

TWO LOANWORDS MEET: WHEN *FUCK* MET *FOKK* IN ICELANDIC

by
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Icelandic phonotactics and phonology require the short vowels /ʌ/ and /ə/ in English loanwords be represented by the phoneme /œ/. The words *fuck* and *fucking*, which began appearing in Icelandic around 1970, are however nearly always pronounced and spelt differently from what is expected, i.e. with the vowel [ɔ] and spelt ‘fokk’, ‘fokking’. The reason is that there already existed in Icelandic a couple of older loanwords, probably from Danish, which to some extent both in terms of semantics and pronunciation already occupied the position that the new loanwords were expected to take in the language. This article discusses the meaning of the older loanwords, their use and semantic development, and compares them to the newer words, with examples taken to show what happens when the new loanwords met the old ones.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the English words *fuck* and *fucking* have become part of the Icelandic language¹. They began showing up sporadically in Icelandic newspapers and magazines around 1970 – very few examples are older than that – but it was not until the 1980s and the beginning of the twenty-first century that *fuck* and *fucking* respectively became frequent. Their surface forms in Icelandic today are *fokk* (noun/interjection), *fokka* (verb) and *fokking* (adverb/interjection). It is not at all surprising that these words have found their way into Icelandic, widespread as they are in modern pop culture, music and films, which – as in other European countries – are primarily influenced by English in Iceland.²

When loanwords enter a language, certain things happen. Usually the words adapt relatively quickly to the phonology and orthography of the reci-

ipient language and in different ways may also adapt to patterns of inflection and word-formation. They may also be adapted to semantics; for example, they acquire a restricted or specialized meaning (on this, see Haspelmath 2009: 42–44; Winford 2010: 173–175). Thus, it is to be expected that a word such as Eng. *fuck* will in some way be moulded by the Icelandic language, which has both a sound system different from English and a rich inflectional morphology. However, as far as this word and its derivative *fucking* are concerned, the result of nativization did not turn out to be what was expected: It does not comply with a basic phonetic-phonemic requirement, stipulating that English short [ʌ] or [ɚ] are always identified as [œ] in Icelandic. The explanation is in itself not complicated: At the time of arrival of Eng. *fuck*, a pair of older words, a verb and a noun, already existed in Icelandic and in terms of morphology, semantics and partially also pronunciation they occupied the domain that the new lexeme was about to claim. What seems to have happened – a development that is still under way – is a gradual takeover by a new loanword of both the form and function of an older word.

The principal aim of this article is to throw light on what is probably a rather rare situation: when a word from a donor language meets in a recipient language a homophone or near-homophone that moreover is partly homonymous with the first word. After this introduction, part 2 discusses the phonology of a couple of English and Icelandic vowels, in order to explain what would have been the expected manifestations of this loanword in Icelandic. Part 3 deals with the old and the new words, their meaning and usage, and part 4 is a discussion and closing words. The article is not aimed at being a comprehensive treatment of the use and function or meaning of the words that are discussed, but it will hopefully not leave too many questions unanswered.³

2. *A quick look at the phonology of a few vowels*

Different languages have different phonemic inventories, and each phoneme in a language has its own acoustic domain⁴ in which its basic

phonetic units (phones) surface. This domain area and the space it occupies depend on the adjacent phonemes: the greater the distance between them, the more ‘empty space’ for the phones to move around in.

The consequences are especially noticeable when it comes to phonological *imposition* (van Coetsem 1988: 3) in second language acquisition on the one hand and the pronunciation of loanwords on the other, in particular when a speech sound in the donor language is structurally alien to the phoneme system of the recipient language. When second language learning is imperfect (in the sense of Thomason 2001: 66 ff.) and affects the linguistic outcome, the new and foreign speech sound tends to settle in the domain of that phoneme in the recipient language whose phones are perceived by the speaker as having greatest similarities to the foreign speech sound. The same applies when the borrowing of a loanword is the result of a casual contact situation rather than bilingualism. In his work on contact-induced language transfer, Frans van Coetsem describes how the recipient language of a monolingual speaker “functions as a filter, so to speak, limiting the range of usage of phonological loans and restricting significantly the possibility of integration” (van Coetsem 1988: 112; cf. a longer discussion of the mechanisms of adaptation on pp. 21–23 and definition on pp. 7–8). Where the foreign speech sound lands, is controlled both by the phonotactics of the recipient language and its phoneme inventory. This means, for one thing, that a particular speech sound in a donor language does not necessarily end up in the same phonemic domain in two different recipient languages, when words with this speech sound are introduced as loanwords.

