



# Icelandic Variation Projects: An Overview

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# Outline of the talk

## A brief description of projects and the methods:

- Björn Guðfinnsson's study in the 1940s
- RÍN in the 1980s
- Ásta Svavarsdóttir's study 1981, Tolli and Jóhannes 2001+ etc.
- Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir and Joan Maling 1999+
- IceDiaSyn and FarDiaSyn 2004+
- RAUN 2010+

## Our experience with the methods used:

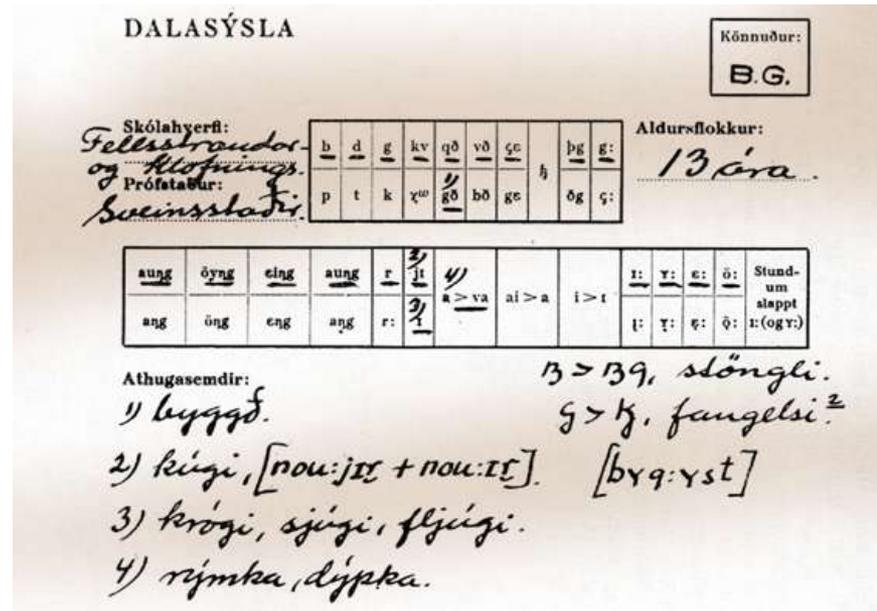
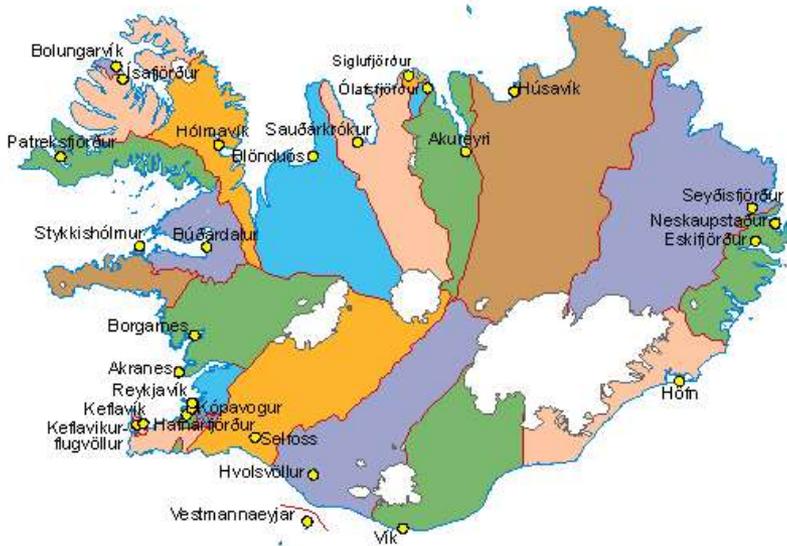
- Methodological points about the phonological studies
- Methodological points about the syntactic studies

## Some similarities and differences:

- On “natural data” and other data
- The pervasiveness of intra-speaker variation

# BG's study in the 1940s

**Topic:** Phonological variation  
**Subjects:** 6520 12 year olds  
**Method:** Reading of special texts  
**Coverage:** All parts of the country  
**Emphasis:** Regional variants



