

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

# Language Attitudes: English in Iceland

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A qualitative study on language attitudes  
towards English in Iceland

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract  <p>This thesis examines the language attitudes of immigrants in Iceland when their primary language is English. Immigrants in Iceland are approximately 12% of the population. Language attitudes of Icelanders towards the English language have been studied extensively. However, the language attitudes of immigrants in Iceland have not been studied. Previous studies on the English language in Iceland have mentioned the idea that Icelanders are becoming bilingual, Icelandic/English, and that the English knowledge that Icelandic children have is greater than expected.</p> <p>In this qualitative study, ten immigrants in Iceland were interviewed and asked about their language attitudes and how they felt about having to rely on English in Iceland in their everyday life. The interviews were semi-structured, and the data was analysed using qualitative content analysis. The aim of the thesis was to see what the language attitudes of immigrants in Iceland when their language of communication is English and if those attitudes were different depending on how long the person had lived in Iceland.</p> <p>The results from the interviews were that all of the informants felt that they wanted to learn Icelandic to be a part of the Icelandic society. The biggest hindrance, according to the informants, was being accepted into the society by Icelanders and being able to practice Icelandic with locals, since Icelanders would rather switch to English than speak Icelandic. The informants felt that Iceland was a bilingual country and that knowing English was almost as important as knowing Icelandic. Nonetheless, even though there were some complaints from the informants, they wanted all to stay in Iceland for the unforeseeable future.</p>			
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## 1 Introduction

In the past couple of years, there has been a fear in Iceland that not only is the Icelandic language gradually being lost but that the English abilities of Icelanders are not good enough. These ideas have been written about in the Icelandic media. There have been several opinion pieces, news articles and interviews that claim that Icelandic is under a siege from the influences of English. For example, Hafþís Ingvarsdóttir, a professor emeritus at the University of Iceland, said in an interview with *Morgunblaðið* that “If nothing will be done there is a danger that Icelanders will be neither good in Icelandic nor English”<sup>1</sup> (Erlingsdóttir, 2018). Bjartey Sigurðardóttir, a speech pathologist, writes in a similar tone in her opinion column in *Vísir*. Sigurðardóttir writes that she notices a difference in children that need speech therapy and that preschool children sometimes might have a more comprehensive grasp on English than Icelandic.

When analysing children’s language problems, I sometimes meet parents who say that the child’s vocabulary is considerably better in English than in Icelandic, and I am talking about parents whose mother tongue is Icelandic<sup>2</sup> (Sigurðardóttir, 2018).

Sigurðardóttir believes that the children are picking up English at the expense of Icelandic and would, therefore, be worse off later when they start primary education (Sigurðardóttir, 2018). Several other opinion pieces have been published in the two biggest newspapers in Iceland (*Morgunblaðið* and *Fréttablaðið/Vísir*) about these issues and that the Icelandic youth does not speak Icelandic fluently anymore. None of the opinion pieces cites any research, but they focus on what the writers are seeing

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<sup>1</sup> “Ef ekkert verður að gert er hættu á að Íslendingar verði hvorki góðir í íslensku né ensku”

<sup>2</sup> “Mörg börn á leikskólaaldri eru jafnvel með sterkari orðaforða á ensku en íslensku. Við greiningu á málþroskavanda barna hitti ég stundum foreldra sem segja með nokkru stolti að orðaforði barnsins sé talsvert betri á ensku en íslensku og er ég þar að tala um foreldra sem eiga íslensku sem móðurmál.”

in their own children or other people's children. Furthermore, Ebba Ísberg (2015) writes in her opinion piece in *Vísir* that if “English would be adopted in this country, I am sure Iceland would be turned into a small tourist island”<sup>3</sup> (Ísberg, 2015). Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir (2011) summarises all the different opinion pieces by encapsulating the notion that Icelandic is suffering because of foreign languages.

English has replaced Danish as Icelandic's enemy number one in the eyes of all those who act as gatekeepers of the linguistic borders of Iceland (Þórarinsdóttir, 2011).

This thesis is based on a qualitative semi-structured interview study. Ten foreign citizens in Iceland were interviewed during the summer of 2018. The interviews aimed to see if the foreign citizens had adapted to Icelandic culture even if they mainly spoke English. Additionally, some questions were aimed at language attitudes, both from the viewpoint of how the interviewees felt about using Icelandic and English and how the society responded to how the foreign citizens spoke. The aim of this thesis is to see:

1. What are the language attitudes of foreign citizens in Icelandic society when their language of communication is English?
2. What are the differences in language attitudes in correlation to how long they have lived in Iceland?

The background section of the thesis includes a brief overview of the three different components of language attitudes. Then it discusses immigration and the influx of tourism in Iceland. Next is a brief overview of the history of foreign languages in Iceland and attitudes towards those languages, such as Danish and English. Finally, the last section of the background reviews previous research on English in Iceland. Chapter 3 explains the methods and data that was used in this study. Chapter 4 then analyses the ten interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses what could have been done

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<sup>3</sup> “Ef enska væri tekin upp hér á landi er ég handviss um að Ísland myndi breytast í eina litla ferðamannaeyju.”

better in this study and what could be done in Iceland to rectify the issues that came on the surface from the interviews.

## **2 Background**

The background chapter discusses three fundamental aspects of English in Iceland. Section 2.1 introduces the three components of language attitudes. Section 2.2 will concentrate on immigration in Iceland in relation to population growth and a study that Hagstofan published on the social status of immigrants in Iceland. This section includes information about the tourist industry in Iceland. Section 2.3 is a very brief overview of the history of Iceland and language attitudes towards Icelandic, Danish, and English. It discusses language politics and some research on language attitudes in Iceland. Finally, section 2.4 is about previous research on English in Iceland.

### **2.1 The three components of language attitudes**

Peter Garrett et al. (2003) wrote that language attitudes are said to have three different components, cognitive, affective, and behavioural that are linked together. These three different components are created by oneself in conjunction with the stereotypes that one might have about the language or nation (Garrett et al., 2003).

Firstly, the cognitive component, which is when the attitudes are based on the stereotypes that a person has towards the language and people that speak that language. Those stereotypes can be either negative or positive and can either influence language learning in a positive or a negative manner (Garrett et al., 2003). For example, a person might not want to learn French if they do not have a positive stereotype of France. In comparison, someone might want to learn French because they love French food.

Secondly is the affective component, which might sometimes influence the language attitude a person has towards a language. The affective component is about what people personally think of a language, such as thinking that the language sounds beautiful. They do not need to understand what is being said in the language or even know what language is being spoken (Garrett et al., 2003). For example, someone



might want to learn Swedish because it sounds like someone is singing. In comparison, the person might not want to learn Danish, since the spoken language might not sound as good to them.

The third and last component of language attitudes is the behavioural component. It is more complex than the other two components since it might not be possible to change a person's behaviour simply based on their attitudes (Garrett et al., 2003). For example, whilst a person might want to study a language and have positive attitudes towards learning the language there might other things stand in the way of them learning that language. Therefore, changing that person's behaviour, making the person start to learn a new language, might not be connected to that the person has positive stereotypes towards the language and thinks the language is beautiful.

## **2.2 Immigration and tourism in Iceland**

There are two main aspects of the influx of foreign languages in Iceland, immigration, and tourism. This section discusses the rise of immigrants and the rise of tourists coming to Iceland.

Every quarter Hagstofan (E. Statistics Iceland) releases information about the Icelandic population. As of the third quarter of 2018, there are 43.430 foreign citizens living in Iceland. The total population in Iceland at the same time was 355.620 inhabitants, 12.2% of the population being foreign citizens. Hagstofan defines an immigrant as a person that is born outside Iceland that has foreign parents and foreign grandparents. Additionally, a person born in a foreign country but both parents are Icelandic is a person with a foreign background, as is a person that has one foreign parent. A person with a foreign background is not considered to be a foreign citizen. (Hagstofan, 2018b).

As Figure 1 demonstrates, there has been a steady rise of foreign citizens moving to Iceland, except between 2010 and 2012 where there was a small dip in numbers. These increases can be explained by the influx of tourism in Iceland and thus the need for extra workers.