In English, the words *fuck* and *fucking*, as well as other words with the same phonemic structure, such as *butter*, *hut*, *luck*, etc., are, according to handbooks, pronounced with an open-mid, unrounded vowel, [ʌ] ([fʌk]), or in American English with a central unrounded close-mid/open-mid vowel, that is, a schwa, [ə] ([fək]) (see e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary*). In some dictionaries (e.g. *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, *Macmillan Dictionary*, *Oxford Learners Dictionaries*), the pronunciation [fʌk] is given for both Bri-

tish and American English. Things are, of course, more complicated than handbooks suggest, and the vowels may have other qualities in English and American dialects and sociolects, or in other English language varieties.

Both speech sounds, [ʌ] and [ə], are *phonemically* foreign to Icelandic, that is, neither of them are phonemes in Icelandic and they do not have any contrastive function in the language. *Phonetically*, on the other hand, similar speech sounds are found as allophones to other phonemes.

Of special interest for us at present is the phoneme Icel. /ö/. It is usually transcribed phonetically as [œ], that is, as a rounded open-mid front-central vowel, but a more lax pronunciation is probably as common, with the phoneme surfacing as neither particularly front nor specifically round, but more in the direction of [ə] or [ɘ]. It has been suggested that in a narrow transcription, one of those symbols might be as appropriate as [œ] (Rögnvaldsson 2013: 16). In view of what was said before about domains of phonemes and perceived similarities to foreign speech sounds, we are able to predict that a probable phonological outcome, when words from English with a short [ʌ] or [ə], such as *butter*, *hut*, *luck* or *fuck*, enter Icelandic, will be one where the foreign vowel is recognized as belonging to the Icelandic phoneme /ö/. And indeed this is what happens, almost without exception. With an Icelandic accent the first three words are pronounced approximately as [pœhtɚ], [hœht] and [lœhk], with an expected [œ] (or [ə], [ɘ], see above) – and of course with Icelandic preaspiration, /tt/ > [ht] and /kk/ > [hk].

The phoneme Icel. /a/ is also of some interest. Its surface form is usually transcribed as [a], but where a more appropriate narrow transcription is probably [ɐ] (cf. Rögnvaldsson 2013: 16). It is possible that the vowel is often even more back and more close, i.e. in the direction of [ʌ]. English short [ʌ] and [ə], do, however, never surface as /a/ ([a] or [ɐ]) in Icelandic. This can be compared to German, where the vowel in words like Eng. *luck* is typically identified as /a/ and pronounced [a] (Nemser 1991: 356). The same goes for Swedish, cf. Otterstedt (2016: 20), who lists English and American [ʌ] among “[v]owels that are similar in English and Swedish”, and compares them to Swedish short [a]. According to

inquiries among my Swedish colleagues, this is a part of what they would define as typical Swedish accent.

It is informative in this context to look at some examples of English loanwords with a short [ʌ] or [ə] in the Icelandic dictionary of slang (Árnason, Sigmundsson & Thorsson 1982). Without exception such words are assigned the vowel phoneme /ö/ in Icelandic, and are spelt with <ö> in the dictionary (the meanings in Icelandic are usually colloquial meanings of the corresponding English words):

Eng. *buff* n. > Icel. *böff*, *bug* v. > *bögga*, *bummer* n. > *bömmur*, *bunch* n.
 > *böns*, *bust* n. > *böst*, *dub* v. > *döbba*, *dull* adj. > *döll*, *funk* n. > *fönk*, *fuzz* n.
 > *föss*, *hum* n. > *hömm*, *cut* v. > *kötta*, *must* n. > *möst*, *nut* n. > *nött*, *plug* n.
 > *plögg*, *pub* n. > *pöbb*, *punk* n. > *pönk*, *slum* n. > *slömm*, *stuff* n.
 > *stöff*, *success* n. > *sökksess*, *thug* n. > *þögg(i)*; *rough* adj. > *röff*, *tough* adj.
 > *töff*, *touch* n. > *töts*

