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## Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík: Cultivation of Language in his early Writings (1727–1737)

### Abstract

This article discusses Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (1705–1779), a prominent spokesperson for purism and language cultivation in eighteenth-century Iceland. Jón's attitude towards his mother tongue is investigated here by discussing several representative texts that he wrote: his youthful translation of Barthold Feind's *Cosmographia* (1727, AM 958 4to); a Latin lecture on the Icelandic language (written no later than 1730, AM 1013 4to, ff. 68r–76r); the introduction to Jón's orthographic treatise (ca. 1733, AM 435 fol.); a purist wordlist (ca. 1736, AM 1013 4to, f. 37v); and *Hagbenkir*, a treatise on education (1737, JS 83 fol.). After a short introduction, there follows a brief overview of Jón Ólafsson's life, learning, and scholarly publications. The next section examines Jón's attitude towards his mother tongue as reflected in the aforementioned texts. In the concluding section, the issue of language cultivation in eighteenth-century Iceland is addressed. In particular, it is argued that in Jón's foster father, Páll Vídalín (1667–1727), there exists a link between Jón Ólafsson and the “father” of Icelandic purism, Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned (1568–1648).

### Keywords

Language cultivation, Icelandic, language purism, eighteenth-century linguistics, history of the Icelandic language

### 1 Introduction

The present article<sup>1</sup> presents a portrait of Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (1705–1779), a

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a lecture given at a meeting of the Society for the Study of Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (Góðvinir Grunnavíkur-Jóns) in Reykjavík (March 2016), and on a conference paper given at the Annual Colloquium of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas in London (April 2017), for which I was granted a travel bursary from the Salmon-Verburg Fund. I am thankful to the members of the Society for the Study of Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, most notably to Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson and Margrét Eggerts Þóttir, for having invited me to their meeting. I also wish to express my gratitude to Prof.

prominent spokesperson for eighteenth-century Icelandic purism and language cultivation. Detailed reference will be made to a representative selection of his early writings (1727–1737), i.e. from the first decade of his sojourn in Copenhagen. The article is structured as follows: firstly, basic information will be provided concerning Jón Ólafsson’s life, learning, and scholarly writings (§ 2). The selected texts will then be introduced and their links to purism and language cultivation highlighted (§ 3). In the next section (§ 4), it will be argued that significant links can be identified between Jón Ólafsson and the origins of Icelandic linguistic purism at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as he must have developed his views on the native language prior to his arrival in 1726 at Árni Magnússon’s (1663–1730) household. There is in fact a direct family line between Jón and the putative initiator of Icelandic purism, Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned (1568–1648), that passes through Jón’s foster-father Páll Vídalín (1667–1727), himself a scholar and cultivator of the Icelandic language.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Jón Ólafsson’s life, learning, and scholarly production: a brief overview

As Jón Ólafsson is relatively little known outside Iceland, it seems appropriate to offer here a brief account of his life, learning, and scholarly writings. This is chiefly based on Tarsi (2016: 79–82) and the relevant literature cited there, to which the reader is referred for further information.

Jón Ólafsson was born on 15 August 1705 at Staður í Grunnavík í Jökulfjörðum in the Western Fjords. His father, Ólafur Jónsson (1672–1707), was the local priest. Jón was the first of three children, though only he and his younger brother Erlendur (1706–1772) survived. Jón’s father died prematurely in 1707 due to a smallpox epidemic, whereupon his mother, Þórunn Pálsdóttir (1681–1719), moved with the children to her parents’ farm at Melstaður í Miðfirði (Northwest Iceland).

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Andrew Linn and to those who contributed in the discussion during my presentation. Last but not least, I wish also to thank Prof. Andrew Wawn for having corrected the final version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Páll Vídalín (1667–1727) was the son of Jón Þorláksson í Viðidalstungu, the great-grandson of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, and Hildur Arngrímsdóttir, daughter of Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned. During his lifetime, Páll occupied several important positions: headmaster at Skálholt school (1690–1696), magistrate for the Dalar administrative district in Western Iceland (1696–1708, and 1718–1727), royal census officer (1702–1712), and county magistrate for the Strandir administrative district (1708–1718). A man of great learning, Páll also devoted himself to the cultivation of the Icelandic language. His most notable works are: a collection of poems (*Visnakver Páls lögmanns Vídalíns*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson, 1897), an essay on the state of Iceland and Icelanders (*Deo, regi, patriæ*, printed first in 1768; translated version published in 1985), an essay on the glottonym *lingua danica* (originally in Icelandic (AM 993 4to), Latin translation: *De lingva septentrionalis appellatione*, printed in the 1775 Copenhagen edition of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*), and a work on the lexicon of the lawbook *Jónsbók* (*Skýringar yfir fornyrði lögþókar*, 1854). Most of his writings remain unpublished.