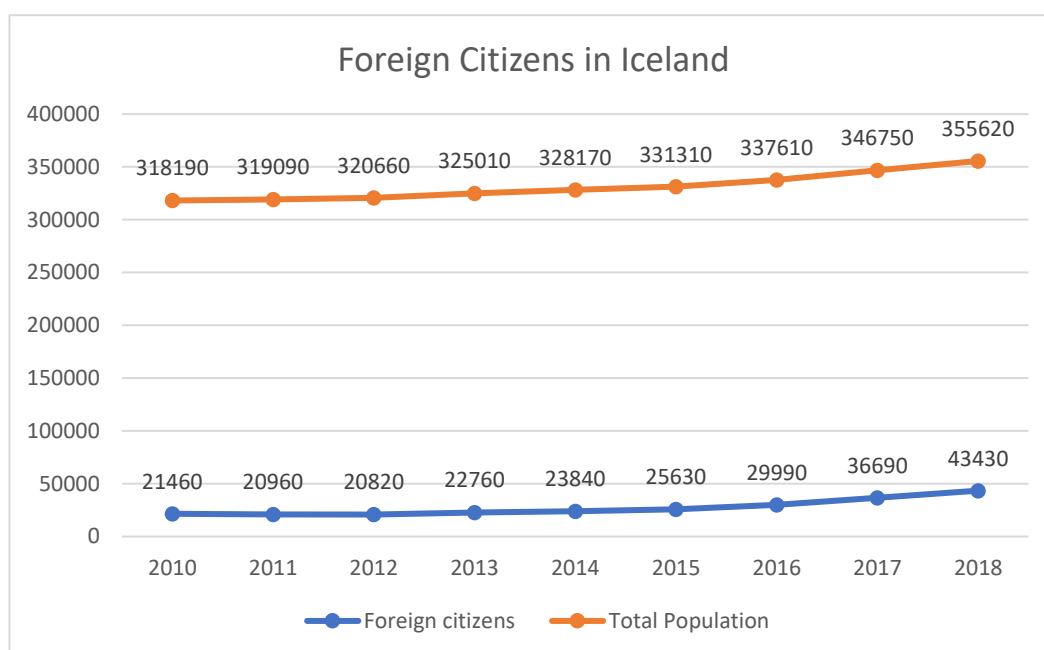


Figure 1: Foreign citizens in Iceland in correlation to the total population (Hagstofan, 2018a).

Hagstofan published a special issue on the social indicators of immigrants where the aim of the special issue was to have a cohesive statistics document on the social aspects of immigrants in Iceland. There were three things that stood out in the special issue.

Firstly, how long immigrants live in Iceland. Most of the immigrants in Iceland have lived in Iceland for less than five years. Nonetheless, in the past ten years, there has been an increase in immigrants that have lived in Iceland for over nine years.

Secondly, was that immigrants have lower salary than locals. Immigrants earned 300.000 ISK (around €2.200) less on a yearly bases than Icelanders. Moreover, the immigrants are more likely to be overqualified for the job they are in than an Icelander. Thirdly, immigrants seem to have a longer working day than Icelanders. Hagstofan estimates that the average working hours for immigrants are around 40.2

to 42.7 hours a week whereas the average working hours for an Icelander is around 39.3 to 40.1 hours a week. (Einarsdóttir, 2019)

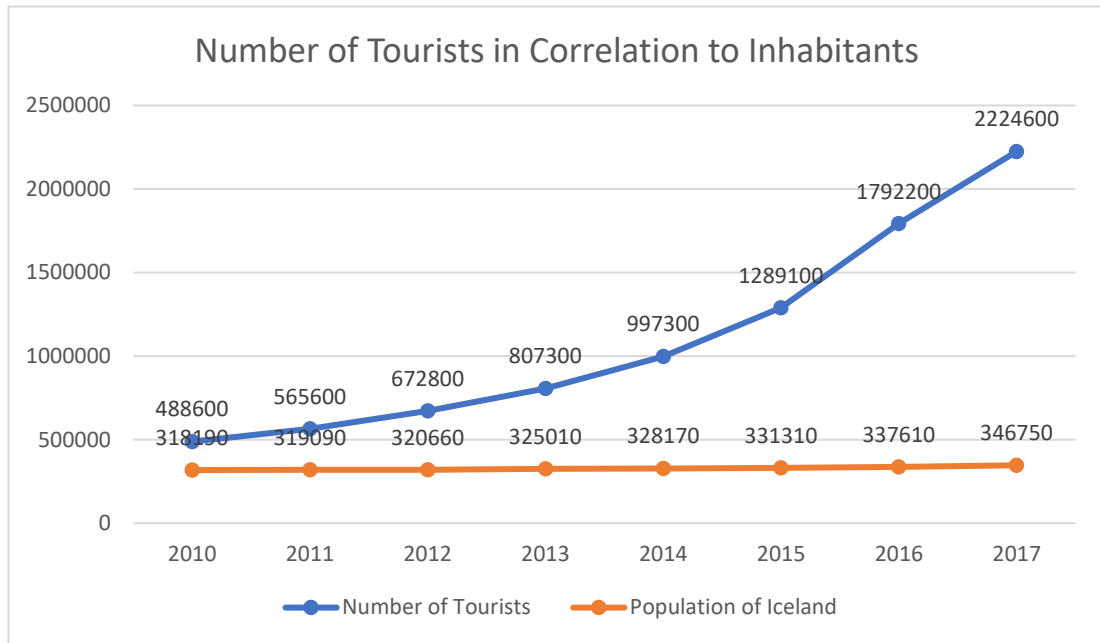


Figure 2: Number of Tourists in Iceland in Comparison to Inhabitants (Hagstofan, 2018; Óladóttir, 2018)

According to the 2018 tourism report from the Icelandic Tourist Board (2018), there has been a 24.4% increase in tourists visiting Iceland every year between 2010 and 2017. In 2010 there were less than 500.000 tourists visiting whilst in 2017 there were around 2.2 million tourists. As Figure 2 demonstrates, there has been a significant rise in tourists coming to Iceland with the last three years having the biggest increase. With the increase in tourism, there has also been an increase in money coming from the tourist industry and employment (Óladóttir, 2018).

Because of the increase of foreign citizens and tourists in Iceland, there has been an increase in services aimed at English speakers. For example, there are several newspapers in English in Iceland. Some of the newspapers are connected to the bigger Icelandic newspapers, such as Morgunblaðið which publishes in English under the name Iceland Monitor, and Fréttablaðið that does the same but under the name Iceland Magazine. Additionally, there is a printed and an online paper called

Grapevine that is not connected to the larger newspapers. Grapevine writes predominantly about things that are going on in Reykjavík. The oldest English (and German) magazine is *Iceland Review*, which started publishing in 1963. Additionally, the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV) has started recently to produce more material in English, a podcast, and some articles on their website.

### **2.3 Language attitudes in Iceland towards Danish and English**

There are two sides to the struggle of the Icelandic language. On one hand, researchers refer to “its utter lack of usefulness outside of Iceland” (Þórðardóttir and Júlíusdóttir, 2013). On the other hand, it is what gathered the nation together to stand up and fight against Danish oppression. Because of the size of the country, the Icelandic nation has always had to rely on foreign languages to communicate with the outside world. During the Danish colonization, between the late 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1944, Danish was the primary language of administration and trade. However, Danish was no longer used by the general population in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir, 2018). In Iceland, the Danish language has had an unusual position since there are two sides to what Danish stands for. Although Danish was the language of the colonizer, thus, creating a negative implication towards it, it was also valuable knowledge for anyone that wanted to further their education and was “the primary lingua franca and linguistic capital in Iceland well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Þórarinsdóttir, 2011).

Since the inhabitation of Iceland, the Icelandic language has been an important factor in what has identified the nation. There have been several instances in the Icelandic history that affected language and language attitudes, such as the British army invasion in 1940 and the subsequent military command by the United States army until 2006. Additionally, the relationship between Iceland and Denmark has been strained, especially right before and after Iceland finally got its independence from Denmark in 1944 (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir, 2018).

Danish is still a compulsory part of the education system in Iceland. In 1999, the English language took over Danish as the first foreign language that the students must learn when they begin their education. According to the Icelandic national curriculum for compulsory schools the main Nordic language that the students must learn is Danish. However, if the students have any connection to Norway or Sweden they can choose to learn Norwegian or Swedish instead if possible. Danish is the second foreign language that the students learn. Not every student in Iceland starts to learn foreign languages in school at the same time, but by the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (age 9) everyone has started to learn English (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Another aspect of the Icelandic language is the idea of how it is connected to the Icelandic national identity. Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir (2011) writes that for:

the national leaders and the general public alike, the Icelandic language is the cultural symbol that makes them a nation, distinguishable from other nations. This notion has its roots in the fight for independence when the Icelandic language became a political tool used in order to consolidate and construct the Icelandic nation (Þórarinsdóttir, 2011).

In comparison, Finnur Friðriksson (2008) mentions in his dissertation that the Icelandic national identity is no longer as strict in Icelandic language and history. He claims that in the past 10-15 years the Icelandic national identity has become more varied (Friðriksson, 2008). Not many studies have been done about language attitudes in Iceland towards Icelandic, therefore, it is not strange seeing contrasting opinion on the matter. A study by Hanna Óladóttir (2007) focuses on the attitudes Icelanders have towards their own language. In 2002 she interviewed 24 Icelanders, 12 males and 12 females, between the ages 27-36. According to her interview results, the connection between being an Icelander and speaking Icelandic is very strong. Additionally, according to her interviews, it was Icelandic that was the reason Iceland was a country (Óladóttir, 2007). This mirrors a poem that both Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir and Finnur Friðriksson mention in their research. The poem was written by Snorri Hjartarson and is called “Land, þjóð og tunga, þrenning sönn og ein” (E. “Country, nation, language, a trinity true and one”). The poem describes the holy trinity of the land, country and language and how they are connected to one’s

person from childhood. Therefore, it is hard to say whether the national identity is connected mainly to Icelandic or if it is enough to live in Iceland to be Icelandic.

