

# The Fight against Variation

## Grammar Instruction in Icelandic Compulsory Schools

Hanna Óladóttir, University of Iceland, hannaola@hi.is

Traditionally, when language is discussed in schools in Iceland, teachers take their stance in the written register. This can be explained by the fact that one of the schools' main purposes from day one is to teach children to read and write, and from then on this seems to steer the discussion about language. As the written register is in itself standardized and very conservative, the discussion about variation, within morphology and syntax in particular, is bound to be minimal, and even to the extent that it is not considered part of the language. The discussion about language is also strongly influenced by ideas about language preservation where variation and language change, which are usually referred to as "linguistic errors", are not welcomed, to say the least. The consequences of this fight against variation deserve a thorough examination. Therefore, the main questions asked in my doctoral thesis are: Which ideas do Icelandic school teachers have about language, language norms and their own role when it comes to grammar teaching? What influences does it have on the students' attitudes towards their own language? To shed light on this, I will discuss the results from a pilot study I did last October in one school where I interviewed one 10th-grade teacher and six of his students. The school in question can be considered conservative in its way of teaching and therefore a good example of a school where traditional ideas about the language, including variation, are dominant.