



*North American Icelandic:
Some Elicitation Methods
that we have borrowed, tried out ...*

Höskuldur Thráinsson
University of Iceland

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Purpose of the talk

- To tell you about some of the elicitation methods we have tried out in our work on North American Icelandic (NAmlcel, NAI) so far ...
- ... so we can learn from your comments and experience ...
- ... and you may even get some ideas, based on our experience, that you could then try out later in your research





Structure of the talk

- Background
- The elicitation experiments in April and May 2013: syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics... concentrating on
 - What worked well and what did not
 - Some things we would like to do differently or in addition
- Discussion: Your comments and ideas





Background

The project

- **Research project supported by IRF** (Icel. Res. Fund): *Heritage Language, Linguistic Change and Cultural Identity*
- **Applicants:** Höskuldur (PI), Birna A. (PI), Ásta, Kristján Árnason, Matthew, Daisy Neijmann, Úlfar Bragason
- **Other researchers** include several of the speakers at this workshop ...

The main goal

- “... to study the nature of North American Icelandic (NAmlcel) and compare its development to that of the “parent language”, i.e. Icelandic in Iceland, **from the 19th century** to the present day ...”
- “... to tease apart the roles of sociocultural and structural factors in language change ...”



Background, 2

Some linguistic questions of interest in this context:

- **lexicon:** extent and types of lexical borrowing, adaptation of loanwords, case government of borrowed verbs ...
- **phonological development:** fate of regional phonological features, nature and extent of English influence ...
- **inflectional morphology:** the preservation/acquisition of the rather complex inflectional morphology of Icelandic ...
- **morphosyntax:** the development/acquisition of case government (subject, object), agreement, subjunctive, passive ...
- **syntax:** word order, pronouns and reflexives, extraction ...
- **semantics:** lexical semantics, aspect and auxiliary constructions, interpretation of morphological clues ...



Background, 3

Pre-existing NAmlcel material includes:

- **audiotaped interviews etc.** from
 - **1940s** (very little), **1950s** (a bit more), **1970s** (a lot), **1980s** (a lot), **1990s** (some) ...
 - **collections of letters** from late 19th century onwards, some published in edited forms, some transcribed ...
- **published material** in North America (especially Canada) ... (cf. the talks by Ásta, Iris, Sigríður Mjöll, Jóhannes ...)

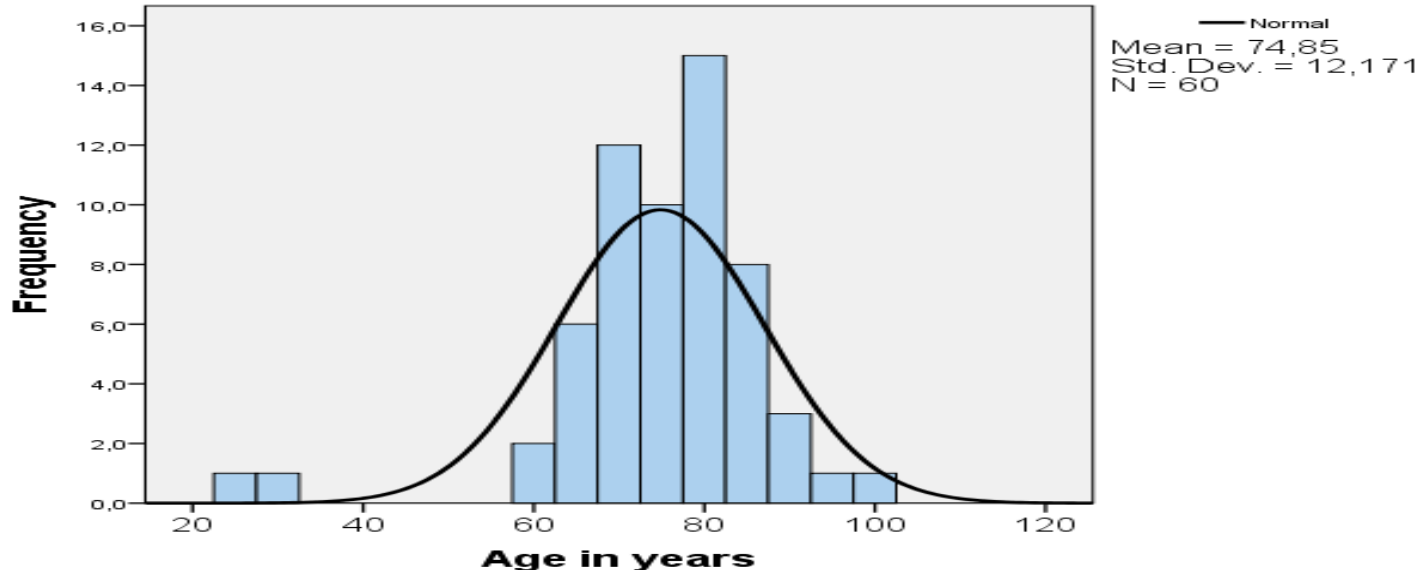
Additional material collected in 2013:

We (Birna A, Birna B, Matthew, Stína and me) interviewed 60 speakers of NAmlcel + 27 English speakers (cf. Matthew's talk tomorrow morning)



The elicitation in 2013

Our Icelandic-speaking subjects:



Typically 3rd generation: A typical story:

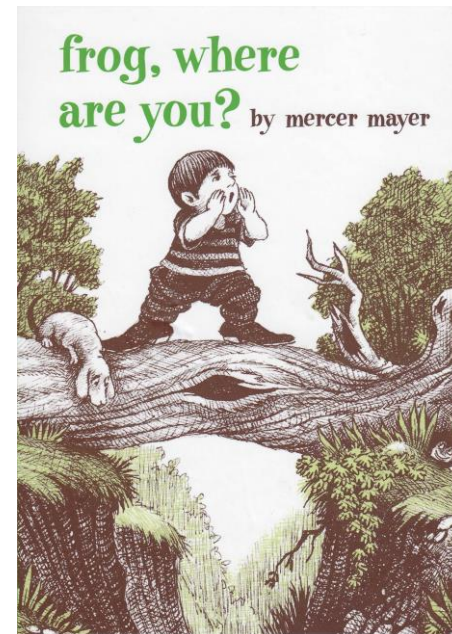
„We spoke Icelandic at home when I was growing up. My grandparents didn't speak much English. Icelandic wasn't used in the school. My children understand a little Icelandic but they don't speak it.“

The elicitation in 2013

Biographical questionnaire – rather extensive (all subjects)

Spontaneous (and semi-spontaneous) speech:

- ***audiotaped interview*** (life-story type and various other topics), approx. 15-20 minutes each (all subjects)
- ***some video-recorded interviews***, typically involving more than one speaker of NAmlcel at a time
- ***an elicited narrative*** (audio-taped) using *Frog – Where Are You?* (46 good ones)





The elicitation 2013, 2

Other elicitation experiments:

Syntax/Semantics:

- **interpretation/understanding of syntactically complex sentences** (passives, clefts, topicalization, *wh*-questions ..., some of them with distinct morphological clues)

Syntax (some of this already described in Birna and Elma's talk this morning)

- **interpretation of pronouns vs. reflexives** (long/medium/local binding)
- **filling in gaps with pronominal forms** (pronouns vs. reflexives)
- **inserting sentential adverbs** into sentences (V2, V3 ...)
- **choosing between alternatives** (word order, pronouns vs. reflexives, case, agreement, indicative/subjunctive ...)
- **judgment tasks** (some of the same, i.e. word order, pronoun vs. reflexives ...)





