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## GUESTS AND HOSTS ON THE SOUNDS OF MODERN ICELANDIC

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For over a hundred and fifty years, foreign tourists have been sharing their impressions of Iceland: its geography, economy, culture, and, among other things, language. Foreigners' impressions of a language new to them are not devoid of interest, for outsiders often hear the subphonemic nuances that native speakers miss by definition. They also make typical mistakes while assessing the pronunciation of a language they hear for the first time. Their observations add a special dimension to the traditional descriptions of this or that language. The present paper summarizes the notes on Icelandic vowels and consonants by English, German, and other tourists made during their stay in Iceland. Of equal interest is the advice given by the authors of Icelandic textbooks to foreigners planning to study Icelandic, and by foreigners, sometimes trained philologists, who warn their prospective readers of the main difficulties of Icelandic phonetics. The survey offered here must be fairly complete, because it is based on the rich collections of books in the Fiske collection (Cornell University, USA) and the two great libraries in Reykjavík. Special emphasis has been laid on the most "exotic" features of the Icelandic phonemic system: devoiced /b d g/, devoiced /l m n r/ before /p t k/, preaspiration, and the pronunciation of [i:] and the diphthongs, of which short [ou] creates especially great difficulties to foreigners. The importance of foreigners' observations has been once discussed by an Icelandic researcher, but a full-length survey of this type appears for the first time.

**Keywords:** Icelandic phonetics, impressions by and advice to foreigners, devoicing, preaspiration, short diphthongs.

At one time, in my effort to get acquainted with everything written about Icelandic phonetics, I looked through nearly a hundred travelogs and textbooks by tourists and Icelanders, whose goal was to inform

their readers about Iceland's geography, culture, and language. Many authors said nothing about the subject that interested me, but some did. My work became possible because I spent the summer of 1982 between the Fiske Collection at Cornell University and two great libraries in Reykjavík. There I prepared an edition of Stefán Einarsson's selected articles and hoped to put together a survey of the literature on Icelandic phonetics. The survey turned out to be too huge an enterprise to complete. For decades, even the paper presented here, which is based on a tiny section of what I gathered in 1982, remained on the proverbial back burner, but I never forgot about it. My research was funded by the American-Scandinavian foundation. I am grateful for their generosity and have the best memories of Ithaca, NY, and my hosts in Iceland.

Naturally, I made no revolutionary discoveries, but this outcome could be expected. People hear the slightest accent in their native language; yet, unless they are specialists, they can seldom describe their impressions in clear terms. By contrast, the same people are, predictably, unaware of non-phonemic distinctions in their mother tongue. For instance, Russian speakers do not realize that they lengthen all stressed vowels or that, word-initially, their vowel /o/ is realized as [ʉo]. English speakers hear the difference between *let* and *late*, but have a hard time believing that /ei/ (in its standard variety) is a diphthong. To them, the opposition between /e/ and /ei/ is one between short and long, and they keep pronouncing German *lesen* 'to read' as [leizən]. Foreigners are amused by the obtuseness of native speakers, for they hear [ʉo], [ei], and the rest without difficulty. Apparently, the Norwegian scholar Olof Brock heard the traces left by apocopated vowels in Russian. Likewise, only outsiders hear the [œ] timbre of French consonants in word-final position.

An additional obstacle in evaluating foreigners' opinions about the sounds of Modern Icelandic is the use of multifarious metaphors (metaphors in phonetics is the subject of Fonagy's 1963 book). Thus, consonants are called hard, soft, thick, thin, light, dark, etc., while Germans are fond of characterizing vowels as *spitz* and *trüb*. Translating such epithets into the universally understandable terms (voiced, palatalized, cacuminal, and the like) is sometimes an unsafe procedure. Occasionally one is regaled with such a statement: "The voices and accent of the Icelandic people are soft and pretty" [Leith, 1908, p. 52] or about Eiríkr Magnússon: "The rich rhythm and resonance of the ancient tongue were a delight to the ear" [Headley, 1875–1877, p. 289].

Even much later, one can run into something like this: “Icelandic is generally spoken crisply and definitely with pure vowels, and thus resembles Italian or Spanish in many ways. ...But it drops extra vowels where one suffices and consonants when they get in our way... In this way it resembles French” [Einar Pálsson, 1975–1977, p. 8]. This was written by an Icelander for the edification of foreigners. The texts in his book are quite reasonable, but one is embarrassed to read the phonetic introduction.