Likewise, the expected pronunciation in Icelandic of the word *fuck* would be [fœhk] and the most apparent spelling would be *fökk* – in fact corresponding to usual pronunciation and spelling of the word in Norwegian, *føkk* (see Andersen 2015: 128).⁵

As any native speaker can confirm, this is, however, not the rule in Icelandic – and is in fact not at all usual. On the contrary, the noun/interjection is more or less always spelt *fokk* and pronounced [fœhk], and the same applies to the corresponding verb, *fökka* [fœhka] ‘to fuck’ and the adverb/interjection *fokking* [fœhkiŋ]. A search through a digital library of Icelandic newspapers and magazines and the largest text corpus for Icelandic⁶ confirms this, with examples implying pronunciation with [œ] in an absolute minority.

This may seem odd, but as was already revealed in the introduction, there is an explanation for this idiosyncrasy. Simple as the explanation may seem, the phenomenon is interesting nonetheless, not least from a historical contact-linguistic view, and the rest of the article is an attempt to make a detailed account of it.

3. *Loanwords meet*

In this part we will discuss what happened when two words of different import origin but phonetically and semantically not so dissimilar, met in Icelandic, both of which are loanwords but introduced at different times. One is a rather old loan probably from Danish, a verb which in Icelandic took the form *fokka* and later gave rise to a noun, *fokk*, and the other a twentieth-century newcomer from English, *fuck*, which in Icelandic has become homonymous with the older words, and was shortly after followed by its derivative Eng. *fucking*, Icel. *fokking*.

For the present study, a search was made in the collections of the Department of Lexicography at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (University of Iceland), in the text corpus *Íslenskt textasafn* (Icelandic Text Corpus), and in the digital library *Tímarit.is*, available at the National and University Library of Iceland.

In its historical collections containing approx. 2.5 million examples of usage for almost 700,000 words, the Department of Lexicography has thirteen examples of the old verb and seven of the old noun but no examples of the younger words.

The text corpus *Íslenskt textasafn* contains various texts, old and new, with approx. 65 million running words in total. It has about twenty examples of the old verb and ten of the noun, most of them the same as in the collections of the Department of Lexicography. Examples of the younger noun and verb number about one hundred and examples of *fokking* about as many. More than half of those examples are from blogs from the years 2001–2006, over half of the remainder are from a single novel (Helgason 2008) – about 50% *fokk* and 50% *fokking* – and the rest from a couple of novels from 2008 and 2015 and from other recent texts.

The digital library *Tímarit.is* contains nearly 4.5 million OCR-scanned pages from Icelandic newspapers and magazines from the early nineteenth century until today. A search among these texts found around 130 examples of the old verb and around 80 of the noun. The verb is attested from 1850 and onwards and examples of the noun from 1935

and onwards. The younger words begin to show up sporadically in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but become more frequent from the middle of the 1980s and especially after 2000. Around 170 examples of the younger noun/interjection in its adapted Icelandic form were found, around 100 examples of the verb and around 80 examples of the adverb/interjection *fokking*. With English spelling, these younger words almost always occur in an English context or in citations from English and are only minimally relevant for this study (see further section 3.3.2).

In the following, the discussion is, with a few exceptions, built on the examples from *Tímarit.is*. No systematic attempt was made to search in other texts, nor to draw on newer material from the Internet. Some stray searches on the net show, however, that the word forms *fokk* and *fokka*, reflecting the meaning of the older words, are still quite common in Modern Icelandic, even if the same word forms, whose use and meaning without doubt represent the new loanword from English (*fuck*), are in a great majority.

After this introduction, the oldest examples of the older (Danish) loanword and its nominal derivation are discussed shortly in section 3.1. The semantics of the verb in its two main meanings and functions, as well as of the noun, is dealt with in section 3.2 and subsections. In 3.3, the late twentieth-century English loanword *fuck* is introduced and compared to the older words, and some account is given of its use as well as of that of the participle *fucking* and a handful of compound words.