## **2.4 Previous research on language attitudes towards English in Iceland**

This section is about the status of English in Iceland, and is based on the research that has been done on the subject. The notion that English is no longer considered to be a foreign language in Iceland has been mentioned in several studies that are cited in this section (e.g. Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir, 2018). The section moves from discussing English during early education, to English at the University level and then general English knowledge and English in the society.

As mentioned in section 2.3 English is the first foreign language that students in Iceland learn. Not every child in Iceland starts learning English at the same time since differentiates between primary schools when the schools start teaching English, but by the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, every student has started learning English (Ministry of Education, 2016). Several studies have been conducted that are about the English skills of children in Icelandic schools. Auður Torfadóttir et al. (2006) studied the English knowledge of children in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade (9 to 10-year-olds). The results from the study demonstrate that the students gained some English knowledge from outside the classroom. Additionally, the students had surpassed the goals that the National Curriculum Guide had given for their age group (Torfadóttir et al., 2006). Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir (2010) also did a study on 4<sup>th</sup> graders and their attitudes towards English and what motivates them to learn English. There were 416 participants in her study which was conducted by using a questionnaire that the students answered in class. The results of her study indicate that students believed that during the English class and speaking to foreigners were when they were supposed to speak English. The students that answered the questionnaire were motivated to learn English so that they could watch TV and films, play video games and listen to music. Additionally,

the students did not correlate the English they learned at school with the English they use in their daily life (Jóhannsdóttir, 2018).

Several studies about English knowledge have been conducted with teenagers. In 2009, Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir and Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir studied the English language attitudes of 10<sup>th</sup> graders (16-year-olds). The study was conducted with a questionnaire that was sent to students at the end of the school year. Out of 703 responses, 682 said that English is very or rather important. The results from the study showed that more boys believe their English is very good or good than girls, 81% and 60% respectively. There were several interesting findings from the study, such as that 97% wanted to be able to speak English when going abroad and 69% wanted to be able to speak to tourists in Iceland. Additionally, 88% thought it was important to know English for further education or work. The main results were that most of the students were confident in their English skills, even with productive English skills such as speaking and writing in English. Ingvarsdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir also mentioned that English is being taught as a foreign language without thinking about how there is tremendous English exposure in Iceland (Ingvarsdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2018). However, in 2012, a study by Ólöf Hildur Egilsdóttir on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (14-year-olds) showed “a decline in comprehension that correlated with text length and number of academic words” (as cited in Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018a). The students became frustrated when working with longer texts since they did not have enough vocabulary to understand the texts. The results from these studies are that even though the students are better in conversational skills than expected they may be lacking in formal academic English skills which could later lead to problems when the students start studying at the university.

In 2009, Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir (2018c) analysed how much English is used at the University of Iceland. Arnbjörnsdóttir investigated the classes taught between 2007-2008 to see how much English was being used in the classes. Her results were that around 10% of all courses taught were in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c). Additionally, Arnbjörnsdóttir analysed the syllabi of most of the departments at the University of Iceland, Reykjavík University, The Agricultural University of Iceland,

and the Iceland University of Arts. Her results were that over 90% of the study material was in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c). Moreover, the Agricultural University of Iceland had all its required study material in English. Most of the textbooks at the Faculty of Science at the University of Iceland were also in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c). To examine how students were dealing with the English at the university level a questionnaire was sent out to all the students at the University of Iceland in December 2009. The results were that 44% of respondents said that having the textbooks be in English “increased their workload” (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c). In comparison, only 24% said that there were advantages to having textbooks in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c). Another contrast in the study was that 63% of respondents said it was easy or somewhat easy to use textbooks in English. However, when the students were asked about what they thought about having to use English terminology in courses that were taught in Icelandic the results were that most of the students had problems with using both Icelandic and English simultaneously when learning (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018c).

Even though there seems to be a problem with having so much of the study material in English Icelandic people seem to frequently read in English. According to a survey run by the Ministry of Education in 2001, 64% of Icelanders between the ages of 18-29 read something in English daily. Furthermore, 95% of that age group heard English daily but only 28% spoke English every day. Therefore, Arnbjörnsdóttir claims that English is now prevalent in Icelandic society (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018b). Arnbjörnsdóttir followed the 2001 Ministry of Education study with two diary studies. One was in 2011, with fourteen participants, and the second one in 2015 with eighteen participants. When Arnbjörnsdóttir compared the results from both studies it was obvious that there was an increase in English usage. (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018b). Arnbjörnsdóttir quotes another nationwide telephone survey that was completed in 2014 that asked Icelanders to evaluate their English skills. The skills were split into four different categories, understanding, reading, speaking, and writing. 74% responded that they understood English very well or rather well. Furthermore, 65% responded that they spoke English very well or rather well (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018b).



The main issue with those studies is that they are based on what people think of themselves and therefore there could be some bias. Whilst people might think they speak English very well it might also depend on what kind of setting they are speaking English in. For example, basic daily life English does not the same as academic English. Nonetheless, the English knowledge and uses of Icelanders are very likely quite high.

One of the language laws that the government has set is to make sure that advertisements in Iceland are in Icelandic. The act 57/2005 says that “advertisements intended to appeal to Icelandic consumers shall be in Icelandic.”<sup>4</sup> (Alþingi, 2005 translations from Neytendastofan). However, these regulations are not always followed. With the arrival of H&M in Iceland during summer 2017, there was an uproar in the Icelandic media since H&M did not follow that regulation. H&M planted a big advertisement that was only in English in the centre of Reykjavík. Subsequently, they were ordered to remove their advertisement. Previously there had also been loud criticism when the regional airline changed its name from Flugfélag Íslands to Air Iceland Connect. Several other companies have done similar things so that they are more accessible to tourists and foreign markets. For example, 66° North used to be called 66° Norður, Iceland Air used to be known as Flugleiðir, Reykjavik Excursion used to be Kynnisferðir, and the Blue Lagoon used to be Bláa Lónið. Similarly, many new Icelandic brands start out with English names, such as IceWear, Zo on, WOW Air, Center Hotels. What those companies have in common is that their primary source of income is tourist related. Additionally, many restaurants in the capital region have foreign names, such as Dirty Burger and Ribs, Local, American Style, Roadhouse, and Lemon.

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<sup>4</sup> “Auglýsingar sem höfða eiga til íslenskra neytenda skulu vera á íslensku.”

### **3 Method and Data**

A Facebook status asking for people to be interviewed was shared to a Facebook Group “Away from Home – Living in Iceland.” The Facebook group has over 18.000 members and is a vibrant Facebook community for immigrants in Iceland. The group was created in September 2007. Additionally, the Facebook status was shared by several other people and some interviews were arranged by word of mouth.

Over twenty people showed an interest in taking part in the research. To be able to make the informant base as diverse as possible there were some criteria that the participants had to fulfil. Firstly, there should be approximately the same number of female and male participants. Secondly, the same should go for native and non-native English speakers. Thirdly, since I wanted to be able to analyse whether there were any differences with language attitudes dependent on how long the person interviewed had lived in Iceland some participants were chosen over others based on how long they had lived in Iceland. Since people that had lived in Iceland for a short time showed more interest in the research I had to decline several offers of being interviewed based on the last criteria.

The interviews were semi-structured with questions that were decided beforehand, and the same questions were asked in all of the interviews. These questions can be found in the Appendix. The informants did not get the questions beforehand. The questions were designed with three themes in mind: language attitudes, information flow, and their life in Iceland.

The interviews were conducted either in a public place or at the workplace of the person being interviewed. Everyone signed a form allowing their data being used for this thesis and then deleted. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 14 and 71 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English, however, they included Icelandic phrases. The first step of analysing the interviews was to transcribe all the interviews. Since the only interest of the thesis is the content of the interviews they were analysed based on the qualitative content analysis (Dörnyei,

2007). Then the answers were grouped together based on the previously decided themes and later those groups were analysed further too examine if there were any recurrent subjects that several of the informants spoke about during the interview.

The quotes do not include personal information; all hesitation markers have been removed, and the quotes are set up with regular sentence structure, making them easier to read. Words that have been added into the quotes are shown in square brackets [] and are either used to add information that is needed to understand the quote or to omit personal information. There are several instances of Icelandic being used during the interviews when that occurs the English translation is offered after the Icelandic phrases in parenthesis (). The interviews were given a random letter from A-J which distinguishes them from each other.

In total there were ten interviews. The persons interviewed were from seven different countries. They had lived in Iceland from under a year to over twenty years. Five were native English speakers. There were six women interviewed and four men. Eight out of ten lived in the capital region in Iceland. All had moved to Iceland as adults and were planning on staying in Iceland for the foreseeable future. They could not say with certainty that they would live in Iceland forever but are not planning on leaving any time soon. They were all working in Iceland and had tried to learn Icelandic at one point or another with different success rate.

