Icelandic 19th century newspapers and periodicals as showcases for an emerging language standard

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One of the main resources for the project “Language Change and Linguistic Variation in 19th-Century Icelandic and the Emergence of a National Standard” (cf. http://arnastofnun.is/page/LCLV19) is a corpus of newspapers and periodicals. The main corpus, “Tímarit.is”, was constructed at the National and University Library of Iceland and consists of scanned pages and an attached OCR-read text of all newspapers and periodicals published in Icelandic during the 19th century (and beyond). A smaller subcorpus, containing a selection of texts from the 19th and early 20th centuries, corrected and prepared for linguistic analysis, is under construction at The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

This material will be the focus of the presentation, both as a resource for the study of language ideology and attitudes, and as data on language use. The 19th century was a time of increasing national awareness in Iceland, and a struggle for national independence. Throughout the century, newspapers and periodicals were the main forum for social and political discussions, including language policy and reform, and at the same time they were important vehicles for the emerging language standard. As they were widely distributed among the general public and much read in the period, it seems safe to conclude that the direction and pace of the standardization process in such texts gives an indication of the general progress of the language standard in the community. Some publishers and editors were active participants in the language debate, and used their papers as test cases for their ideas by trying out forms and features, which they considered right or desirable for the language standard. Others might not have had as strong feelings about the language standardization, but their texts can, however, be expected to reflect its effects in various ways.

Keywords: “19th century Icelandic”, “language standardization”, “newspaper corpus”.