The areas visited by BG

The way BG's data are catalogued



# BG, 2

## Main results of BG's study:

- There are regional phonological variants in Icelandic
- Some of these variants are restricted to relatively small geographical areas and characterize the speech of small minorities of the population
- In general, however, these variants could (with some simplification) be grouped into:
  - a. Northern and North-Eastern variants
  - b. South-Eastern variants
  - c. Southern variants
  - d. North-Western variants

Reykjavík is a melting pot but gradually emerging as the home of “the majority dialect”

# RÍN 1980s: Kristján & Höskuldur

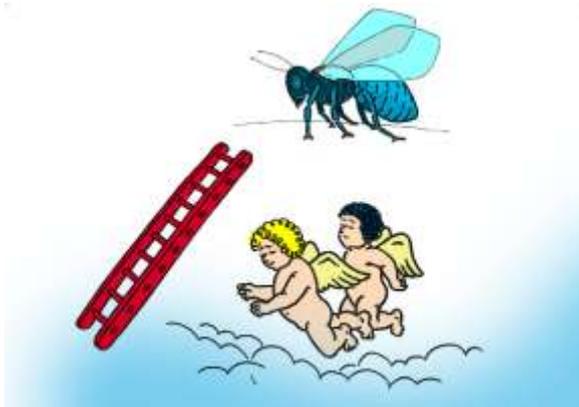
**Topic:** Phonological variation

**Subjects:** 2800+ subjects, all age groups

**Methods:** Interviews centering around pictures  
Reading of texts

**Coverage:** All parts of the country

**Emphasis:** Comparison with BG (400 of his subjects reinterviewed); regional and social variation; development of the variants



*RÍN-pictures*

mynd nr:	orð:	staður í upptöku:	breytur og gildi þeirra:	hljóðritun ef þurfa þykir:	athugasemdir:
1.	<i>fata</i>		C1 (harð):		
2.	<i>bjúgu</i>				(umræðuefni)
	...				
59.	<i>stigi</i>		J1(skaftf):		
60.	<i>englar</i>		I(ngl): H3(vestf):		

*Form used in analysis of the RÍN-data*

# RÍN, 2

Some results from RÍN (see also a special poster):

- Most of the regional variants can still be found
- Some of the variants are fading fast, others gaining ground
- Hence, there is often clear correlation with age (“apparent time”)
- Hardly any evidence for correlation with education
- Female speakers are sometimes leading the way in changes

Dissemination of results and accessibility of data:

- Various articles (cf. references on handout by poster)
- Recordings are being digitized and some are already accessible on the Internet (cf. presentation on Saturday)

Some remaining questions and tasks:

- How do the variants spread?
- More detailed study of change in real time needed (= RAUN)

# Ásta's study of "Dative Sickness"

<i>Topic:</i>	Variation in subject case
<i>Subjects:</i>	Some 200 11 year olds
<i>Method:</i>	Filling blanks in a text
<i>Coverage:</i>	Selected areas (11 schools)
<i>Emphasis:</i>	Linguistic and social variation

## Ásta's fill-in method:

Á morgun á að fara í skólaferðalag. Sif ætlar auðvitað með. *Sif* þykir gaman að ferðast og *Sif* hlakkar óskaplega til. Þó kvíðir *Sif* fyrir einu. *Sif* verður oft svo skelfilega bílveik og *Sif* langar sko ekki að fara að æla í rútunni. *Sif* leiðist ósköp þessi bílveiki en vonar þó að allt gangi vel.

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# Ásta, 2

## Some results from Ásta's study:

- The method apparently worked well.
- Dative Substitution was found in all the areas – but it was relatively less frequent in Reykjavík than in the rural areas.
- There were considerable lexical differences.
- There was some indication that the use of the “correct” case (Acc., sometimes Nom.) correlated with:
  - a. **Social class** (lower social class = more Dat.)
  - b. **Academic performance** as evaluated by the teachers (lower acad. ability = more Dat.)
  - c. **Gender** (boys relatively more likely to use Dat.)