In compliance with his father's will, Jón was given in foster-care to Páll Vídalín at the age of seven in 1712. After completing his basic education with Páll, he pursued further studies at the episcopal school at Hólar, from which he graduated in 1723. He then served Páll as secretary and copyist until 1726, when Árni Magnússon, the renowned manuscript collector and former colleague of Páll Vídalín in the years 1702–1712,<sup>3</sup> invited him to Copenhagen to serve as a copyist. Upon his arrival, Jón enrolled at the University of Copenhagen, graduating in theology in 1731. Until Árni's death in 1730, Jón also served as the manuscript collector's private copyist and secretary, an experience which was to set an indelible mark on Jón's life. On 20 October 1728 much of Denmark's capital burned down in what came to be known as the Great Fire of Copenhagen. Árni's home was also affected and numerous manuscripts were destroyed in the fire.<sup>4</sup> In 1743 Jón returned to Iceland, where he stayed until 1751, before returning to Copenhagen. During this period he served among other things as copyist and translator for his host, Bjarni Halldórsson, the local governor at Þingeyrar (Northwest Iceland). In the last years of his life he continued to pursue the study of Old Icelandic language and literature until his death in 1779.

Although Jón published little during his lifetime, his scholarly output is vast, as well as to a great extent chaotic and difficult to edit. His works include an Icelandic dictionary (AM 433 fol. [Latin/Icelandic]);<sup>5</sup> treatises on runology (AM 413 fol. [Icelandic/Latin/Danish]), education (JS 83 fol. [Icelandic]), and Icelandic orthography (AM 435 fol. [Icelandic]); several essays on the Icelandic language (e.g. in AM 982 4to [Latin]); wordlists (e.g. in AM 1013 4to [Ancient Greek-Icelandic, Latin-Icelandic, French-Icelandic, German/Danish-Latin-Icelandic]); drafts for an Icelandic grammar (AM 433 fol. [Latin/Icelandic], AM 976 4to [Latin], and Thott 1486 4to [Latin/Icelandic]); and several other (mostly incomplete) linguistic and philological works, (cf. Jón Helgason 1926). Jón is also the author of the first

<sup>3</sup> In the years 1702–1712 Páll Vídalín and Árni Magnússon were commissioned by the Danish king Frederick IV to prepare a land register and census of the Icelandic population. The census was completed in 1703 but the land register remained unfinished. The 1703 census was the first project of its kind ever to be undertaken anywhere in the world and is now part of the UNESCO World Heritage. It is accessible through the Icelandic National Archives website at <http://www.manntal.is>.

<sup>4</sup> Árni Magnússon laments the major damage to his manuscript collection in several of his letters, some of which have been printed as an appendix to Jón Ólafsson's report of the Great Fire of Copenhagen (Jón Ólafsson 2005: 118–124). Jón Ólafsson's account of the loss echoes that of Árni. In his report (Jón Ólafsson 2005: 74–75) Jón notes (my translation): 'There [in Árni's private library] perished many good books, both handwritten and printed, so that it is an irremediable loss, for some were unique exemplars, while others are qualitatively irreplaceable.'

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Jakob Benediktsson has registered every lemma and relative definitions on paper slips, which are now on deposit at the Department of Lexicography of the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Reykjavik. A list of lemmata is accessible through the Institute website at [http://www.lexis.hi.is/JOL\\_skra.htm](http://www.lexis.hi.is/JOL_skra.htm).

index of the Arnamagnæan Collection, compiled in 1730 (Thott 1046 fol.),<sup>6</sup> and has been controversially portrayed under the fictitious name of Jón Guðmundsson from Grindavík by the Icelandic Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness in his trilogy *Iceland's Bell* (*Íslandsklukkan*, Halldór Laxness 1943–1946, see furthermore Veturliði Óskarsson 2003).

