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Icelandic regional pronunciation: Recent developments and attitudes

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CRISCO, University of Caen Normandie, 3 October 2024

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Overview

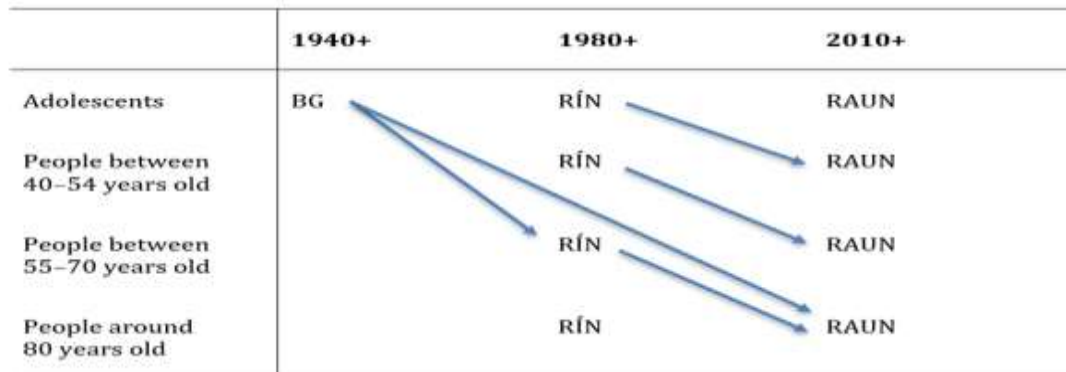


- **Background**
- **Aims**
- **Methods and data**
- **Some selected phonological results**
- **Some selected attitudinal results**
- **Conclusions**
- **References**

Background



- *Regional Pronunciation, Attitudes and Real-time Change*
- Independent continuation of previous studies:
 - Björn Guðfinnsson's study of Icelandic variation (BG 1940+) (Guðfinnsson 1946)
 - The RÍN project (Rannsókn á íslensku nútímamáli/Study of present-day Icelandic -1980+) (Árnason & Þráinsson 2003; Guðmundsdóttir 2024; Þráinsson & Árnason 1992)
 - The RAUN project (Málbreytingar í rauntíma í íslensku hljóðkerfi og setningagerð/Real-time change in Icelandic phonology and syntax - 2010–2012)(Þráinsson et al. 2013a; Guðmundsdóttir 2022, 2024; Höskuldsdóttir 2013)



Background (cont.)

- Various interesting results from previous studies:
 - Regional variables appear to develop in different ways
 - Moving between areas appears to affect individual development of the variables (Práinsson 2011; see also Guðmundsdóttir 2008; Sankoff 2005; Sankoff & Blondeau 2007; Stefánsdóttir & Ingason 2008; Sundgren 2009)
 - Regional variables are more likely to be maintained by those who stay put in their home area than those who move away (Höskuldsdóttir 2013; Práinsson et al. 2013b)
- But:
 - Very little research on the relationship between attitudes and the development of the relevant phonological features.
 - No overarching data from speakers born after around 1975.
 - Conditions for a thorough real-time study.

Aims



- The project aims to:
 - investigate how individuals change their pronunciation through the lifespan.
 - map the current status of the regional pronunciation in Iceland in such a way that the results can be used for a systematic comparison to those of the three major previous overview studies, i.e. Thráinsson et al. (2013b), Árnason and Thráinsson (2003) and Guðfinnsson (1946).
 - to explore the extent to which conscious and subconscious language attitudes play a role in explaining such real-time linguistic changes, using the uniquely documented development of local phonological variation in Iceland as a test case
 - integrate attitudinal factors into models of phonological change

The main regional variables

- **North/North-East:**

- Post-aspiration (“harðmæli”) of /p, t, k/ after long vowels: *tapa* [tʰa:pʰa] (‘lose’), *líka* [li:kʰa] (‘like’), *bíta* [pi:tʰa] (‘bite’) as opposed to lack of such post-aspiration.
- Voiced pronunciation (“raddaður framburður”) with voiced sonorants before an aspirated stop: *hempa* [hɛmpʰa] (‘cassock’), *mennta* [mɛntʰa] (‘educate’), *hjálpa* [çaulpʰa] (‘help’) as opposed to voiceless sonorants in this position.

- **South/South-East:**

- *hv*-pronunciation in words like *hvalur* [xa:lʏr] (‘whale’) has a voiceless velar fricative [x] in initial position, as opposed to the general *kv*-pronunciation (“kv-framburður”) with [kʰv] in this position.
- monophthongal pronunciation (“skaffellskur einhljóðaframburður”): *bogi* [pɔ:ji] (‘bow’), *magi* [ma:ji] (‘stomach’), as opposed to the more common diphthongal pronunciation (“tvíhljóðaframburður”).

- **West Fjords:**

- monophthongal pronunciation (“vestfirskur einhljóðaframburður”): *banki* [paŋci] (‘bank’) as opposed to the general diphthongal pronunciation [pauŋci].

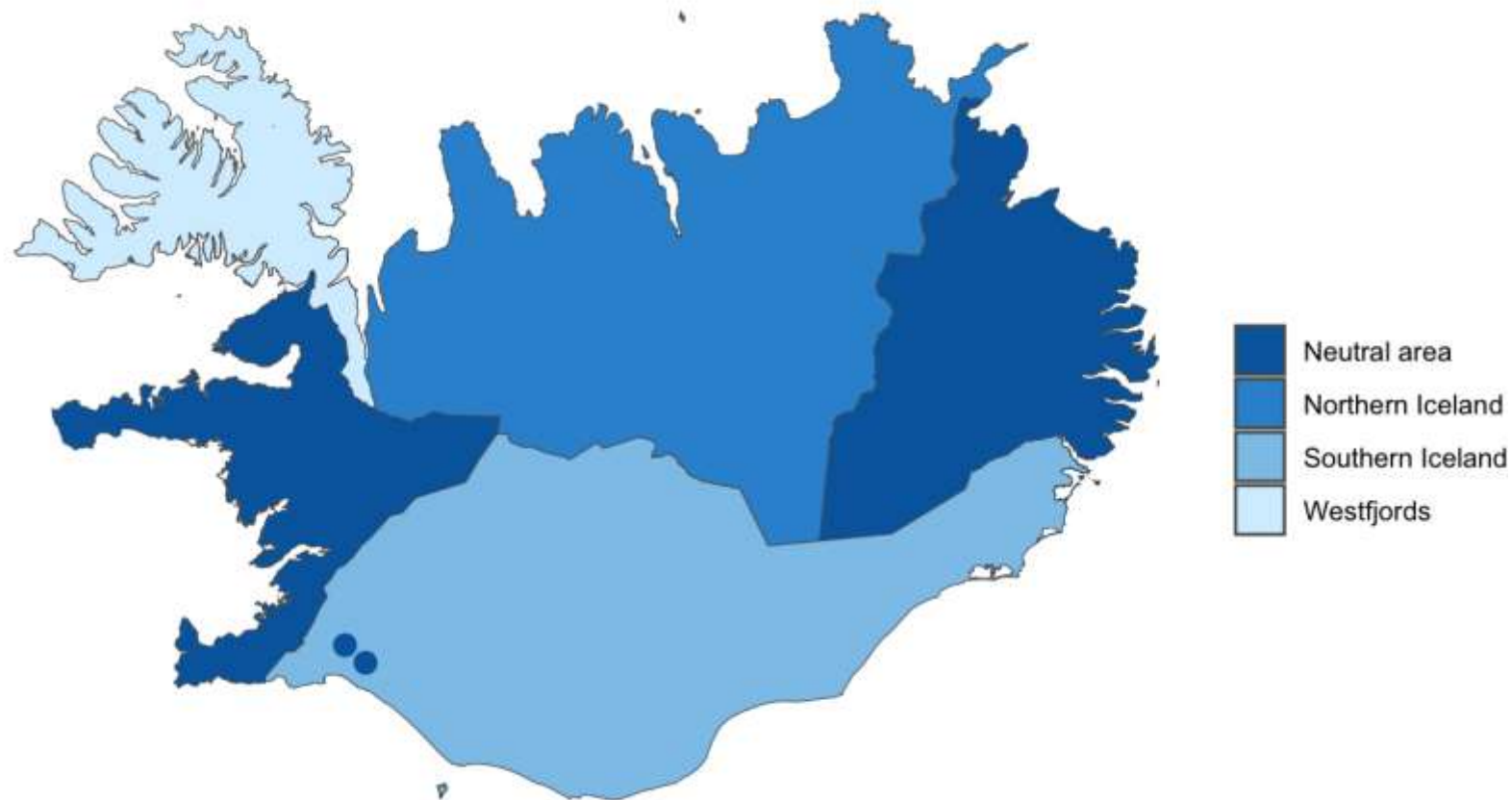
Methods and data



Two main phases

- 1) Web questionnaire sent out to a sample of 3000 people:
 - 1000 12–20 year olds, 1000 participants from RÍN/BG, 1000 random
 - Central dialectal areas + „neutral“ areas
 - Westfjords
 - North Iceland
 - South and southeast Iceland
 - Neutral = Capital area and other southwestern parts, Eastfjords
 - **Pronunciation tests**
 - Listening to verbal guises of regional speakers (outside each participant's home area)
 - Questionnaire: voice-placing task and closed + open-ended evaluation tasks directed at attitudes towards own pronunciation and that of others (finished in april 2024)
 - 960 responses
- 2) In-depth interviews to examine attitudes further:
 - with 160 informants from the original sample (finished in August 2024)
 - with 23 informants from Björn Guðfinnsson's study who also completed the first phase at the same time (finished in September 2023)