(cf. Ásta Svavarsdóttir 1982, Ásta, Gísli & Þórólfur 1984)

# Tolli and Jóhannes: Subject Case in Icelandic and Faroese

Two (or more) projects (cf. overview on poster):

*Topic:* Variation in subject case **in Icelandic**  
*Subjects:* Some 850 11 year olds (for comparative purp.)  
*Method:* Fill-in similar to Ásta's  
*Coverage:* Selected areas (20 schools)  
*Emphasis:* Linguistic and social variation

*Topic:* Case variation **in Faroese**  
*Subjects:* 290 teenagers and 280 adults  
*Method:* Fill-in similar to Ásta's  
*Coverage:* Mostly Tórshavn  
*Emphasis:* Linguistic variation

# Tolli and Jóhannes, 2

Some results from Tolli and Jóhannes's Icelandic study:

- Dative substitution had apparently increased since Ásta's study
- Correlation with education of the s's mothers (less ed. = more D.)
- Dative substitution more prevalent w. boys
- Dat. subst. relatively less common in Reykjavík than elsewhere – and in Reykjavík it was more common in the newer parts

... and their Faroese study (together with the Icel. one):

- Dat. and Nom. subst. shows extensive **intra**-speaker variation
- This variation is arguably “grammar-internal” optionality rather than competition between grammars
- There is no evidence for influence from one dialect (or language) on another here – the development is towards more regularity

cf. e.g. Jóhannes & Tolli's joint papers 2003, 2005 and several other papers of theirs (vs. Kroch 1989, 2001)

# Sigga and Joan Maling 1999-2000

*Topic:* The New Passive/New Impersonal  
*Subjects:* 1700 teenagers + 200 adults  
*Methods:* Questionnaire (asking for judgments)  
*Coverage:* All parts of the country  
*Emphasis:* Linguistic and social variation

The form of the questionnaire used by Sigga and Joan:

Leiðbeiningar: Settu X í viðeigandi dálk.

Já = Svona getur maður sagt!

Nei = Svona getur maður **ekki** sagt!

	Já	Nei
Það var rekið Ólaf úr skólanum.		
Hún var skilin eftir hjá ömmu og afa.	X	



# Sigga and Joan, 2

## Some results from Sigga and Joan's study

- The construction was widespread throughout Iceland
- It was accepted less frequently in “inner Reykjavík” than elsewhere
- There was no correlation with gender but strong correlation with the parents' education (less education = higher accept.)
- The construction was typically rejected by the adult subjects

## Table from Sigga and Joan: Acceptance rate by different groups:

	adults	teenagers in in inner R	teenagers in outer R and elsewhere
það var beðið mig að vaska upp <i>there was asked me(A) to wash up</i>	7%	47%	73%
það var sagt mér að taka til <i>there was told me(D) to clean up</i>	2%	34%	62%

cf. Sigga and Joan 2001, Joan and Sigga 2002, etc.



# The dialectal surveys providing the empirical data

## IceDiaSyn

- Part of ScanDiaSyn (Scandinavian Dialect Syntax)
- Connected to NORMS (Nordic Center of Excellence in Microcomparative Syntax, <http://norms.uit.no/>)

**Three large scale surveys** (7–800 participants in each, different age groups, different parts of the country ...), using questionnaires (different tasks: judgments, fill-ins ...); also interviews, comparison with corpora ...

## FarDiaSyn

Faroese sister project, two **large scale surveys** (220–320 participants in each ...), using comparable methods, also interviews, etc...

## RÍN

**Large scale survey** of phonological dialects of Icelandic. Interviews with some 3000 speakers (some being reinterviewed).