It can be taken for granted that, as a general rule, travelers of the past, unless they were familiar with the scene, expected all Icelanders to have a uniform pronunciation from south to north and from east to west. Yet, even though dialectal differences in Icelandic are considerably less dramatic than elsewhere in the West European languages, they are not negligible and have been described in minute detail. Nor do we know anything about the native dialects of the German, Dutch, and other authors, and expect such words, as, for example, *Deutsch* to mean *Hochdeutsch* (an unsafe, even dangerous assumption).

In leafing through tour guides, general descriptions of the country, and manuals for foreigners, I was mainly interested in what the speakers of English, German, Dutch, French, Italian, and the continental Scandinavian languages wrote about the difference between [i:] in *tíma* ‘to happen, occur’ and [ɪ:] in *rita* ‘to write’ (the second vowel is more open but closer than [e:], while [ɪ] is more open than the “average” European [i]). I also wondered what foreigners could say about the so-called short diphthongs. Of even greater interest was foreigners’ reaction to the “exotic” consonants of Modern Icelandic: the practically devoiced [b d g], [gʰ kʰ] in words like *gefa* ‘to give’, *ketill* ‘kettle’, *gína* ‘to open the mouth wide’, *kippa* ‘to pull’, and especially in *gjalda* ‘to pay’, *eggja* ‘to sharpen, whet; egg on’, *kjósa* ‘choose’, and the like, whose pronunciation poses great difficulties to the speakers, unused to palatalized velars. Equally “exotic” are the devoiced /l m n r/ in *hjálpa* ‘to help’, *kempa* ‘warrior’, *henta* ‘to suit, pass’, *harpa* ‘harp’, and so forth. Initial *hl-*, *hn-*, *hr-* are also tricky: one can equate them with the devoiced resonants (liquids and nasals) or hear [hl hn hr]. Either way, such sounds do not exist in any of the major West European languages. The tourists rarely satisfied my expectations, but a few remarks were worth salvaging.

Of special importance is preaspiration. The first professional students of it, including some Icelanders, heard not only an [h]-like sound,

traditionally associated with this insertion before the orthographic *pp*, *tt*, *kk*, as well as *p*, *t*, and *k*, followed by *l* and *n*, but also some semblance of [x] and even [f]. Although modern researchers reject those conclusions, no one has explained why several reliable scholars recorded the non-existent variants. I hoped to find some new data on this subject, and indeed, a few observations did turn up. I noted such observations, without trying to evaluate them.

The authors of travelogs and of more general books about Iceland instructed their countrymen how to read Icelandic words. Their starting point was the letters of the Icelandic alphabet. Below, I will single out only the less trivial remarks.

Halldór Briem wrote a textbook of English for Icelanders. It appeared in two editions. I used the second [Briem, 1875], which did not undergo any revision. Briem says that *a* in *paper* = Icel. *e*. Perhaps he did not hear the glide in Engl. [ei]. This equation will recur below and in the section on Guðbrandur Vigfússon. It might be that their long vowel had a glide (the tendency of long Icelandic vowels toward diphthongization has been described in many special works). Helgi J. Halldórsson [Helgi, 1954, bls. 6] went so far as to equate [iə] in Engl. *beer*, *here* with Icel.<sup>1</sup> *í*. Briem's note explaining that he referred to the variety of northern English and Scots, where [ei] is not pronounced, makes his equation hard to interpret, because the main text appears on p. 2 and the note on northern English is added only on p. 9. Did he stick to the northern norm throughout? More thought-provoking is his statement (p. 4) that the vowel of Engl. *cut* is "dull" [ö] (*óglöggt* [ö]). Does *óglöggt* here mean the same as Germ. *trüb*, mentioned above? In the nineteenth century, the English vowel in *cut*, *nut*, *rut* must indeed have resembled [ö]. For instance, the name *Ruskin* and a few others were transliterated into Russian with the Cyrillic letter *ë*.