The elicitation 2013, 3

Other elicitation experiments, 2:

Morphology:

- **plural formation** (learned/acquired ... a *wug*-type test)
- **past tense** and **auxiliary/aspectual constructions** (cf. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir's talk earlier today)

Phonology/phonetics:

- **picture naming task**
- **reading of a short text** (cf. the talk by Margrét, Katrín and Gísli tomorrow morning)

Semantics:

- **lexical semantics** (containers, body parts, spatial relations) (cf. Matthew's talk tomorrow morning)

Interpretation of complex sentences

A test developed by Sigríður Magnúsdóttir (2000):



- (1) a Stelpan eltir strákinn.
the-girl(N) chases the-boy(A) (Active)
- b Strákurinn er eltur (af stelpunni).
the-boy(N) is chased by the-girl(D) (Passive)
- c Strákinn eltir stelpan.
the-boy(A) chases the-girl(N) (Topicalization of object)
- d Það er stelpan sem eltir strákinn.
it is the-girl(N) that chases the-boy(A) (Subj. Cleft)
- e Það er strákurinn sem stelpan eltir.
it is the-boy(N) that the-girl(N) chases (Obj. Cleft)
- f Hvaða stelpa eltir strákinn?
which girl(N) chases the-boy(A) (wh-, subj. gap)
- g Hvaða strákur eltir stelpan?
which boy(A) chases the-girl(N) (wh-, obj. gap)



Interpretation of complex sentences, 2

Previous use of the test:

- to test grammatical knowledge of aphasics (works very well)
- to test grammatical knowledge of children (being developed)

First impression for NAmIcel:

- easy to administer
- worked very well: some subjects performed close to perfection, others had a hard time (not analyzed yet)
- interpretation ability doesn't always seem to match production, which is interesting ...

Conclusion:

- we will definitely continue using this



Interpretation of pronouns and reflexives

Examples:

1. *True long distance vs. local w. simplex refl.:*

Jóni finnst [að Gunnar hafi svikið pabba **sinn**]
John thinks that Gunnar has betrayed father refl.poss.

Question: Whose father?

2. *Medium-distance vs. local w. simplex refl.:*

Jón bað Pétur [að PRO raka **sig** á hverjum degi]
John asked Peter to shave refl. every day

Question: Shave who?

3. *True long distance vs. local w. complex refl.:*

Jón segir [að Pétur tali mikið við **sjálfan sig**]
John says that Peter talks a lot to self+refl.



Interpretation of pronouns and reflexives, 2

First impression:

- relatively easy to administer

Some problems:

- some (most) of these examples are truly ambiguous and we do not know how which reading speakers of Icelandic would answer (nor how to interpret the answers)

Conclusion:

- we will need to redesign this test to some extent if we want to continue using it



Filling in gaps using pronouns and reflexives

Examples:

1. Sentence completion in simplex sentences:

Jón	rakar	—	[= rakar Jón]
John	shaves		[= shaves John]

2. Sentence completion in long distance environments:

Jón heldur [að Gunna hafi málað __]	[= málað Jón]
John thinks that Gunna has painted __	[= painted John]

3. Sentence completion in non-long distance environments:

Jón lýsti því [þegar Magnús rakaði __]	[= rakaði Jón]
John described it when Magnus shaved __	[= shaved John]



Filling in gaps using pronouns and reflexives, 2

First impression:

- a bit difficult to administer at times
- can give useful information

Some problems:

- some of the examples were too complex (some of these were based on actual examples from NAmIcel transcripts)

Conclusion:

- we will probably try to revise this test a bit and used it again in a modified form



Inserting adverbs

Examples:

1. V2 adverbs:

Petta er stúlkan [sem konan tók þvottinn fyrir] stundum



this is the girl that the lady took the laundry for sometimes

2. V3-adverbs:

Ég veit það ekki.

bara



I know it not



Inserting adverbs, 2

First impression:

- not entirely easy to administer (part of the reason here and elsewhere is the limited reading ability of many of the subjects, which complicates things)
- could give useful information

Some problems:

- somewhat difficult to design and evaluate because in many instances more than one position is possible

Conclusion:

- we might want to try to develop this further (but see other variants of this experiment below)



Evaluating sentences

Examples:

1. *Simple V2 examples*

Börnin fóru **aldrei** í skólann.
the children went never to school

*elicited
judgments*
OK/*

2. *Simple V3-examples*

Pabbi minn **alltaf** söng í kór.
my dad always sang in (a) choir

OK/*

3. *Long distance reflexives*

Jón hefur engar áhyggjur af þessu.
John has no worries about this
Hann veit að þú elskar **sig**.
he knows that you love(ind.) refl.

yes/?/no

Evaluating sentences, 2

Examples, condit.

