

# Loanwords vs. native words in Old and Middle Icelandic

Matteo Tarsi – 3rd Pavia International Summer School for Indo-European Linguistics – Pavia, Sept. 7th-12th 2015

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## The project

My research project intends to analyze the relationship between loanwords and native words in a representative corpus of Icelandic texts, which have been composed in the period ranging from the late 9<sup>th</sup> century CE to 1550, that is before the dawn of the Icelandic linguistic purism (late 16<sup>th</sup> c.-early 17<sup>th</sup> c.).

In order to do so, the research will focus on a particular phenomenon, namely that of **(quasi-)synonymic couples**, where one end is constituted by a loanword and the other by a native word, i.e. when loanword and native word are coreferentially used in the texts one alongside the other, in different but reasonably near *loci*.

## Research aim and questions

The main aim of the research is to investigate the pre-purist relationship between loanwords and native words.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### TEXTS

a) intertypological analysis  
Do different textual typologies mirror a difference in the use of loanwords and native words?

b) intrastemmatic analysis  
Is there a difference with regard to the usage of loanwords and native words in (quasi-)synonymic couples in the manuscript transmission of each text?

#### LEXICON

What is the frequency of usage with regard to each single (quasi-)synonymic couple?

How much were loanwords and native words effectively used interchangeably in Old and Middle Icelandic?

## Loanwords vs. native words: a model of analysis

In order to precisely determine the two objects of my research a model of analysis is by all means necessary.

Starting from the bipartite model proposed by Halldór Halldórsson in his article *Nýgervingar í forn máli* (Halldórsson 1964), this has been expanded and integrated with the renowned model by Werner Betz (Betz 1974) and Roberto Gusmani's analysis of **homoionyms**, **rough translations** and

**substitute neologisms** (Gusmani 1981-3). In his analysis in fact, Gusmani theorizes the effects of loanword-native word lexical couples on the lexicon.

Thus, in the model adopted in this research a sharp distinction is made between words that are formed with endogenous lexical material (native words), being them structural calques, semantical calques or neoformations, and those that are not, namely loanwords.

## The corpus of texts

In order to be as complete as possible, the corpus of texts has been specifically designed to contain a sample of texts from every textual typology extant in the to-be-researched period. These are given in the following table.

	Old Icelandic (late 9th c. CE-1350)	Middle Icelandic (1350-1550)
Religious texts	The Icelandic Homily Book Elucidarius Stjórn	The New Testament
Legal and bureaucratic texts	Grágás Jónsbók A selection of <i>diplomata</i>	A selection of <i>diplomata</i>
Treatises	Grammatical treatises (I-III) Physiologus Algorismus Snorri's Edda	The fourth Grammatical treatise
Historiographical texts	The Book of the Icelanders Veraldar saga Kristni saga	
Bishops' sagas and other hagiographical texts	Hungrvaka Þorláks saga helga	Laurentius saga biskups <i>exempla</i> transl. from ME Transitus Mariæ <i>exempla</i> from the Reykjahólabók
Sagas of the Icelanders	Egils saga Gísla saga Grettis saga	Víglundar saga Fljótsdæla saga
Kings' sagas	Sverris saga Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (H) Knyttlinga saga	
Chivalric sagas	Alexanders saga	Dínus saga drambláta

Chivalric sagas	Karlamagnúss saga Þiðreks saga af Bern Sigurðar saga þögla	
Legendary sagas	Völsunga saga Ásmundar saga kappabana	Hrólfs saga kraka Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis
Poetry	Poetic Edda Skaldic poems	<i>Rímur</i>

## Some examples

The following examples<sup>1</sup> are taken from the Icelandic Homily Book, exclusively preserved in the ms. Holm perg 15 4to (ca. 1200) (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket).

### discipulus – lærisveinn

(89r3-4) Þessa jartein gjörði Jesus fyrsta í augliti discipuli sui, ok vitraði gloria sua. Ok trúðu á hann lærisveinar hans.

### evangelista – goðspjallamaðr

(5r7) Svá segir Lúkas evangelista.  
(11r4-5) [...] at þá gerum vér glíkt at því, er segir Lúkas goðspjallamaðr.

### prestr – kennimaðr

(96r32-96v1) En þá es hann vaknaði fyr dag, þá sendi hann þegar menn eftir kennimönnum. En es prestar kvómu þá sagði hann sig trúa á Kríst og vas hann þegar skírðr.

## About the author

Matteo Tarsi is born in Grosseto in 1988. He has studied Danish and Nordic Literature at the University of Pisa (BA, 2010) and Modern Philology at the same university, where he wrote a thesis about loanwords of Latin origin in contemporary Icelandic (MA, 2013). He also holds a BA-degree in Modern Icelandic from the University of Iceland, Reykjavík (BA, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> The following examples are given in normalized orthography.