At about the same time, Warnford Lock (1879; or is his family name simply *Lock*?), in a fully dependable book on Iceland, also said that Icel. *e* (I assume he meant the long vowel) was equivalent to *a* in Engl. *take*, *same* (p. 289), and there is of course no mention of the North or Scotland. He also identified Icel. [hv] with the sound of Engl. *wh*. Did he distinguish between Engl. *which* and *witch*? Many British speakers did at

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in this paper: Dan. — Danish, Engl. — English, Germ. — German, Icel. — Icelandic.

that time and still do. All the other authors recorded *hv* words with [kv]. Unexpected is his identification of Icel. short [a] with the vowel of Engl. *marry*. But Guðbrandur Vigfússon made the same statement. Were they the only ones to have noticed how open Icel. [a] is? Jón Ólafsson's [Jón Ólafsson, 1882, bls. 1–3] comparison would have been more useful if it were not couched in such vague terms (the vowel of *cut* he wrote, has a stronger “smack” of *o* or *a* than of *e* or *i*, etc.); *keimur* ‘taste, smack’ is not an uncommon word in Icelandic phonetic texts.

The Icelandic sentences transcribed by Harley [Harley, 1889, p. 73] would not have deserved a mention if she had not noticed palatalization and not written Icel. *get* ‘can’ as *gyet* (only once!). She also paid attention to the voicelessness of Icel. [d] and [b], even in initial position, as follows from her *taulitith* for Icel. *dálítið* ‘a little’ and *tíl þaka* ‘back’ (*tíl-þaka*). I wonder how she managed to hear *gerið s(v)o vel* ‘please’ as *kurisō* (she did not explain her constant use of the macron: length?).

Anna Bjarnadóttir's book for beginners (1958) is, as could be expected, fully professional. She warned Icelanders against typical mistakes, but did not mention the difference between Icel. and Engl. [s], so obvious to but so rarely described by outsiders, even though few Icelanders get rid of “lispings” when they speak foreign languages. Nor did she comment on the peculiarities of the closed front vowels, which give trouble to foreigners trying to speak Icelandic without an accent.

Of special importance is Jespersen (1906). The book is about English, and in his introduction, Jespersen says nothing about Icelandic, but in the version published in Reykjavík, the chapter on phonetics was adapted to the needs of the Icelandic readership. This short chapter is excellent. I don't know whether Jespersen edited or looked through it (probably not), but, in my opinion, it is still the best and the most reliable old comparison of the sounds of English and Icelandic.

Early German-Icelandic and Icelandic-German comparisons are also of unequal value. Bernhard Kahle was a renowned philologist, and his knowledge of Icelandic left nothing to be desired, but in the 1900 book on his stay in Iceland, he devoted less than half a page to phonetics. Of some interest is his remark (s. IV) that Icel. *ey* ~ *ei* are somewhat like [ei] in the pronunciation of the East Prussians. Another great expert, Paul Herrmann (1907), made the same observation: *ei/ey*, he said, is like long *ej* in Königsberg. Unfortunately, neither of them described that vowel, and we, who were not born in Königsberg in the nineteenth

century, cannot benefit by their observations. One always feels puzzled at encountering bizarre transcriptions. According to an Icelandic proverb, sharp is the guest's eye, and it has once been remarked that sharp is a guest's ear [Jón A. Jónsson, 1951]. However, what could Carl Küchler (1911) hear? Not unexpectedly, he transcribed Icel. [u:] as German *uh* (*hús* 'house' = *huhs*), but he also rendered Icel. *tunga* 'tongue' and *munkur* 'monk' as *tuhnga* and *muhnkürr*, and he heard *hafði* 'had' as *habbði*.

It seems that the hardest vowel to describe is Icel. [ou]. On paper, it looks like a regular diphthong, but few people among foreigners and even native speakers hear the glide. Schweitzer [Schweitzer, 1895, s. 168] heard only [o:]. According to Zugmayer (1903, an unnumbered page at the beginning of the book), Icel. *ó* sounds almost like German [u]. The description of Icelandic sounds in Erkes (1906) is, on the whole, reliable, though one wonders how he pronounced German diphthongs. He says that in *eng* ~ *enk* (which today are [*eink*<sup>h</sup>]), the diphthong is the same as in German *Eis*, while the Icelandic letter *æ* has the value of Germ. *ei* in *zwei* 'two', *beide* 'both', *kein* 'no; not a', if pronounced broadly (*breit gesprochen*). About the value of the orthographic Icel. *ei* ~ *ey* he remarked that they differed from German (*Hochdeutsch*) *ei*, because they were much sharper (or more "pointed": *spitzer*) and were followed by a glide (*mit nachgeschlagenem i*). In sum, he concluded, the closest analog of Icel. [ei] was the vowel in Engl. *late*, *say*, *stay*. His observations are subtle but confusing. No longer surprising is his equation of Icel. *ó* in *skóli* 'school', *fólk* 'people', and *stór* 'big' with Germ. *o* in *Ofen* 'stove'. He noted the voicelessness of Icel. /b d/, heard *nótt* 'night' and *rétt* 'right' as *nocht* and *rjächt*, but said nothing about palatalized /k g/.

