

Haraldur Bernharðsson*

Spreading the standard: The nineteenth-century standardization of Icelandic and the first Icelandic novel

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Abstract: A literary standard for Icelandic was created in the nineteenth century. The main architects of this standard were scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic language and literature who turned to the language of the medieval Icelandic literature for linguistic models. Consequently, the resulting standard included a number of features from earlier stages of the language. This standard was successfully implemented despite the relatively weak institutional infrastructure in nineteenth-century Iceland. It is argued in this paper that the first Icelandic novel, *Piltur og stúlka*, appearing in 1850 and again in a revised edition in 1867, played an important role in spreading the standard. The novel championed the main ideological tenets of the prevailing language policy, and at the same time it was a showcase for the new standard. A rural love story set in contemporary Iceland, the novel was a welcome literary innovation. Most importantly, the subject matter appealed to children and adolescents in their formative years, and the novel thus became a powerful and persuasive vehicle for the new linguistic standard.

Keywords: language standardization, linguistic variation, Icelandic

1 Introduction

The current linguistic standard for Icelandic was developed in the nineteenth century amid rising romantic nationalism in Iceland and demand for independence from Danish rule. The architects of this standard, many of whom were scholars or students of Old Norse-Icelandic language, literature, and history, looked to the medieval Icelandic literature – the sagas – for linguistic ideals. This retrospective standard was propagated through the Latin School in Iceland, the only institution of higher education in the country at the time, and, especially in the second half of the century, through grammars and in printed books,

*Corresponding author: Haraldur Bernharðsson, Department of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Iceland, IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland, E-mail: haraldr@hi.is

journals, and newspapers. The emerging linguistic standard thus became visible through its application in printed materials in the public sphere.

It will be argued in this paper that the first novel printed in Icelandic, Jón Thoroddsen's *Piltur og stúlka* 'Boy and girl', appearing in 1850 and then again in a second revised edition 1867, played an important role in displaying and propagating the new and emerging linguistic standard. As a rural love story featuring many linguistic characteristics of the medieval Icelandic sagas, the novel soon enjoyed immense popularity. The second edition of 1867 was printed in 1,200 copies, a very large print run for the small Icelandic society of only around 70,000 people. Moreover, this love story about the young son and daughter of two neighboring and rivaling farmers, appealed to children and young people in a way that no grammar, journal, or newspaper ever could. This appeal to young people in their formative years no doubt made the novel instrumental in establishing a standard literary language for Modern Icelandic.

This paper will first describe some of the properties of the standard (in Section 2) before addressing the social forces behind the creation and propagation of the standard (in Section 3). Special attention will then be paid to the first Icelandic novel and its role (in Section 4).¹

2 The new and emerging standard

2.1 The models for the standard

In the public discourse in the nineteenth century about the Icelandic language, two sentiments were prominent and may be characterized as the bedrock of the prevailing Icelandic language policy:²

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Historical Sociolinguistics Network Conference hosted by New York University and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City on April 6–7, 2017, as well as at the Sosiolingvistisk nettverk (SONE) conference hosted by Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim on April 19–20, 2018. The paper has benefitted from feedback from the audiences at these conferences, insightful and constructive comments by the editors of the *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* and two anonymous reviewers, as well as by Már Jónsson and Chip Robinson.

² For an overview of the purification and standardization of Icelandic, see Halldór Halldórsson (1979), Kjartan G. Ottósson (1990), and Kjartan Ottósson (2005); see also a collection of papers on the Icelandic language from 1840–1940 edited by Baldur Jónsson (2006). The nineteenth-century standardization of Icelandic is, of course, not a unique process; language standardization with romantic nationalistic undertones also took place elsewhere around Europe (Haugen 1966).

- (1) a. Concern for the purity of the Icelandic language and the need to purge it of foreign, primarily Danish, influence.
 b. Reverence for the language of the medieval Icelandic literature and calls for its application as a linguistic ideal.

In addition to an effort to rid the Icelandic language of foreign borrowings by replacing them with newly-coined Icelandic words, the nineteenth-century standardization was primarily directed at the written language, aiming for a uniform orthography, as well as regularizing certain aspects of the morphology. Models for both the orthography and the language were sought in the medieval Icelandic literary language as manifest in, for instance, the medieval sagas of Icelanders (the family sagas), the sagas of the Norwegian kings, or the Old Norse mythological material in the Eddas, as transmitted in manuscripts from the twelfth century onward. As discussed below (Section 3.3), the principal architects of the standard were scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic language, literature and history, who were therefore intimately familiar with the language and orthography of the medieval manuscripts. Many properties of the Icelandic language found in manuscripts from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries were selected for inclusion in the standard in the nineteenth century and as replacements for features of the contemporary language.

2.2 The properties of the standard

Several features of thirteenth-century orthography were adopted as part of the new standard, thus suppressing the orthographic manifestation of a number of sound changes that had taken place in the period from the (late) thirteenth century down to the nineteenth century. These included, for instance, the fourteenth-century diphthongization before *ng*; the sixteenth-century vowel mergers *i + y > i*, *í + ý > í*, and *ei + ey > ei*; and the change of word-initial *hv-* to *kv-*, starting in the seventeenth century, as shown in (2) with some examples.³

- (2) a. Diphthongization before *ng*
 “lengi” instead of “leingi” (*lengi* adv. ‘long’)
 “langur” instead of “lángur” (of *langur* adj. ‘long’)
 “löng” instead of “laung” (of *langur* adj. ‘long’)

³ See Stefán Karlsson (1989, 2000: 19–75, 2004) and Kristján Árnason (2005: 313–425) on these sound changes and their orthographic manifestation. For an overview of the history of Icelandic orthography and the orthographic standard, see Jóhannes L.L. Jóhannsson (1921–22), Jón Aðalsteinn Jónsson (1959), and Anna Sigríður Þráinsdóttir (2006).