Four speech areas



Pronunciation tests

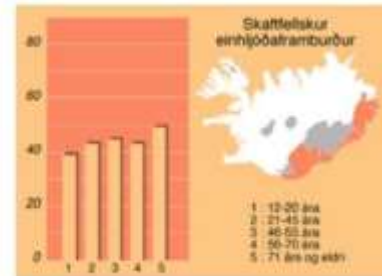
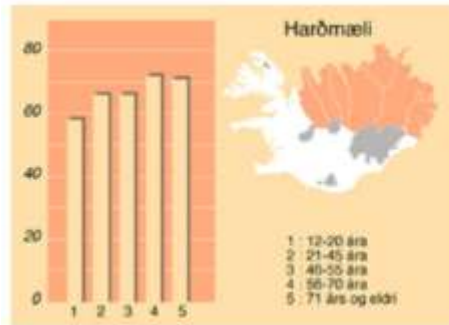
- All participants were asked to record themselves reading aloud a text containing target words for certain phonological variants
- The texts were the same as were used in RÍN, with some minor changes. The results are therefore directly comparable with RÍN
- The recordings are then analysed by researchers and research assistants, trained in phonetic analysis.
 - They listen to the recordings and for each target word, they give a score of 1 if a variant is not present and 2 if a variant is present.

Phonological analysis: the dataset

- All recordings have been analysed at least once, but a full analysis is where a recording has been analysed by two different people.
 - Thus, the presented results might change slightly when a second analysis has been completed for all the recordings
- Each region is divided into counties. Due to low numbers of participants in a few counties, the results of neighbouring counties were combined.
 - North: Húnavatnssýslur; Skagafjarðarsýsla; Eyjafjarðarsýsla; Þingeyjarsýslur
 - South: Árnes- and Rangárvallasýsla; Vestmannaeyjar; Skaftafellssýslur (S-Múlasýsla not included)
 - For monophthongal pronunciation, Árnessýsla was not included

1. The use of the northern and southern variables

Hard speech (harðmæli), voiced pronunciation (raddaður framburður) *hv*-pronunciation (*hv*-framburður) and monophthongal pronunciation (skafffellskur einhljóðaframburður) by age-groups in RÍN (1980s)



Hypotheses



- With special interest in the youngest age groups (12–20 years old), the following hypotheses were put forward:
 1. The northern voiced pronunciation is sporadic or non-existent.
 - 35–40% in Eyjafjarðarsýsla and Þingeyjarsýslur in RÍN
 2. The southern *hv*-pronunciation is sporadic or non-existent.
 - 23–36% in Skaftafellssýslur in RÍN
 3. The northern hard speech is still relatively widespread.
 - 80–90% in Eyjafjarðarsýsla and Þingeyjarsýslur in RÍN
 4. The southern monophthongal pronunciation is still existent but not very common
 - ~55% in Skaftafellssýslur in RÍN
(Árnason, 2005:368–384)

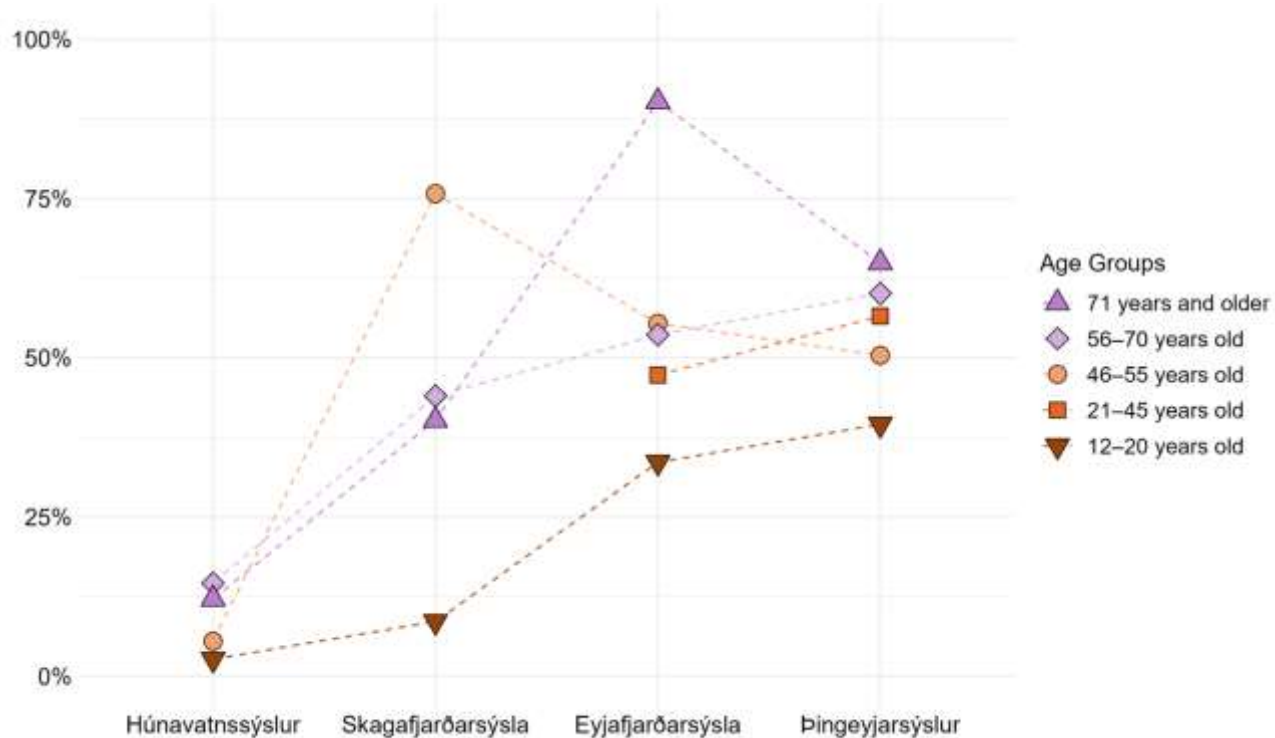
Northern region: overview of participants and results



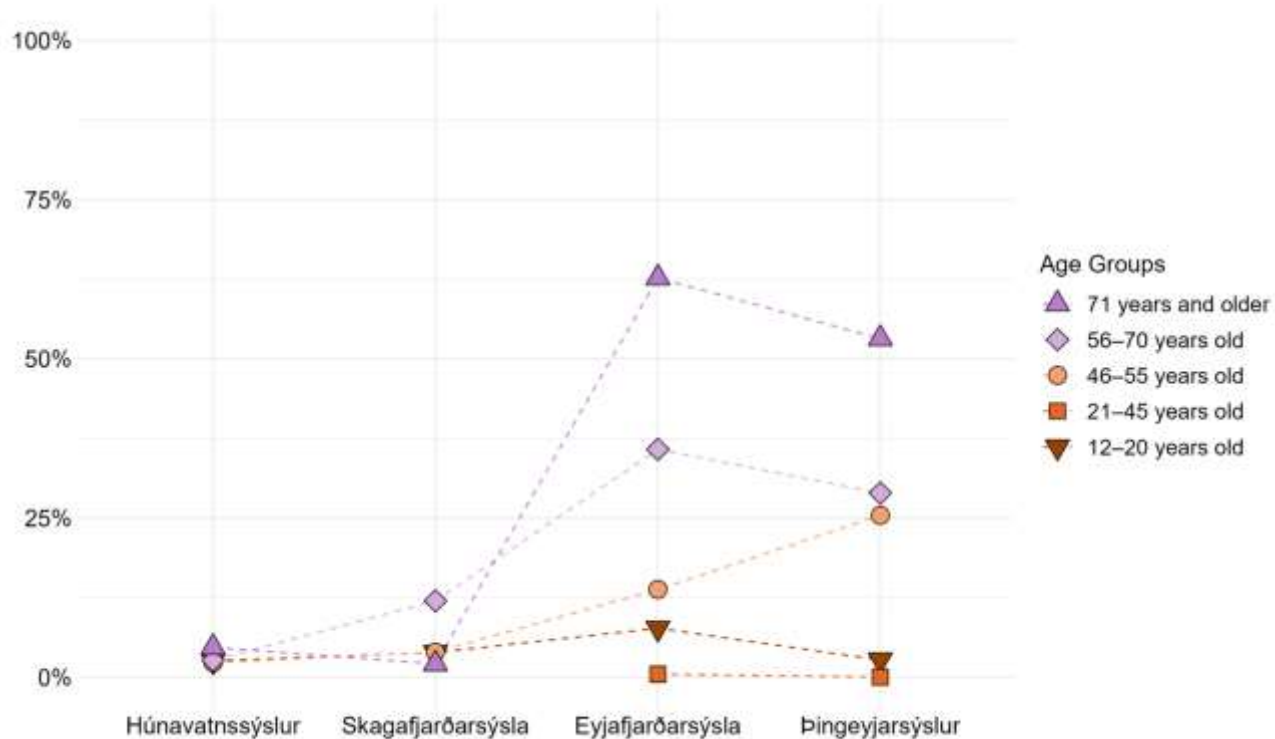
PC = Participant count; HS = hard speech; VP = voiced pronunciation

