

Kristjana Vigdís Ingvadóttir, *Þrautseigja og mikilvægi íslenskrar tungu* [Perseverance and Importance of the Icelandic Language] (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2021). 320 pp.

*Halldóra Kristinsdóttir, National and University Library of Iceland*

In her first published book, *Þrautseigja og mikilvægi íslenskrar tungu*, Kristjana Vigdís Ingvadóttir discusses Danish influence in Iceland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the importance of the Icelandic language from the Reformation. The book is based on her BA thesis in history from the University of Iceland in 2019 and was nominated for the Icelandic Literary Prize in the category of academic and non-fiction books in 2021.

The book explores the languages used in Iceland at the time of Danish rule in Iceland, more specifically the languages used by Icelandic officials in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even though Icelanders have always thought of their native language as an important part of their identity, there were ideas of adopting Danish in the second part of the eighteenth century. One of the advocates for this was Bjarni Jónsson, the rector of Skálholt, who said in a letter to the Icelandic Land Commission in 1771 that Icelandic was both useless and harmful.

The purpose of the book, as stated in the introduction, is to explore why Icelanders were permitted to use Icelandic within the local governance and not made to use Danish. In order to shed light on this, Ingvadóttir researches whether and how language usage changed and evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Was Danish used more than Icelandic? And was the use of Danish more extensive in the nineteenth century than the eighteenth? Was there a difference in the use of the two languages between different groups of people? Did government officials for example use Icelandic more when corresponding with the public than other people? These are some of the key questions Ingvadóttir puts forward.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the state of language use and Icelandic society until the nineteenth century. In this part,

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Ingvadóttir presents her research on language use in the eighteenth century. In the second part, she makes mention of changes in attitude towards Danish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and gives an account of her research on nineteenth-century language use. In the third part, Ingvadóttir compares the status of Danish in Iceland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the status of English there nowadays.

The first chapter describes various changes that had taken place in Icelandic society and can be traced to increased administrative relations with Denmark. This led to what can be referred to as “Danish influence” within some areas of society. So the question arises whether these influences were so great that adopting Danish, instead of Icelandic, would have been a trivial matter. In the second chapter, the author goes on to talk about the importance of Icelandic within the Danish monarchy, increasing interest in medieval manuscripts and texts along with the Old Norse language. She mentions the early stages of language purification and the Reformation, with increased book publishing in Icelandic, laws and regulations regarding the use of Icelandic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She compares the status of the Icelandic language to Greenlandic and Faroese, but those nations also belonged to the Danish monarchy. The status of Icelandic was different from that of the other languages, partly due to the rich history of written texts in Icelandic and the importance of Icelandic cultural heritage for Denmark’s own historical identity. This part gives a good overview of the status of the Icelandic language within the Danish monarchy in the eighteenth century. It sets the stage for Ingvadóttir’s discussion of her own research in the following chapter.

Ingvadóttir’s research, which is presented in the book, is twofold and the results are discussed in chapters three and six. In the first part of her research she looks at correspondence between officials and the public in the eighteenth century, preserved in the archives of the district governor (*amtmaður*) in the National Archives of Iceland. In this period there was only one district governor working at a time, but the men who held this office were both Icelandic and foreign. Ingvadóttir examines a selection of letters sent to and from the district governor. Regarding the letters sent from the district governor she only looks at letters from the two Icelandic men who held the office in this period, and not foreigners, as she assumes they did not write in Icelandic. As the archive is a quite large one, Ingvadóttir researched a selection of letters, to some extent a random choice, but large enough to give clear results. The author gives an overview in tables of the correspondence she analysed. However, some of the statistics are only reviewed in the text itself, but would have been clearer if they had been presented further in additional tables. Furthermore, some statistics are nowhere mentioned, i.e. the total number of letters preserved from each district governor and the percentage

researched. Ingvadóttir only mentions the number of boxes and letter books preserved, but not the number of letters.