4. *Extended progressive aspect*

Biggi fær ekki íbúðina fyrr en eftir þrjá mánuði.

Biggi gets not the apartment until after three months

Hann **er að búa** hjá mömmu sinni og pabba þangað til.
he is living with mother his and dad until then

yes/?/no

5. *The new passive*

Gunnar eldaði matinn, Jóna lagði á borðið.

Gunnar cooked the food, Jona laid the table

Það var **beðið mig** að vaska upp.
there was asked me(A) to wash up

yes/?/no

6. *Dative substitution (sickness)*

Helgi er að fara í útilegu.

Helgi is going camping

Strákunum langar til að fara með honum.
the boys(D) want to go with him

yes/?/no



Evaluating sentences, 3

First impression:

- did not work so well

Some problems:

- to avoid “serial effects” or satiation, it is necessary to vary the examples, which is not a problem in itself, but
- too many examples tended to make the subjects very insecure and they got easily tired and confused

Conclusion:

- we will have to limit the use of this method much more than we had anticipated and just use it to a very limited extent with carefully selected examples



Choosing between alternatives

Examples: Check the appropriate version(s)

1. *V2 adverbs*

Þórður **aldrei** hefur lesið bókina.

Thordur never has read the book

Þórður hefur **aldrei** lesið bókina

Aldrei hefur Þórður lesið bókina

2. *V3 adverbs*

Ég vil vatn **bara**

I want water just

Ég vil **bara** vatn

Ég **bara** vil vatn





Choosing between alternatives, 2

Examples, contd.:

3. *Indicative vs. subjunctive*

Er læknirinn við í dag?

Is the doctor in today

verður

Veistu hvort hann

við á morgun?

verði

Do you know if he will-be(ind.)/will-be(subjunct.) in tomorrow

4. *Agreement*

Grímur er ekkert lélegur í reikningi.

Grimur is not bad at math

er

Hann veit að tveir plús tveir

fjórir.

eru

He knows that two plus two is/are four



Choosing between alternatives, 3

Examples, condit.

5. *Pronouns vs. (long distance) reflexives*

Þú verður að hætta að senda þessi skilaboð.

You must stop sending these messages

sig

Rúna fer að halda að þú elskir

[= Rúnu]

hana

Rúna will start believing that you love refl./her [= Rúna]

6. Object shift

Þau höfðu bæði vatn og bjór með sér í gönguferðina

They had both water and beer with them on the hiking trip

bjórinn ekki

en þau drukku

bara vatnið.

ekki bjórinn

but they drank the beer not/not the beer just the water



Choosing between alternatives, 4

Examples, contd.:

7. V2/V3 and topicalization

María er að læra frönsku.

Mary is studying French

hún ætlar

Næsta vetur ætlar hún að læra ítölsku.

ætlar hún

Next winter she intends/intends she to study Italian

8. Subject case.

Við ætlum til Íslands í sumar.

We are going to Iceland this summer

Ég hlakka

Mig hlakkar mikið til.

Mér hlakkar

I (N/A/D) look forward to it a lot.



Choosing between alternatives, 5

First impression:

- relatively easy to administer and works pretty well for most of the things we tried

Some problems:

- requires careful design if it is to give maximally useful information (minimize acceptable alternatives, keep the sentences as simple as possible ...)