- b. The vowel mergers $i + y > i$, $í + ý > í$, and $ei + ey > ei$
 “skildi” (of *skilja* ‘understand’) vs. “skyldi” (of *skulu* ‘shall’)
 “tína” ‘pick’ vs. “týna” ‘lose’
 “eira” ‘spare’ vs. “eyra” ‘ear’
- c. $hv- > kv-$ in word-initial position
 “hvalur” instead of “kvalur” ‘whale’
 “hvass” instead of “kvass” ‘sharp’
 “hvítur” instead of “kvítur” ‘white’

These features of the new orthographic standard were inconsistent with the pronunciation of the majority of speakers at the time: a large portion of the population probably pronounced word-initial $kv-$ in (2c) instead of the earlier $hv-$, most speakers pronounced diphthongs before ng in (2a) (rendered orthographically with “ei”, “á”, and “au”), and by the mid nineteenth century there were probably no speakers left distinguishing the unrounded vowels i , $í$, ei and their rounded counterparts y , $ý$, ey , respectively (where $í$ and $ý$ are the etymologically long counterparts of i and y), cf. (2b). Consequently, these (and several other) archaic spelling features were (and still are) for the most part without support in the pronunciation of Icelandic and they required learning and training.

This archaic orthography never affected the pronunciation, and that was never the intention as far as we know. Instances can be identified, however, where the orthography ultimately altered the pronunciation. In the word-initial clusters $hve-$ and $kve-$, the etymologically short unrounded vowel e [e] was rounded to [œ] or, sometimes, [ɤ], probably starting around 1400, affecting several very frequently used words, including the indefinite and interrogative pronoun $hver > hvör$ ‘which, who’, the adverbs $hvergi > hvörgi$ ‘nowhere’, $hvernig > hvörnig$ ‘how’, and $hversu > hvörsu$ ‘how’. This rounding of the vowel probably began around 1400 and became widespread by the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these words and other similar ones were, it seems, predominantly pronounced with a rounded vowel, and were spelled accordingly in the contemporary orthography. The orthographic standard developed in the nineteenth century, by contrast, prescribed spelling only with “e” for these words. This was consistent with the medieval orthography, but probably inconsistent with the predominant pronunciation at the time. Yet, the orthographic standard gradually impacted the pronunciation to such an extent that these words are now almost always pronounced with the unrounded vowel [e]/[ɛ:] in the modern language (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925: xiii; Bandle 1956: 42–43; Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson 2011: 50–53; Kristján Friðbjörn Sigurðsson 2014).

Other features introduced as part of the standard were morphological. For instance, the indefinite pronoun *engi* ‘no one’ had two alternating stems already in the earliest attested Old Icelandic in the second half of the twelfth century: on the one hand *eng-* with an unrounded vowel and on the other hand *øngv-* with a rounded vowel and a stem-final *v* which was lost immediately before a consonant or a rounded vowel. The most prominent forms of the pronoun in early thirteenth-century Icelandic are shown in Table 1 below (Noreen 1923: 322–23 [§476]; Björn K. Þórolfsson 1925: 50–51; Bandle 1956: 372–74; Katrín Axelsdóttir 2006). Apart from the nom. sing. in masculine and feminine, nom.-acc. singular and plural in the neuter, and gen. sing. in masculine and neuter, the forms with the rounded vowel (and sometimes a stem-final *v*) appear to have predominated from the sixteenth century onward (Jón Helgason 1929: 80; Bandle 1956: 373; Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson 2011: 192–95).

Table 1: The most prominent forms of the indefinite pronoun *engi* ‘no one’ in early thirteenth-century Icelandic.

		Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Sg.	Nom.	engi	engi	ekki (etki)
	Acc.	engi, engan, øngvan	enga, øngva	ekki (etki)
	Dat.	engum, øngum	engri, øngri	engu, øngu
	Gen.	einskis, enskis	engrar, øngrar	einskis, enskis
Pl.	Nom.	engir, øngvir	engar, øngvar	engi
	Acc.	enga, øngva	engar, øngvar	engi
	Dat.	engum, øngum	engum, øngum	engum, øngum
	Gen.	engra, øngra	engra, øngra	engra, øngra

Even if the stem with the rounded vowel (and stem-final *v*) was probably most common in the nineteenth-century language, the orthographic standard developed at the time only included the spelling “eng” representing the unrounded vowel and stem form without the stem-final *v*; that is, a stem form adopted from Old Icelandic. The orthographic form prescribed as part of the standard was thus inconsistent with the language of the majority of the speakers. Gradually, the literary standard influenced the colloquial language, and in present-day Icelandic, the stem with the rounded vowel (and stem-final *v*) is rarely heard as part of the colloquial language or seen as part of the literary language.

Other morphological features of the new standard included the revitalization of the Old Icelandic inflection of the masculine *ija*-stem substantives, such as *hellir* ‘cave’, *hirðir* ‘shepherd’, or *læknir* ‘physician’ (Hreinn Benediktsson 1969,

2002: 314–22; Kjartan G. Ottósson 1987: 314; Linda Ösp Heimisdóttir 2008; Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson 2011: 120–122), as well as the Old Icelandic inflection of the kinship words *faðir* ‘father’, *bróðir* ‘brother’, *móðir* ‘mother’, *systir* ‘sister’, and *dóttir* ‘daughter’—the so-called *r*-stem substantives (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925: 28–31; Bandle 1956: 263–67; Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson 2011: 155–64).

In the verb conjugation, the middle voice arose in Proto-Norse through the cliticization of a pronominal form to verbal forms. This conjugation underwent several changes on the way from Old Icelandic to Modern Icelandic, including a change in the first person plural where the original first person plural ending *-um* lost the nasal before the middle voice component *-st*; subsequently, a new first person plural ending *-um* was added analogically following the middle voice component *-st*, as illustrated in Table 2 with the present indicative middle voice of the verb *kalla* ‘call’ as an example.

Table 2: The development of the 1st person plural of the middle voice from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth illustrated with the verb *kalla* ‘call’.

Sg.	1	kalla-st
	2	kalla-st
	3	kalla-st
Pl.	1	köllum-st > köllun-st > köllu-st → köllu-st-um
	2	kallizt
	3	kalla-st

The ending *-ustum* (as in *köllustum*) arose around 1600 and appears to have gained considerable currency beside the earlier endings *-unst* (as in *köllunst*) and *-ust* (as in *köllust*). The ending *-umst* (as in *köllumst*), however, seems to have disappeared around 1500. Still, it reappeared in the first half of the eighteenth century and was adopted as part of the standard in the nineteenth century, at the expense of *-ust*, *-unst*, and *-ustum*, which were widespread and perhaps predominant the colloquial language, at least in the first half of the century (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1987: 315, 1990: 39, 1992: 209–238). Here, too, the standard ultimately changed the colloquial language, and as a result *-umst* is the prevalent ending in present-day Icelandic.

