

Ellert Thor Johannsson

## OLD WORDS AND OBSOLETE MEANINGS IN MODERN ICELANDIC

**Abstract** This paper examines a certain subset of the vocabulary of Modern Icelandic, namely those words that are labelled as ‘ancient’ in the *Dictionary of Contemporary Icelandic* (DCI). The words were analysed and grouped into two main categories, 1) Words with only ‘ancient’ sense(s) and 2) words that have modern as well as an obsolete older sense. Several subgroups were identified as well as some lexical characteristics. The words in question were then analysed in two other sources, the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (ONP) and the *Icelandic Gigaword Corpus* (IGC). The results show that the words belong to several semantic domains that reflect the types of texts that have survived until modern times. Most of the words are robustly attested in Old Norse sources, although there are a few exceptions. Large majority of the words can be found in Modern Icelandic texts, but to a varying degree. Limits of the corpus material makes it difficult to analyse some of the words. The result indicate that the words labelled ‘ancient’ can be divided into three main groups: a) words that are poorly attested and should perhaps not be included in the lexicographic description of Modern Icelandic; b) words that are likely to occur sometimes in Modern Icelandic; c) words that function as other inherited Old Norse words and perhaps do not require a special label or should have an additional sense in the DCI.

**Keywords** Modern Icelandic, Old Norse, historical lexicology

### Contact information

**Ellert Thor Johannsson**

The Arni Magnusson Institute for Icelandic Studies  
Laugavegi 13, IS-105, Reykjavík, Iceland  
etj@hi.is