Age	Húnavatnssýslur			Skagafjarðarsýsla			Eyjafjarðarsýsla			Þingeyjarsýslur			Total
	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	
71+	3	12%	5%	4	40%	2%	4	90%	63%	11	65%	53%	22
56–70	3	15%	3%	11	44%	12%	10	54%	36%	24	60%	29%	48
46–55	10	5%	2%	1	76%	4%	24	55%	14%	5	50%	25%	40
21–45	0	–	–	0	–	–	7	47%	0%	1	57%	0%	8
12–20	7	3%	3%	8	9%	4%	39	34%	8%	22	40%	3%	76
Total	23	7%	3%	24	32%	7%	84	46%	14%	63	53%	27%	194

Hard speech: distribution in the Northern Region



Voiced pronunciation: distribution in the Northern Region



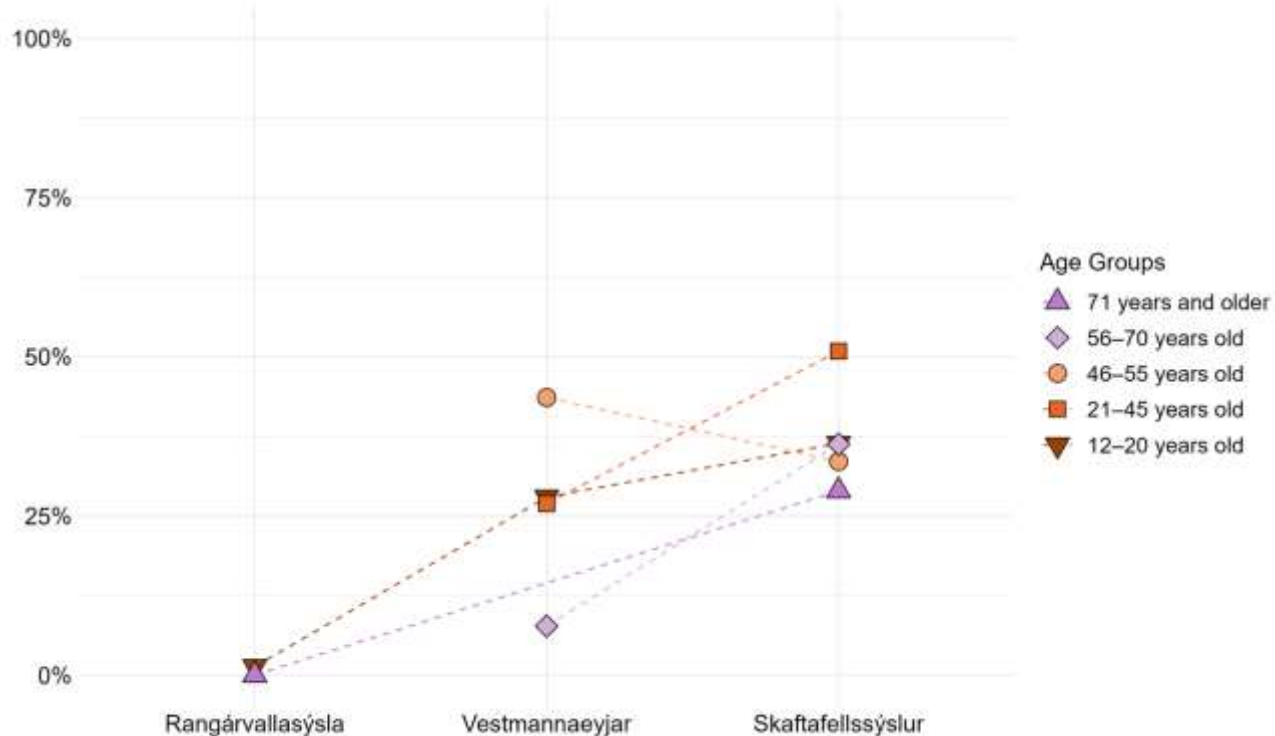
Southern region: overview of participants and results



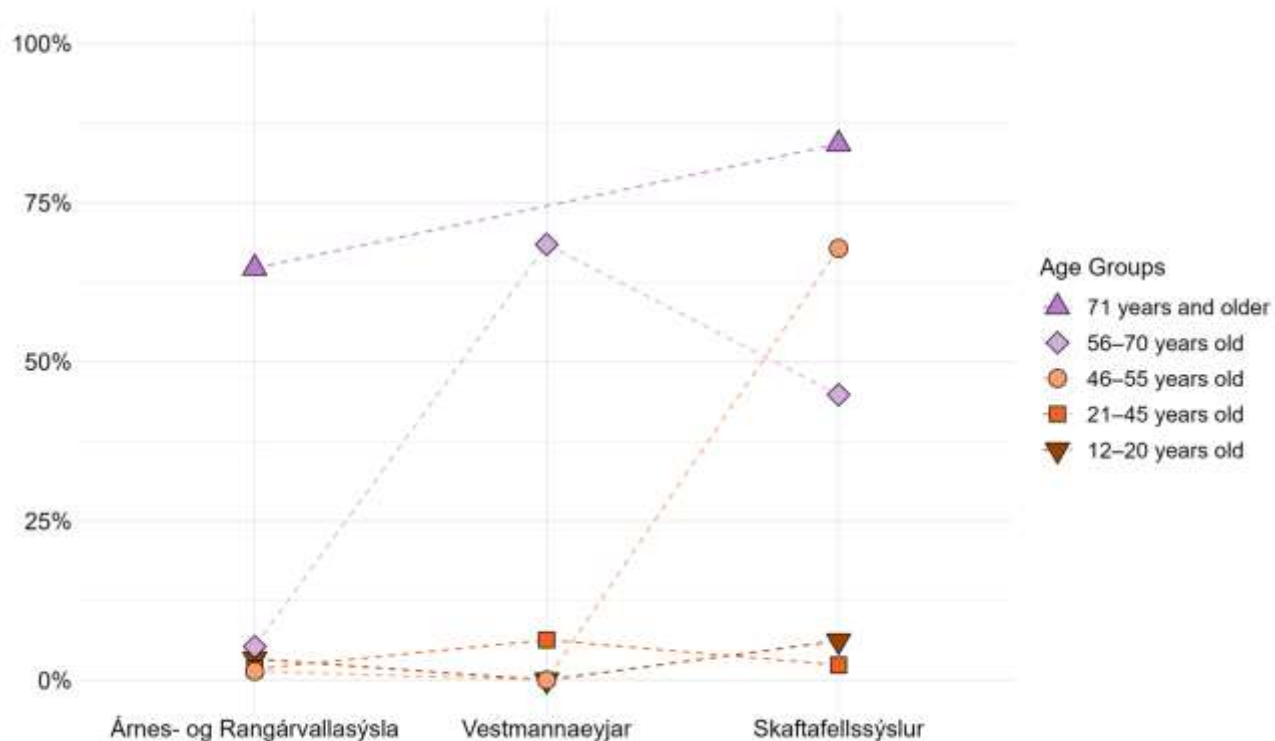
PC = Participant count; MP = monophthongal pronunciation; HV = hv-pronunciation