2.3 A successful standard

All of the features discussed thus far were prescribed as part of the new Icelandic linguistic standard emerging in the nineteenth century. They were all

adopted from an earlier stage of the language and, moreover, they were at odds with the language of either most or all speakers of Icelandic in the nineteenth century. Yet, they were successfully implemented, and even if they were primarily intended as part of the literary language, many of them ultimately had a significant impact on the colloquial language, in effect altering the language of an entire nation. In an effort to understand better this successful implementation of a new linguistic standard, this paper will examine the social forces behind the design and implementation of the standard with a special attention to the role of the first Icelandic novel in the dissemination of the standard.

3 Spreading the standard

3.1 The social forces of language standardization

The process involved in language policy and planning has been described and analyzed by Einar Haugen (1966, 1972: 159–190, 1987: 59–64), and the goals of language planning have been examined by Nahir (1984) and Ager (2001). Here, the focus will be on the social forces and authorities that were instrumental in forging and spreading the standard. These have been discussed by Ammon (2003, 2015) who defines four key elements (Ammon 2015), shown in (3):

- (3) a. Language norm authorities: What were the institutions responsible for the creation and propagation of the language norm?
- b. Language codifiers: Who were the individuals in charge of defining the standard?
- c. Language experts: How was the standard received?
- d. Model speakers and model authors.

In addition to the social forces outlined in Ammon's model, it is necessary to reckon with the romantic nationalism in nineteenth-century Icelandic society as well as with Icelanders' desire for self-rule and (ultimately) separation from Denmark as significant forces in the language standardization. The Icelandic language and the medieval literary inheritance were at the same time sources of pride and important features defining Icelanders as a nation; the language had become a national symbol. Nineteenth-century Icelandic society was thus a fertile ground for ideas and discussions about the form and status of the Icelandic language inspired by the idealization of the medieval language (Guðmundur Hálfðanarson 2000, 2001, 2006, 2011).

In trying to identify the forces outlined in Ammon's model in nineteenth-century Icelandic society, it is important to keep in mind that this was a very small community with a population around 47,000 inhabitants in 1800 and 78,000 in 1900. This was primarily a rural society with only a few tiny villages. The largest one was Reykjavík with a population of only around 300 people in 1800, but grew rapidly in the nineteenth century with the population rising to nearly 1,200 by 1850 and to around 6,600 in 1900, ultimately becoming the capital of Iceland (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 49, 66–67). Thus, it is not surprising to find that in such a small society the distinction between the different roles outlined in (3) can become somewhat blurred as the same individuals served in different capacities. Despite this inevitable overlap, it is instructive to attempt to discern the different social forces.

3.2 Language norm authorities

Icelandic nineteenth-century society did not have strong language norm authorities at the institutional level. There was no official language academy (the Icelandic Language Council was not founded until 1964) and the government, which was Danish and headquartered in Copenhagen, was indifferent to matters of the Icelandic language and had no educational authority established in Iceland (this only changed with Iceland's home rule in 1904). Consequently, there was no government body to issue directives on the Icelandic language and related matters, such as orthography.

Public education had long been the responsibility of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland. According to a royal decree of 1790, all children were to be taught to read as part of their Christian upbringing and preparation for their confirmation. Reading skills were developed primarily through home schooling by their parents with the local priest acting as an examiner. Only in 1880 was this requirement extended to include writing and arithmetic, but still, by that time, there were very few schools in Iceland. A milestone was reached in 1907 when schooling became mandatory for all children aged 10–14. Iceland had not benefited from the establishment of the Danish public schools in 1814, and was in this regard far behind neighboring societies where compulsory education was introduced much earlier (Sweden 1842, Norway 1860) (Loftur Guttormsson 1993, 2008; Ólafur Rastrick 2002, 2003).

The Latin School of Bessastaðir (*Bessastaðaskóli*), founded in 1805, from 1846 based in Reykjavík (*Lærði skólinn*), was in the first half of the century the only institution of higher learning in the country until the foundation of the Lutheran Seminary (*Prestaskólinn*) in 1847 and the Medical School (*Læknaskólinn*) in 1876.

Even if the Latin School was run on a Danish model and in compliance with Danish educational authorities in Copenhagen, Icelandic was not only the language of instruction, but it also had its place as a subject in the curriculum. Yet, for the first decades, there were no textbooks for Icelandic, and the instruction was carried out mainly by translating texts from other languages into Icelandic. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Halldór Kr. Friðriksson's *Íslenzkar rjettritunarreglur* 'Icelandic orthographic rules' 1859 and *Íslenzk málmyndalýsing* 'A description of Icelandic word forms' 1861 became the main textbooks for the Icelandic language at the Latin School (Kjartan G. Ottósson 1990: 51–75; Heimir Þorleifsson 1975–1984; Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 2005; Alda B. Möller 2017; Heimir van der Feest Viðarsson 2017).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Latin School, first at Bessastaðir outside Reykjavík and from 1846 onward in Reykjavík, was arguably the strongest institutional authority involved in shaping the new and emerging linguistic standard. Even if the school had no official mandate from Danish authorities in Copenhagen in matters of the Icelandic language, many of the teachers were personally interested in the subject, and through their instruction and textbooks, they institutionalized a linguistic prescription within the school. The school was thus a formidable authority, but it must be kept in mind that this was a small all-male school, first and foremost catering to the needs of the relatively affluent members of society. The school thus impacted the general public indirectly through its graduates, many of whom became influential figures in the small Icelandic society.

3.3 Language codifiers

The groundwork for the language standard was laid in the eighteenth century by learned men like Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), professor in Copenhagen and renowned collector of medieval manuscripts, and the natural scientist Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768). Árni was a passionate antiquarian and a scholar of history and Old Icelandic philology. He assembled the largest single collection of medieval Icelandic manuscripts in the world and provided a solid foundation for studying medieval Icelandic language and literature (Már Jónsson 2012). Eggert wrote a treatise on orthography (*Réttritabók* 'Book of proper spelling') inspired by the language and orthography of medieval Icelandic manuscripts. The treatise was never published, but it circulated widely in manuscript form. Eggert Ólafsson's passion for the medieval language no doubt inspired the founders of the Icelandic Society of the Learned Arts (*Það íslenzka lærdómslistafélag*), which published an annual journal in fifteen volumes 1780–1794, as well as Chief Justice Magnús

Stephensen (1762–1833) who in 1794 founded the Icelandic Society for the Education of the Nation (*Hið íslenska landsuppfræðingarfélag*) and published books and journals (Árni Böðvarsson 1951; Smith 1969; Kjartan G. Ottósson 1990: 29–14; Ingi Sigurðsson 1990, 1996: 142–148).