The outcome of Ingvadóttir's research gives a clear picture of the languages used by the district governors and the public. It shows an extensive use of Danish by the two Icelandic district governors. The public, on the other hand, mostly wrote their letters in Icelandic, which Ingvadóttir says is not surprising as knowledge of Danish was not common amongst this group and they would have needed help with writing in Danish. This implies that she assumes the public's letters in Icelandic are autographs. Writing skills were, however, very limited in the eighteenth century, especially amongst women and uneducated men. Some discussion about the letters themselves would have been beneficial here, whether there are indications that they are in fact autographs, or if there is any evidence that might suggest the same handwriting in letters from different correspondents.

The focus in the second part of the book is on the nineteenth century, but first Ingvadóttir discusses the views of several government officials and other learned men concerning the use of Danish and Icelandic in the eighteenth century. She wonders whether they can be regarded as patriots if they wanted to adopt Danish at the expense of Icelandic, and she gives examples of officials who used both languages.

Criticism of the use of Danish became more conspicuous during the nineteenth century, and in the fifth chapter Ingvadóttir looks at the opinions expressed by the government, officials, the elite, the public and even foreign travellers about the two languages in the nineteenth century. She asks why criticism of the use of Danish became so extensive. In order to explain this, Ingvadóttir gives a good overview of the increased Danish influence in Iceland, e.g. rising numbers of Danish merchants and growing Danish influence on the Icelandic public. At the same time, the use of Danish within the administration began to be criticized and it was recognized that Icelandic should be used in domestic affairs.

So, was the use of Danish rightly criticized? Was it used so much amongst officials? And how did the use of the two languages develop as the century passed? In order to obtain answers to these questions Ingvadóttir examines the correspondence of district governors (*amtmenn*) in the western part of the country (*vesturamtíð*) in 1787–1876. Again, Ingvadóttir looked at letters both to and from the district governor, but this part of the research included a broader group of correspondents. In this part, the author asks whether and how language use changed in this period. Was Danish employed more than Icelandic? Had the use of Danish increased from the eighteenth century?

As in the first part of the research, Ingvadóttir has studied at a selection of the district governors' correspondence, covering about 3–6% of the letters preserved

in each book of correspondence. She explains the selection of letters at length, which can be confusing to follow. A presentation of this in tables would have given the reader a clearer picture.

The results of this research are interesting and prove the value of Ingvadóttir's study. At the beginning of this period almost all the letters are in Danish. For example, one of the district governors wrote to people of all classes in Danish, even those who had no knowledge of the language and likely needed the letters to be translated for them. But in the last years (1873–1876) 95 % of the correspondence is in Icelandic. This means that there is a complete reversal in the use of the languages in the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Icelandic was mostly influenced by Danish. Nowadays, however, the language is mostly threatened by increased use of English. In the past few years there have been ideas about adopting English instead of Icelandic – ideas that are similar to those voiced in the eighteenth century. In the last part of the book, Ingvadóttir discusses anglophone influences on various areas of language use in Iceland, and compares it to the Danish influences in the previous centuries. This comparison is interesting and places historical research in a modern context. However, this issue is more complex than can be resolved in several pages, and Ingvadóttir discusses this in rather simple terms.

One of the main purposes of this work is to find out why Icelandic is still spoken in Iceland. Ingvadóttir's research concludes that the reason for this is that Icelanders, including government officials, never ceased to use Icelandic. And when Danish influence had become so great, the demand for increased use of Icelandic got louder. Her research is therefore a part of the answer to that question. However, the scene of Ingvadóttir's research is the administration, i.e. correspondence to and from government officials. The answer to Ingvadóttir's questions is probably to be found just as much in the general language use of the public. Other factors were also at work, such as increased literacy among the public and publications of grammar books in the vernacular. These factors are not discussed in the book, but Ingvadóttir's research does nonetheless give this topic a fresh perspective and it is an important study of primary sources.

The finish of the book has been carefully accomplished. There is an abstract in English, bibliography and a list of images, names and keywords, tables and charts. Images of documents could have been printed in better quality. All in all, the book is a promising first published piece from the author and it will be exciting to take notice of her work in the future.