## **4 Analysis**

The results are separated into four different subsections based on the questions that were asked in the interview. First, Section 4.1 is about the language attitudes that the informants have about using English in Iceland and what kind of response they reported getting when they speak Icelandic. Section 4.2 discusses if the informants felt that the increase of English in Iceland is aimed at immigrants or just the tourists. Additionally, it includes the English media in Iceland and how the informants find out what is going on in Iceland. Section 4.3 is about finding work, being an employer and what languages are essential in finding jobs in Iceland. Finally, section 4.4 is about what it means being Icelandic from the viewpoint of the newcomers and questions when one might feel Icelandic and why. It includes how it has been integrating into society and being a part of an Icelandic family.

### **4.1 Language attitudes towards language choice**

This section discusses the attitudes that the interviewees have towards using English in Iceland and how they feel about Icelandic. Additionally, it includes what reactions the informants have gotten by using English in Iceland and when they have tried speaking Icelandic.

Out of the ten people that were interviewed six moved to Iceland because they had an Icelandic partner, one to study, one moved after a job offer and two moved just because they simply just wanted to move to Iceland. There was no correlation between why people moved to Iceland and how they felt in Iceland and their language attitudes. For example, some of the ones that moved to be with their Icelandic partner spoke more Icelandic because of their partner whilst others did not since they did not speak any Icelandic to their partner. Additionally, there was no difference in how long they had lived in Iceland depending on if they had moved there for a specific reason or not. Therefore, the reason why people moved to Iceland did not have an impact on how their lives were at the time of the interviews.

Several of the informants mentioned that they think that Icelanders are bilingual and speak English as fluently as they would Icelandic. This mirrors what researchers have also considered is happening with English in Iceland (see Chapter 2).

- (1) I mean every Icelandic is bilingual. (Interview A)
- (2) Icelanders are more comfortable switching from English to Icelandic than I am, just because they have grown up bilingual effectively, or been bilingual for so long. (Interview E)
- (3) It is almost too easy, everyone just speaks [English]. (Interview F)

The notion that Icelanders are bilingual was used in the sense that that was the reason Icelanders did not want to speak Icelandic to them. That Icelanders could as easily speak English and therefore speaking Icelandic would slow the conversation too much. One informant felt that some Icelanders might also sometimes be ashamed of being from Iceland and that might be the reason they would talk English to them.

- (4) There is also this side of people of people that are ashamed of being from this rock in the north Atlantic and they want to show how good they are in English, so it is not necessarily entire negative. (Interview C)

When the informants were asked if people started speaking to them in English in when they were trying to speak in Icelandic eight of the informants said that it happened often. The remaining two informants were not sure since their Icelandic knowledge was not on that level where they would feel comfortable to speak Icelandic. Additionally, all of the ten informants wanted the people to speak to them in Icelandic when they were trying to speak Icelandic.

One person mentioned that since Iceland does have a lot of foreign citizens it might happen that you would be trying to speak Icelandic to a person that does not speak great Icelandic either.

- (5) Sometimes [the reason you are speaking English] is because you are in a service situation and the other person is also a non-native Icelandic speaker. (Interview J)

One person interviewed mentioned how useful it is for immigrants that Icelanders speak English well and that it might help immigrants to integrating into society.

- (6) I think it is useful, especially to those newcomers, English is international, and Icelandic is a difficult language to master. It is good for them to get used to be able to talk a bit in English and then slowly to transfer to Icelandic. (Interview H)

Even though many claimed that Icelanders were bilingual the people interviewed reported some problems with speaking English in their daily life. One informant claimed that they practised in Icelandic precisely what they wanted to say beforehand to be sure to get the right service. They mentioned that:

- (7) It is more about getting shoddy service because "ég nenni ekki að tala ensku" (E. I cannot be bothered to speak English). (Interview C)

Additionally, one person did not want to speak English because they did not want to be seen as a tourist.

- (8) There is a lot of tourists in this area and being Asian I look like a tourist. So very often when I am grocery shopping if I go to the cashier and I start a conversation in English, which I haven't done in a long time now, I feel like there would sort be, and this sounds really really strange, but you know being mistaken for a tourist when I haven't been a tourist here in a very long time. (Interview A)

One informant mentioned that when they had just moved to Iceland and decided to study at the University of Iceland there were a lot of issues with speaking English both at the University itself and with classmates. The department they were studying at taught courses only in Icelandic.

- (9) Awful, I just felt it was really unhelpful. Nobody wants to help you, nobody wanted to be in a group with you and I actually just quit. [...] I did not understand [Icelandic]. I had just moved here, and they told me I could do it and have someone just help me. [...] it was just really badly organized and then they said I could have my exams in English and then when the time came I wasn't allowed to. And then it was like a big deal, and then [the teacher] was like I will just sit here and if you don't understand something I will just tell you and I'm like I won't understand anything because I've been learning it through English and there is a lot of misinformation and then a lot of talk of yeah that everything is fine and then it wasn't. (Interview I)

Others that had studied at the University of Iceland did not report the same problem. However, they had not studied at the University at the same time or in the same

department. Many other services did get positive feedback on language choice (e.g. dentists, doctors, and nurses). Some informants mentioned that they had gone to a foreign dentist or that the doctor had studied in a foreign country and was, therefore, more comfortable at speaking English.

When asked if Icelanders would rather not speak to them because they were speaking English the answer varied. Some felt that Icelanders would rather not talk to them because they would have to speak English to them. Others thought it did not matter at all and that there were other reasons why they felt that Icelanders would not speak to them as much. Some felt that it was simply because the people that would not speak to them probably did not speak English well. This contradicts some of the informants claim that most Icelanders are bilingual and are comfortable with switching between languages (see quotes 1-3, and section 2.4).

However, several of the informants thought that it was not maybe the fact that they only spoke English which was the reason why Icelanders would not speak to them, but it was their own fault for not trying harder to seem more open and connecting with Icelanders. Some also mentioned that they did notice that people that knew that they mainly spoke English would instead approach their Icelandic partner than themselves. In addition, some people thought that maybe the English was not the problem but the xenophobia (see quote 37).

(10) There are still people that view us [immigrants] as small people. (Interview C)

(11) I was treated like shit until they realized I was English so that was okay. And I was like no-no, carry on treating me like crap please, let's pretend I am from Poland. (Interview C)

(12) I am a white middle-class American, you get treated differently. (Interview J)

As quotes 11 and 12 suggest, it matters what kind of immigrant you are rather than what language you speak. Many of the interviewees mentioned how much easier it was for them because they were white.

(13) I feel really bad for kids that are maybe half-Thai or something like that, I feel really bad for them because I heard how they are spoken to, the same things I am talking about happen have happened to my friends that are half-Thai for

instance who have been raised here from birth “já, en þú ert ekki svona alvöru Íslendingur” (E. yes, but you are not real Icelandic) and they are like “jú” (E. yes). (Interview C)

- (14) You know I think especially people from Thailand have it worst, they are really like mean about it. (Interview I)

The other side to why Icelanders would not speak to them was that they might just be shy or that not speaking to strangers might be connected to the Icelandic culture rather than any type of xenophobia.

- (15) I think overall Icelandic people are more closed off than it has anything to do with language. Most Icelandic people would only greet people they know very well, they are more shy. It doesn't matter which language it is, they are just not that open. (Interview H)
- (16) It is such a cultural issue, is it because I speak English or simply because I am not in their rather intimate friend family circle. I don't want to overinterpret, because there is a whole society issue going on as well, but general people don't approach me as easily as my husband. (Interview J)

Since most of the interviews came from the immigrant Facebook group many of the people interviewed were active in the immigration population in Iceland and complimented how welcoming they were. People had been offered jobs through other immigrants and gotten help with many things.

- (17) The immigrant population here is in general incredibly welcoming people. (Interview J)

On one hand, this could explain why many informants claimed to have more immigrant friends in comparison to Icelandic ones (see section 4.4). On the other hand, it could also be because of how closed off the Icelanders are perceived to be to immigrants as previously mentioned.

When asked if English was viewed in a more positive light now than when the informants had moved to Iceland there were several different answers. On one hand, some believed that English was considered more positive now than before since the tourist industry was so big and therefore people might hear English more.

- (18) I do think it is more accepted now because people realise English equals money. (Interview C)



- (19) Yes, definitely, but I at least put that down to the number of tourists coming, they are just more used to speak in it. (Interview D)
- (20) I think they are more tolerant of English-speaking people. I even noticed it last week when I was in a restaurant and somebody was working with a foreign girl and she was speaking to her in English and I was thinking wow, you wouldn't have seen that ten years ago. (Interview I)

On the other hand, they also noticed more negativity towards English. That more and more people were writing about how English was taking over Icelandic and how the Icelandic youth did not speak proper Icelandic anymore, as was mentioned in the introduction chapter. Whilst some did mention that English was being spoken about in a negative manner they believed it was only a small group of people that thought that English was a negative thing.