One of the most influential individuals in the first part of the nineteenth century was the Danish linguist Rasmus Christian Rask (1787–1832). Rask, who was one of the founders of Indo-European comparative linguistics, taught himself Icelandic as a student in Denmark and subsequently spent two years in Iceland between 1813 and 1815. His grammars, *Vejledning til det Islandske eller gamle Nordiske Sprog* ‘A guide to Icelandic or the early Nordic language’ from 1811, and its Swedish version *Anvisning till Isländskan eller Nordiska Fornspråket* from 1818, as well as an abridged version from 1832, were the most thorough and systematic grammars of Icelandic to date, and earned him, along with his learning and fluency in Icelandic, respect among Icelanders. In his grammars, the focus was on classical Old Icelandic, the language of the medieval literature, with only a peripheral discussion of the contemporary language and its departure from classical Old Icelandic. This approach was the result of a conscious decision by Rask because, as he explained in a letter to a friend in 1817, he feared that foreigners would lose interest in Icelandic culture if the difference between Old Icelandic and Modern Icelandic became too clear (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1888; 90–91 [Rask’s letter]; Guðrún Kvaran 1987; Kjartan G. Ottósson 1990: 52–53).

The grammars by Rask were thus instrumental in defining classical Old Icelandic as the point of reference, and they set the tone for the discussion in the decades to follow. Rask also exerted his influence by actively participating in the foundation of the Icelandic Literary Society (*Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*) and becoming its first president. The society published books and an annual journal, and Rask no doubt had considerable influence on the linguistic form of these publications. In his 1830 *Lestrarkver handa heldri manna börnum* ‘A reader for children of noble parentage’, Rask prescribed an orthography that proved to be very influential.

The teachers at the Latin School played a major role in defining the standard, as already indicated. Hallgrímur Scheving (1781–1861) and Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1791–1852) taught the classical languages, Latin and Ancient Greek, but they were also respected scholars of Old Icelandic language and literature, and Sveinbjörn Egilsson also compiled a major dictionary for the Old Norse-Icelandic poetic language, *Lexicon poëticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis* in 1860. Through their teaching of the classical languages, mostly by translating works of classical authors into Icelandic, they instilled in their students a standard for the Icelandic language that was very much inspired by the medieval literature.

Konráð Gíslason (1808–1891) was another major figure in shaping the standard. A student of Hallgrímur Scheving and Sveinbjörn Egilsson at the Latin School at Bessastaðir, Konráð went on to study Old Norse-Icelandic language and literature at the University of Copenhagen. Later, he became a professor of Old Norse philology in Copenhagen and a prominent scholar in that field. Konráð Gíslason, who lived all of his adult life in Copenhagen, was one of the editors of the journal *Fjölnir*, issued in nine volumes in 1835–39 and 1843–47. The editors of *Fjölnir*, all graduates of the Latin School at Bessastaðir, took great interest in matters of language and style. Their journal published book reviews in which a critical discussion of the language was often at the forefront. As the linguist among the editors, Konráð Gíslason was no doubt the principal authority on language and style. He wrote treatises on orthography and was the main architect of an orthographic reform, which later was abandoned (see Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson 2017 for an overview of this debate). Many of the anonymous book reviews have been attributed to him. In addition to his work with the journal *Fjölnir*, Konráð Gíslason exerted his influence as a language authority on his students at the University of Copenhagen, collaborators on various projects and in his circle of friends in Copenhagen (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 1999, 2003).

Halldór Kr. Friðriksson (1819–1902) was both a graduate of the Latin School at Bessastaðir and a protégé of Konráð Gíslason. Halldór studied at the University of Copenhagen, worked on the Old Icelandic dictionary by Richard Cleasby (1874), and was one of the editors of the last two volumes of the journal *Fjölnir*. Upon returning to Iceland, Halldór was hired as a teacher at the Latin School where he was the main instructor of Icelandic for nearly half a century (1848–1895). During his tenure at the Latin School, Halldór Kr. Friðriksson coached many generations of students on matters of orthography, language, and style, and published leading textbooks on the subject: *Íslenzkar rjettritunarreglur* ‘Icelandic orthographic rules’ in 1859 and *Íslenzk málmyndaýsýng* ‘A description of Icelandic word forms’ in 1861.

Jón Þorkelsson (1822–1904) was a graduate of the Latin School in Reykjavík and the University of Copenhagen. He taught at the Latin School in Reykjavík from 1859 to 1895 where he was rector beginning in 1872. A prominent scholar of Old Norse-Icelandic philology, Jón participated in the public debate on Icelandic orthography where he advocated a regularized orthography of the finest medieval Icelandic manuscripts (Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson 2017).

The most influential authors or codifiers of the nineteenth-century linguistic standard for Icelandic were scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic language and literature. They were all intimately familiar with the language of the medieval literature and its manuscript transmission and thus also the language and orthography of the medieval manuscripts.

3.4 Language experts

In Ammon's (2015) model, language experts are those who review and pass judgment on the language standard. This group can overlap with the codifiers if the codifiers themselves review part of the codex written by others (Ammon 2015: 62). As is not surprising, there was a great overlap of codifiers and language experts in this small Icelandic nineteenth-century society. There was considerable contention on matters of orthography. Konráð Gíslason and his fellow editors of the journal *Fjölnir* advocated and, for a period of time, used spelling that was very close to the pronunciation. This spelling was, however, met with considerable resistance and eventually abandoned (Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson 2017). Other orthographic details, such as the spelling of the etymologically long vowel *é* or the rendering of geminate consonants before a consonant, were also subject to debate for several decades (see Jón Aðalsteinn Jónsson 1959 for an overview).

Orthography aside, there appears to have been neither much public dispute about the linguistic standard nor about the linguistic ideals; the use of the language of the medieval Icelandic literature as a model seems not to have been contested. Moreover, there seems to have been a general consensus on a wide array of linguistic aspects of the standard; the features discussed in Section 2.2 above seem all to have gone unchallenged.