Age	Árnes- and Rangárvallasýsla			Vestmannaeyjar			Skaftafellssýslur			Total
	PC	MP	HV	PC	MP	HV	PC	MP	HV	
71+	1 / 2	0%	65%	0	–	–	3	29%	84%	5
56–70	0 / 4	–	5%	1	8%	68%	9	36%	45%	14
46–55	0 / 9	–	1%	3	44%	0%	7	34%	68%	19
21–45	0 / 3	–	2%	6	27%	6%	9	51%	2%	18
12–20	7 / 28	1%	3%	6	28%	0%	14	36%	6%	48
Total	8 / 46	1%	6%	16	29%	7%	42	39%	28%	104

Monophthongal pronunciation: distribution in the Southern Region



Hv-pronunciation: distribution in the Southern Region



Northern region: overview of participants and results



PC = Participant count; HS = hard speech; VP = voiced pronunciation

Age	Húnavatnssýslur			Skagafjarðarsýsla			Eyjafjarðasýsla			Þingeyjarsýslur			Total
	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	PC	HS	VP	
71+	3	12%	5%	4	40%	2%	4	90%	63%	11	65%	53%	22
56–70	3	15%	3%	11	44%	12%	10	54%	36%	24	60%	29%	48
46–55	10	5%	2%	1	76%	4%	24	55%	14%	5	50%	25%	40
21–45	0	–	–	0	–	–	7	47%	0%	1	57%	0%	8
12–20	7	3%	3%	8	9%	4%	39	34%	8%	22	40%	3%	76
Total	23	7%	3%	24	32%	7%	84	46%	14%	63	53%	27%	194

Youngest groups in Eyjafjarðarsýsla and Þingeyjarsýslur in RÍN: HS = 80–90%; VP = 35–40%

Southern region: overview of participants and results



PC = Participant count; MP = monophthongal pronunciation; HV = hv-pronunciation

Age	Árnes- og Rangárvallasýsla			Vestmannaeyjar			Skaftafellssýslur			Total
	PC	MP	HV	PC	MP	HV	PC	MP	HV	
71+	1 / 2	0%	65%	0	–	–	3	29%	84%	5
56–70	0 / 4	–	5%	1	8%	68%	9	36%	45%	14
46–55	0 / 9	–	1%	3	44%	0%	7	34%	68%	19
21–45	0 / 3	–	2%	6	27%	6%	9	51%	2%	18
12–20	7 / 28	1%	3%	6	28%	0%	14	36%	6%	48
Total	8 / 46	1%	6%	16	29%	7%	42	39%	28%	104

Youngest groups in Skaftafellssýslur in RÍN: MP = ~55%; HV = 23–36%

Concluding remarks



Development of the regional variants:

- Both northern voicing and southern *hv*-pronunciation are rare or seem to have disappeared almost completely among the younger generation.
- Monophthongal pronunciation and especially hard speech appear to be still fairly common in their southern and northern core areas. Both are declining but not as quickly as the other variants.
- The older age-groups generally show considerably stronger signs of regional pronunciation, with the exception of monophthongal pronunciation in the South that seems relatively even between age-groups.

Icelandic regional pronunciation: Recent developments and attitudes Part II: An investigation of attitudes

Ásgrímur Angantýsson

CRISCO, University of Caen Normandie, 3 October 2024

2. Attitudes towards own pronunciation and that of others

Aims of the attitudinal part



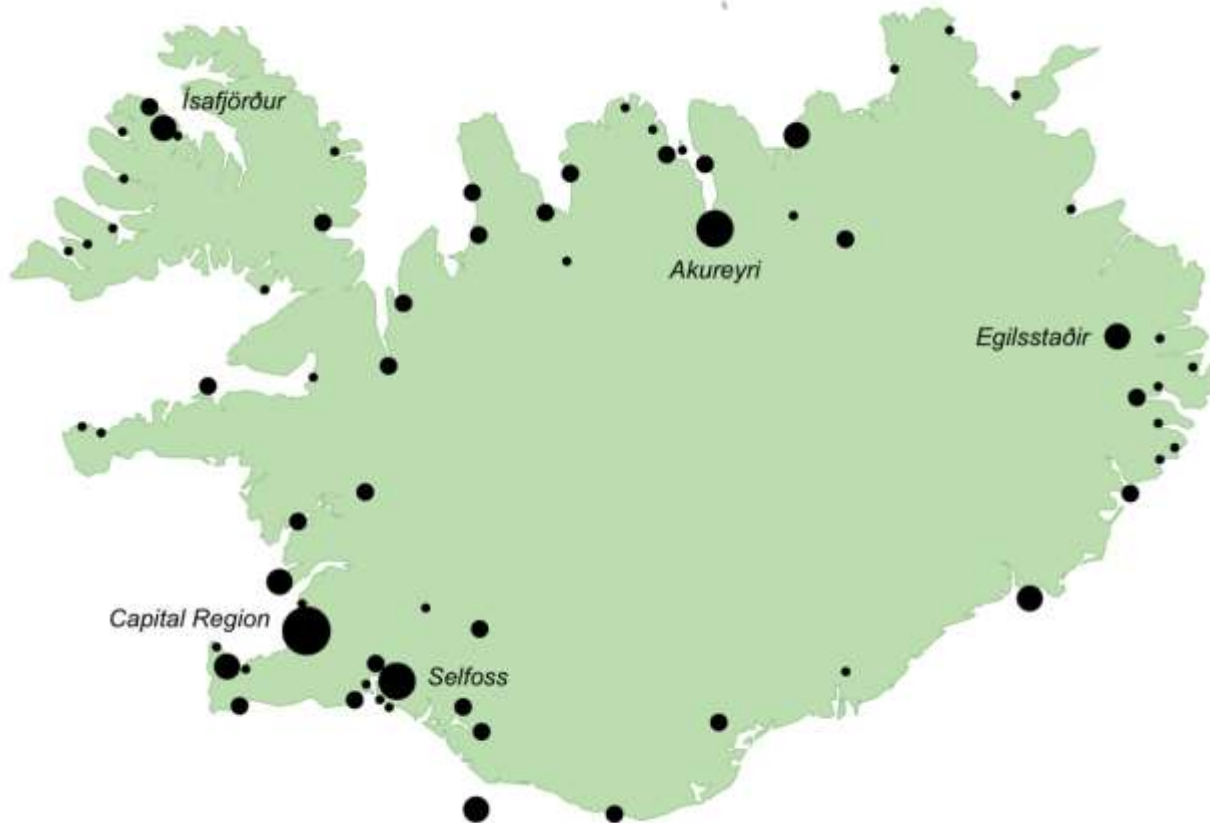
- **Combination of methods from attitude research (Giles 1970; Kristiansen 2010, 2006; Phrao & Kristiansen 2019; Levon et al. 2022) and folk linguistics (e.g., Evans et al. 2018; Niedzielski & Preston 2003; Preston 2010, 2018)**
- **Aim to:**
 - **investigate conscious and subconscious attitudes towards regional variation**
 - **explore what role language attitudes play in linguistic change**
 - **uncover underlying language ideologies by investigating non-expert's perceptions of and beliefs about linguistic matters, ultimately providing "a window into speakers' cultural beliefs" (Preston 2018: xxi)**
 - **expose how "linguistic facts are linked to geographical ones in the popular mind" (Preston 2010: 88)**

Our data



- **1) Online questionnaire**
 - 960 participants (12–88 years old)
 - reading task
 - listening task
 - attitudinal questions
- **2) In-depth interviews**
 - 23 participants (91–95 years old)
 - reading task
 - listening task
 - attitudinal questions

Origin/residence of the participants



Stratification of the participants



Speech area	Online survey	Interviews
Neutral area	499	7
Northern Iceland	245	13
Southern Iceland	143	3
Westfjords	73	–
Total	960	23

Age group	Online survey	Interviews
12–20 years	300	–
21–45 years	116	–
46–55 years	228	–
56–70 years	244	–
71+ years	72	23
Total	960	23

1) Online questionnaire

A) Salience of variants

- i. What part of the country do you think the reader is from?