- (21) I feel like there still, you know when things get too liberal on one side people get more conservative on the other side. There is a small portion of the population that is kicking against the wider acceptance of English. (Interview C)
- (22) I think now they are becoming a bit more negative because they think [English] is infiltrating the system. (Interview I)
- (23) There is that whole fear that [English] is going to take over Icelandic. I point out to them that they are a postcolonial society and Danish did not take over Icelandic. (Interview J)

Additionally, many of the informants mentioned how Icelanders do not encourage them to speak Icelandic and would rather just speak English with them.

All informants expressed hurt feelings about how rude Icelanders were towards them when they tried to speak Icelandic, which slowed down their language learning since they did not have a native person to speak the language with.

- (24) Some of my friends even see it as a like a bit of a joke when we speak Icelandic together even though we can. (Interview C)
- (25) I have had people laugh when I am trying to speak Icelandic. Like when I speak sentences and they are like oh so cute. But no one will understand and then they will switch to English. I find that most often like if I even try to speak any Icelandic they kind of smirk and then we go to English. [...] I would prefer if they would try I think it would also be ideal if they wouldn't laugh but it kind of puts me off continuing to speak Icelandic. (Interview D)
- (26) I do sometimes try to speak Icelandic especially if they are not English speaking if they are from another country. People always want to speak

English, sometimes I feel a little bit like I don't actually always want to speak English because I want to practice [Icelandic]. But when I first moved here, and there were very few foreign people living here I had a friend from [country], she couldn't speak English, so we always spoke Icelandic and I really liked it because it really helped. We were both very similar, so I could actually understand Icelandic. I think sometimes it would be nice if us foreigners would speak Icelandic to each other sometimes. I know it is nice to speak English, but I think it would actually help us. (Interview I)

(27) If I am freaking trying [to speak Icelandic], try back at me. [...] I had someone say laughingly at me, you talk like you are seven, I am like, I am a grown adult do you realize how stupid that is what you just said. (Interview J)

Most informants expressed a wish that Icelanders would try to take their time to talk to them in Icelandic. One person said that they kept on reminding their Icelandic friends to speak to them in Icelandic and moved the conversation always back to Icelandic when the friends had switched over to English.

All the people interviewed had studied some Icelandic, everything from just an online course to almost finishing a full Bachelor of Arts degree in Icelandic as a second language at the University of Iceland. The ones that felt most confident in their Icelandic were the ones that had studied Icelandic as a second language at the University of Iceland, even though they had not finished the entire Bachelor programme. There was no distinct difference between the informants' language use depending on how long they had been in Iceland. What mattered was if they had decided early on that they wanted to learn Icelandic and try to be as fluent as possible or not. For example, two of the informants had lived in Iceland for the same amount of time; one spoke almost fluent Icelandic whilst the other one spoke little to no Icelandic.

It did not matter how well they could speak Icelandic since they said it was never good enough for many Icelanders. Many spoke Icelandic in their daily life but did not perceive themselves as having a perfect Icelandic accent, therefore, they felt there was prejudice against even trying to speak Icelandic.

(28) You get this type of prejudice where if you don't speak any Icelandic you are a retard, if you speak Icelandic fluently it is not perfect enough and you are still

foreign, and if you speak like a little bit it is not good enough, you should learn more. (Interview C)

(29) It is never good enough, they will always pick at something. Which I don't get, I don't know. They constantly, why would you pick on somebody's language skills. (Interview I)

(30) It is two sides of the same coin, either you are a model immigrant and it gets pointed out to you over and over again how nice your language is or you're the horrible immigrant and it gets pointed out over and over again why you should be speaking Icelandic. [...] People make comments all the time, equally "þú talar svo góða íslensku" (E. you speak very good Icelandic). Oh my god, I am not a trained pony. That sort of thing. Even more passive, not directed at me but in passing we need to save Icelandic from English. (Interview J)

The informants in quotes 22, 23 and 24 felt that even though they could speak Icelandic it simply was never going to be good enough for Icelanders. Quote 24 mentioned the two different responses they would get when speaking Icelandic. Sometimes their Icelandic was good enough and the people the informant was speaking to would compare them to other immigrants that did not speak Icelandic. At other times, the informants Icelandic was not good enough and then the informant was the immigrant that could not speak Icelandic well enough. The feeling that their Icelandic would never be good enough might be connected with the feeling of belonging in Iceland and feeling Icelandic (see section 4.4).

Furthermore, there was a lot of self-blame with the interviewees about their own language skills. All of the informants wanted to be able to speak Icelandic and not having to use English. They felt like they should be better and not having to rely on English. This was similar for the informants, like quotes 31 and 32, that had just moved to Iceland and the ones that had been there for a longer time, quote 33.

(31) I wish I was a lot better at using Icelandic. I don't think I am anywhere near as fluent as I would like to be. It is a language that I think, I mean I have strong feelings about choosing to move to a country and I think it is important that if you choose to move to a country that you make every possible effort to learn the local language. (Interview A)

(32) I told them I did not speak Icelandic, a family, there was a younger girl and she was telling her parents, in Icelandic, you know he should speak Icelandic. I didn't say anything, but I understood them. I didn't mind, I agree, I should. (Interview B)

(33) I hate having to speak [English] to Icelanders. [...] It is also incredibly embarrassing and sometimes belittling for me to have to speak English depending on who it is with. Because it really can be sometimes you feel like that person thinks you should be ashamed of speaking English. (Interview C)

At the same time as quote 32 is about the negativity that others were portraying towards the person, quotes 31 and 33 are more about how the informants themselves felt bad about having to speak English and not Icelandic. Quote 34 is similar to quote 33 in the sense that they both mention that they feel embarrassed when they need to speak English instead of Icelandic. Nonetheless, quote 34 also mentions that it is nice being able to speak English when you need to.

(34) I don't know, I kind of think that I want to be able to use Icelandic a lot more and I wish I could use it a lot more. I kind of like the idea that you live in a country and it is like achieving something if you get the language. I think I would feel really bad if I could say I couldn't really speak Icelandic and I was living here. So, for or me, I don't really want to be using English with Icelandic people, to be honest, I kind of feel like it is a little bit embarrassing. But I think it is great if it is you are doing something if you went up in hospital or something and you really need to talk one on one with somebody about something important then it is really nice if people do speak to you in English. But I think it is also nice if you can actually get through in Icelandic. (Interview D)

Quote 34 demonstrates the mixed feelings that many of the other informants also talked about with having to use English in Iceland. On one hand, they felt it was extremely helpful and good that it was possible to speak English in Iceland without having a big language barrier. On the other hand, they wanted to be able to speak Icelandic and felt a bit embarrassed about having to rely on English.

One informant mentioned that many Icelanders that they had spoken with had a strange relationship towards Icelandic and that they might be ashamed of how badly they speak it.

(35) If you talk to many Icelanders about their relationship to their native language, they all think they suck at it. [...] Because they have been told for so long they aren't doing it right, that they internalize this, and they have very conflicted feelings about their language. (Interview J)

Additionally, the people interviewed mentioned how sometimes there are some xenophobic views towards foreigners in general and fear that they are taking over the country. It depended on where the person was from how if they were welcomed into the society or not.

(36) This guy was talking to the librarian, and he said, oh there are 300.000 Icelanders in Iceland and she was like no the most recent numbers are 330.000 and he said no that is the ten percent that is foreigners, we don't count them. (Interview J)

As mentioned in section 2.2, about 12.2% of the population of Iceland are immigrants. Many informants mentioned that they did sometimes notice negativity towards English in general. Frequently it was rather connected to an increase in immigrants rather than increased English entertainment.

(37) I understand people's, though unfounded, fear of Icelandic dying out I primarily think that they use language to express their xenophobic views. (Interview J)

Some of the people interviewed also wanted to protect Icelandic and not have English take over, even though they did not speak Icelandic. This demonstrates that while not speaking English or Icelandic with the immigrants might be because of xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants. However, it might also be a reflection on what Icelanders think of their own language.

Many of the informants felt that Icelanders probably did not like how the informants spoke broken Icelandic when they were trying to speak it and therefore would only speak to them in English and when someone made time to speak with them in Icelandic it meant a lot to them.

(38) There were people that were like ugh I don't want to deal with your butchered Icelandic, so we are just going to switch [to English]. (Interview E)

(39) I remember the first librarian I met here, who would keep with me in Icelandic even though I knew I was murdering it, and she would really try to understand what I was asking, trying to work with me. And I felt like that person was gold because she wouldn't switch. (Interview J)

The informants also reported being blocked from speaking Icelandic when they were trying to talk in Icelandic with officials, for example, at Útlendingastofnun (E. The Directorate of Immigration), who deal with immigrants.

(40) I was talking to someone at the counter, it wasn't a very difficult thing, just as I am here to renew my resident permit. I am here to do this, and every time I said something in Icelandic, and I know my Icelandic isn't that bad it is not unintelligible. But she would try always in English. (Interview A)

Most informants felt quite bad about how Icelanders did not want to speak to them in Icelandic since they felt as they were being excluded from the Icelandic society by being denied using the local language. One additionally mentioned that it was also a shame that the immigrants did not practice their Icelandic with each other instead of always speaking in English which also was not the native language of many. Instead of speaking broken Icelandic they spoke broken English to each other.