3.5 Model speakers and model authors

The medieval Icelandic literature was the primary source for linguistic and stylistic ideals, as already indicated. In the Latin School at Bessastaðir, one of the teachers read to his students a Latin translation of the Old Icelandic *Heimskringla*, an early thirteenth-century collection of sagas about the Norwegian kings by the chieftain and historian Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), and had them translate it into Icelandic. Afterward, their Icelandic translations were then compared to and corrected according to the original Old Icelandic text of *Heimskringla* (Alda B. Möller 2017: 10–11).

In an inspirational piece written by Baldvin Einarsson (1801–1833) in the first volume of the annual journal *Ármann á Alþingi* in 1829, the fictitious model farmer explained how he carefully selected material to be read out loud for his household members to ensure both entertainment and educational value. He read the medieval sagas, he explained, because they were entertaining and

useful at the same time, and he concluded “that the medieval sagas were the best medium to maintain the language” (Baldvin Einarsson 1829: 102–103).⁴

One of the editors of the journal *Norðurfari* received a letter from a reader in 1850 expressing his discontent with its phrasing and style. He wrote: “In my view, the language is nowhere nearly carefully crafted enough with regard to syntax or choice of words. I think you need to spend more time reading the fine sagas” (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 1986: 131–32).⁵

During a time of increasing production of printed materials, the new and emerging linguistic standard was propagated through its use in books and journals, allowing the standard to become more visible and to evolve. Journals such as *Skírnir* (1827 to present), published by the Icelandic Literary Society; *Fjölnir* (1835–39 and 1843–47), edited by Konráð Gíslason and his companions; and *Ný félagsrit* (1841–1873) published by Jón Sigurðsson, a scholar of Old Norse-Icelandic philology and a politician, were thus instrumental in displaying the different steps of the new standard as it gradually advanced. Published annually, these journals were largely devoted to news and current affairs, but also contained poetry and short stories.

Of even greater significance was the first Icelandic novel, *Piltur og stúlka* ‘Boy and girl’, appearing in 1850 and again in 1867. Because of its appeal to audiences of all ages, including children and adolescents in their formative years, it was a pivotal tool for displaying and promoting the new and emerging linguistic standard and no doubt had greater impact than any journal or grammar ever could.

4 The first Icelandic novel

4.1 The novel

The first Icelandic novel published in print, Jón Thoroddsen’s *Piltur og stúlka* ‘Boy and girl’, appeared in 1850 and then again in a second revised edition in 1867. The novel is a love story romanticizing life in rural Iceland. The main protagonists are the young boy and girl Indriði and Sigríður. Being the children

⁴ “... að fornmannasögurnar væru það besta meðal til að viðhalda málinu” (Baldvin Einarsson 1829: 102–103).

⁵ A letter from pastor Sigurður Gunnarsson at Desjarmýri to Gísli Brynjúlfsson in 1850: “Málið þykir mér hvörgi nærri nógu vandað að niðurskipun eða orðum. Eg held þú þurfir að lesa lengur sögurnar góðu” (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 1986: 131–32).

of two prominent and rivaling farmers, their friendship is met with disapproval by Sigríður's mother who makes effort to keep them apart. In the end, however, Indriði and Sigríður overcome all obstacles and are reunited. The novel, which is set in contemporary Iceland, enjoyed immense popularity.

4.2 The author

The author, Jón Thoroddsen (1818–1868), graduated from the Latin School in Bessastaðir in 1840, studied law at the University of Copenhagen, and served as a county magistrate in Iceland from 1850 until his death in 1868. Jón Thoroddsen received the best education available in Iceland at the time. He studied under Hallgrímur Scheving and Sveinbjörn Egilsson at the Latin School, who were very influential in shaping the linguistic standard, as indicated above (Section 3.3), and continued to enjoy the company of his learned countrymen during his Copenhagen years, many of whom were authoritative figures in the discourse on language and style, such as Konráð Gíslason. Jón Thoroddsen's career as a county magistrate lasted nearly twenty years. The position was one of the highest government offices in the country and granted him status and respect in society. This role also enabled him to maintain his contacts among learned Icelanders in Iceland and abroad. Jón Thoroddsen's education and high social rank, enhanced by his educated friends and acquaintances, afforded him an ideal position, both to keep abreast of and to participate in the ongoing discussions on matters of language and style.⁶

4.3 Championing two tenets of the standard

As indicated in Section 2.1 above, there were two main ideological facets to the discussion about the Icelandic language in the nineteenth century: on the one hand was concern for the purity of the language and the need to purge it of foreign, primarily Danish, influence; on the other hand was reverence for the language of the medieval Icelandic literature and calls for its application as a linguistic ideal. In his novel *Piltur og stúlka*, Jón Thoroddsen champions both aspects of this ideology.

The concern for the condition and purity of the Icelandic language is demonstrated several times in the novel in comments on the deterioration of

⁶ On Jón Thoroddsen's life and work, see in particular Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson (1943; 1: 15–51, 1950b) and Már Jónsson (2016b, 2016c); cf. also the most recent edition of Jón Thoroddsen's letters by Már Jónsson (2016a).

the language due to Danish influence in the country's largest town Reykjavík. The author presents a stark contrast between, on the one hand, the way of life in Reykjavík with its Danish-tainted language and customs and, on the other hand, a romanticized image of rural Iceland with pure Icelandic language and traditional Icelandic culture. When one of the two main protagonists, Sigríður, born and raised in the countryside, travels as a young woman to Reykjavík for the first time, the author notes that “there were two things about her that she felt no need to change and was determined always to preserve, and that was the language and the traditional costume” (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 70).⁷ The language in Reykjavík is characterized as a hybrid of Icelandic and Danish: In Reykjavík, “no one but Sigríður uttered a word of more than one syllable without it having either a Danish tail or a head, but being otherwise Icelandic” (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 70; cf. also Ásta Svavarsdóttir 2017).⁸ The reader is thus presented with a clash of two cultures: life in rural Iceland, represented by Sigríður, with pure Icelandic language and traditional Icelandic clothing as opposed to life in Reykjavík with a hybrid of both Danish-Icelandic language and Danish-Icelandic clothing.