Like Kahle and Herrmann, Jón Ófeigsson was an outstanding specialist. He wrote a great German-Icelandic dictionary and an excellent textbook of German. The textbook ran into five editions. I have seen the fifth and a reprint of the second (1951 = 1917). His comparison of German and Icelandic sounds is fully reliable. Of note is his remark that Germ. [i:] is very similar (*likast*) to Icel. [i] (p. 7).

Adrian Mohr's impressions of Iceland (1925) contain, among others, a long and trivial chapter on the language; he thought that *Islands Maul*, with a pun on Germ. *Maul* 'animal's mouth' or simply 'mouth' (vulgar) ~ Icel. *mál* 'language' is witty. Among other things, he transcribed the beginning of "Lorelei." Here are the first two lines: "Eg veit ekki af hver-

skonar völdum / So veiknandi dapur ég er” (‘I don’t know by what forces / I am [made] so weakened’): “Jäck weht äcki aw kwehrskonar wölldüm / so wehknandi dahpür jäck ehr.” He did not hear the diphthong in *veit* [weht], and it is unclear whether he heard preaspiration in the mysterious *weiknandi* or whether his *ei* stands for [e:], as in *veit* [weht]. (He also took *völdum* for “Welt, world” and mistranslated the word.)

With the age of the direct method, advocated by Henry Sweet, Otto Jespersen and their allies, and with the appearance of scholarly articles and books on Icelandic phonetics, the impressionistic etudes of the type being discussed here lost even the little appeal they might have in the past. Therefore, in this cursory survey, I seldom go beyond the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Certain observations, such as Germ. [e:] = Icel. [i], probably became commonplace rather early. But even much later, one occasionally finds equations like Germ. [o:] = Icel. ó, or Germ. [b d g p t k] = Icel. [b d g p t k] [Jón Gíslason, 1951, bls. 11–13]; the same in the 1956 edition.

Occasionally undecipherable remarks turn up. Steingrím Thorsteinsson (sic) (1886: III) wrote that Germ. [s] in word-initial position is weaker (*linara*) than Icel. [s] and is pronounced with a kind of sibilant coloring (*með eins konar blísturhljóð*). Did he mean that Icel. *s* is a lisping sound? Or did he refer to *s* in Germ. *sp*, *st*? His mastery of *Hochdeutsch* is unknown, but he pronounced *Tag* ‘day’ with the *ach-Laut* at the end. Other than that, he identified Icel. ó as Germ. [o:], a familiar identification, and noted that Icel. *bb* and *gg* designated devoiced stops.

Dutch comparisons with Icelandic are few and late. One of them was written by Van Hamel (1933) and therefore deserves a brief mention. All kinds of predictable things are said on p. VIII. But, curiously, *dóttir* ‘daughter’ and *dráttur* ‘draft; traction’, both with preaspiration, appear as “Dutch” *döchtir* and *drauchtur* there.

I have found little more in the Danish sources. (Let me repeat that I tried not to go beyond 1930.) Since I skipped Rasmus Rask, the earliest book on my list was Iversen (1861). Like some German authors surveyed here, he did not hear the Icelandic diphthong [ou], for he wrote (s. 11) that the letter ó has the same value as *o* in Dan. *rod* ‘root’. But to his ear Icel. [e] was always open, like *æ* in Dan. *tæt* ‘thick’ or *e* in Dan. *let* ‘light; weak’. He also noted that Icel. [i] was like Dan. [e] (*ibidem*).

