
GF Resource Grammar Summer School,
Chalmers University, Gothenburg, Sweden
August 17-28, 2009

Features of Icelandic

Martha Dís Brandt
M.Sc. in Language Technology
Reykjavík University, Iceland

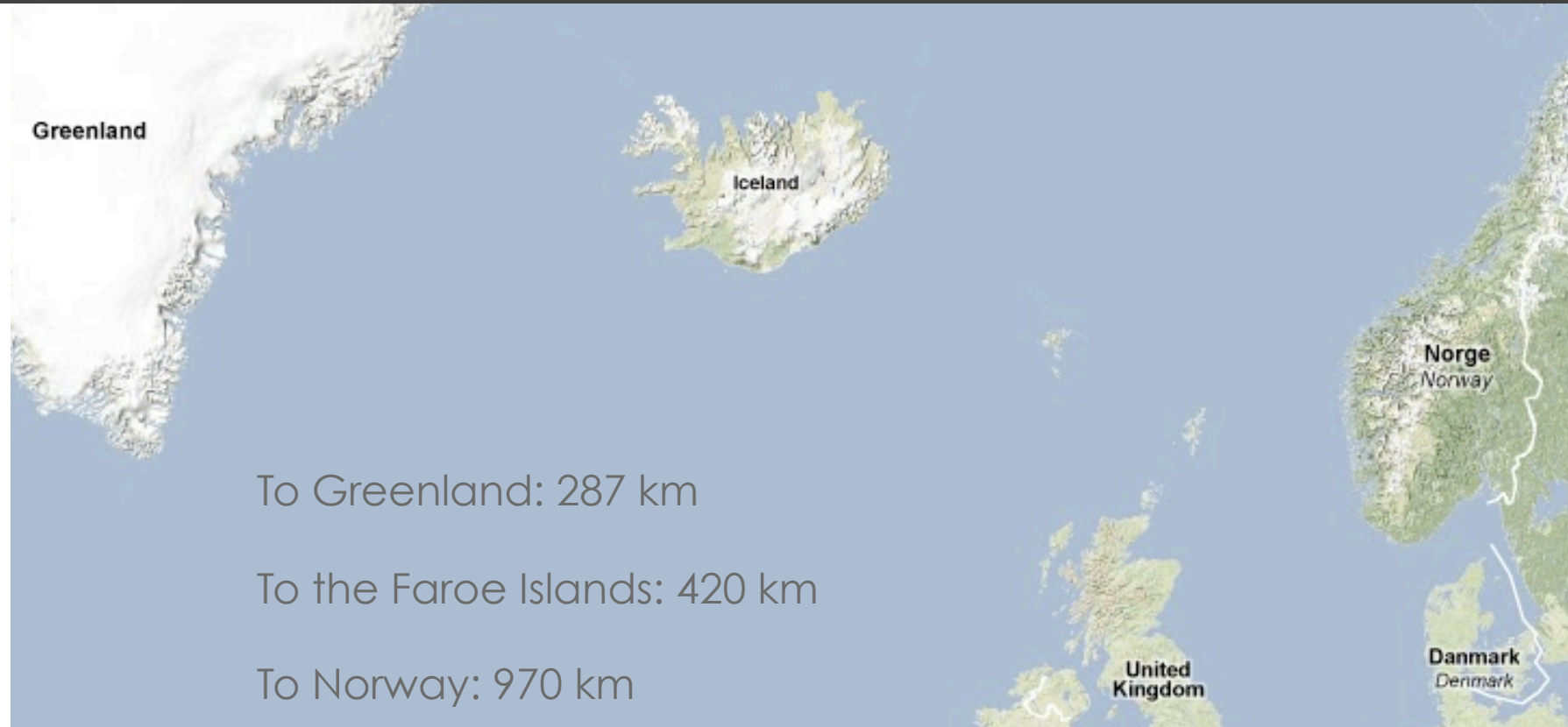


HÁSKÓLINN Í REYKJAVÍK
REYKJAVÍK UNIVERSITY

Overview

- ❖ About Iceland
 - ❖ Location, size, geology, seismic activity
- ❖ About Icelanders
 - ❖ Population, number of speakers
- ❖ About Icelandic
 - ❖ Language group, alphabet, Old and Modern Icelandic, tagset, word groups, oblique subject