This view is also presented when Indriði, the other protagonist, is traveling from the countryside to Reykjavík. After a brief rest stop at a farm near Reykjavík, he and his travel companion Sigurður have the following conversation (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 84):⁹

- “Is there now a long way to Reykjavík, Sigurður?”
- “Didn’t you see that from the milk we were served to drink?”
- “No, and I don’t understand how that can be deduced from the milk.”
- “Oh, it gets more diluted, my friend, like the Icelandic language, the further south we get.”

The novel thus presents Danish language and culture, clothing in particular, as a threat against Icelandic language and clothing. The Icelandic language appears as a national symbol, and a puristic view of the language is instilled in the minds of readers.

7 “Tvent var það, sem Sigríði virtist eingin nauðsyn tilbera að hún breytti, og ásetti sjer jafnan að varðveita, enn það var málið og klæðabúningurinn” (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 70).

8 “... einginn maður, nema Sigríður ein, mælti þar svo orð einu atkvæði leingra, að ekki væri annaðhvort með dönskum hala eða höfði, enn að öðru leiti íslenskt” (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 70).

9 “Er nú langt eptir til Reykjavíkur, Sigurður minn!”

“Sástu það ekki á mjólkinni, sem við feingum að drekka?”

“Nei, jeg skil heldur ekki í, hvurmin slíkt má af mjólkinni ráða.”

“Ójú, hún þynnist, góðurinn minn! eins og íslenskan, eptir því sem sunnar dregur ...” (*Piltur og stúlka* 1850: 84)

At the same time, the novel is a showcase for a pure, contemporary Icelandic narrative prose in the spirit of the medieval Icelandic literature. The language of the novel contains several syntactic characteristics that are more commonly found in the medieval literature, the sagas, than in nineteenth-century Icelandic, including instances of object-verb word order and inflected preterite participles with the verb *hafa* ‘have’ (see examples in Haraldur Bernharðsson 2017: 110–111). There can be no doubt that these were conscious stylistic choices by Jón Thoroddsen, modeled on the language of the medieval literature.¹⁰

The novel *Piltur og stúlka* came out in two editions, in 1850 and again in a revised edition in 1867. In the second edition, changes were made in orthography and language (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2017). Both editions are consistent with the ideology fundamental to the standardization of the Icelandic language, but in the second edition, the standardization has been taken one step further, systematically incorporating the properties described in Section 2.2 above. The two editions thus illustrate two successive stages in the development of the standard. The development of the standard manifest in the two editions of the novel is summarized in (4).

- (4) a. The changes involve a departure from the colloquial language. The features adopted are inconsistent with the contemporary language as spoken by most Icelanders around the middle of the nineteenth century.
- b. The changes bring the language closer to the language of the medieval Icelandic literature. The features adopted are all modeled on earlier stages of the language, while departing from the contemporary language.

Practically all of the changes implemented in the second edition of *Piltur og stúlka* in 1867 proved to be enduring features that to this day remain part of the linguistic standard for Icelandic (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2017).

4.4 The impact

The first edition of *Piltur og stúlka* was printed by S.L. Møller in Copenhagen in April of 1850. Following Jón Thoroddsen’s death in 1868, the printer filed a claim

¹⁰ On Jón Thoroddsen’s style, see also Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson (1943, 1: 615–17), Hallberg (1958), as well as Þorleifur Hauksson and Þórir Óskarsson (1994: 506–10).

against his estate for an unpaid remainder of the printing cost. According to the claim, the novel was produced in a print run of 500 copies. The second edition of 1867 was printed by Einar Þórðarson in Reykjavík. The contract for the printing has survived, stating that the second edition was produced in a print run of 1,200 copies (Már Jónsson 2016c: 157).

In the nineteenth century, Iceland was (as it still is) a small community, and as the number of speakers of Icelandic outside of Iceland was so small at the time as to be considered negligible, the Icelandic language community was confined to Iceland. The total population of Iceland in 1850 is estimated to around 60,000 people; in 1870, the population is believed to have reached around 70,000 people (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 49). The first edition of *Piltur og stúlka* in a print run of 500 copies in 1850 thus amounts to one copy of the novel for every 120 speakers of Icelandic. The second edition printed in 1,200 copies came to one copy for every 58 speakers.

Both print runs must be considered very large in proportion to the number of speakers of Icelandic. Regrettably, not much information is available about print runs in Iceland in the nineteenth century, but a print run of 1,200 copies in 1867 can be compared to the 1841 edition of the Bible in Icelandic which was printed in Viðey in 1,400 or 1,500 copies, and the 1859 edition of the Bible printed in Reykjavík which had a print run of 2,000 copies (Már Jónsson 2016c: 162). Needless to say, the Bible would be expected to be published in a fairly large print run. In late nineteenth-century Iceland, when perhaps the entire society was Christian, it seems not unreasonable to assume that most households possessed a copy of the Bible. By comparison, a novel in 1,200 copies in 1867 must be considered a very large print run. It amounts to 5,500 copies in present-day Iceland with a population of around 320,000, which only occurs with a few of the biggest bestsellers.¹¹

There is, moreover, reason to believe that the novel enjoyed far greater readership or, more accurately, a larger audience than the number of printed copies may suggest. First, in rural nineteenth-century Icelandic society, books were routinely borrowed from one farm to the next, sometimes in a systematic fashion through reading societies, especially after the middle of the century. The reading societies were instrumental in providing families without means access to printed books (Ingi Sigurðsson 2003: 123–130; Jón Jónsson 2003). Second, in

¹¹ The journal *Minnisverð tíðindi* edited by Magnús Stephensen 1796–1808 is reported to have had over thousand subscribers (Anna Agnarsdóttir 1990: 357) and the journal *Gestur Vestfirðingur* 1847–1855 around 750 subscribers (Loftur Guttormsson 2003a: 55). It must be kept in mind, however, as pointed out by Loftur Guttormsson (2003a: 55), that there may have been a tendency on the publisher's part to exaggerate the number of subscribers.

Icelandic nineteenth-century society, oral reading was no doubt much more common than silent reading. Typically, the entire household, family members as well as hired farmhands, two or three generations, would gather in the evening for work, such as knitting and sewing, combing sheep wool, spinning, twisting horsehair ropes, wood carving or repairing tools. While working, stories were told, *rímur* poetry recited, and usually someone was charged with reading aloud for the entire household. The practice of reading aloud at these evening gatherings (referred to as *kvöldvaka* ‘evening wake’) brought a single copy of a book to a large audience (Magnús Gíslason 1977).