B) Attitudes towards speakers' own pronunciation / linguistic awareness and upbringing

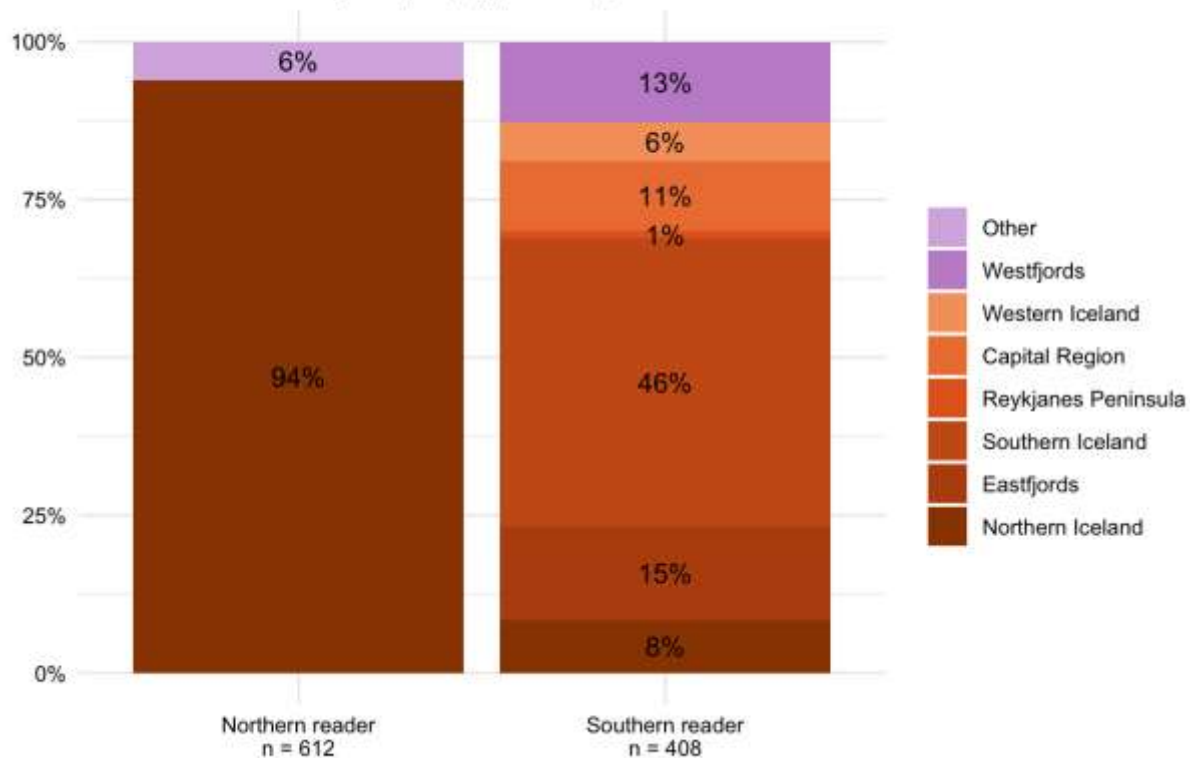
- i. My pronunciation is common.
- ii. My pronunciation is beautiful.
- iii. My pronunciation is an important part of my identity.
- iv. I noticed people's pronunciation when I was younger.
- v. Do you remember being commented on your pronunciation?

C) Attitudes towards the pronunciation of others

- i. The reader is clear.
- ii. The reader is attractive.
- iii. The reader is normal.

A) Salience of variants

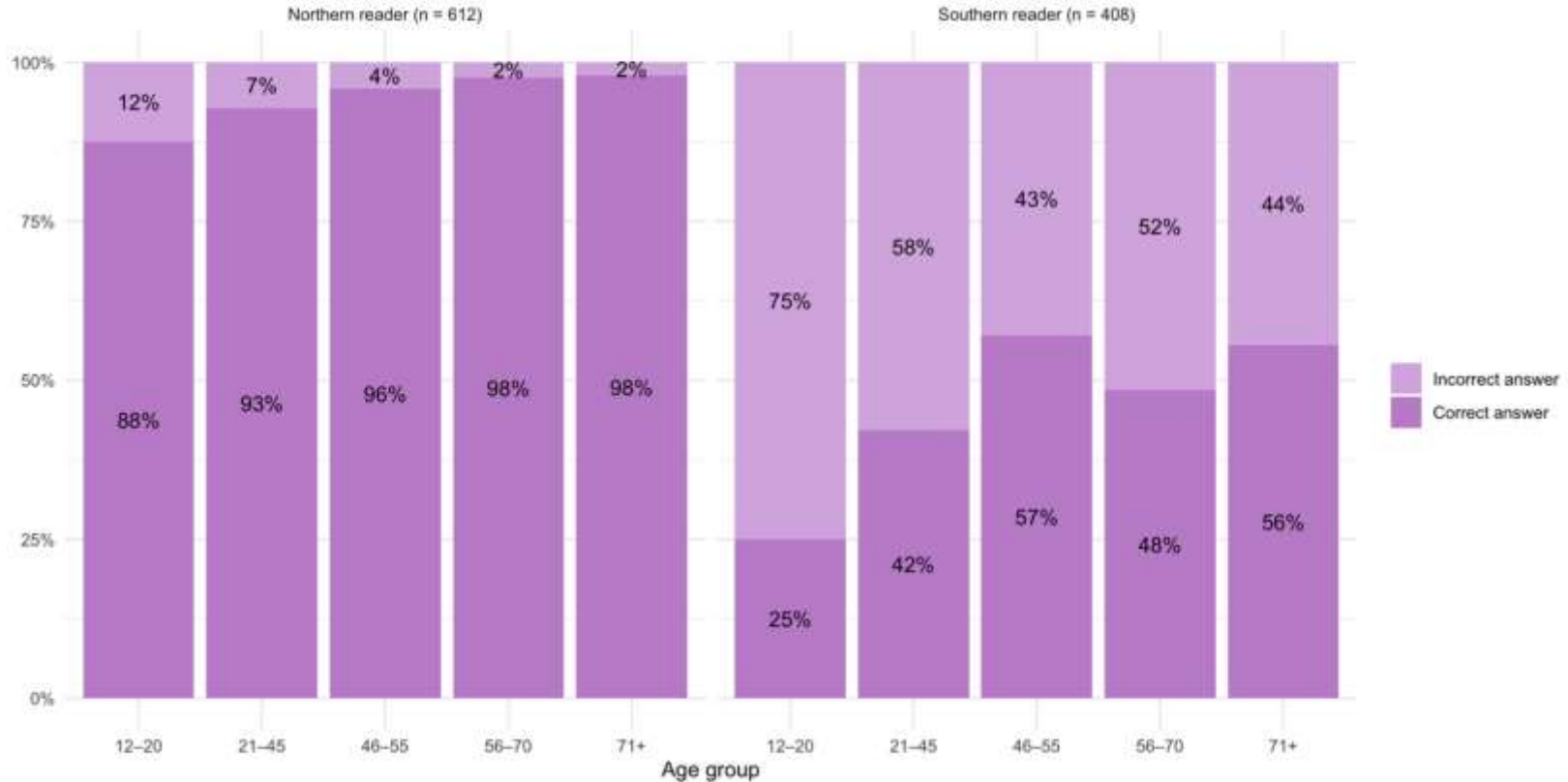
What part of the country do you think [the reader] is from?
Hvaðan af landinu heyrðist þér [upplesarinn] vera?



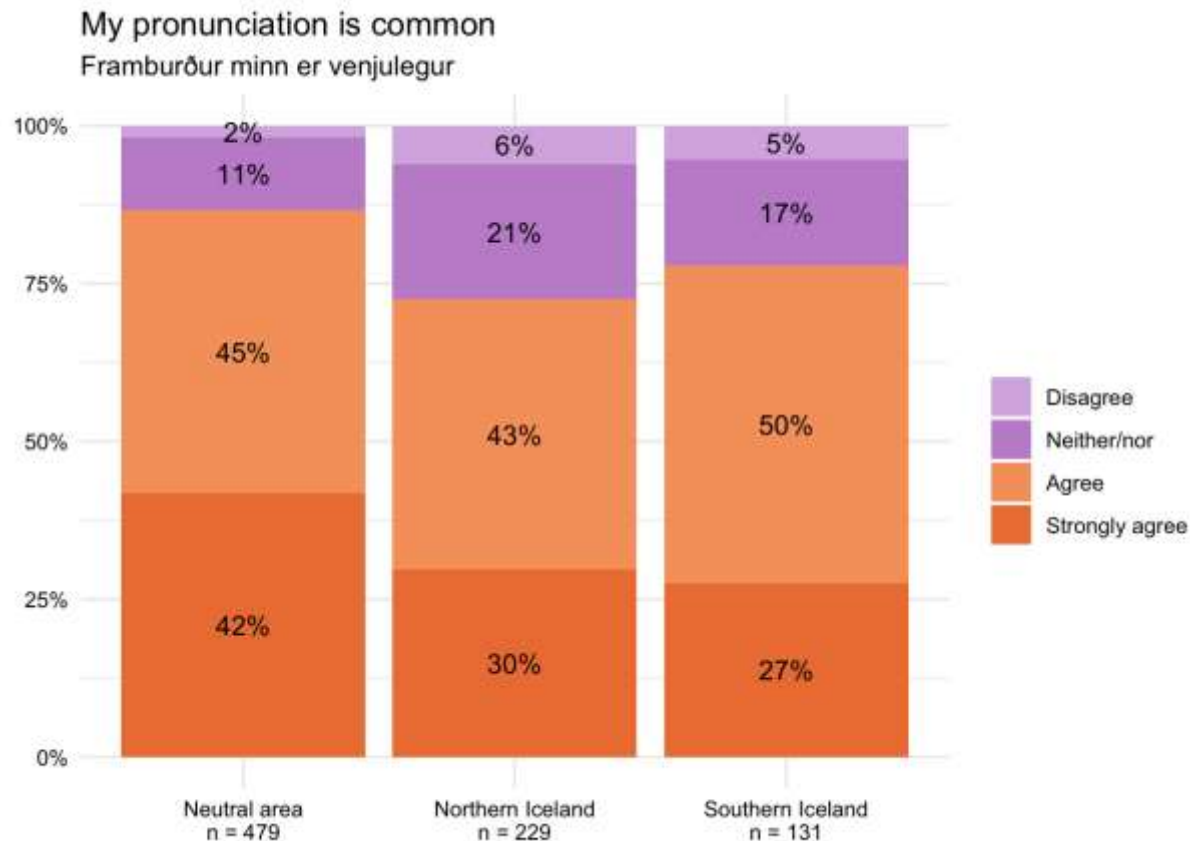
A) Salience of variants by participants' age