C. W. Paijkull, Iversen’s contemporary, spoke Icelandic with some ease and was praised for his mastery of the language, which is remarkable, because among the Scandinavians, the Danes usually speak Icelan-

dic with the heaviest accent. Paijkull observed (with surprise, as he says) the similarity between the Icelandic and the Swedish *tonefald* [Paijkull, 1867, s. 59]. I understood *tonefald* as ‘intonation’, and it made little sense to me. A year later, the book appeared in English. There, on p. 64, I found *accent* for *tonefald*, which, I suspect, showed the translator’s embarrassment. *Accent* in this context means nothing. Paijkull could not refer to what in books on phonetics is called *tonelag* (Icelandic lacks the equivalent of acc. 1 and acc. 2 of the Swedish-Norwegian type). Did he perhaps think of the quantitative relations [V:C] ~ [VC:] common to Icelandic and Swedish but alien to Danish?

Another author who commented on the differences between Icelandic and Danish sounds was the tireless Finnur Jónsson. He spent most of his adult life in Copenhagen and must have been a good judge of the subject. Yet his remarks are few and uninformative. He wrote (1905, s. 6) that the difference between [b] and [p] in Icelandic is much greater than in Danish. Apparently (assuming that this observation is correct), even though Danish and Icelandic have undergone the same consonant shift, the realization of their stops need not be in all respects identical. Bruun (1921) referred to Finnur Jónsson’s table of Icelandic-Danish sound correspondences, and some additional information emerges from his list. We discover that Finnur Jónsson, too, considered the vowel designated by the letter *ó* as a monophthong: it was, in his opinion, only more open than Dan. [o:] in *flora* ‘flora’. The rest is fairly trivial: *u* = *ø*, *ö* = *ö* (but very open), *au* = *öj* (very open), *æ* = *aj*, etc.

Jón Ófeigsson, whose contribution has been mentioned above in connection with German, also wrote the phonetic section in his and Jóhannes Sigfússon’s elementary textbook of Danish [1909, bls. 3–6]. It is probably the most professional short comparison of the sounds of the two languages in the early twentieth century books of this type. He says that Dan. [o:] resembles Icel. *ó* and *ú* pronounced at the same time. Apparently, he was aware of a glide in Icel. [ou], but, unlike Finnur Jónsson, he heard no difference between initial [b d g] in Icelandic and Danish. According to him, in the articulation of Danish [ð], the front of the tongue (and not only its tip) is active. (There is no *stød* in Icelandic, and Jón Ófeigsson remarked that this hiccup-like closure of the vocal chords can be mastered only after many years of living among the Danes. As a curiosity, I can mention Ágúst Sigurðsson’s advice [Ágúst Sigurðsson, 1939, bls. 140] to beginners not to bother about *stød*.)



Icelandic textbooks by the native speakers of the Romance languages are few and, as concerns our subject, uninformative. Twice did Paul Passy's name turn up in my material. Valtýr Guðmundsson (1891) wrote a detailed article about the books by foreigners who had dealt with Iceland and Icelandic literature. Pp. 268–73 are about Passy's book *De nordica lingua*. One finds a passage from Snorri's *Edda* in transcription. The word *áttir* 'directions' appears there without preaspiration, but Passy distinguished preaspiration quite well, as follows from Jón A. Jónsson [1951, bls. 115, note 16]. He had access to Passy's correspondence with Rolf Arpi (a researcher who combined expertise in folklore with a thorough knowledge of phonetics and other things Icelandic). Passy transcribed *úttalið* 'pronunciation' and *þetta* 'that' as [uhttalið] and [þehta], but I cannot explain his [h] in *víst* 'certain' (n.); 'probably' with the pronunciation [vihst] (p. 115, note 13).

There is almost nothing to report from the Slavic-speaking countries. P. S. Pallas's 1789–1791 dictionary contains a short list of Icelandic words printed in Cyrillic. The transliteration is, naturally, crude (see [Lieberman, 1994]). No Russian textbooks of Modern Icelandic exists, and for V. P. Berkov's 1962 Icelandic-Russian dictionary transcriptions were written by Árni Böðvarsson. In Frýba's description of Iceland for the Czech readers (Frýba *et al.* 1975, s. 21), half a page is devoted to the value of the letters. The information is trivial, but, curiously, *dóttir* 'daughter' is transcribed as [douchtir]. Other than that, Czech scholars have not neglected the study of Icelandic (see [Heger, 1997]), but the article is only about literature, old and contemporary). As a curiosity, I can mention the fact that one of the best overviews of the differences between the vowels of Icelandic and an "average" European language can be found in an old textbook of Esperanto (Þorstein [sic] Þorsteinsson 1909: 1).