In a letter to a friend in early 1867, Jón Thoroddsen discussed his plans for a second edition of the novel and noted that the first edition was “worn out everywhere” and therefore he cannot deny requests for reprinting it (Már Jónsson 2016a: 264–266). The popularity of *Piltur og stúlka* must be viewed against the reading material that was available at the time.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the most common printed books in Icelandic homes were religious in nature, as shown by Sólrún B. Jensdóttir’s (1968, 1974–1977) study of book ownership in Iceland in 1800–1830. Sólrún examined two types of sources. First, written records made by priests systematically surveying the religious life and educational status of their parishioners, including religious books owned by each household. Sólrún examined records from one county in Northern Iceland (Austur-Húnavatnssýsla) from 1809 until around 1830, detailing 2,490 religious books at 159 farms or an average of 15.7 religious books per household. Second, she examined inventories of 125 decedents’ estates preserved from the same county in the period 1800–1830, cataloging 1,521 books, both religious and secular, printed and manuscript books. Admittedly, the division between printed books and manuscript books sometimes is unclear, as they are not always clearly kept apart in the records, and an item only labeled “a book of sagas” could equally well refer to a printed book or a manuscript book. By contrast, the division between religious and secular books is for the most part quite clear, and, interestingly, only 12.4% of the books in the decedents’ estates were of a secular nature (the priests, by comparison, only registered religious books). The six most widespread religious books are listed in Table 3 below in a descending order of frequency and the four most common secular books in Table 4.

Sólrún’s findings are corroborated by Már Jónsson’s survey of the inventories of 96 decedents’ estates from different counties throughout Iceland in the period 1722–1820 (Már Jónsson 2015). In the inventories published by Már, registering close to 600 books, the same three titles are at the top as in Sólrún’s study, shown in Table 3, followed by Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason’s (1597–1656) meditations, *Fimmtíu heilagrar hugvekjur eður umþenkingar*, a translation of Johann Gerhard’s

Table 3: The six most common religious books in Austur-Húnavatnssýsla county in northern Iceland in 1800–1830 (Sólrún B. Jensdóttir 1968, 1974–1977).

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- 1 Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's (1541–1627) post-Reformation missal, *Graduale: Ein almennileg messusöngsbók* (known as "Grallarinn"), first printed 1594 in Hólar, reprinted regularly (with some revisions) until the nineteenth and last edition appeared in 1779.
 - 2 Bishop Jón Vídalín's (1666–1720) House Postil, *Húspostilla eður einfaldar predikanir* (known as "Vidalínspostilla"), sermons on the gospels for the Sundays and principal festivals of the church year, printed in two volumes 1718 and 1720 in Hólar, reprinted regularly until the thirteenth and last edition appeared in 1838.
 - 3 Hallgrímur Pétursson's (1614–1674) Hymns on the Passion of Jesus Christ, *Historía þinnar og dauðans drottins vors Jesú Kristi* 'History of the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ' (known as "Passíusálmar"), first printed 1666 in Hólar, reprinted regularly; the 42nd edition appeared in 1900.
 - 4 Þórður Bárðarson's (d. 1690) prayer books (known collectively as "Þórðarbænir"), *Ein lítil ný bænabók*, first printed 1693 in Skálholt, and *Það andlega tvípartaða bænareykelsi*, first printed 1723 in Hólar. Both prayer books were reprinted over and over again.
 - 5 The New Testament, first complete translation into Icelandic by Oddur Gottskálksson, printed in 1540 in Roskilde, Denmark; revised and reprinted 1609 (Hólar), 1746, 1750, 1807, 1813 (all in Copenhagen), 1825–1827 (Viðey), 1851 (Reykjavík), 1863 (Oxford), and 1866 (Oxford).
 - 6 The Bible, first complete translation into Icelandic by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1541–1627) and his collaborators, printed 1584 in Hólar; revised and reprinted 1638–1644, 1728 (both in Hólar), 1747 (Copenhagen), 1813 (Copenhagen), 1841 (Viðey), 1859 (Reykjavík), and 1866 (London).
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Table 4: The four most common secular books in Austur-Húnavatnssýsla county in Northern Iceland in 1800–1830 (Sólrún B. Jensdóttir 1968, 1974–1977).

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- 1 *Jónsbók* law code, in force from 1281, printed in Hólar 1578, 1580, c1620, 1707, and 1709.^a
 - 2 The Norwegian Law of King Christian V, *Norsku lög*, translated into Icelandic by Magnús Ketilsson, printed 1779 in Hrapsey.
 - 3 Medieval Icelandic sagas printed in two volumes in Hólar 1756 as *Nokkrir margfróðir sögubættir* and *Ágætar fornmannasögur*.
 - 4 Sveinn Sölvason's (1722–1782) primer on law and legal matters, *Tyro juris eður barn í lögum*, printed 1754 and 1799 in Copenhagen.
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^a On the printed editions of *Jónsbók* law code, see Már Jónsson (2004: 26) and Steingrímur Jónsson (1997).

Meditationes sacrae, first printed in 1630 in Hólar, and a hymn book, *Sálmabók*, appearing in several different editions. As in the inventories surveyed by Sólrún, the religious books are most prominent, leaving secular books as few as around 10%. Interestingly, very few manuscript books are identified in the inventories published by Már Jónsson; in fact, only around 5%. A single manuscript with

rímur poetry is recorded and another with (presumably an excerpt of) The Norwegian Law of King Christian V (item 2 in Table 4), but, apart from that, the manuscript books recorded in the inventories appear to be manuscript copies of printed religious books, typically a hymn book or a prayer book.

Records from the second quarter of the nineteenth century do not indicate significant changes in book ownership. Már Jónsson's (2014) survey of inventories of decedents' estates from two districts in Borgarfjörður county from the period 1822–1851 still shows the preponderance of the same religious books.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, most Icelandic households probably owned some (paper) manuscripts containing sagas or *rímur* poetry, but the studies by Sólrún B. Jensdóttir's (1968, 1974–1977) and Már Jónsson (2014, 2015) illustrate how vastly predominant religious books were in terms of sheer volume. In a typical Icelandic household at the time, one could expect to find one or more of the religious books in Table 3 and perhaps one or more of the secular books in Table 4.