3.1. The verb *fokka* enters Icelandic

The verb *fokka* appears for the first time in Icelandic texts from the seventeenth century. The origin of the word is not clear, but according to the Icelandic etymological dictionary it is a loanword, probably from older (late medieval) Danish or Middle Low German (Magnússon 1989: 199).

The oldest known examples of the verb are from the first half of the seventeenth century, both from poetry. One is from an epic poem about a slave raid in Iceland in 1627, where the assault of the group of raiders

is portrayed, and the other one is from a poem cited in the first Icelandic dictionary, *Specimen Lexici Runici* by Magnús Ólafsson, printed in 1650 (the author died in 1636). Both examples are bound by rhyme, and may have been used simply because they were suitable words in the rhyming position. The meaning is a little obscure, at least that of the first example:

- 1) Upp og niður um ból og bæi / bramla og fokka
(‘[they] smash and storm up hill and down dale, around the houses and the village’) (*Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627, 1906–1909*: 477)
- 2) Fóckum vier bróckum met stóckum
(‘we run, (we) dance with sticks’) Faulkes & Ingólfsson, 2010: 88)

In both examples, the verb has something to do with moving quickly, which corresponds to the meaning in related languages in earlier times, for example older Danish *fukke* ‘move back and forth’ (Moths Ordbog) and Swedish *focka* ‘press, bump’ (Magnússon 1989: 199; cf. Hellquist 1980: 228–229). All the words – as well as *fuck* in English – have the same Germanic origin and all of them contain to some extent the same meaning, which involves the act or process of moving. The etymology will not be discussed further here, as it is not the intention of this article, but it can be read about in etymological dictionaries such as Magnússon (1989), Hellquist (1980), in the *Oxford English Dictionary* under *fuck* and in various handbooks, for example in Sheidlower (2009), especially in the Introduction p. 7–9.

In the first example above, (1), the meaning may be connotation-laden in some way, as the verb is there used together with another verb, *bramla*, this one with a clear negative meaning, ‘smash, break, destroy’. The second example, (2), is supplied with a Latin translation and the verb form *fokkum* (spelt <Fóckum>), 1st person plural, is rendered with “currimus”, i.e. ‘we run’. This example is from a poem in a very complex metre, where form more or less dominates meaning, which makes it close to impossible to do more than loosely paraphrase line by line.

In neither of the examples is the verb a part of the same morpho-

syntactic structure that later became the prevailing one for this verb in Icelandic, that is, as an infinitive form preceded by an auxiliary verb, and the meaning is not the same as the one that is known from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Icelandic (see 3.2). These examples can therefore not easily be compared to younger examples.

I have not found the verb again in Icelandic texts until the nineteenth century. The next known example is from an epic poem by a poet who was born 1772 and died 1826 (Ólason 1949: 76), printed in 1856:

3) skulu' ei fá að fokka hjer, / fallegu bláu sokkarnir (Laxdal 1856: 58)

The context, talking about a group of men riding horses, may suggest that *fokka* is here used in the same meaning as the oldest examples, that is, 'run', 'move quickly', and that those lines are to be understood as something like 'the man/men wearing the beautiful blue stockings shall not rush before the other men'. (The beautiful blue stockings would in that case be some sort of a *pars pro toto* for the person[s] wearing these garments.) However, the literal meaning may quite as well be approximatively 'the beautiful blue stockings shall not be dropped', as it seems, which then would be the oldest example of a younger meaning, 'let go, let fall' (see 3.2.1)

It is not possible to tell how common the verb has been through the centuries; it can very well only be a coincidence that it does not occur in preserved texts, but the verb may also have been unfamiliar and infrequent. Some manuscripts including copies of the poem in *Specimen Lexici Runici* (cf. 2 above) have the word form *flokkum* – probably understood as dative plural of *flokkur*, meaning 'flocks' – instead of *fokkum*, which may suggest that the word was not usual and that copyists either misread or misunderstood it (see for example Helgason 1955, photo on fol. 25). It is worth mentioning that a database, covering 1,640 Icelandic private letters from the nineteenth century, with over 900,000 words (tokens), has no examples of the verb.⁷ As was said above, The Department of Lexicography at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies has

only thirteen examples of the verb in its historical collections. They are the two mentioned above from the seventeenth century, six from the nineteenth century and five from the twentieth century.