With this brief outline of Jón Ólafsson's life, learning, and scholarly production in mind, it is now time to move on to the core of this paper, which involves analysis of five representative early works by Jón Ólafsson, in each of which his purist attitudes find significant expression.

### **3 Jón Ólafsson's purism and concern for the mother tongue in his early linguistic writings (1727–1737)**

In this section, a selection of early works by Jón Ólafsson will be discussed. The primary focus will be on purism and language cultivation as revealed in the following works: the translation of Barthold Feind's *Cosmographia* (1727, AM 958 4to [Icelandic], cf. Jón Helgason 1926: 36–38); a Latin lecture on the Icelandic language (not later than 1730 [Latin], AM 1013 4to, ff. 68r–76r, cf. Jón Helgason 1926: 44–46); the introduction to his orthographic treatise (ca. 1733, AM 435 fol. [Icelandic], cf. Jón Helgason 1926: 71–87); a purist wordlist (ca. 1736, AM 1013 4to fol. 37v [German/Danish-Latin-Icelandic], edited in Tarsi 2016, cf. also Jón Helgason 1926: 213); and *Hagþenkir*, a treatise on education (1737, JS 83 fol. [Icelandic], edited in Jón Ólafsson 1996, cf. also Jón Helgason 1926: 159–163).

#### **3.1 Jón Ólafsson's translation of Barthold Feind's *Cosmographia***

According to Jón Helgason (1926: 36), this translation was one of Jón Ólafsson's first works after he arrived in Copenhagen. The translation was probably based on the fifth edition of Feind's work from 1694. In the introduction, Jón adds a *caveat* to the reader (AM 958 4to, f. 30v), where he explicitly states that 'he has sought to give an Icelandic word for each technical term, so that it would be apparent that such terminology also existed in Icelandic, although people preferred the most familiar (albeit alien) terms, rather than the new (Icelandic) ones, even though these explain the concepts as well as the others' (my translation).<sup>7</sup> Although the original text served as a model for Jón's translations of technical

<sup>6</sup> An autobiographical account of Jón Ólafsson's life and scholarly works has been published in Jón Ólafsson 2013 (pp. 221–298).

<sup>7</sup> In Icelandic (normalized spelling, abbreviations silently expanded):

Höfum vér viljað gefa íslenskt orð yfir hverja glossu, að sjást mætti að þau væri til í tungunni, enn þó menn kunni jafnan best við þau brúkanlegu, þó framandi séu, heldur enn þau nýju, þó þau utskýri eins vel efnið sem

terminology, the author's objective was different from that of Feind, in that he sought to make the work accessible to a non-specialist readership (cf. Feind 1707: *An den günstigen Leser*, pp. 2–3).<sup>8</sup> In fact, as is clear from the aforementioned *caveat*, Jón translates the technical terminology into Icelandic in order to expand the Icelandic lexicon, an initiative that testifies to the high priority he placed on both purism and elaboration of function (i.e. the creation of a specific lexicon to describe e.g. new fields of knowledge or to meet the linguistic needs of any other function a language is called to carry out. See furthermore Haugen 1972). Examples of such terminology include: *miðdagshringur*, *miðdegishringur* and *lína* ‘meridian’ (now *hábaugur* or *hádegisbaugur*); *miðjarðarhringur* ‘equator’ (now *miðbaugur*); *sólmerkjahringur* ‘zodiac’ (now *dýrahringur*); *sólstöðuhringur* ‘tropic’ (now *hvarfbaugur*, *hitabelti*); and *sólstöður/sólhvörf* ‘solstice’.<sup>9</sup>

Although Jón’s terminology, if indeed it was his own creation, cannot be said to have received any specific attention from later authors,<sup>10</sup> it is important to recognize how developed his notion of “pure language” was, and how clear it was to him that Icelandic needed to expand its lexicon if it was to achieve parity of esteem with other culturally developed languages.

