

Føroyskt - Faroese



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In this article I will give a brief outline of i.a. Faroese language policy, including the debate about loan words and replacement words - and the relationship between Faroese and Danish. In addition, I will touch on the role Danish plays in Faroese society and on the learning of Danish in Faroese schools.

The Faroese language is spoken today by about 46,000 people in the Faroes and by about ten thousand outside its borders. Faroese is one of the West Nordic languages that has developed out of Old Norse, the language the first landnamsmen brought with them when they settled in the Faroes in the ninth century. The Faroes, then, acquired a population during the Viking Age, since when Faroese has been spoken on the islands, whereas the fate of the written language was to be quite different (see

below). During the first centuries after the colonisation, the language was the common West Nordic language which, apart from in the Faroes, was spoken on Iceland and in Norway as well as elsewhere in the North Atlantic (see Andreasen and Dahl 1997: 19).

A comparison of these three languages around 1200 leads to the conclusion that the differences between them were very small. At that time, Norwegian had the old characteristics of e.g. a morphological, lexical and orthographical nature that we still have in present-day Faroese and - to an even greater extent - in Icelandic. One of the differences around 1200 was that Norwegian and Faroese had lost *h* in front of *l*, *r* and *n*, whereas Icelandic has retained *h* in this position: Icelandic *hlaupa* (Dan. løbe - to run), *hníga* (Dan. neje - to curtsy),

hrósa (Dan. *rose* - to praise) as opposed to Norwegian and Faroese *laupa*, *níga*, *rósa* (Torp 1999: 39 ff). The Faroes were governed by the Norwegians until 1380, when the Faroes and Norway came under the Danish crown. Norway gained its independence in 1819, while the Faroes remained part of the kingdom of Denmark. Faroese began to lose its status as a written language before the Reformation. From documents written prior to the Reformation it is possible to see that Faroese is normally not used for writing and has been replaced by other languages - in particular, Danish.

After the Reformation, Danish was the sole written language in the Faroes. And it was not until 1948, the year of Home Rule, that Faroese was confirmed as the main language of the Faroes, whilst it was emphasised at the same time that Danish was to be learned 'well and thoroughly'. Danish became not only the written language but also that of culture and religion. After the Reformation, the Danish bible was used in the Faroes, i.e. the basic idea of the Reformation that religion should be communicated in the national language was not implemented in the Faroes at that time. During this period, Danish left distinct traces in both the everyday language and in such things as personal names.

The Faroese never stopped speaking their own language. When they wrote, however, they had to write in Danish.

The Faroese chain dance and the Faroese lays have been given the credit for Faroese having at all been able to

survive this period when the upper class was Danish, the clergy and the officials were Danish and the prestige language was Danish. When the first attempts were made to introduce systematic schooling in 1845, the language of instruction was Danish - and there was no school subject called Faroese.

In 1912, the so-called Paragraph 12 came into force, when a majority of the Lagting (the Faroese parliament) approved a bill that the language of instruction was to be Danish. It was not until 1938 that Faroese attained equal status with Danish in Faroese schools and until 1948, with Home Rule, that Faroese was recognised as the main language on the islands - with the proviso that Danish had to be learned 'well and thoroughly'. In the Home Rule Act it does not say that Faroese is the national language, simply the main language in the Faroes. This formulation has been confirmed by the Danish government, which refuses to admit that Faroese is the national language in the Faroes!

The earliest documents in Faroese

The oldest documents in Faroese from after the Reformation, e.g. lays and records of words, date from the 1770s. In 1846, the Faroese written language was launched. It was highly etymological, building on the language system of Old Norse. Roughly the same spelling has been used to this day, though with slight modifications. The distance between written and spoken Faroese is large, which results in quite a few difficulties in spelling.

The development of the Faroese vocabulary

As soon as people began to use the new written language in books, articles, newspapers, etc., there was a lively debate regarding the Faroese vocabulary. Obviously, once one wanted to describe things and concepts that lay outside everyday Faroese life, the problems were not long in surfacing: What terms are we to use for such things and phenomena? We have to remember that when a people has used a foreign written language for several centuries, it takes time to develop a national written language which, in principle, has to be able to be used to describe all conceivable things and phenomena. This problem still exists in the Faroes. But it almost seemed to be in the air from the outset that the attempt would be made to manage using one's own language corpus and, in those instances where one lacked words, one would invent new ones, thereby avoiding having to use loan words whenever there was not an existing Faroese term. One wished to uphold the principle of self-sufficiency. As early as the end of the 19th century, the idea emerged of making Faroese replacement words for loan words. The first person to support this self-sufficiency principle was the philologist Jakob Jakobsen (1864-1918).