3.2. The meaning in Modern Icelandic

3.2.1. The verb

In the modern language, the verb has two meanings which are curiously distant from each other, an older meaning ‘let go, let fall’ and a younger one, ‘loiter, kill time’, both with various secondary connotations.⁸ Icelandic dictionaries treat the word in both its meanings under one and the same headword, but given the semantic differences it would probably be more appropriate from a lexicographical point of view to list it as two headwords. In the present article I will approach the word from a historical view.

The main dictionary of Modern Icelandic, *Íslensk orðabók*, 3rd edition (2002 and later impressions), lists the verb *fokka* with two meanings.⁹ The first one (1) is ‘loiter, potter’ etc. (without examples of usage). The second one (2) is ‘release sth, let go’, mainly found in the infinitive phrase *láta fokka* ‘let sth go, let sth fall; dump sth, throw sth’ etc. Examples of usage for meaning (2) are *láta aurana fokka* = ‘spend the money / let the money be spent’ (*aurar* is informal for ‘money’) and *láta það fokka sem manni dettur í hug* = ‘say whatever comes to mind’. Both meanings are marked as informal and the same applies to meaning (1) in the previous edition from 1983,¹⁰ but both were uncommented in the first edition as of 1963. In the Icelandic-Danish dictionary from 1920–1924 (Blöndal 1920–1924) the verb has the following explanation in Danish, and is without any comments or remarks of warning regarding usage and language purism:

lade n-t flyve, slippe n-t løs, lade n-t løbe
(‘let sth go, release sth, leave sth’)

A further explanation is added to one of the examples of usage, the words

“bruger ugenert” ‘(he) uses undisturbed’, but they are corrected to “slaar om sig með” ‘bandies about with’ in an addendum on p. 1020. The verb is not in the Supplement to the dictionary from 1963.

The infinitive phrase *láta fokka* and the meaning given as no. (2) in *Íslensk orðabók* is the older one, as becomes clear when we look at the examples in the excerpted texts and those in the collections of the Department of Lexicography. Consequently, I will in the next two subsections first discuss this one and only after that turn to the younger one.

3.2.1.1. The meaning ‘let go, let fall’

In all but one or two of the approx. 115 excerpted examples of *fokka* in this meaning, the verb is in the infinitive and is usually preceded by the modal verb *láta* ‘let’: *láta* + object + *fokka* inf., a few times by other auxiliary or modal verbs (*eiga* ‘shall’, *fá* ‘may, be allowed, let’, *lofa* ‘let, permit’, *mega* ‘may, be allowed’, *verða* ‘must’, and *skulu* ‘shall’).

It is very probable that this use has been modelled upon a corresponding construction with another verb, *flakka*, in *láta flakka* ‘be outspoken, be frank’, which is usual in Modern Icelandic, with examples from the seventeenth century (see <http://lexis.hi.is>), and is still much used. Syntactically, the following constructions appear:

subject + <i>láta</i> + object + <i>fokka</i> inf.	: ég læt það fokka (‘I let it go’)
<i>láta</i> imp. + object + <i>fokka</i> inf.	: láttu það fokka! (imperative) (‘let it go!’)
<i>láta</i> inf. + object + <i>fokka</i> inf.	: að láta það fokka (infinitive phrase) (‘to let it go’)
‘object’ + <i>láta</i> -part. + <i>fokka</i> inf.	: það er látið fokka (passive) (‘it is being let go’)
subject + aux. + <i>fokka</i> inf.	: það má fokka (‘it can go’)

The meaning is more complex and nuanced than these fictitious examples suggest, with connotations of the type ‘throw away’, ‘release’, ‘remove’ etc., and it has always, so it seems, somewhat nonchalant, sarcastic or even derogatory undertones.¹¹