### **3.2 A Latin lecture on the Icelandic language**

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<sup>8</sup> In German (normalized spelling, *loc. cit.*):

[...] dem Verlangen der Liebhaber zu willfahren die Sternkunst samt allen Kunstmärtern (vocabulis technicis) in unsere Muttersprach zu übersetzen, denjenigen so weder der Lateinischen Sprache kündig noch in Mathesi geübet, den Weg dadurch zu bahnen, damit sie gleichwohl von dieser edlen Wissenschaft einigen Unterricht schöpfen möchten. [...] to fulfill the wish of having translated in our mother tongue the science of the stars and its technical vocabulary for those enthusiasts who neither have knowledge of Latin nor are trained in astronomy, thus paving the way so that it is possible for them to study this noble science by themselves.] (My translation)

<sup>9</sup> Just a few of these terms are listed in Jón Ólafsson’s dictionary: *sólmerkjahringur*, *sólstöður*, *sólhvörf* and *dýrahringur*. The terms listed above as examples may be (at least in part) Jón Ólafsson’s own coinages. Feind uses the following terms: *Mittagscirckel* ‘meridian’, *Mittelkreis* or *Linie* ‘equator’, *Tierkreis* ‘zodiac’, *Wendecirckel* ‘tropic’, *Sonnenwende* ‘solstice’. Jón’s words (‘[...] so that it would be apparent that such terminology existed also in Icelandic [...]’) are possibly not to be interpreted *verbatim*. Rather, they may have signified that Icelandic had the inherent capacity to generate such terminology—in other words, that such words were already extant *in potentia*.

<sup>10</sup> In the history of the Icelandic language, the poet and natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1846) is believed to have coined many words, not least in the topic areas under discussion. In 1842 he published an Icelandic translation of G.F. Ursin’s *Populært Foredrag over Astronomien* (1837). Examples of Jónas’ coinages include *aðdráttarafl* ‘attraction’ and *ljósvaki* ‘ether’ (Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944). Jónas is also thought to have created the word *hitabelti* ‘tropic’, and indeed uses it in his translation. However, the form had already been used by Jón Ólafsson in his translation of Holberg’s *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum* (1741), meaning ‘sweltering region’ (see Holberg 1948: 187).

This lecture, with the title (translated from the Latin original *Emphas in lingvæ islandicæ peculiarem variis ostendat exemplis*) *The emphasis proper to the Icelandic tongue is demonstrated with various examples*, was given by Jón not later than 1730 at a college gathering, according to Jón Helgason (1926: 213). It is an eloquent celebration and glorification of the Icelandic tongue. After an introductory address, the text follows a clearly organized structure. Firstly, the substance is presented. Jón then explains why there are so many languages in the world. The argument is then divided into four main chapters, in which Jón explains why Icelandic is an ancient language. The main claim on which the whole argument rests is that the older the language, the more emphatic (semantically clear) it is. The four chapters focus on the following issues: 1) the relationship and conformity of lexeme and relative meaning; 2) the expressive similarity between Icelandic and Ancient Greek; 3) the multiplicity and specificity of lexemes for similar concepts (e.g. two different words for human and animal flesh); and 4) the euphony of the language's sounds and pronunciation. For example, he claims (AM 1013 4to, f. 69v) that Icelandic is the oldest (surviving) literary language in Europe, and that (ff. 70r–70v) Icelandic is purer than Danish. Moreover, he notes that Icelandic has undergone just minor changes during the centuries, whereas German has changed more dramatically. As an example for early German, he quotes (f. 71v) the *Sacramento Argentariæ*.

The bold claim that Icelandic is the oldest literary language of Europe, having changed little from its earliest forms, has a parallel in the third chapter of the first book of Arngrímur Jónsson's *Crymogæa*. According to Jakob Benediktsson (1987: 47), it was Arngrímur who initiated discussion of Icelandic purism at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it is indeed in the same chapter of *Crymogæa* (Arngrímur Jónsson 1609: 28–29) that he explicitly states that Icelandic should be protected from foreign influences (see also Kjartan G. Ottósson 1990: 20–23).

### **3.3 The Introduction to Jón's orthographic Treatise**

The first orthographic work in the Icelandic literary tradition is the anonymous *First Grammatical Treatise* from ca. 1130–1140, in which the author sets himself the goal of providing his fellow countrymen with an alphabet that would facilitate writing in the vernacular. Although a work of this kind emerges so early in the Icelandic literary corpus, writings of this type were not popular over the following centuries, so that orthographic