## **4.2 Available information in English aimed towards immigrants**

Because of the influx of tourism and immigrants Iceland has become more bilingual (see section 2.4). One aspect of that is that there are then more things, such as websites, official documents, and signs in English for them so that people can find information without being able to speak Icelandic. However, not all the informants agreed on whether there was more information for them now in English. They did agree that there was more information in English that was mainly aimed at the tourist but not the immigrants.

(41) I think it is primarily tourist things that are written in English. And a lot of shop windows signs now tend to be a lot in English and I have noticed in some places that you have English on top then Icelandic below rather than Icelandic on top and English below. (Interview A)

(42) Downtown Reykjavik feels like it is not Iceland anymore because you don't have the Icelandic anymore, you only have English, and I don't think that is as good. Both would be great. (Interview B)

(43) Way more advertising, way more stuff on the internet, increased updates on news websites way more, Grapevine has come up a lot and is really in the

forefront, not just with foreigners. English is more visible everywhere. (Interview C)

- (44) I think that is why everything is in English, including the milk, so that tourists know what they are buying. Really, I think if it wouldn't be the tourists it would not be like this. It is definitely the tourists. (Interview I)

One person mentioned that while there seems to be a lot more in English it is only in downtown Reykjavik where the tourists are staying. The things that people noticed were in English were things such as menus and advertisements. Some mentioned that it does make their life a bit easier having more English around even though it was not especially aimed at them. Things such as going out to eat, finding information online had become a bit easier. Nonetheless, many believed that English was mainly aimed at tourists and did therefore not really benefit them that much.

- (45) The books are still very much in Icelandic, even in the library, they are improving, there are more selection of English, but it is mostly Icelandic. (Interview H)

Some believed that if it would not be for the tourists there would not be anything in English.

- (46) If it could be it would be exactly as it was back then [in 2007], boutiques, champagne, caviar on tap and no one speaking English. (Interview C)
- (47) I think they keep using Icelandic and keep talking Icelandic to one another it is not like it is going to disappear. I think that as soon as tourism would be banned, and all the tourists would leave the country it would be Icelandic only. (Interview F)

Because what was written in English seemed to be mainly aimed at tourists there was a lot of information that was not in English that the informants might need, and the informants had to seek other alternatives or try to find the information by themselves.

- (48) When I first moved here it was like that, no one would speak to me in English and I was a little bit upset because some people could, and it was usually generally with the playschool. I didn't really understand the system, and nobody explains to you. I thought a little bit they would rather just be angry with you and then they still wouldn't explain to you and even though someone could explain in English they would sort of refuse to because they were shy. [...] I was really shocked, and upset, and hurt when afterward I realized ohh there is all this information, and nobody bothered to tell me. (Interview I)

(49) There is a lot that goes unspoken because that is how it has always been.  
(Interview J)

As quotes 48 and 49 demonstrate there seems to be an issue of not explaining certain things to the newcomers, such as how the preschool system works in Iceland since it was something that had simply always been like that. Interviewee I and J had been in Iceland for a different amount of time, but both had noticed the lack of information about how the preschool in Iceland is organized. The occurrences that quote 48 and 49 talked about happened around almost 10 years apart. This can demonstrate that even though there should have been a visible change with the influx of immigrants and therefore the schools should have realized that not everyone knows how the Icelandic school system works there has not been a change in how English is being used in the society itself. Other informants also mentioned something similar and many felt that there might be some missing information.

One informant did not believe that it was the influx of tourists that was the cause of the increase in English but other aspects, such as social media.

(50) I think social media probably changed it long before the tourist did. Just the consumption of social media is primarily in English and I think the generation now that are working with the tourists got most of their English off YouTube and social media and stuff like that and so you know I think that consumption drives it more. (Interview J)

This supports the previous research that has been done on language attitudes in Iceland which demonstrates that younger children are getting most of their media in English (see section 2.4).

Furthermore, informants mentioned that important information for immigrants was not available in English, such as the collective wage agreement from Efling, a big union in Iceland. Their webpage is available in English, Polish and Icelandic but the collective wage agreement is only available in Icelandic. However, another big union VR does have some of its collective wage agreements in English. Having the wage agreement only in Icelandic can be a big problem because the workers might therefore not know their rights, such as minimum wage and resting hours, and might,



therefore, be cheated by their employer without them knowing it. This might change in 2019 since the wage agreement will be changed and thus it might be translated into other languages.

- (51) The *kjarasamningur* (E. the collective wage agreement) is only in Icelandic, you cannot find that translated. All their website is in [English], but the second you click on *kjarasamningur* it is a pdf written up years ago and I have never seen it in English. Efling has gone out of their way to accommodate more non-Icelandic speakers but three-four years ago people complained a lot about Efling and their unwillingness to go to bat for, they are now realizing they represent so many non-Icelandic speakers. (Interview E)

There was an agreement among all the people interviewed that they would need some more information available to them in English.

- (52) I would prefer if there would be slightly more information available in English. But I would not like to see the entire situation kind of be one of those you have English forcing out Icelandic. I would like for there to be a little more English just so that newcomers to the country would be able to understand more but I would not like to see English displace Icelandic as the main language of communication. (Interview A)
- (53) I think it is much more difficult to get through the administrative things without knowing Icelandic when I want to find something about taxes or on the site of the union for instance, and then I feel like not everything is put in English. (Interview F)
- (54) There is always an English translation for most things like nearly everything on the internet they have always like you can go to English version. [...] I feel like it is almost everywhere. [...] If you want to go deeper into things, it is only just sort of the basic which is fine. But then when you actually want to actually go into it then you are kind of stuck. It only brings you to level one and then you are screwed after that, it doesn't follow through. (Interview I)

Another aspect of being acclimatised into society is being able to understand what is happening in the society, which includes being able to read the news. Whilst there are newspapers available in English all the interviewees thought that the news that was offered in English was badly written and lacked important information.

There were two news sites that are written in English that were mentioned repeatedly, Reykjavik Grapevine, which is both printed and website, and Iceland Monitor, which is only a website and run by Morgunblaðið (see section 2.4).

Additionally, several interviewees mention how important the news is to Icelanders and how it influences the culture.

(55) Icelanders are obsessive about the news. They watch 3 different versions of the news on tv, they read 4 different newspapers, I don't know where you have the time to do anything else. (Interview E)

Therefore, because some the informants did not understand Icelandic and get as much of what was in the news in Iceland changed the way that they could connect with other people and therefore excluded them a bit from the society. All of the informants agreed on that if the news in English was as well written as the news in Icelandic they would have a better opportunity to have an opinion on what was happening in society and act appropriately.

There were several complaints about the English news, things such as that the news that was written in English was very biased, badly written, and not focused enough on what was happening in Iceland and sometimes aimed more at tourists than immigrants.

(56) If I am really interested in a new article then I would probably see if Grapevine or Monitor had it, had something about it. But it is not so up to date on the current on the English language ones. (Interview C)

(57) The English language news is terrible, the translation is terrible. It is almost unreadable for a native English speaker. Don't like the slant that Grapevine puts on the news, it is always very uninformed leftist. I am a leftie, my politics are pretty far to the left, but I find theirs just uninformed and leftist, and it is cherry picked the topic it is not like reading the news. (Interview E)

(58) Grapevine, they are okay, not up to par to BBC and CNN it is okay, just to be in the know of what is happening in Iceland. (Interview H)

In general, many of the people interviewed had stopped reading the news in English since they felt that they were bad. Instead, they had started to use Google Translate to translate the Icelandic news sites to English but felt that it was not very accurate.

Nonetheless, it was the only way that they could get up to date news about what was happening in Iceland. The statement that they use Google Translate was often followed by laughter because there had always been something that did not translate well.

- (59) If it is something interesting, as the image or I understand the title and I want to figure out what it is about I would just like translate it, with Google Translate into English. (Interview B)
- (60) If there is an article that really got me then get it translated, then I translate it on Google Translate, then I will just do with the horrific translation. (Interview C)
- (61) I follow some sites that write mostly in Icelandic, so I understand kind of what it is mostly about but then I kind of Google Translate it or follow sites that write in English. (Interview F)

However, none believed they were getting any fake news or wrong news since they thought that it did not occur in Iceland.

Moreover, there was a recurring idea that they were not getting all the information that they needed. Right before the interviews occurred there was a municipal election and the interviewees talked about that they could not make an informed decision on whom to vote for and therefore did not use their right to vote.