A little more than half of the examples are about discarding something or letting something disappear:¹²

- 4) Vonandi fær nú flatti þorskurinn að fokka af þinghúsinu (1903)
(‘hopefully, the filleted cod [i.e. the Icelandic heraldic symbol] will disappear from the parliament building’)
- 5) Þá telur blaðið upp 15 presta, sem stjórnin ætli að láta fokka (1934)
(‘the newspaper lists 15 vicars whom the government is going to fire’)
- 6) verði hreintungustefnan látin fokka verður menningarslys (2001)
(‘if language purism is going to be abandoned, a cultural accident is bound to happen’)

While the other half of the examples also have the semantic component ‘let go, throw away’, the more specific meaning of these is ‘be outspoken, be frank, say whatever comes to mind’, used about throwing in spontaneous and (usually) unprepared thoughts, remarks or words, speaking freely, without a second thought or hesitation, saying everything as it is, saying the first thing that comes to mind etc. A few times it is used about citing or printing a (controversial) text without hesitating.

- 7) Kona ... sem vön var að láta allt fokka, sem henni datt í hug (1891)
(‘a woman who was used to saying whatever came into her mind’)
- 8) ekki [er] hægt að prenta braginn ..., en samt held ég, að ég verði að láta þessa vísu fokka (1923)
(‘the poem cannot be printed, but I think I must, however, get this stanza included’)
- 9) Láttu það [i.e. the secret] þá bara fokka, kall minn (1933)
(‘just tell us the secret, buddy’)

It may be telling, that the verb is rather often used in the Icelandic satirical magazine *Spegillinn* (1926–1983), supposedly to provoke or give the text a careless and playful appearance (examples from 1941, 1952, 1954, 1955, 1957 three times, 1958 two times, 1959 two times), maybe in a few cases with a latent reference to Eng. *fuck*.

A few examples of *fokka* in another construction than infinitive with *láta* or similar verbs were recorded in the meaning ‘let go’ or one related to that, for example the following one with a prepositional phrase: *fokka úr* ‘from, out of’ + sth (1980) ‘leave sth, be thrown out of sth’:

- 10) Ég sé ... ekkert því til fyrirstöðu, að megnið af þessum körlum fokkuðu úr stjórnnum ASÍ (1980)
 (‘I see nothing to prevent most of these guys from being thrown off the federation board’)

And this one, without a prepositional phrase, in the meaning ‘break’ with a connotation of being nonchalant or coolly unconcerned:

- 11) Þarna fokkuðu fjögur rif (1966)
 (‘four ribs were broken/smashed there’)

Even if examples of the verb in this meaning, used as an intransitive verb, are few in the texts, this use is not foreign or unfamiliar to a modern Icelander. The infinitive phrase *láta fokka* is, however, a more usual construction.

3.2.1.2. The meaning ‘loiter, kill time’ etc.

In the second meaning, the verb *fokka* is used as an intransitive verb. It is not clear to the present writer how this new meaning has arisen, but a semantic element which might be described as ‘acting carelessly, coolly or unconcerned’ is common both to the infinitive expression *láta fokka* and

to the intransitive construction. As far as I can see, there are no examples of the verb being used as a transitive verb, that is, **fokka* + object – which also would have been rather unlikely, considering the meaning.

The oldest one of the sixteen excerpted examples of the verb in this meaning is from 1948. However, the noun *fokk* n. ‘idleness, loitering’ etc. appears in texts a decade earlier (see section 3.2.2), and if the noun is derived from the verb, which is rather probable, then the verb has been in use in this meaning at least as early as that.