Among the authors whose opinions have been cited above, four were distinguished, even renowned scholars: Finnur Jónsson, Paul Herrmann, Bernhard Kahle, and A. G. van Hamel. However, their area of expertise was Old Icelandic philology, and none of them was a phonetician. Jón Ófeigsson, an outstanding lexicographer, probably knew more about the formation of sounds than even Finnur Jónsson, who wrote countless articles about things Icelandic, but not about the details of pronunciation. The only relatively early professional phonetician who touched on the differences between the impressions made by the vowels and consonants of Icelandic and of other languages was Stefán Einarsson.

At the celebration of the Icelandic Alþingi (1930), the Finnish ambassador, who did not know Icelandic, read the speech translated for him. SE stood far from the tribune but understood everything. The Finnish accent, he concluded [1934, p. 142], is “almost Icelandic” (for that reason, Finnish always seemed to him a beautiful language).

In the same 1934 article, he offered a short comparison of Icelandic and English sounds, with a few remarks added about German. SE’s German, as I understand, was active from early on, for his first book (dissertation) was written in that language. In 1924–1925, he spent some time in Cambridge (England) and in 1926, at the age of twenty-nine, settled in Baltimore (see an essay on his life in [Stefán Einarsson, 1986]). When he referred to English, he probably meant the East Coast variety of American English with which he was familiar. His accent remained heavy until the end, but being unable to articulate certain sounds does not mean that the person concerned, especially a trained specialist, fails to hear the main features of a foreign language.

In SE’s opinion, distinction between short and long vowels unites Icelandic, English, and German, but, as he pointed out, in Icelandic and German, vocalic length is not accompanied by diphthongization, while to his ear English vowels were almost erratically unstable. All three languages have diphthongs; yet, according to him, the short diphthongs of Icelandic are particularly hard for foreigners to master (p. 147). Many people share his view. Finnish probably sounds so similar to Icelandic because both languages have geminates and distinguish stops as aspirated and non-aspirated, rather than voiced and voiceless. The degree of sonority in /b d g/ depends on their position in the word and seems to vary from one speaker to another. In principle, [b] in *bryggja* ‘pier’ is perhaps more voiced than [g], but both are quite unlike [b] and [g] in Engl. *brigand* (the length and palatalization of *gg* in *bryggja* play no role here). Yet in his textbook (1945, pp. 12–14), SE wrote that, though [b d g] are always voiceless, initially they sound like Engl. [b d g]. This is a somewhat unexpected statement. More to the point seems to be his remark that medial [b d g] resemble French [p t k].

Our last informant will be Guðbrandur Vigfússon, the man who brought to completion the great dictionary, known to specialists as Cleasby-Vigfusson (CV). He moved to England in 1864, at the age of thirty-seven. Both he and Stefán Einarsson learned English sounds by imitation, and GV was, according to his statement, mute when he relo-

cated to Oxford (see the relevant facts in [Svarar Sigmundsson, 1989]). It is no wonder that he too retained a heavy accent, felt isolated (his isolation was much greater than Stefán Einarsson's). Both men's written English also needed serious editing.

In CV, we find many references to Modern Icelandic, and the introductory section, along with the entries on individual letters, contains numerous remarks of a comparative nature. For example, on p. XVI, right-hand column, GV says that Icelandic is not a strongly accented language. Stress is not a force and can therefore be neither strong nor weak. When people speak about stress in a language like English or Russian, they mean that one (and only one) "privileged" syllable is the locus of some oppositions disallowed elsewhere. *Strong stress* is a metaphor, but, when the "privileges" (that is, phonemic oppositions) are nonexistent or few, the metaphor loses its appeal. Icelandic has no schwa; hence the legitimate observation that it is "not a strongly accented language." This, incidentally, is another feature common to Icelandic and Finnish. Some Swiss dialects of German also do without schwa, and, according to those who described them, such dialects sound like Icelandic. GV's remark has not been noticed by later researchers.