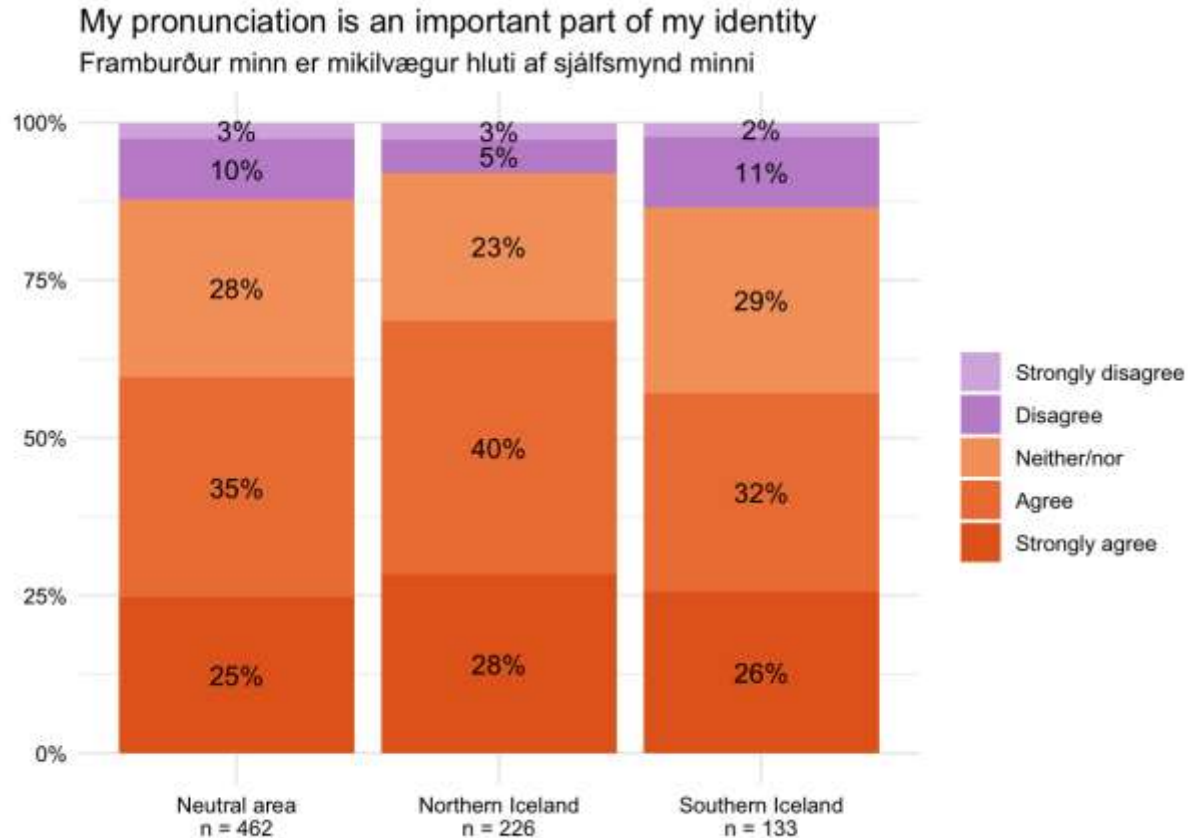
What part of the country do you think the reader is from?



B) Attitudes towards one's own pronunciation



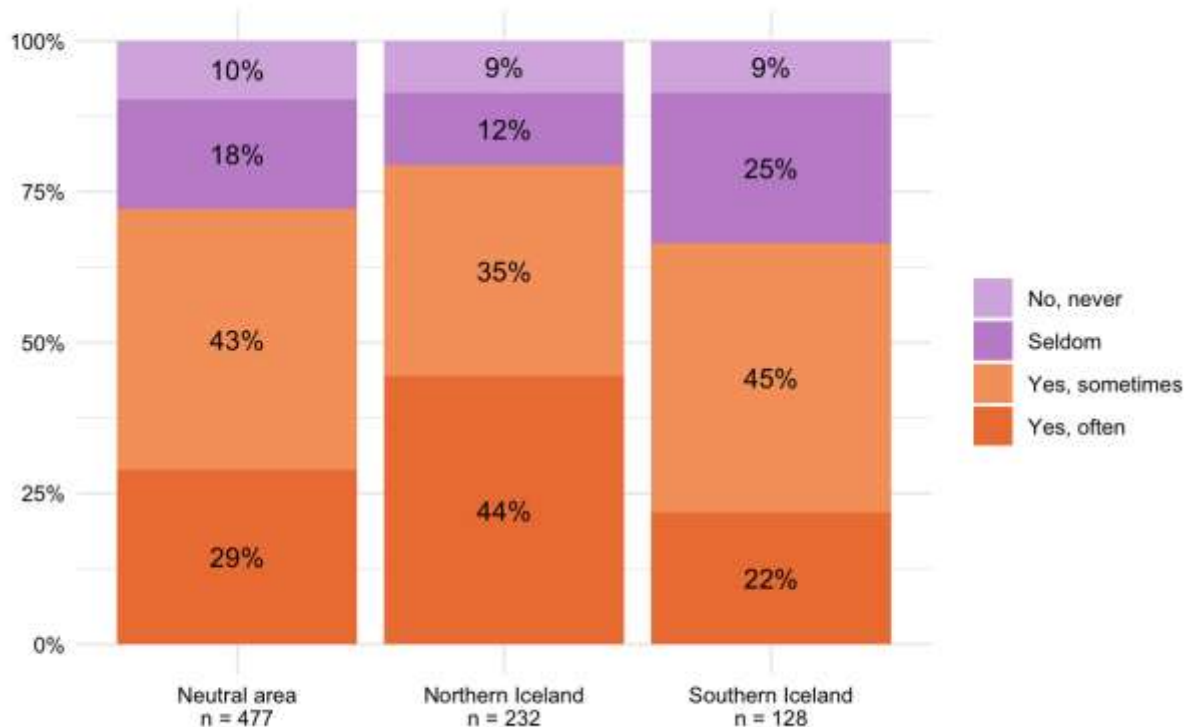
B) Attitudes towards one's own pronunciation



B) Awareness

I noticed people's pronunciation when I was younger

Manstu til þess að hafa velt fyrir þér framburði fólks þegar þú varst yngri, t.d. hvort það segði „fata“ eða „fada“?