Loan words

Such a language policy is normally referred to as linguistic purism - an ideology whose aim is to keep the language free from foreign words and expressions. This line has been followed ever since;

and it continues to characterise Faroese language policy. Purism can be practised at several linguistic levels. Typical for Faroese is lexical purism, i.e. one tries to make up Faroese words to replace loan words. These are known as replacement words, also referred to as neologisms or new formations. It is this lexical purism that also characterises Icelandic language policy. Examples of Faroese replacement words from the earliest period of the 1890s are such words as *bókasavn* (library), *bókmentir* (literature), *halastjørna* (comet), *hugsjón* (ideal), *kollvelting* (revolution), *lærdur háskúli* (university), *skráskrift* (italics), *sjónarringur* (horizon). For us, these words seem as if they had always existed in the language. Some of Jakobsen's replacement words that now are a fully integrated part of the Faroese spoken and written language have been inspired by Icelandic. There are naturally also translations of foreign, e.g. Danish, words: *eftirspurningur* (demand), *mállæra* (grammar), *ráevni* (raw material). Orthographical and phonological purism mean that one retains loan words but adapts the spelling to national language rules (pronunciation, inflection, etc.). This form of purism, however, was not so popular with Jakobsen; Kaj Larsen (Larsen 1993: 12ff), at any rate, does not list any examples of foreign words with a Faroese adapted spelling and inflection.

Present-day Faroese language policy

There no longer exists such an unambiguous attitude in favour of lexical purism. The tendency towards orthographical, phonological and mor-

phological purism now enjoys a strong position alongside lexical purism among present-day Faroese linguists. In the two Danish-Faroese dictionaries from the 1990s (Føroya Fróðskaparfelag 1995 and Stidin 1998) and the English-Faroese dictionary (Stidin 1992) one can thus see a considerable number of loan words spelled according to the rules of Faroese pronunciation: *sjalu* (jealous), *tineygjari* (teenager), *spitari* (speeder), *kovboy* (cowboy), etc. Replacement words from the 1980s and 1990s include *farstøð* (terminal), *telda* (computer), *tyrla* (helicopter), *tvíkilja* (catamaran), *bingja* (container), *fløga* (CD). Obviously, not all the proposed replacement words will take root in the language community, although two-syllable words of the feminine weak declension have proved well able to survive the struggle (those which end in -a, see above).

Purism

It is possible to differentiate between several types of purism: general or selective purism and conservative or regressive purism (Vikør 2001, unpublished). *General purism*, which is against all types of loan words, is rare. On the other hand, *selective purism* is typical for Faroese: one opposes words from certain languages, but not others. Selective purism is clearly expressed in the way words from Danish and English are opposed while the replacement words in many instances have been inspired by or some of them loaned from Icelandic. Otherwise, we have practically no Icelandic loan words in modern Faroese.

Regressive purism applies to the eradication of all loan words, even those which are centuries old. *Conservative purism*, on the other hand, is only against new loan words. Faroese purism cannot be placed in either category, comprising both regressive though mostly conservative characteristics. It is, for example, still possible to hear people who advocate replacing the word *telefon* with a Faroese new formation, *fjarrøðil*, which was proposed many years ago; it never was accepted, however (a mobile phone is called *fartelefon*, by the way).

Present-day purism is not only directed against Danish but, to an even greater degree, against the intense influence from English and American. This applies to a great extent to specialist terms within various technical subjects, the terminology of which is, of course, mainly English. Purism attempts to create Faroese terminology for modern areas, e.g. technical subjects and others linked to modern society. A dictionary project is, for example, underway, the aim of which is to collect corpus material for a Faroese technical dictionary. There are also specialist word lists of Faroese terms within such areas as computer technology, law, quality control, zoology, botany, geology, mathematics, medicine, language, literature, etc. (Concerning purism in Faroese, see Sandøy 1997).

The Faroese language council

Official language policy is at present the responsibility of the Faroese language council, which was established in 1985. Linguistic advice had been

available prior to that, but with the establishing of the council, care of the Faroese language became institutionalised. In the objects clause it says that the language council is to collect and register new Faroese words and to help in the selection and form of Faroese words. The council is also to be on its guard against 'linguistic pollution' and to seek to prevent adverse language usage gaining a foothold in the language. The council consists of five members, who represent the native language association, the trade union of journalists, the department of education, the authors' association and the institution of Faroese language and literature at the University of the Faroes. The council operates via a secretariat (Málstovan), which has one permanent secretary to answer enquiries from institutions or private persons by phone, fax or e-mail. The language council takes the initiative of contacting the media about adverse language usage. It is the council's responsibility to have good links to institutions with considerable linguistic influence, i.e. the mass media, administration, schools, etc. The council is also to answer questions to do with personal names, place names and other names. Apart from this, personal names are regulated by law, and a personal names committee has been set up, although without its own permanent secretariat.