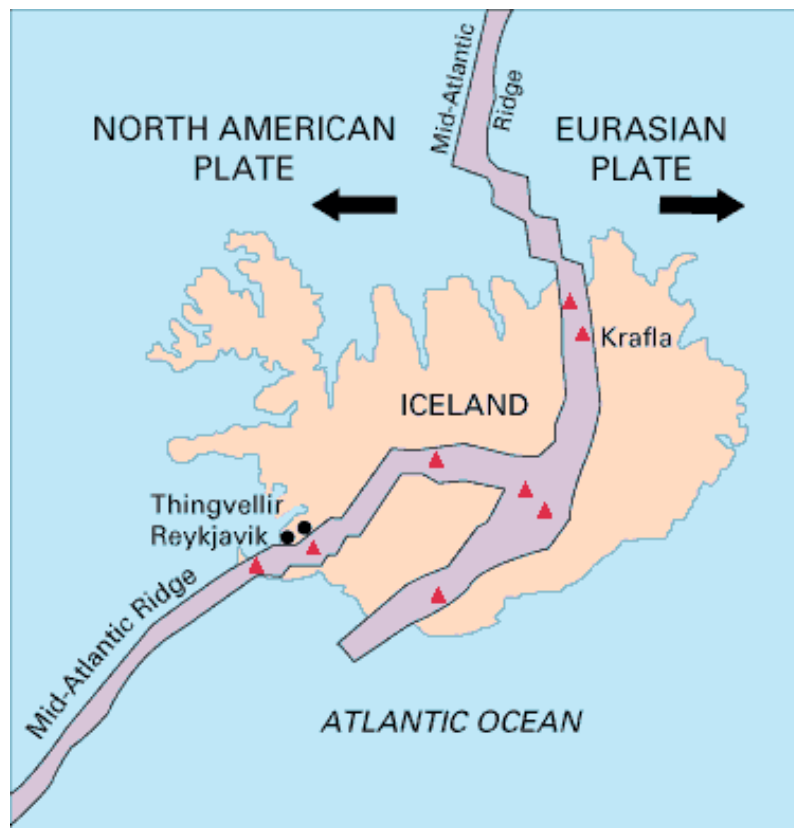
Where is Iceland?



Size

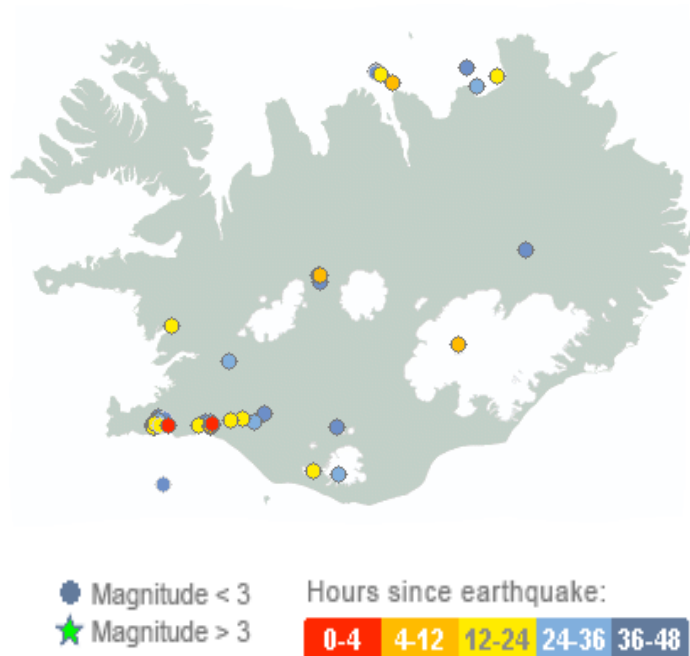
- ❖ Iceland is 103.000 km²
- ❖ Smaller than Bulgaria
- ❖ Larger than Portugal
- ❖ 2½ times the size of Denmark
- ❖ 2nd largest island of Europe
 - ❖ (after Great Britain)

Geology



- ❖ On the boundary of the North-American and Eurasian tectonic plates
- ❖ Due to the drifting of the plates, Iceland is growing about 2 cm per year

Seismic activity



- ❖ 100+ earthquakes in the past 48 HOURS
 - ❖ But only three above 3.0 on the Richter scale¹
 - ❖ Last large quake was in May 2008, 6.2 on Richter scale
- ❖ 37 volcanic eruptions in the past 100 years
 - ❖ Last in 2004 under Vatnajökull glacier

Footnote¹: The above image was retrieved from <http://en.vedur.is/#tab=skjalftar> on Aug 31, but the text refers to the date the presentation was given, i.e. Aug 20 2009

Population

- ❖ Just under 320 thousand inhabitants
- ❖ Two-thirds of them live in the capital area
- ❖ The national census from July 2009 revealed a decrease in the population (109 pers / 0.03%)
 - ❖ ... this has not happened since 1889