accounts are rare, whether descriptive or normative.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1730s Jón Ólafsson writes his own orthographic treatise (Jón Helgason 1926: 71–87). The only manuscript of this work is AM 435 fol., now preserved at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík. The introduction is instructive in revealing our author’s attitude towards the orthography of his mother tongue. In it, Jón Ólafsson lists the three elements that should govern contemporary orthography, namely 1) the orthography to be found in old works (mainly from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, which Jón calls *secula docta*), 2) etymology, and 3) common pronunciation, together with the customary usage of learned men.<sup>12</sup> Priority, Jón argues, should be given to common usage. However, in cases where it is etymologically wrong, reference should be made to the orthography found in old works. This is put into practice, for example, when he restores <y> at appropriate places instead of the generalized <i>, since both graphemes denoted the same phoneme at the time he was writing.<sup>13, 14</sup> However, Jón advocates critical use of old sources. This is mainly for two reasons: a) there may be scribal errors in the manuscripts, and b) the language of the oldest Icelandic works might not reflect the actual state of the Icelandic language, viz. since Icelandic has changed (albeit relatively little) from the language as preserved in the oldest works, it would be wrong blindly to follow the orthography of these

<sup>11</sup> Jón Helgason (1926: 75) notes Jón Ólafsson’s complaint that no one before him has written about Icelandic orthography. This statement by Jón Helgason is however controversial, as Jón Ólafsson (AM 435 fol., f. 4r) explicitly names Óláfr Þórðarson hvitaskáld (1210–1259), who at the time was thought to be the author of all the grammatical treatises in the *Codex Wormianus* of Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (AM 242 fol.). Moreover, in a marginal note, Jón observes that if Óláfr was the author of the orthographic treatise (‘auctor ad orthographia Eddu’ in the original), then he did not invent all the rules himself since similar, if not identical, orthographies are to be found in pre-13<sup>th</sup>-century works.

<sup>12</sup> Jón lists (AM 435 fol., fol. 3v) the following learned men as reliable models: Árni Magnússon; Páll Vídalín; Jón Porkelsson Vídalín (1666–1720), bishop of Skálholt; Jón Halldórsson í Hitardal (1665–1736), priest and author (among other texts) of two biographical works about the bishops of the two Icelandic episcopal sees, Hólar and Skálholt; Eyjólfur Jónsson á Völlum í Svarfaðardal (1670–1745), priest, writer, and teacher at the episcopal school at Hólar; and Jón Magnússon (1662–1738), Árni’s brother and author of an Icelandic grammar (Jón Magnússon 1997). Jón Magnússon was moreover one of Jón Ólafsson’s teachers at Páll Vídalín’s.

<sup>13</sup> In discussing his orthographic treatise, Jón Ólafsson (1853: 317) emphasizes that his work sought to provide advice on correct spelling, especially of the letter *y*. In fact, well into the treatise (ff. 117r–v), Jón explains the origin of the confusion between <i> and <y>. Moreover, he says that those who first corrected this orthographical feature in accordance with the orthography of older manuscripts were Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, who, in turn, taught the correct orthography to their copyists.

<sup>14</sup> Jón’s dependence on the orthography of Old Icelandic manuscripts, is apparent in problematic cases, where he cannot establish a word’s etymology and thus decide whether <i> or <y> should be written. See, for example, the definition of the word *bylta* in the younger part of his dictionary (AM 433 fol.):

*billta: f. lapsus, casus sensu unde forte *bullt*, n. (*volutatio*, definition s.v. *bullt*, N/A) sed si *billta* inde est derivanda scribi debet *byllta*, sed vox non est antiqua, ideoque in veteribus codicibus non invenitur, ideoque nec sciri potest, quomodo sit scribenda. [billta: f. ‘fall, (grammatical) case’ which is perhaps derived from *bullt*, n. (‘rolling, wallowing’, definition s.v. *bullt*, N/A). If *billta* indeed derives from that word, one should write *byllta*. However, this word is not ancient, for it does not appear in old manuscripts. Thus, it cannot be determined in which way this word should be written.]* (My translation)

texts; it would be better to adopt common usage in problematic cases.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of Jón’s learning, it is interesting to note how his apprenticeship with Páll Vídalín and, later, Árni Magnússon played a key role in shaping his scholarly approach, not least with respect to orthography. In fact, Páll and Árni, for both of whom Jón worked as a copyist, laid particular emphasis on teaching their copyists correct orthography, viz. based on ancient usage and etymology.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, according to Jón Helgason (1926: 72), Árni Magnússon was one of the first learned Icelanders correctly to distinguish between etymological <i><i>> and <y>. In addition, he made extensive use of an etymologically-based orthography (cf. Tarsi 2016: 78–79).