Many of the books in circulation in Iceland in the first half of the nineteenth century contained texts from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that had been reprinted (in some instances several times) with only minimal changes. The 1813 edition of the Bible and a separate edition of the New Testament, for example, reached far greater circulation than previous editions of the Bible and the New Testament, no doubt because it was relatively affordable, but the text was largely based on the 1584 translation of the Bible (Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson 1950a: 72–73). In language and orthography, these books were, therefore, inconsistent with the linguistic standard that was emerging in the second half of the century.

In the decades from around 1830 down to 1850 when the first edition of *Piltur og stúlka* appeared, there was a steady increase in the availability of printed books and journals, but the main surge first came after 1870 (Loftur Guttormsson 2003a). Print editions of the medieval Icelandic sagas, it turns out, were very few until 1891 (Böðvar Kvaran 1995: 261–263). Journals appeared annually, a few monthly, but many of these were short-lived; daily newspapers in Icelandic did not appear until the early twentieth century (Loftur Guttormsson 2003a: 44). The first enduring news journal, *Þjóðólfur*, started in 1848 and was issued every other week for decades (Guðjón Friðriksson 2000). *Þjóðólfur* was first and foremost a political journal, and this may have restricted its readership among the younger generation.

Piltur og stúlka was the first of a kind when it appeared and, as the first Icelandic novel, must be considered a revolutionary innovation. A love story about the young son and daughter of two neighboring and rivaling farmers must have felt like a breath of fresh air in a literary environment where the printed

book had for decades (centuries, in fact) been practically synonymous with a missal, a house postil or a law book. True, the medieval literature, including the *rímur* poetry, partly accessible in print, but primarily in manuscript books, offered material (including love stories) that probably appealed better to children and adolescents than a missal, house postil or a law book, but *Piltur og stúlka* had the unique quality of being set not in a distant past but rather in contemporary Iceland, thus both in time and environment to which the audience could directly relate.

The two protagonists in *Piltur og stúlka*, the boy Indriði and the girl Sigríður, are introduced as children. The story describes their coming of age in rural Iceland, their friendship maturing into love, and their eventual triumph over series of challenges to their relationship until they are happily united. This romantic rural love story appealed to children and adolescents who were in their formative years. The novel was thus a powerful and persuasive vehicle for conveying a new linguistic standard. If the main characters said, for example, *hver* and *engu* instead of the customary *hver* and *öngu*, as described in Section 2.2 above, then that was certain to leave a lasting impression on the minds of a youthful audience captivated by the story and its young main protagonists. To the youngsters of the audience, the very likable Sigríður and Indriði may have become role models on many levels, including linguistic levels.

In Icelandic nineteenth-century society, oral reading was almost certainly much more common than silent reading. As already indicated, it was common practice for the entire household, family members as well as hired farmhands, to gather in the evening for work. While working, stories were told, *rímur* poetry recited, and usually someone read aloud for all assembled. As the availability of books was limited, the same texts were read and re-read. A popular text would therefore have been read quite intensively, and there are reports of people knowing parts by heart. *Piltur og stúlka* was “our favorite book” notes Ingunn Jónsdóttir, born 1855, reminiscing about her childhood in Northern Iceland in her memoirs in 1946 (Loftur Guttormsson 2003b: 206). It is also no accident that *Piltur og stúlka* was used for teaching children to read in a Reykjavík public school in 1903–1904 (Ólafur Rastrick 2003: 103).

It is also a testament to its immense popularity that *Piltur og stúlka*'s characters are well known among Icelanders still today. The legacy of the gossipy lady Gróa á Leiti is established to such a degree that there was a steep decline in the popularity of the personal name *Gróa* in Iceland after the appearance of *Piltur og stúlka* (Guðrún Kvaran and Sigurður Jónsson frá Arnarvatni 1991: 20, 254–55). Moreover, the very name of the character Gróa á Leiti provided the base for the compound noun *gróusaga* ‘gossip’, a word probably known to every speaker of Modern Icelandic.

5 Conclusion

During the nineteenth century, a linguistic standard for Icelandic was developed, using the language of medieval Icelandic literature as a model, adopting many features from the earlier stages of the language. This standard proved to be successful. Even if it was primarily directed at the literary language, it ended up having a significant impact on the colloquial language. In order to understand better the effective implementation of the standard, the social forces of language standardization, as outlined by Ammon (2003, 2015), were examined (Section 3).

In Icelandic nineteenth-century society, the institutional infrastructure responsible for the development and propagation of the language standard was very weak. The Danish government was indifferent to Icelandic language matters and was based in Copenhagen without educational authorities in Iceland. For the better part of the nineteenth century, public education was primarily carried out through home schooling, and the exclusive Latin School was the only institution of (higher) learning in Iceland.

The codification of the standard was largely the responsibility of a relatively small group of individuals, fundamentally scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic language and literature, passionate about the language and its history, propelled by romantic nationalism through which the language had become a national symbol.

The standard was generally well received. Certain aspects of orthography stirred debate, but there appears to have been general consensus regarding the principal ideology and the linguistic aspects of the standard. In this small society, there was inevitably great overlap between language codifiers and language experts in Ammon's (2003, 2015) model. Consequently, this was primarily an internal debate in a relatively small circle of individuals.

The weak institutional infrastructure in nineteenth-century Iceland lent increased importance to model texts for spreading the standard. The medieval Icelandic literature served as the main model for the standard, but as the result of a centuries-old church monopoly on printing, in addition to the church's long-standing antipathy to much of the medieval literary tradition, religious books were predominant among books owned by the average household. Moreover, these books were mostly reprints of older books and because of this the language and orthography were inconsistent with the new and emerging standard (Section 4).

The first Icelandic novel, *Piltur og stúlka*, appearing in 1850 and again in a revised edition in 1867, a rural love story set in contemporary Iceland, was, therefore, a welcome literary innovation. It was argued that the novel played an important role in spreading the standard. The novel championed the ideology of the language standardization and at the same time served as a showcase for the

new and emerging linguistic standard. Most importantly, the subject matter appealed to children and adolescents in their formative years in a way that no grammar or journal ever could. The novel thus became a powerful and persuasive vehicle for the new linguistic standard.

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