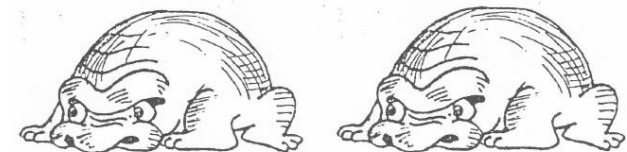
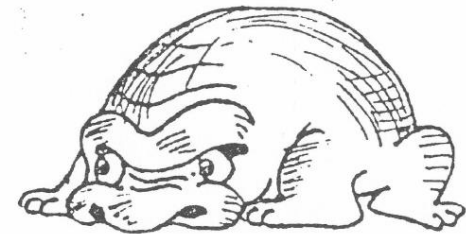
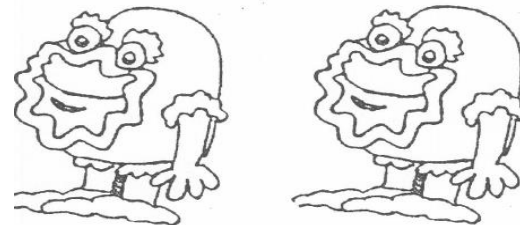
Conclusion:

- we will definitely develop this further and continue using it for a variety of phenomena — and probably rely much more heavily on it than on sentence evaluation (judgments)

Plural formation of nouns

Question: What is the nature of the subjects' morphological knowledge?

Wug-type test: known words, regular words, more complex ...





Plural formation ...

First impression:

- easy to administer
- can give interesting information about the nature of the acquisition

Some problems:

- needs to be simplified a bit (concentrate on different kinds of regularity vs. known words; leave out „ambiguous“ words)

Conclusion:

- we will definitely keep using this (in a simplified form)



Verbal morphology and aspect

Topics of interest:

- The nature of the subjects' morphological knowledge (past tense formation ...)
- The use of auxiliaries, restrictions on and role of aspectual constructions ...

cf. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir's talk at this workshop earlier today ...

First impression:

Can be profitably used but may need some modification ...



Phonetics and phonology

Topics of interest:

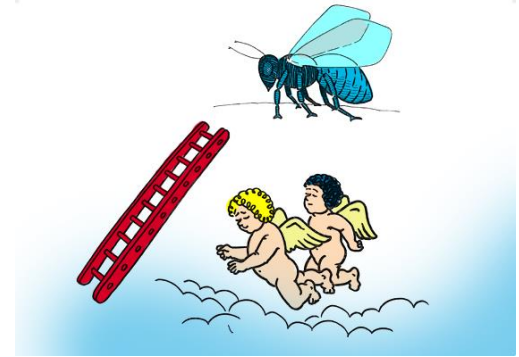
- Which phonological features have been preserved, which ones disappeared and what has emerged?

Methodology:

- Picture naming
- Reading of a short passage

cf. the talk by Margrét, Katrín and Gísli tomorrow morning ...

First impression: Needs to be further modified but works well in principle, especially the picture naming part ...





Semantics

Topics of interest include:

- **lexical semantics** (containers, body parts, spatial relations ...)

A comparative study related to a large international project that Matthew Whelpton will tell you all about tomorrow morning ...



Conclusion

Methods that worked well included and need no or very little modification („first impression“):

- spontaneous speech, including the elicited narrative
- interpretation of syntactically complex sentences
- choosing between alternative forms and structures
- the lexical semantics part (Matthew's talk)

Methods that require some modification/simplification

- picture naming (phonetics, phonology)
- the morphological tests (plural formation, verbs and auxes)
- filling in gaps and inserting words into structures

Methods that need to be extensively modified if included at all

- reading a passage (for phonetic/phonological purposes)
- syntactic judgment tasks
- interpretation of local vs. long(er) distance reflexives





Future plans

We are planning more

- analysis of what we already have (material that we have collected, other material)
- elicitation of new material (the source is about to dry out!)
- co-operation with researchers in other disciplines (literature, cultural studies, history ...) to get a better understanding of the social and cultural situation in the past and at present
- co-operation with other linguists (like you, guys) ...





References

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- Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir. 2006. *North American Icelandic. The Life of a Language*. University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg.
- Sigríður Magnúsdóttir. 2000. *On Grammatical Knowledge in Agrammatism. Evidence from Icelandic*. Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, Boston.