# On the methodology of the syntactic surveys

## Important points:

To get reliable results using written questionnaires it is important to take certain methodological precautions (cf. e.g. Schütze 1996 (ch. 5), Cornips and Poletto 2005):

- make sure everybody get the **same instructions** (read them)
- **explain the grading scale** by giving illustrative examples
- **vary the order** of the test sentences (e.g., reverse for half of the subjects)
- **test different constructions** in each overview and **include fillers**
- **vary the tasks** (absolute judgments, relative judgments, fill-ins ...)
- **include a break** in long sessions to prevent excessive fatigue and boredom
- **include context sentences** to get all subjects thinking of similar contexts
- **try to use natural sounding examples** (short, plausible, lexically neutral ...)
- test **multiple examples** of each construction to minimize unwanted effects
- try to make the contrasting variants maximally close to **minimal pairs**
- test **different types of speakers** (age groups, locations ...)
- throw out data from **“unreliable speakers”** (e.g. “language specialists”)
- get speakers to **report on their own intuition** (cf. Henry 1995, 2005a,b)



# On the methodology of the surveys, 2

Even more important points:

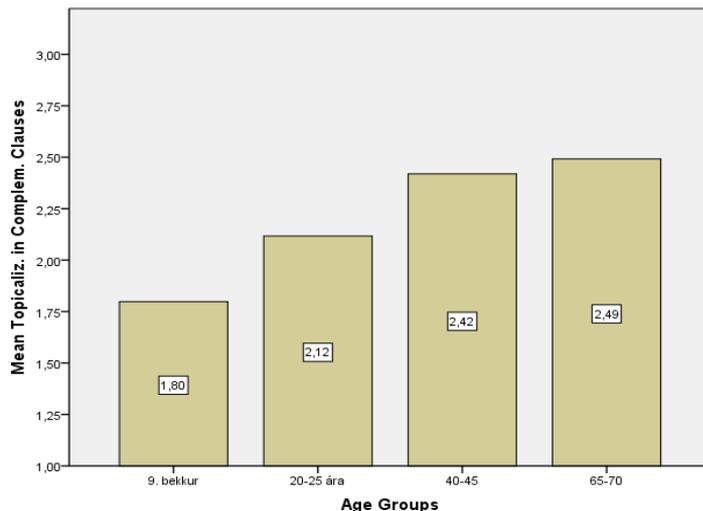
We have shown that it is possible to get reliable results by using written questionnaires of the kind used in the syntactic surveys:

- The **variation is systematic** (differences between age groups and (in a few cases) regions, etc.) and not random (Or: “The proof is in the pudding” – and the pudding tastes good).
- All **generations seem reliable** (e.g., it’s not the case that the youngest generation “accepts everything”).
- The **subjects answer honestly** in general and don’t seem worried by any kind of prescriptivism or the like (there is very little awareness of most of the variants anyway, cf. below).
- Comparison of **different tasks** confirms reliability of judgments.
- Comparison with **corpora** confirms reliability of judgments.
- Comparison with **interviews** confirms reliability of judgments.
- Comparison with results of the **phonological interviews** shows interesting parallels strengthening the conclusion.

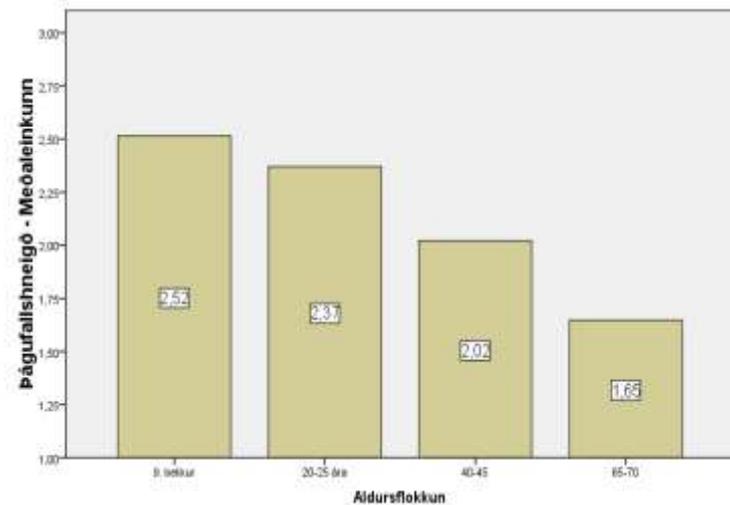


# On the reliability of the data

Systematic variation and generational differences:



Acceptance of Topicalization in complement clauses by different age groups.  
Correlation with age:  $r = 0,466$ .  
Statistical significance:  $p < 0,001$ .