### 3.4 A purist wordlist in AM 1013 4to

AM 1013 4to contains several wordlists that can be linked to Jón’s activity as a lexicographer. One in particular (fol. 37v) can be labelled as purist. With its title (translated from the Latin original *Germanica-Danica, quæ præve in linguam Islandicam introducta sunt*) *German and Danish words which have wrongly been introduced into Icelandic*, the list shows loanwords from German and Danish and their respective “more correct” Icelandic word.

It is often claimed that Icelandic purism aims at introducing a word formed from native lexical material for every already extant loanword, or seeks to prevent the introduction of new loanwords by resorting to the Icelandic lexicon. If these were the main priorities of the most radical Icelandic purism, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we may note a degree of flexibility, foresight, and linguistic maturity in Jón’s approach to such issues. In fact, as revealed in his early writings, he is fully aware that language undergoes change both in time and space. Moreover, from the typology of loans in the list under discussion,<sup>17</sup> it is clear that they are all common words, i.e. words for which Icelandic had more or less exact equivalents, and for which borrowing was perhaps seen as unnecessary. However, this latter

<sup>15</sup> As an example, Jón says that in *Íslendingabók* (e.g. AM 113 b fol., f. 1v20) the word á ‘river’ occurs written <ꝑ> instead of <aa>. The latter is a common 18<sup>th</sup>-century way of writing what nowadays is written <á>.

<sup>16</sup> In *Skyringar yfir fornyrði lögbókar* (Páll Vídalín 1854: 392) the author states that his copyists are children, a claim confirmed by Jón Ólafsson ([forthcoming], KBAdd. 3 fol., f. 82v), who states that he began writing for his mentor at the age of 12. The article to which reference is made here is *prioritas dotis eður heimanfylgja*, dated to 1721 by Jón Helgason (1926: 9, footnote 4), viz. when Jón Ólafsson was about to turn 16, since Páll prefacing his explanation of the legal term by noting that he fell sick at the *Alþingi* when the article was written. Elsewhere in *Skyringar* (p. 138, s.v. *Dönsk tunga*) Páll Vídalín affirms that since the death of Bishop Brynjólfur Jónsson in 1675, nobody but Árni Magnússon (and his pupils) could spell Icelandic correctly.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. (normalized orthography, favoured native terms in brackets) *kortur* ‘short’ (*stuttur*), *jungfrú* and *jómfrú* ‘virgin’ (*mær*), *pláss* ‘place, space, room’ (*ríum*), *sprok* ‘language’ (*tunga*). See furthermore Tarsi 2016, in particular pp. 86–97.

dimension of linguistic thought, namely that borrowing is not to be regarded as dangerous *tout court*, but only when lexically redundant, so to speak, does not emerge explicitly in Jón's linguistic writings before 1759, in an essay titled (translated from the Latin original *De causis corruptelæ linguae Islandicæ*) *On the causes of the decadence of the Icelandic language* (Lbs 853 4to, edited in Jón Ólafsson 1998: 147–154).

### **3.5 A treatise on education: Hagþenkir**

In 1737, Jón composes a treatise on education, *Hagþenkir* (JS 83 fol.), in which he advocates an approach to teaching which was largely new at the time. In a nutshell, Jón recommends that educators should take account of the child's natural inclinations. Among other things, he advises the reader as to which subjects are most important for a child to learn, and in which order they should be studied. In the context of the present discussion, it is important to notice Jón's comment on the use of Icelandic, which closely resembles current pedagogical practice. He notes (Jón Ólafsson 1996: 51–52, cf. furthermore pp. xvii–xviii) that one should write in a clear and lucid style, avoiding foreign words when Icelandic ones are available, and making use of Icelandic rather than Danish or Latin syntax. He warns the reader against an unnecessarily archaizing manner, favouring a common style that reflects Icelandic as spoken by ordinary folk. This is subsequently reiterated in connection with the language of contemporary legislators (see Jón Ólafsson 1996: 61).

In the context of Icelandic purism, Jón's comments are perfectly aligned with his earlier scholarship, but also with today's Icelandic language policy. Nevertheless, he does not always follow his own recommendations, often using loanwords, especially from Latin and Danish, where Icelandic equivalents are available. This does not, however, detract from the value of Jón's reflections, as it was common for Icelandic scholars at the time occasionally to borrow learned terms, mostly from Latin. Jón's primary concern may have been the language usage peculiar to state officials, and indeed this theme is directly addressed in his *On the causes of the decadence of the Icelandic language* (Jón Ólafsson 1998: 147–148), where he states that poor language use of this kind is bound to spread among the less educated by virtue of its prestigious societal provenance.

