An emerging standard variety of Icelandic was a major focus of attention in the 19th century, although it counted by no means as a first attempt. Written norms had formed already in the 12th century, perhaps best seen as a ‘natural’ linguistic process of selection (along the lines of Hope 2000). These norms continued to be adopted and adapted, to some extent representing social and demographic changes in the population (Kusters 2003). Nationalistic movements in the 19th century regarded the flux in the earlier standard as deterioration. As a result, the medieval variety was ‘legitimised’ as proper Icelandic, made possible i.a. by the codification of Old Norse grammar by Rasmus Rask early in the century, where it was equated with (an idealised variety of) contemporary Icelandic, downplaying the differences between the two (Ottósson 1990, Árnason 2003). In this, the ideology of Rask and his followers was inspired by an earlier Icelandic humanist tradition (Hastrup 1990, Jensson 2008), but became more moderated as time progressed (Ottósson 1990).

It should be kept in mind that the linguistic landscape of Iceland changed extensively in this period. The partial introduction of free trade (late 18th century) meant Danish merchants were allowed permanent stay in designated centres of commerce around the country, stimulating urbanisation and leading, e.g., to the establishment of Reykjavik (Hastrup 1990). To some extent in response to this development, Danish features, not attested in ‘great ancient books’, were being identified and stigmatised. Although in general the focus was on the lexicon, it was also claimed that a ‘pure’ syntax was perhaps of greater importance. The logic was that foreign words left wounds that healed quickly whereas foreign syntax was in conflict with the Icelandic principles of thought (Gíslason 1897).

In this talk, I will report on an ongoing study of the effects of standardisation on 19th century Icelandic syntax, which aims to investigate the erasure of syntactic variants and the extent to which this contributed to the (alleged) uniformity of Icelandic (cp. Milroy & Milroy 2012). I will focus on a particular type of variation concerning the relative order of adverbs and finite verbs, viz. V2 vs. V3 (e.g. Angantýsson 2001). V3 orders (S-Adv-Vfin) appear to have been singled out by language ‘mavens’ in the 1840s and associated with Danish, cf. (1).

By comparing different registers before and after V3 became stigmatised, I wish to assess the effects of 19th century prescriptivism and whether the innovation of V3 may actually have been change at a native level. Indeed as Van der Sijs (2004) concluded for Dutch, Icelandic standardisation, too, always focussed on details. That grammatical changes are not very salient to speakers (Mair 2009) is furthermore confirmed by the change from a flexible OV syntax to rigid VO (Hróarsdóttir 2000), which occurred below the level of consciousness. Despite the fact that this resulted in an increasing convergence with Danish, as with V3 orders, it was never perceived as such.

**Examples**

(1) a. *Danish-like word order*  
allt það, er vêr ekki áttum von á  
all that which we not had hope on

b. *Proper* *Icelandic word order*  
[allt það, er vêr] áttum ekki von á  
all that which we had not hope on

‘All that which we had not expected.’ (cf. Gíslason 1844:85, slightly adapted)
References
Gíslason, Þorsteinn (1897) Um íslenskuna. Sunnanfari 6(9): 72–74.