Icelandic speakers

- ❖ Over 95% of population has Icelandic as mothertongue, over 300 thousand
- ❖ More than 15 thousand native speakers live outside of the country
- ❖ Furthermore, there was a large scale emigration to North America in the late 1800s, so...
 - ❖ About 90 thousand Icelandic descendents in Canada and about 40 thousand in USA... some of them speak Icelandic

Icelandic language

- ❖ Indo-European language

- ❖ Germanic

- ❖ North Germanic

- ❖ Alphabet is Latin

- ❖ excluding c, q, w and z

- ❖ with added accented vowels

a á b d ð e é f g h i í j k l m n o ó p r s t u ú v x y ý þ æ ö

Old Icelandic

- ❖ Oldest written texts are from around 1100
 - ❖ Pronunciation has changed, especially vowels (changed most during 12th -16th century)
 - ❖ Written language has changed very little
- ❖ Modern speakers can more or less understand the original Sagas and Eddas from 800 yrs ago
 - ❖ Using modern script

Modern Icelandic

- ❖ Heavily inflected and morphologically rich
- ❖ Basic word order is Subject – Verb – Object
 - ❖ But it is also fairly flexible due to inflection
 - ❖ Can find every combination in poetry:
SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV and OVS
- ❖ Part-of-speech tagset
 - ❖ Icelandic = more than 700 tags
 - ❖ English = 45 tags (Penn Treebank)

Icelandic tagset

Char#	Category/Feature	Symbol – semantics
1	Word class	n –noun
2	Gender	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter, x –unspecified
3	Number	e –singular, f –plural
4	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive
5	Article	g –with suffixed definite article
6	Proper noun	m –person name, ö –place name, s –other proper name
1	Word class	l –adjective
2	Gender	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter
3	Number	e –singular, f –plural
4	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive
5	Declension	s –strong declension, v –weak declension, o –indeclineable
6	Degree	f –positive, m –comparative, e –superlative
1	Word class	f –pronoun
2	Subcategory	a –demonstrative, b –reflexive, e –possessive, o –indefinite, p –personal, s –interrogative, t –relative
3	Gender/Person	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter/ 1 –1 st person, 2 –2 nd person
4	Number	e –singular, f –plural
5	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive
1	Word class	g –article
2	Gender	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter
3	Number	e –singular, f –plural
4	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive
1	Word class	t –numeral
2	Category	f –cardinal, o –numeric constant, p –percentage
3	Gender	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter
4	Number	e –singular, f –plural
5	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive

Icelandic tagset, cont.

Char#	Category/Feature	Symbol – semantics
1	Word class	s –verb (except for past participle)
2	Mood	n –infinitive, b –imperative, f –indicative, v –subjunctive, s –supine, l –present participle
3	Voice	g –active, m –middle
4	Person	1 –1 st person, 2 –2 nd person, 3 –3 rd person,
5	Number	e –singular, f –plural
6	Tense	n –present, p –past
1	Word class	s –verb (past participle)
2	Mood	p –past participle
3	Voice	g –active, m –middle
4	Gender	k –masculine, v –feminine, h –neuter
5	Number	e –singular, f –plural
6	Case	n –nominative, o –accusative, p –dative, e –genitive
1	Word class	a –adverb and preposition
2	Category	a –does not govern case, u –exclamation, o –governs accusative, p –governs dative, e –governs genitive
3	Degree	m –comparative, e –superlative
1	Word class	c –conjunction
2	Category	n –sign of infinitive, t –relativizer,
1	Word class	e –foreign word
1	Word class	x –unanalyzed word

Word groups

- ❖ Nouns – 3 genders, 2 numbers, 4 cases
 - ❖ Not same inflection within gender (4+ groups each)
- ❖ Definite article
 - ❖ Suffixed or stands alone
 - ❖ No indefinite article (implied)
- ❖ Adjectives – 3 declensions, 3 degrees
 - ❖ Must agree with nouns on gender, number and case

Word groups, cont.

- ❖ Adverbs – 6 categories
 - ❖ Don't inflect, some govern case
- ❖ Prepositions
 - ❖ Don't inflect, all govern case
 - ❖ Some govern more than 1 case
- ❖ Verbs – 6 moods, 3 voices
 - ❖ Up to 10 tenses with auxiliary verbs
 - ❖ Many govern case

Oblique subjects

- ❖ Icelandic permits a “quirky subject”, or “oblique subject”
- ❖ An oblique subject is when certain verbs specify that their subject must be in a case other than nominative. Example:
 - ❖ Mig vantar penna = I need a pen
 - Mig (I - accusative)
 - vantar (needs)
 - penna (a pen - accusative)
 - ❖ The verb is always in third person

Thank you...

 Questions?