Acceptance of Dative Subjects with typical “Dative Sickness” verbs by different age groups.  
Correlation with age:  $r = 0,511$ .  
Statistical significance:  $p < 0,001$ .

# On the reliability of the data, 2

Honest answers and stigmatized (?) variants:

## *A potential problem:*

When asked to judge sentences reflecting “Dative Sickness” subjects will not admit that they find them acceptable. If that’s so, then the acceptance rate will be lower than the relative frequency found in masked tests (disguised fill-ins) and in spontaneous speech. But this is **not** what we find:

Study	All age groups			Youngest age group	
	Judgments	Fill-ins	Corpora	Judgments	Fill-ins
IceDiaSyn	68% acpt.	19% sel.	7% /25% * us.	77% acpt.	35% sel.
Jónss. & Eyth. 2003					40% sel.
F. Friðriksson 2008			15% ** usage		
Á. Svavarsd. 1982					32% sel.

Dative subjects with *langa* 'want'

\*Only 10% of the first corpus is from spoken language but all of the second one is.

Cf. Á. Svavarsdóttir 2006 and 2010.

\*\*Spoken language only.

Despite the difference between judgments and fill-ins, there is still a **strong and significant correlation** between the judgments and the selection of dative subjects in fill-ins for typical Dative Sickness verbs:  $r = 0,570$ ,  $p < 0,001$





# Inter-speaker variation

Variation in case marking is arguably more “pure” than many other instances of variation as it typically seems devoid of any semantic or pragmatic nuances (the same is probably true of agreement but not necessarily of word order variation, use of reflexives/non-reflexives, etc.). Hence case alternations are useful for our purposes.

October 8, 2010





# Inter-speaker variation, 2

(Dative) case alternation is

## Dative subjects in Icelandic

- Some speakers use **dative** (or accusative) **subjects** with a couple of verbs that used to take nominative subjects.

*Acceptance rate (%) in the written survey of IceDiaSyn:*

	<i>Nom</i>	<i>Acc</i>	<i>Dat</i>
<i>hlakka til</i> ‘look forward to’	48,6	59,7	44,2

- Some speakers use **dative subjects** with a few verbs that used to take accusative subjects.

*Acceptance rate in the written survey of IceDiaSyn:*

	<i>Acc.</i>	<i>Dat.</i>
<i>vanta</i> ‘need, lack’	92,1	56,6
<i>langa</i> ‘want, long for’	88,3	68,2





# Inter-speaker variation, 3

## Dative objects in Icelandic

Some speakers use **dative objects** with certain verbs where other speakers use accusative objects.

*Acceptance rate (%)* in the written survey of IceDiaSyn:

	Acc.	Dat.
faxa 'fax'	91,3	23,8
framlengja 'extend'	82,7	61,0
negla 'nail (a ball into a goal)'	66,5	72,6
rústa 'demolish' (lit. and fig.)	22,3	82,4



# Inter-/Intra-speaker variation

## Observe:

Adding the percentages for acceptance of (Nom) + Acc + Dat subjects and Acc + Dat objects in the preceding slides gives more than 100% in each instance: Suggests **intra-speaker variation**.

*Judgments of subject case (% of speakers accepting):*

	<i>Nom</i>	<i>Acc</i>	<i>Dat</i>	=
<i>hlakka til</i> 'look forward to'	48,6	59,7	44,2	<b>152,5</b>
<i>vanta</i> 'need, lack'		92,1	56,6	<b>148,7</b>
<i>langa</i> 'want, long for'		88,3	68,2	<b>156,5</b>

*Judgments of object case:*

<i>faxa</i> 'fax'	91,3	23,8	<b>115,1</b>
<i>framlengja</i> 'extend'	82,7	61,0	<b>143,7</b>
<i>negla</i> 'nail (a ball into a goal)'	66,5	72,6	<b>139,1</b>
<i>rústa</i> 'demolish' (lit. and fig.)	22,3	82,4	<b>104,7</b>



# Intermezzo about a myth

## The myth

It would be best if we could rely on “natural data” in syntactic studies (“real examples” found in spontaneous speech) but unfortunately we cannot because the constructions we are interested in are too infrequent.