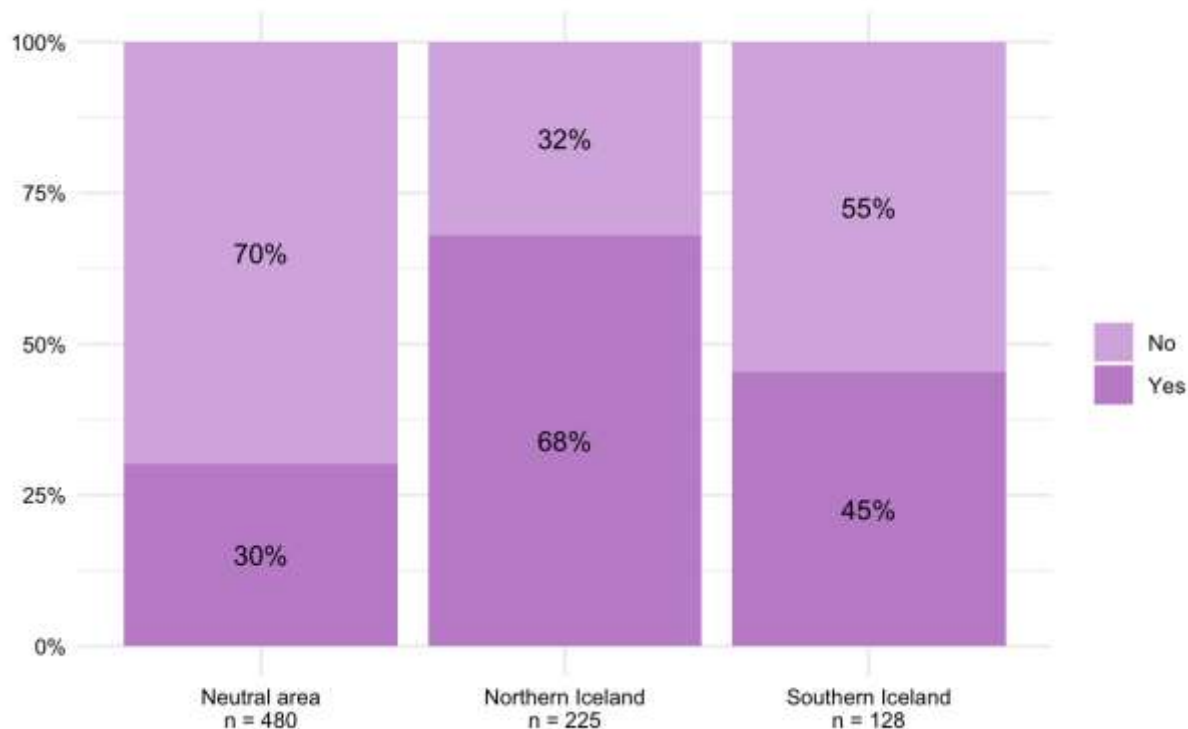


B) Attitudes (of others) towards one's own pronunciation

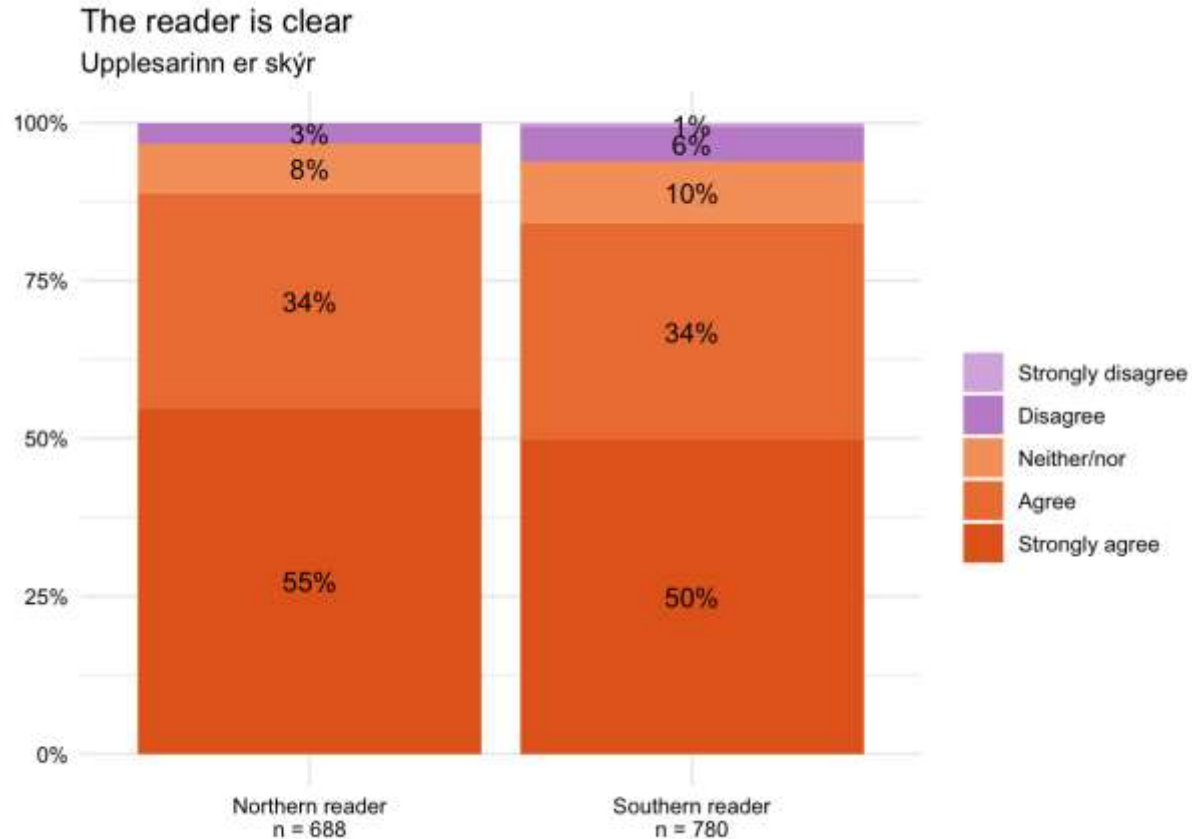


Do you remember being commented on your pronunciation?

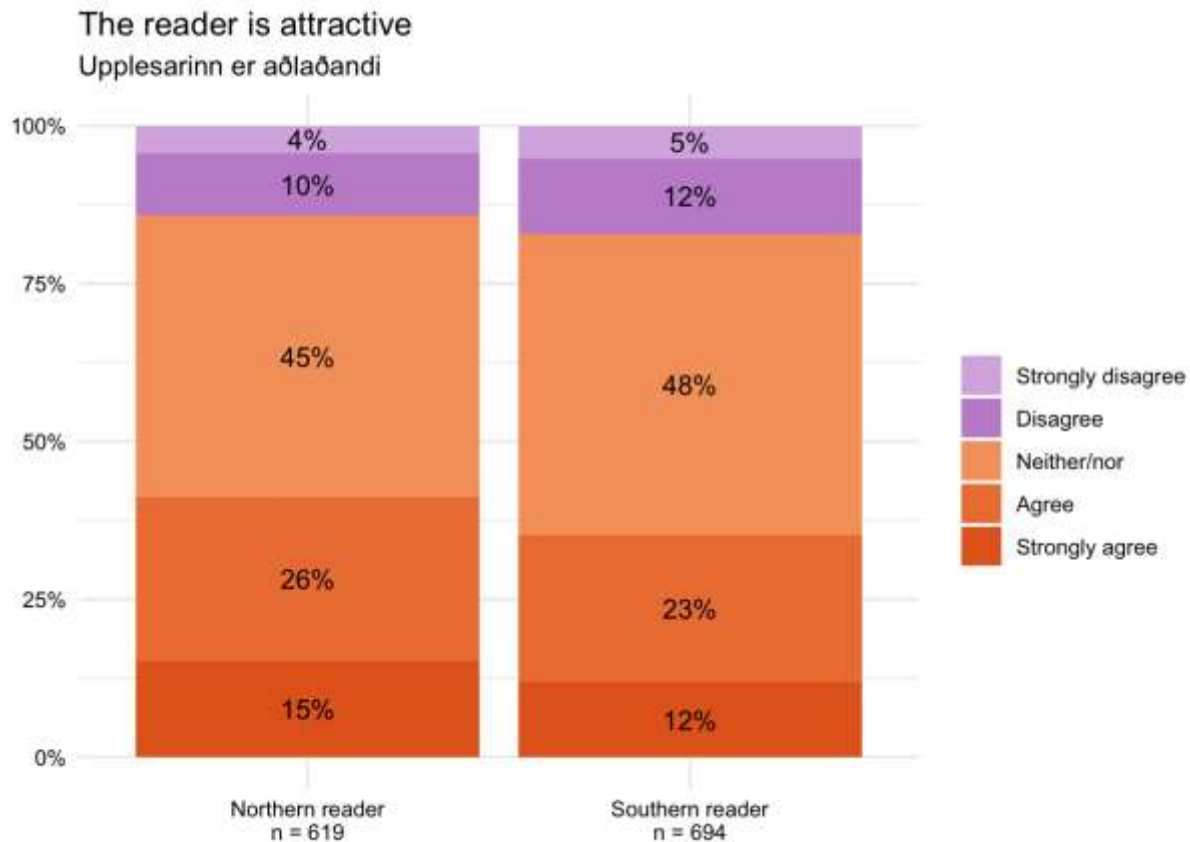
Manstu eftir að hafa fengið athugasemdir um framburð þinn,
t.d. á vinnustað eða í vinahópum?