The other observations pertaining to our discussion appear, as pointed out, in the entries on individual letters. Long [a] is said to be the same sound as *a* in Engl. *father* and Ital. *padre* 'father'. Likewise, GV heard almost no difference between Icel. [au] in *þá* 'then', *ná* 'to reach', and so forth and the diphthong of Engl. *thou*, *now*. It is written that Icel. [a] is identical with [a] in Engl. *marry*; as we have seen, Disney Leith thought the same. "The diphthong *au* has at present in Icel. a peculiar sound, answering to *äu* or *eu* in German, and nearly to Engl. *oi* (p. 1)." Sweet had the same opinion, but Passy disagreed and gave *au* the value [öi] [Jón A. Jónsson, 1951, bls. 115, note 16]. Modern observers side with Passy.

In the entry on the letter *e*, GV says that Icel. *e* "is sounded as English *a* in *same*, *take* (p. 113)." This identification puzzled the first reviewer of the dictionary [Anonymous, 1869, p. 610] (the reviewer was GV's Cambridge opponent Eiríkr Magnússon), but, as with *a* in *marry*, other Icelanders said exactly the same (see above). More unexpected is the remark in the entry on the letter *u*, which is said "to be sounded like *eu* in Fr[ench] *feu*, *ö* in Germ[an] *hören* (p. 648)." At present, Icel. [u] is not so open.

In his exposition, GV combined the facts of Old and Modern Icelandic. For the sake of illustrating his manner (the time is the early 1870s), I will quote a short passage from the entry on the letter B:

as initial it is an agreeable sound in all the branches of the Teutonic, especially in the combinations *br* and *bl*... The Greek and Roman, on the other hand, disliked the initial *b* sound; but the difference seems to be addressed to the eye rather than the ear, as the  $\pi$  in modern Greek is sounded exactly as Icel. *b*, whilst *p* is sounded as Icel. *v*... but although agreeable as the initial to a syllable, yet as a middle or final letter *b* in Icel. sounds uncouth and common and is sparingly used (p. 48).

One wonders whether collecting such crumbs as those picked up above was worth the trouble. Predictably, I hope it was. For instance, one of the most valuable parts of Bruno Kress's 1937 book is a detailed survey of the views of his predecessors. Jón A. Jónsson (1951) also believed that, since a "guest's" ear is sharp, registering foreigners' remarks on the pronunciation of Icelandic and Icelanders' remarks on the sounds of other languages contributes something to our understanding of Icelandic phonetics. Not everybody's ear is sharp, but what people do not hear or misinterpret also has value. Therefore, I found the material presented in this paper suggestive and instructive.

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#### ИСЛАНДСКАЯ ФОНЕТИКА НА СЛУХ ИНОСТРАНЦЕВ

**Для цитирования:** *Lieberman A. S. Guests and hosts on the sounds of modern Icelandic // Скандинавская филология. 2018. Т. 16. Вып. 2. С. 277–292. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2018.206>*

На протяжении почти двух веков приезжавшие в Исландию путешественники оставляли многочисленные описания страны. В их поле зрения попадали географические особенности, экономическое развитие, исландская культура, а также язык «экзотической» страны, в которой им довелось побывать. Заметки путешественников об исландском языке небезынтересны, так как иностранцы, естественно, сравнивают незнакомые звуки с привычными им от рождения. Знание как их ошибок, так и верных наблюдений добавляет штрихи к пониманию фонетических особенностей того языка, который они пытаются охарактеризовать. За долгие годы накопились заметки об исландском языке английских, немецких и голландских путешественников, а также приезжих из Скандинавских стран. Кроме того, существует множество учебников, в которых исландцы и иностранцы сравнивают звуки исландского и других языков и дают рекомендации тем, кто собирается осваивать исландский язык. Статья обобщает эти материалы. В библиотеке Корнеллского университета (США) и в двух главных научных библиотеках в Рейкьявике обнаружилось около ста книг по означенной теме. Описания, иногда беглые, иногда подробные, обладают разной ценностью, но в целом создают впечатляющую картину. Естественно, профессиональные лингвисты оставили наиболее важные для изучения исландского языка описания. Особенно интересно проследить, как звучат на слух иностранцев придыхательные смычные исландского языка, оглушенные сонорные, преаспирация, переднеязычные гласные верхнего подъема и крат-

кие дифтонги. Необходимость анализа наблюдений иностранцев не вызывает сомнений, однако такого полного обзора исландского материала до сих пор в печати не появлялось.

**Ключевые слова:** исландская фонетика, сравнительное восприятие звуков исландского языка, придыхательные смычные, глухие сонанты, преаспирация, краткие дифтонги.

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