- (62) Yes, definitely, I feel like it would be a lot nicer if I could understand because there is a lot of information like political information that you can't get in languages other than Icelandic. (Interview A)
- (63) Yes, absolutely and it frustrates the hell out of me. I don't blame Iceland for that I blame me for that. It is really tricky to get, especially with politics and stuff going on, when you are at that age where other people your age are having all these great opinions and stuff and you fancy having some yourself, but you haven't really got a chance. I really feel like I am again not able to engage in social issues in a way that I would want to. And that is really frustrating because you end up being in a little bubble the whole time. (Interview C)
- (64) Definitely, especially with the election that were recently, it is very difficult for me and I realize I could have actually voted this time around because I have been here so long but trying to get all the information I would need to make an informed decision I didn't. (Interview D)

This was a recurrent frustration with all the interviewees and it was not only about what was in the news but also other information that they felt was missing. This was the same between the people that had been there for a longer and shorter time. The people that had been living in Iceland longer felt it was a greater issue since they had noticed the lack of information in other parts of their lives in Iceland. However, they also mentioned that as they noticed that they were not getting all the information they started seeking out what was missing.

### 4.3 Language attitudes at work

All the people interviewed were working in Iceland, some in more specialised fields whereas others in more tourist-related jobs. Not all the interviewees agreed on if it mattered if they spoke Icelandic or not to be able to get work in Iceland. However, several of the informants mentioned that knowing Icelandic was an extra skill set. One interviewee said that being foreign in Iceland creates a glass ceiling that immigrants cannot break through, even if they speak Icelandic. An immigrant would never be a CEO of a company unless they created that company themselves.

Two informants oversaw hiring people into the company that they worked for and mentioned that Icelandic did matter a lot, even in the tourism industry.

(65) When I am hiring someone I require Icelandic, they need to be able to because it is just going to give them too much trouble. Because people can be so rude, I wouldn't hire someone, I have done it before, but I wouldn't hire someone now that doesn't speak Icelandic just because I wouldn't want them to get a ton of shit thrown at them. (Interview C)

(66) Language skills are worth 10% maybe, that is significant sometimes. That means you have to be more than 10% better, and in the case of offices that are Icelandic, and they are contemplating hiring a non-Icelandic speaker. (Interview E)

As the quotes demonstrate Icelandic is important to the employers not only for the workplace but also because of how Icelanders would treat the workers if they did not speak Icelandic well enough.

This was mirrored in how other informants talked about the job situation in Iceland. Many of them worked in an English-speaking office or in jobs where it did not matter if they spoke Icelandic or not. However, they still felt that there was some pressure to know Icelandic.

(67) Right now, not so much. Employees are half/half, it could be appreciated but I have never noticed that they would choose somebody over somebody else just for that. (Interview B)

- (68) I just think they just worry about us integrating into Icelandic society more than anything else (Interview D)
- (69) If I knew Icelandic that would be an extra, that would be equal or more than English. (Interview F)
- (70) In any kind of bit more serious jobs, they expect you to be able to understand [Icelandic]. (Interview G)
- (71) All employers would want their employees to speak Icelandic, this is Iceland. It also depends on the industry you are working in. If you are working in tourism, then, of course, English is a must aside from other languages you can talk. (Interview H)
- (72) I don't think they care if you are cleaning or stuff like this, but when it is something you know higher paying job they would want you to have some Icelandic. (Interview I)

Some companies offered Icelandic lessons during the workday that the staff could attend to at no cost. There were several informants that did mention that it was difficult to get a job when they arrived in Iceland.

- (73) Difficult, I feel very stuck and uneducated because of the language and not being able to step up to do things because, because of that. (Interview I)

The informants that had been living in Iceland for a long time said that they had had a hard time finding jobs when they arrived. In comparison, the informants that had moved to Iceland in the last 5 years said it had been easy finding jobs. This difference can be explained with the influx of tourists in Iceland and consequently a greater need for English speakers (see section 2.2). Additionally, several of the interviewees mentioned that employers do not know what they really want.

- (74) I think they do [want their employees to know Icelandic]. They just don't know they do. I think it is a fair thing to ask of your employee that they have made some effort to integrate and to speak the local language. (Interview A)
- (75) I don't think they know, I think they think they know, and they put some sort of arbitrary barrier, but I don't think they have ever really sat down and thought through. (Interview J)

Therefore, the uncertainty is making it difficult for the immigrant to know what they should do with their language skills. Many also felt that the other languages that they spoke did not matter at all and the only languages that mattered were Icelandic and English. Some even mentioned that it was not really languages that mattered but it mattered more that you were able to be fluent in small talk. Thus, most of the people

interviewed were not sure about what language skills mattered, many had not had a problem finding a job without knowing Icelandic whereas others had had some problems because they did not speak it.

An additional problem that was mentioned was the fact that as an immigrant you do not have the same network as Icelanders and therefore it might be harder not only to get a job but then to keep it.

- (76) It was easy to find jobs but not for good people, there are a couple of jobs that I had that they were like ahh there is a mug because I am a foreigner, yea it was basically me, the Polish guy and the black guy washing dishes in the back being paid fuck all. Especially before the economic crash (E. the economic crash), and so any of the like minorities were just kept out back and paid badly, treated like shit. (Interview C)
- (77) It is not so easy for foreigners, you don't see anybody a really higher ranked foreigner. [...] Here they don't let you into the circles. It is a very small society very clique. (Interview G)
- (78) I have to be more mindful as a non-Icelander of making sure I have key people in the organisation that will support me. Because I did not come along with that simply because I was born here. I have to be mindful of people know who I am, what I am doing and will support it and things like that. Because I am not related to anybody here, nor have I gone to school with any of them, so it is a little bit different reality. (Interview J)

This was also echoed by other interviewees who reported feeling that Icelandic people would be chosen over them for promotions and that they had to work harder on knowing their rights.

#### **4.4 Language attitudes in connection to family, society, and feeling Icelandic**

Many of the interviewees mention that it was hard to connect with Icelanders and that getting accepted into society was difficult. When asked if they had more Icelandic or foreign friends in Iceland the answers were mixed.

The majority of the people interviewed had either mainly immigrant friends or an equal amount of both immigrant and Icelandic friends. Furthermore, some of those

that mentioned they had an equal amount of both said they were closer to their immigrant friends than their Icelandic ones. There was not a discernible correlation in how long they had lived in Iceland and from where their friends were from.

However, even if they said that they did have equal or more Icelandic friends than immigrants, many mentioned how hard it was to get Icelandic friends.

(79) It was super super hard to crack Icelandic society it took like maybe six years and some. (Interview C)

(80) I think it is really hard to make genuine proper Icelandic friends. [...] I think they just always keep their distance with you, they won't let you in, they just won't let you in. They might invite you to couple of things, but you'll never be properly in the group you'll always be left out a few times. [...] They are not mean, you know, I can't get it, it is something. [...] But then it could be the language because sometimes I feel like when the Icelandic is really bad and then they are talking to you like maybe they just can't be bothered. It is annoying when someone doesn't speak properly. (Interview I)

Some of the informants that had lived in other countries did not believe it was any harder than elsewhere. Another aspect of having friends in Iceland was the fact that many of the immigrants do not stay for such a long time. This makes it difficult to have long-term friends.

(81) I think there comes a time when a lot of foreigners, I don't mind having foreign friends or whatever but it is like, when you have lived here so long you get so Icelandic if you are adaptable, like I am, it is really hard to be around foreigners with their kind of maybe uber politeness, uber sensitivity, that kind of thing, where with the Icelanders you can pretty much say anything. (Interview C)

(82) It is also difficult from the perspective that very few of them actually stay. If you look at the foreigners of the last 20 years, very few people actually settle. They come and go. (Interview G)

What quotes 81 and 82 show is that the longer the informants stayed in Iceland the less connection they felt with the newer immigrants. Additionally, there was also another aspect of language being the reason why the informants reported not having Icelandic friends.

(83) I feel like I would have more Icelandic friends if I spoke better Icelandic. Not that Icelanders can't speak English, of course, they can, I just think that as with

all things it is unfair to ask them to switch to English because my Icelandic isn't up to par. (Interview A)

However, some of the informants mentioned how close-knit friends and family were in Iceland compared to other places they had lived in. Especially those with an Icelandic partner were surprised how important family was in Iceland and how the family had their nose in everything that they would do. Some mentioned how different Icelandic society is to others and mentioned, for example, the Icelandic independence of doing whatever, whenever you feel like it.

(84) They were my introduction to this kind of Icelandic independence, doing whatever the hell they want whenever they want and that was really difficult for [nationality] people, so it was really good to have my friends to help me. (Interview C)

Moreover, some of the informants that had an Icelandic partner mentioned how the extended family was pressuring them to know Icelandic better and were generally interfering in what languages they were speaking with their partner and children.

(85) I know that if I want to be accepted by them, kind of, I need to speak Icelandic to them. (Interview F)

(86) In order to get to know them [the family], in order to get to know the society and the culture you need to emerge yourself in the language. (Interview H)

However, for some of the informants, the Icelandic family were not being helpful in teaching them Icelandic but instead gave snide comments about their language skills.

(87) In family gatherings that is where I get people giving a lot of microaggressions, a lot of comments, and generally I don't care but eventually, I just don't want to deal with your issues. (Interview J)

Many of the informants felt that at the same time as Icelanders complained about the informants Icelandic they also used English while speaking to them to keep the person from integrating into society.

