelandic national identity has been intrinsically linked to the Icelandic language, and that the language still plays a significant emblematic role, helps to predict the future of Icelandic. Matters of identity are critical to the language shift phenomenon: language communities where social or cultural identities evolve to align with that of another group are more likely to experience language shift (or language loss) than a community that retains strong self-identification. Strong ethnic boundaries, including self-categorization as an ethnic group, common ancestry and distinctive cultural patterns such as language, support a linguistic identity that resists language shift (Allardt and Starck 1981 as cited in Baker 2011: 401). In particular, strong ties between language and ethnic identity, emotional attachments to language, and nationalistic aspirations are factors which encourage language maintenance rather than language shift (Conklin and Lourie 1985 as cited in Baker 2011: 73).

These factors exist with force in the Icelandic language community and work against language shift. Sigurdsson (as cited in Mooney 1996) explains that ‘the romantic national identity Icelanders created to justify their struggle for independence is still very much alive’ (p. A47). This romantic national identity, as we have seen, is heavily premised in language and preserving the pure form of Icelandic: the ancient language remains critical to a modern sense of Icelandic self and is a marker of Iceland's uniqueness and above all of its nationhood (Halfdanarson 2005: 63). As a result, ideas about contemporary Icelandic belonging in the face of globalization remain linguistically-oriented. The term *Icelander* is reserved for ‘those who speak Icelandic and share Iceland's history and culture’ (Bragason 2001). This necessarily keeps *Icelandic-ness* homogenous and exclusive. This might suggest that Iceland has fostered a staunchly Icelandic *monoglot* ideology, whereby both government and the native Icelandic community appear to pledge a hegemonic allegiance to only one language, even though the community is characterized by linguistic diversity and Icelanders themselves are generally at least bilingual. An exception is the role English likely plays in contributing to a contemporary sense of self amongst Icelandic youth, but even in this case that sense of self pertains strictly to Iceland's international – not domestic – character (Jeeves 2010: 7–8). Nonetheless, if *Icelandic-ness* remains firmly rooted in its language, there is no reason to believe domestic matters of identity will encourage wholesale language shift away from Icelandic.

Above all, the advent of globalization itself has aroused traditional ideologies to inspire a raft of responses and interventions to safeguard Icelandic – and Icelandic national identity – from English (Hilmarsson-Dunn 2003: 18). Kristinsson (2012: 352) comprehensively explains that it is perceived threats to Icelandic tradition, as they transpired in globalizing Iceland, that have motivated the protectionist responses in law and policy discussed in this paper, such as the hegemonic language provisions in education, broadcasting, immigration, and citizenship law. These responses culminated in legislation in 2011 that confirms Icelandic as the national and official language along with the statutory role of the Icelandic Language Council to advise and report on the status of Icelandic, and a requirement that government authorities promote Icelandic in all parts of society (Alþingi 2011). This builds on the *Íslenska Til Alls* (Icelandic for Everything) policy introduced in 2009 to foster and elevate the status of Icelandic in public domains (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 229), including universities, schools, business, software, the arts and the media (MESC 2009: 5). It appears then that globaliza-

tion, as it is experienced locally in Iceland and has fractured Iceland's linguistic homogeneity, has not just been a source of linguistic concern but also the impetus to counter its linguistic ramifications. Above all, this has resulted in concrete policy action and ideological support. As long as the community endorses its protectionist language policy environment, the risk of any wholesale language shift seems minimal.

Conclusion

Under the process of globalization, English has, without a doubt, found a home in Iceland's sociolinguistic landscape. English plays a prominent role in Icelandic media, academia, business, IT and, potentially as a means of communication with many of Iceland's migrants. Coupled with the generally very advanced English language proficiency of native Icelanders, this has even led English to be touted as Iceland's second domestic language. Alarmist voices have responded with concerns about the linguistic ramifications of globalization, specifically that the ongoing encroachment of English will contaminate the Icelandic vocabulary and jeopardize the very survival of the Icelandic language to the extent that Iceland may ultimately shift to English.

In response, Icelandic ideology and policy have activated protectionist responses to safeguard both the corpus and the status of Icelandic from the perceived linguistic ramifications of globalization. In the first instance, corpus planning to keep English loanwords at bay has been successful. Icelandic language management keeps pace with anglicisms by creating and offering native Icelandic alternatives. Icelanders seem loyal to these efforts and remain skeptical of English influences on the form of Icelandic, especially in formal domains. Secondly, in reviewing the language situation as it concerns the rising status of English, Iceland can be consoled by the fact that Icelandic is by far the domestic majority language – a fact which in itself inhibits language shift – and there are no signs that Icelanders choose English as a medium of communication in domestic affairs. Rather than encouraging a shift to English, local ideologies endorse linguistic protectionism and even disapprove of disloyalties to Icelandic. As a result, a raft of language laws and policies are now in place to protect and promote Icelandic, and ensure migrants learn it. This owes in no small part to the overtly linguistic orientation of Icelandic identity and nationhood: a culture of preserving Icelandic as the ancient proto-Scandinavian language and medium of Iceland's Golden Age of literature justified Iceland's quest for independence. Contemporary Icelandic nationhood therefore owes much to its linguistic history and is still firmly constituted by its language. A strong sense of Icelandic identity can, and does, inhibit the likelihood of native Icelanders becoming complacent in language policy affairs or permitting language loss. For Icelanders, English is only emblematic of internationalization and not of a domestic linguistic identity because 'they speak English to connect with the rest of the world, and Icelandic to connect with their own' (Mooney 1996: A47). As Reykjavík's premier English language magazine explains to visiting tourists and expatriates:

...in a world where minority languages die out at astonishing rates, Icelanders hold proudly to their roots – although almost everyone you meet here speaks excellent English and some adverts now even appear with English text, there is no sign of a decline in the importance of the native language in this isolated community (The Reykjavík Grapevine 2004).

The fear of English, it would seem, is sooner derived from a culture of linguistic anxiety than legitimized by any contemporary sociolinguistic reality, and Icelanders can instead take comfort in their linguistic situation.

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