## The truth

“Natural data” can never tell the whole story about the internal grammar of the speakers. An illustration (cf. preceding slide):

	Dative selected	Dative accepted
<b>Object case with <i>rústa</i></b>	88,1%	83,6%
<b>Subject case with <i>langa</i></b>	19,2%	68,2%

Clear and important difference here which would not show up in “natural data”.

# Intermezzo about intra-speaker variation and case in general

- The intra-speaker variation just illustrated does not reflect a general case-confusion. For most verbs there is no variation in subject or object case. Another “case” in point: Case-transfer from a relative clause to the NP it modifies:

**Listaverkin** eru ómetanleg.  
The pieces-of-art(Nom) are invaluable

**Listaverkunum** var stolið.  
the pieces-of-art(Dat) were stolen

**Listaverkin/Listaverkunum** [sem var stolið e ] eru ...  
the pieces-of-art Nom/Dat that were stolen (Dat) are ...

<i>Acceptance</i>	<i>Nom.</i>	<i>Dat.</i>	=
by all subjects (N 710)	30,0%	57,4%	<b>87,4%</b>
by oldest group (N 160)	47,0%	50,0%	<b>97,0%</b>





# Intra-speaker variation

For most **Faroese verbs** there is no variation in subject or object case but for a few there is (there are virtually no Acc. subjects left in Faroese, cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004, Jónsson & Eythórsson 2005).

## Examples of subject case variation in Faroese:

	Nom.	Dat.	Either (= intra-sp.var.)
<i>tørva</i> 'need'	21,6%	73,9%	0?
<i>mangla</i> 'lack'	73,5%	58,4%	>32%
<i>nýtast</i> 'need'	60,6%	74,3%	>35%
<i>dáma</i> 'like'	54,5%	86,6%	>41%

## Examples of subject case variation in Faroese:

	Acc.	Dat.	Either
<i>stýra</i> 'steer'	37,1%	77,4%	>14%
<i>náa</i> 'get, reach'	75,9%	49,8%	>26%





# Intra-speaker variation, 5

## Possible objection:

The extensive intra-speaker variation illustrated here is somehow an artifact of the research method (evaluation of sentences rather than production).

## Replies:

- The **judgments** are based on the speakers' intuition and they are not a less important reflection of grammatical knowledge than production is (cf. slide 16 above, see also Schütze 1996:50–52, who refers to Pateman 1987 on the difference between intuition and introspection).
- **Production** also shows intra-speaker variation in the use of Dat subjects (Ásta Svavarsdóttir 2010): Subject case of *langa* 'want' in a spoken language corpus:

corpus:	<i>Nom</i>	<i>Acc</i>	<i>Dat</i>
Sp. 1	1	2	1
Sp. 2	0	19	1
Sp. 3	1	5	0

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# Intra-speaker variation, 8

The observed intra-speaker variation is **not random**:

- Speakers exhibit it to **different degrees** (cf. the histograms).
- Even where it is extensive, it is often possible to find interesting **correlations** between judgments that “should” go together according to certain theoretical proposals (parameters). Some Faroese examples of this:
  - Correlation between the acceptance of **V-movement** in emb. clauses and **Stylistic Fronting**
  - Correlation between the acceptance of **Expletive Associates in High Pos.** and **Transitive Expletives**





# Intra-speaker variation: Conclusion

## Intra-speaker variation:

- Is **common and pervasive** in those aspects of grammar that are undergoing change.
- Can be observed in (spontaneous) **speech production** but sometimes even more clearly in (syntactic) **judgments**.
- Is **not random**, may be affected by extra-linguistic features (style, situation...) but not necessarily so, and may show interesting correlations.
- **Needs to be taken seriously** in models of grammar.





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