(88) It does bother me because to me it's rude and careless and it definitely comes across as a sort of very subconscious non-acceptance of the person. (Interview A)



Many agreed that language was being used to differentiate between immigrants and Icelanders, but that was not mainly towards just English but also towards speaking Icelandic with an accent.

Only three informants out of ten considered themselves to be Icelandic. The reasons they reported were similar: the connection to their home country was not as strong as before and they did not see themselves wanting to go back to their home country. Those that did not consider themselves to be Icelandic still had no plans to leave Iceland. Iceland was their home, but they simply did not feel Icelandic.

Furthermore, those that did not consider themselves to be Icelandic did not think that that would ever change. Most of the informants believed that you had to be born in Iceland to consider yourself Icelandic. However, this was not only because of personal beliefs but also because they felt Icelanders determined what it meant to be Icelandic.

(89) By now in some countries, I would basically be [Icelandic], if I spoke fluent French, looked fairly passable as a French person, if I was wearing the right things then I would basically be French. But here it is like such a long-running culture where everyone is tracing themselves back to the settlement pretty much. (Interview C)

(90) I think it is more who are your people than just language, I think language is important, but I think fundamentally if they can slot you into their social worldview then you are [Icelandic]. (Interview J)

(91) Even in 20 years, if I had lived here for 20 years and I would say to someone in my boyfriend's family that I'm Icelandic, they would just laugh. I will never be Icelandic. (Interview F)

Quotes 89 and 90 mention the fact that Icelanders can trace their roots back to the settlement of Iceland and how that influences what it means to be Icelandic. Quote 90 uses the phrase "who are your people" which is a common Icelandic question "hverja manna ertu" which is asked to see if you might be related to someone that they might know.

The seven informants that felt not Icelandic felt quite strongly about not being Icelandic. The reasons they reported were a mix of not being accepted into the Icelandic society as an Icelandic and simply never feeling like they were Icelandic.

- (92) Hell no. Hell no. I don't think I would ever consider myself to be Icelandic even if I had Icelandic citizenship. Just because I am not Icelandic, I am very much [home country]. Just because I feel a strong connection and affinity to the country doesn't necessarily mean that I would see myself as Icelandic. I don't have any Icelandic blood in me I didn't grow up in this country. Just because I decided to move here as an adult does not make me Icelandic. So, yea, I don't think I ever would. (Interview A)
- (93) Not in any way. In the beginning, I was desperate to be accepted. But then I realized you are never, ever going to be. (Interview C)
- (94) I think they have to be at least to be born here. Or their parents were born here and then they were born in a different country. I don't think you can just visit a country and live there for eight years and then be Icelandic. (Interview D)

Whilst some of the immigrants that had lived in Iceland for a long time felt themselves to be somewhat Icelandic, it was still not enough for them to say that they were Icelandic. The fact that they had Icelandic citizenship did not change anything. That was more paperwork related rather than a need to be part of the nation. Several of the informants, especially those that had been in Iceland for a longer time, did say that they had changed and adapted to the Icelandic culture (see quote 81 and 95).

- (95) But I feel like it is more the behaviour, this quiet sort of, yea. Something in the culture. But I can see that I have changed, and I suppose I'm a lot more Icelandic than I was, but I am not 100% there. (Interview G)

Because some of the informants did not feel accepted as an Icelandic they did not feel Icelandic (see quote 91 and 93) and would probably never see themselves as being Icelandic. Most of those informants that felt that they were not Icelandic felt strongly about the fact that they were not Icelandic. That was a similarity between a person that had been in Iceland for a short time and a long time.

For those three that felt that they were Icelandic, it was not that they felt especially Icelandic but more that they no longer felt like they were from their home country. One of the reasons was that the home country was no longer perceived as being the same as when they left it. Additionally, everything they had was in Iceland, family, money, job, and friends, whilst they had nothing in their home country anymore. When asked if they felt Icelandic the answers were similar.

(96) Yes, I do. I do because, I mean, after all, it is more than half of my life that I have lived here, all my adult life. (Interview G)

(97) Yes, half Icelandic, half [home country]. (Interview H)

The ones that said that they felt Icelandic did not stand out from the ones that did not feel Icelandic. There was nothing that those three had in common more than the other ones.

When asked what makes someone Icelandic and if they needed to know Icelandic to be Icelandic there was not a conclusive answer from all the informants.

(98) I think it is important that someone who is Icelandic must speak Icelandic, but I don't think that that equivalency works when in reverse. (Interview A)

(99) What makes someone Icelandic is that you have immersed yourself in the society, you know how things work here, you learn their culture, you take in some parts of their culture that you like into your life and you adapted it into your lifestyle your upbringing. (Interview H)

The informants felt that being Icelandic was a mix of being born and raised in Iceland and being able to speak Icelandic. It was not enough just to be able to speak Icelandic to be Icelandic since you would also need the culture of having lived in Iceland and especially having lived in Iceland as a child.

## 5 Discussion

There were two questions asked at the beginning of the thesis. The first one being on what kind of language attitudes the foreign citizens living in Iceland had when their main language was English. The second one asked if there was any noticeable difference between the immigrants depending on when they had moved to Iceland.

The findings from this study were that there is a big space for improvement. There is a need for better information in English that is not created for tourist but for the people that live in Iceland. Especially when taking into account that Iceland might be becoming a bilingual country (see section 2.3). For example, it would be a good idea to publish a guide to the Icelandic school system and explain the things that might not need to be explained to an Icelander.

Additionally, even though according to previous studies on English knowledge of Icelanders there seems to be still a social gap between immigrants and Icelanders. Whether that is because of xenophobia, different social culture or language barrier is unknown. It might be a mix of all three. This needs to be addressed so that Iceland will not become a country with a big class system.

There are several things that could be done to go deeper into the subject. Firstly, it would be interesting to send a questionnaire to a big portion of the foreign citizens in Iceland with some basic questions to have a bigger picture of how things are. Secondly, a similar study but on a bigger scale with one-on-one interviews would be beneficial to see what could be done to make the lives of foreign citizens better. The data from this study shows that there is a lack of information for the newcomers and it would be a good idea to collect the information that is missing and either create a webpage that is aimed at foreign citizens or a pamphlet that would be easily accessible.

It would be beneficial for Icelanders to hear how newcomers feel about the topics raised in this thesis. There needs to be some sort of awareness that there are people in Iceland that want to learn Icelandic and want to be a part of Icelandic society. That

Icelanders should not so quickly switch over to English and instead try to speak more Icelandic. It is notable that everyone who was interviewed wanted to learn more Icelandic and get to use what they were learning. The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV) could create a mini-series on their website interviewing immigrants in Iceland in Icelandic. This could raise awareness of the fact that there are people in Iceland learning Icelandic and that broken Icelandic is still Icelandic.

The other side of this thesis is that learning Icelandic should be more accessible. Especially since the newest data from Hagstofan shows that immigrants are working more hours and earning less than their Icelandic counterpart. The Icelandic Red Cross does have several free events that are for immigrants in Iceland to practice Icelandic with each other.

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## Appendix

### Interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself
  - a. How long have you been in Iceland?
  - b. What do you do?
  - c. Where are you from?
  - d. Why did you move here?
2. What languages do you use in your daily life?
  - a. What languages do you speak at work?
  - b. What languages do you speak in your free time with friends?
  - c. What languages do you speak at home?
3. How do you feel about using Icelandic?
  - a. Have you studied Icelandic?
  - b. How long? Where?
  - c. Why? Why not?
4. How do you get news about what is happening in Iceland?
  - a. Do you read any of the newspapers?
  - b. Do you watch the news in Icelandic?
  - c. Do you feel like there is missing information?
  - d. Do you get the news from a third source? (like facebook, word of mouth)
5. Is there any occasion when you cannot use English?
  - a. Like doctor's office, taxes, speaking with teachers, police, hospitals?
  - b. Do ever feel unsure about using English in daily life?
6. Children:
  - a. What language do you speak to your children?
  - b. What language do your children speak to you?
  - c. What about their teachers/nursery school teachers?
  - d. How do you handle the homework?
7. How have you managed to make friends here?
  - a. Do you have more Icelandic friends or foreigners?
  - b. Do you speak English with your friends?
8. How has it been to find jobs here?
  - a. Do employers ask about language skills?
  - b. Do you feel like employers prefer Icelandic speaking workers?
  - c. Do you feel that it has changed in the last years?
9. Have you felt any prejudice because of your language skills?
  - a. How do people address you? (English, Icelandic)
  - b. Do they answer you in English even though you speak Icelandic to them?
  - c. Do they only speak Icelandic to you even though you do not understand anything?
  - d. Do you feel people would rather not talk to you because you are speaking English?

10. Have you noticed a change in how English is used here since you moved to Iceland?
  - a. Are people more positive about English?
  - b. Are there more things in English now?
  - c. Do you think the influx of tourists has changed the importance of English?
11. Are you planning on staying here?
  - a. Do you have Icelandic citizenship?
  - b. If not, do you plan on applying for it?
  - c. Would you consider yourself to be Icelandic?
  - d. What makes someone Icelandic?
  - e. Do you need to speak Icelandic to be considered Icelandic?