Shaky foundations of standardization or tempest in the Icelandic teapot? On the implications of new media practices for common beliefs about standard language

Today, we are witnessing a shift in media practices, i.e. increased public participation, notably contributions to the conversation in online media, rather than mere traditional consumption of national audio-visual and printed media.

This paper seeks to explore the ideological and linguistic consequences of such changing media practices for the foundations of standard / standardized / standardizing Icelandic.

The paper takes the perception of canonical vocabulary of Icelandic as a point of departure, taking for granted (1) that excessive use of foreignisms is a principal definition of non-standard Icelandic (Leonard and Árnason 2011), and (2) that lexical purism is an integral part of shared beliefs of the Icelandic speech community (Kristiansen 2010).

Data on foreignisms in Icelandic are discussed in the paper. Foreignisms are largely avoided in traditional prestige media genres (e.g., in scripted radio and television news, and newspaper editorials), while there is ample evidence of foreignisms as linguistic resources in a number of private spheres, and in a variety of new-media channels of communication, in particular in lower formality genres.

In other words, as the digital era allows for expanding production of unedited written texts in the public space, linguistic practices are leading towards increased presence, in today’s media, of forms of language that have by tradition been deemed appropriate only for the more private domains of use.

The paper addresses the question what, if anything, such changing media practices entail for the ideology of the standard, and its linguistic representations.

References