## **4 The red thread: from the origins of the Icelandic linguistic purism to Jón Ólafsson**

As section 3 seeks to show, Jón Ólafsson's purist attitudes towards his mother tongue were clearly evident in his juvenile writings. Moreover, we have noted that such attitudes were

composite, in that they engaged with the language from several different perspectives. In his translation of Barthold Feind's *Cosmographia*, Jón advocates the implementation and elaboration of a scientific lexicon for Icelandic rather than resorting to so-called necessity borrowings. In his lecture on the Icelandic language, he heaps praise on his mother tongue by depicting it as noble, ancient, and expressively powerful, worthy to stand alongside other European languages. In particular, Icelandic deserves to be shown the same cultivation already enjoyed by other European languages (e.g. Danish and German). In the introduction to his orthographic treatise, however, Jón sets out some guiding principles for Icelandic orthography. The wordlist in AM 1013 4to shows a more familiar aspect of language purism, namely that of resorting to the inherited lexicon in order to avoid unnecessary borrowings. As the title of the list shows, these borrowings are seen as having been introduced into the Icelandic language much to its detriment. Finally, in *Hagþenkir*, his treatise on education, when addressing linguistic issues, Jón not only reiterates the necessity of avoiding foreign words when native ones are available, but also recommends a written style which is clear and close to the common spoken language. In particular, he warns against the influence of German and Danish on Icelandic syntax.

This multi-faceted approach was not Jón's own creation. Its roots can be traced back at least to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with Arngrímur Jónsson's address to his fellow countrymen in *Crymogæa*. Here, Arngrímur urges Icelanders to avoid unnecessary borrowing, especially from Danish and German, and recommends the full use of the intrinsic potential of their mother tongue. Where did Jón Ólafsson first encounter such purist notions in respect of his mother tongue? As mentioned before, both Páll Vídalín and Árni Magnússon played a very important role as Jón Ólafsson's mentors. However, such a *forma mentis* must have been part of Jón's early learning, and therefore taught to him by Páll Vídalín.

Páll was probably the most learned man in Iceland during Jón Ólafsson's early years, and it is more than an educated guess to claim that he had a major influence on Jón. Moreover, Páll was a direct descendant of Arngrímur, via his mother Hildur, Arngrímur's youngest daughter (on Hildur, see Jón Ólafsson 2013: 108–110, and Jón Ólafsson [forthcoming]).<sup>18</sup> Although I have been unable to find any direct discussion by Jón of Páll's attitude towards his native language, it goes without saying that such a learned man,

<sup>18</sup> In KBAdd. 3 fol. Jón Ólafsson describes Hildur Arngrímsdóttir as a learned woman, who knew the basics of Latin, which she taught to her children. Moreover, Jón reports that he used to talk and listen to her on a daily basis when he was at Páll's home.

who knew the old Icelandic laws by heart (cf. Jón Ólafsson 2014: 116), and who wrote about archaic terms in those laws (edited in Páll Vídalín 1854), and whose family was descended from Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned,<sup>19</sup> must have held his own mother tongue in such high esteem, that it is hard to believe that as a mentor he did not pass on such attitudes. Indeed, the influence of his teaching methods on Jón Ólafsson's *Hagþenkir* is clear, for in his work he advocates a teaching method that sought to harmonize with a child's natural inclinations, and this is indeed the method that Páll used with his foster-children (cf. Jón Ólafsson 2014: 144–146).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Little is known about Páll's early learning. However, Jón Ólafsson (2013: 116) notes that Páll's mother Hildur played a role in his education until he was sent to school at Hólar. Moreover, at the age of seven, Páll was sent to stay with a certain Þorlákur, probably one of his father's cousins, where he became acquainted with reading and writing. After this, he was sent to his maternal uncle, the Reverend Bjarni Arngrímsson, to learn Latin.

<sup>20</sup> Jón Ólafsson (1996: 30) could be referring to his mentor Páll when he speaks of a learned man, an experienced headmaster, who used to say that the first aim of every teacher should be to understand each pupil's mind and to adapt accordingly.

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