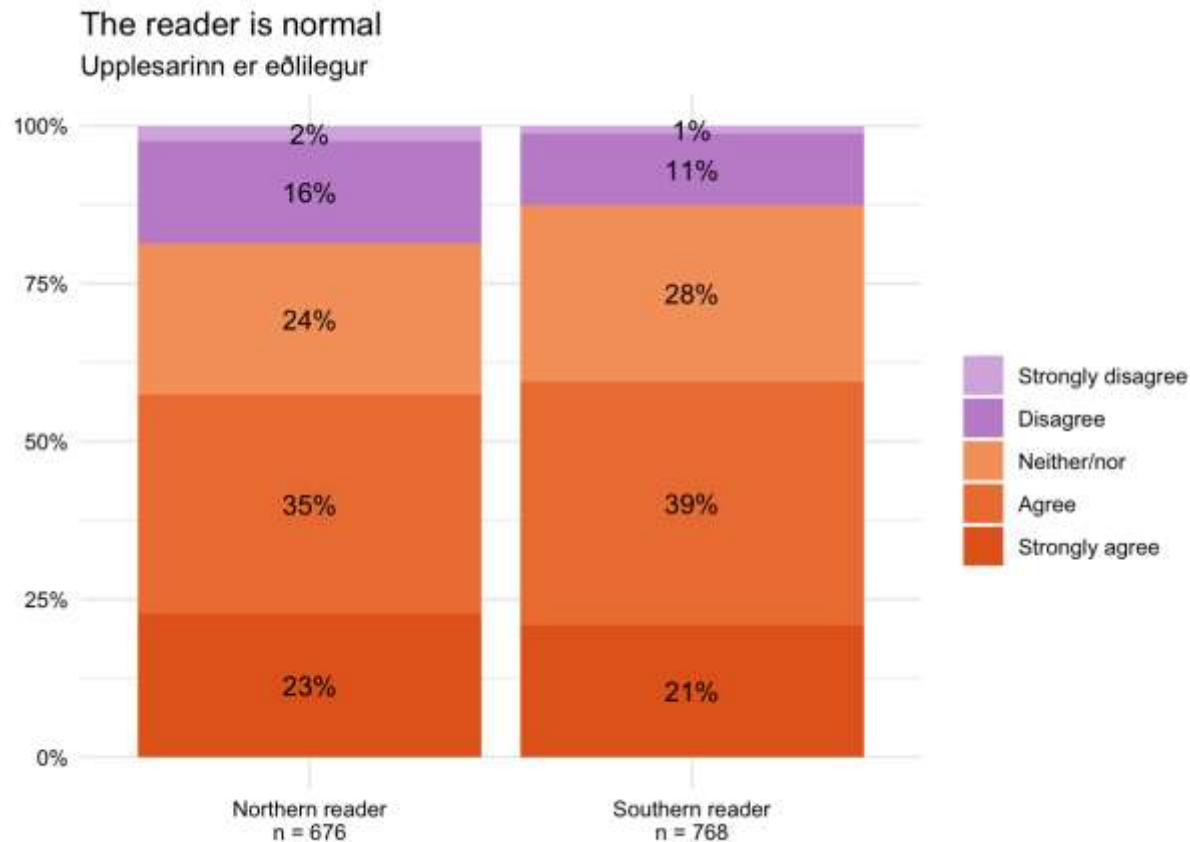
C) Reactions to the listening session



C) Reactions to the listening session

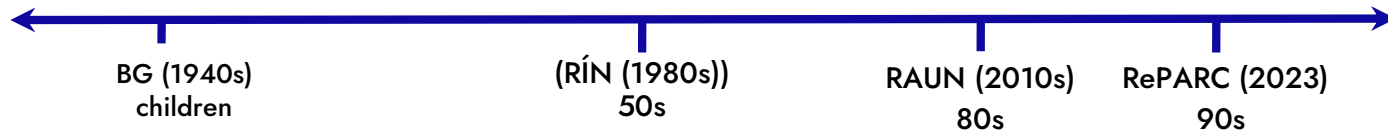


C) Reactions to the listening session



2) In-depth interviews

- This is the third or fourth time these speakers participate in a pronunciation research project over the course of their lives → unique longitudinal data on their speech



- Semi-structured in-depth interviews provided detailed information on the participants' background (upbringing, education, employment, places of residence etc.) as well as deep insights into their attitudes, perception, and awareness of both their own and others' ways of speaking
- Thematic analysis focusing on folk linguistics beliefs (Tómasdóttir 2024)

Identification and evaluation of variation

- In the interviews, participants' evaluations of pronunciation were primarily based on perceived beauty and, especially, **clarity**
- For many, there seems to be a strong association between Northern speech—particularly hard speech—and clarity, and this idea is not limited to speakers from Northern Iceland
- While it is difficult to determine when or how the idea originated, it appears to have gained traction from the mid-20th century onwards (Guðmundsdóttir 2022)

Identification and evaluation of variation



- Ideas about Northerners:
- ***“He reads very clearly. And I think the stresses were good. I could believe that ... he could very well be from Skagafjörður. Or Húnavatnssýsla. Umm ... Eyjafjörður, let me see, Eyjafjörður, Þingeyjar- ... well, at least I think he’s from the North. [...] Well, yes, I thought he had a much clearer pronunciation than one sometimes hears here [in the Capital Region]. The stresses were better, kind of.”***
- ***“Well, it’s ... what indicates it [the reader being Northern] is that he speaks clearly and decisively. And articulates the words well. Yes, that’s Northern speech.”***
- ***“He spoke clearly.”***
- These quotes are all from participants who are themselves from Northern Iceland, though the reader in question was actually from the Westfjords

Comments on pronunciation

- Quite a few interviewees recalled receiving comments on their pronunciation at some point in their lives or having discussions about pronunciation in general
- Northern speakers had mostly received neutral or positive comments on their speech in other parts of the country
 - ***“They just pointed out that it was a bit different from what they were used to. But there was no criticism of it as such.”***
- However, a few speakers with a majority accent—those who do not, e.g., exhibit the often-favored hard speech—received negative comments about their speech while staying for a shorter or longer period in Northern Iceland
 - ***“I just remember that I was mocked [...] because I had soft speech. Then I tried to change myself a bit.”***

Self-identity



- Speakers with minority accents generally seemed to have given more thought to their pronunciation than others, and some cherished it
- A Northern participant with a very strong regional accent did not want Northern speech characteristics to fade, neither in himself nor in others
 - ***“I just speak the way that feels most natural to me, but under this constant ... barrage of different pronunciations, it might gradually happen that you stop doing it. But I prefer speaking my dialect [mállýska].”***
- He also recounted how he had scolded another Northerner for supposedly having lost his accent
- Another Northern participant frequently mentioned her “Skagfjordan accent,” which clearly contributed to her identity as a Northerner – however, one could barely detect any Northern characteristics in her speech
 - ***“I am [proud of my pronunciation]. I like having grown up with this kind of pronunciation.”***

Concluding remarks

1) Attitudes toward regional pronunciation and awareness

- The speech of Northern Icelanders appears to be more salient than that of speakers from other parts of the country.
- Northern Icelanders seem to attach more significance to their way of speaking as part of their own identity.
- At the same time, Northern Icelanders deem their own way of speaking to divert more from the way others speak, thus highlighting the special status of Northern speech.
- Although results on the attractiveness of the speaker did not confirm outcomes of earlier studies (Hlynsdóttir 2016), the forthcoming analysis of the 160 in-depth interviews could provide cues on differences between attitudes toward hard speech and voiced pronunciation.

Concluding remarks

2) Folk beliefs toward regional pronunciation and awareness by the 23 oldest participants

- Perceived clarity is a prominent aspect in speaker identification and evaluation of different varieties, and it is frequently associated with Northern speech
- Northern speakers generally received neutral or positive comments on their pronunciation and did not try to change it, while some speakers with a majority accent faced negative comments in Northern Iceland and attempted to adopt Northern speech characteristics in response
- Speakers who used minority regional variants—though not necessarily to a great extent—reflected more on their pronunciation compared to others, with some taking pride in it

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A forthcoming paper (December 2024)

DE GRUYTER

Sociolinguistica 2024; 38(2): 1–29

Finnur Friðriksson, Ásgrímur Angantýsson and Stefanie Bade

Icelandic regional pronunciation, attitudes and real-time change: Latest developments

<https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2024-0028>

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