The vast majority of enquiries have to do with Faroese replacement words for foreign words: what is this or that called in Faroese? The website of the language council is www.fmn.fo

The language council sends out a lan-

guage letter, Ordafar, free of charge which provides language guidance, points out incorrect language usage, etc. Ordafar is particularly designed for journalists and people working in administration, but many private persons ask to have it sent to them as well. The language council has an agreement with radio and TV that enables us to communicate with, in particular, journalists via e-mail. This seems to be an extremely effective way of getting in contact with the media and journalists.

The present-day situation

We now have Faroese newspapers and periodicals, Faroese radio, Faroese schoolbooks, Faroese as the language of instruction, Faroese in church services, Faroese in administration and Faroese in the Lagting. Faroese TV broadcasts, for example, news, children's programmes as well as cultural and debate programmes in Faroese. All films and foreign programmes, however, normally have Danish subtitles - and such programmes make up a large part of the total broadcasting time. The language council has drawn the attention of the TV directors to this. Dictionaries are in short supply in the Faroes, so the politicians have earmarked funds to rectify this and have stated that they will formulate a Faroese language policy. The Nordic Council of Ministers has, in a global perspective, upgraded the small language areas, which the Faroes have benefited from in the form of grants for such things as research, Faroese dictionary projects and other cultural activities. One area where Faroese is weak is within so-called *popular culture*, i.e.

kiosk literature, weeklies and the like - Danish weeklies are very popular in the Faroes. One of the Faroese newspapers has a 'supplement' once a week edited specially for young people, in terms of both content and layout. This type of informal Faroese newspaper language, oriented mainly towards youth, is something new and a way of getting the young generation speaking - in Faroese. A considerable amount of the free advertising material from shops is in Danish.

Faroese is one of the so-called small languages of northern Europe, but it shows no signs of being threatened by extinction. The first book to be published in Faroese appeared in 1823. It was a translation of St. Matthew's Gospel by J.H. Schrøter (1771-1851). In 2000, title no. 4,000 was published in Faroese, with approximately half of all publications dating from after 1970. A large percentage comprises children's books and schoolbooks. As I see it, the goal must be for Faroese to be used in all areas and within all the occupations of Faroese society. The minister of cultural affairs has stated that the political aim is for Faroese programmes to account for half of all Faroese TV broadcasting time in the course of the next few years. The grant to the cultural sector has also increased, but it is still far from enough to cover the considerable cultural activity taking place in the Faroes.

Danish in the Faroes

Historically speaking, Danish has had an extremely dominant role in the

Faroes. It was for centuries the only written language of the Faroese. Gradually, the Danish written tradition was replaced by a Faroese one towards the end of the 19th century. Danish still continues to play a highly central role in the Faroes. It is the first foreign language that the children learn - from Class 3, with English following in Class 5.

What type of Danish?

Today, children learn 'proper' Danish pronunciation in schools, which of course is perfectly natural, it also being what we do in English, German, French, etc. Earlier, however, a pronunciation was used that was based on written Danish. Some people called this form 'gøtudanskt', i.e. a type of Scandinavian. That pronunciation has the advantage that it can also be used when talking to other Scandinavians and be intelligible. It is extremely practical since it can be used as a type of lingua franca in Nordic contexts. Surveys have shown that many Scandinavians find it extremely difficult to understand modern Danish pronunciation. As a former Scandinavian philologist, I feel that this type of Danish ought not to be completely removed from Danish teaching but be a part of it.

The Scandinavian pronunciation has the added advantage that one is much better able to learn Danish spelling; it is a fact that many Faroese are extremely proficient at writing Danish. It cannot be denied that modern Danish pronunciation is far removed from written Danish. Even so, I do not advocate 'go-

ing back' to the Scandinavian pronunciation of Danish; rather that teachers draw their pupils' attention to it and stress the great practical importance it can have when communicating with Scandinavians - including Danes.

Literature

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Cosmopolitan in Denmark

Benny Andersen

And the language I sing and speak
is woven together with words from the
whole world
not only from German, English and French
No, listen to my Greenlandic
Anorak - kayak - tupilac
Turkish: yoghurt - kiosk
Finnish: sauna
Arabian: almanac - coffee
Chinese: tea
Mexican: tomato
Australian: boomerang - kangaroo
South African: apartheid
I could go on and on - and so I shall
Japanese: kimono - karate
Malayan: bamboo
Hindi: bungalow - pyjamas
I can repeat them in my sleep
Words from all over this revolving globe
meet in my marvellous mouth
and each time I pronounce them
they sound more and more Danish

My shirt is from India
my shoes from Italy
my car from Japan
my watch is from Switzerland - or
Hong Kong
but in the midst of it all I am so thoroughly
Danish
The whole world gathers in me
and is perfectly blended
Sesame, Sesame
Open Sesame ...
Or is it I who am Sesame?
At any rate I will open up!

From: Andersen, Benny Cosmopolitan in Denmark - and Other Poems about the Danes. Translated by Cynthia la Touche Andersen. Borcken, Copenhagen. 1997.