The example from 1948 is in a playful column that is supposed to show slang and corrupted language as used by young people in Reykjavík (*Morgunblaðið* 30.1. 1948: 6 and 8):

- 12) knallið fór þó annars ágætlega, og við fokkuðum ekki á búlunni
lengur en til þrjú (1948)
(‘besides that, the party went well, and we only hung out at
the pub till three o’clock’)

The text includes approx. 65 words and phrases which, according to the columnist, are ‘as incomprehensible as Latin or Greek are to ordinary people’. Most of the words are loanwords from Danish or are homemade Icelandic slang, but at least thirteen words are at that time new English words, which undoubtedly had entered the language with the British and American soldiers during the Second World War, when Iceland was occupied by the allied forces.¹³ These words are *alright*, *blöffa* ‘bluff’, *flirta* ‘flirt’, *fætingur* ‘fighting’, *gefa gas* ‘give gas’, *villt geim* ‘wild game’, *gæi* ‘guy’, *ókey* ‘okay’, *ósmart* ‘uncool’ (i.e. “un-smart”), *party* ‘party’, *sjoppa* ‘shop’, *stæll* ‘style’ and *svinga* ‘swing’.

When we see Icelandic *fokka* in this entourage, it is tempting to consider English influence, even if *fuck* is not usable in an English construction comparable to that in example (12), as far as I know. It must, however, be mentioned, that the old verb does not appear to have been fully accepted in the early twentieth century, as it is often flagged by printing it in

quotation marks (so-called “scare quotes”, see for example Cappelen & Lepore 1997; cf. also a discussion of flagged and unflagged switching in Poplack 1987), for example 1891, 1902, 1907, 1910, 1909, 1917 and 1935, even as late as 1962 and 1966. Why that is, is open to question, but we can suppose that both the nonchalant and sarcastic flavour of the verb, its informal and colloquial style and knowledge (or suspicion) of its origin as a Danish loanword, have all played a role, and that might explain the columnist’s aversion to it.

In this meaning the verb is frequently accompanied by a preposition phrase, *fokka* + *á* ‘on’ sth (1948, 1972) (see the example above), *fokka* + *í* ‘in’ sth (1961, 1962, 1979, 1981, 1985 and 2014), *fokka* + *við* ‘with’ sth (1960, 1965 and 1974):

- 13) Maður getur ekki alltaf verið að æfa sig, við erum svona að fokka í hinu og þessu (1961)
 (‘you can’t always be practising, we are just messing about with this and that’)
- 14) Þar fokkaði ég við eitt og annað, en fór heim á sumrin (1960)
 (‘I was passing the time there with one thing and another, but I went home in the summer’)

It may be even more tempting to suspect English influence here, but it could just as well be the other way round, that is, that such domestic constructions in Icelandic later paved the way for English phrases such as *fuck(ing) in sth*, *fuck(ing) with sth* etc., when they knocked on the door later in the twentieth century. An example worth mentioning in this context is one from a magazine for children and young people from 1961 (*Vorið* 1961/3: 89). There, the author plays with the homonymy of the noun *fokka* f. meaning ‘jib, foresail’ (from Middle Low German *vocke* or Dutch *fok*, see Magnússon 1989: 199) and the verb *fokka* meaning ‘fiddle about with sth’, and lets one of his characters annoyingly complain about another character’s plans to start working on a jib or a foresail, by replying with

“Þú hefur víst nógan tíma að fokka við hana”, that is, ‘you surely have enough time to fiddle about with it’. In that context, in a text for children, the verb cannot have been particularly upsetting, and is definitely used to give the text a comical and colloquial style.

A few times the verb occurs without a following prepositional phrase:

- 15) margir fokka daginn út þar sem líkur eru á að fá tímabundna snapvinnu (1981)
(‘many hang about all day where there is hope of getting casual jobs’)
- 16) Menn eru að fokka þetta langan vinnudag vegna þess að þeir hafa ekki tamið sér aga og skipulag (1989)
(‘people are wasting a long work day because they haven’t got into the habit of discipline and organization’)
- 17) Svo fór restin bara í mig þegar ég var að fokka eitthvað (2002)
(‘I just used the rest of the time for myself, just messing about [= ‘fucking around’])

Even if only a few examples were found in the texts, such use is not infrequent in contemporary language.

Another, even more illustrative example, is from a novel from 1953:

- 18) Hvern djöfulinn ertu að fokka maður ..., heyrðirðu ekki í bílnum?
(‘why the hell are you dawdling man, didn’t you hear the car’)
(Þórðarson 1953: 106)

Here, the expletive *djöfulinn* (accusative), literally ‘the devil’, reinforces the negative meaning of *fokka*.

It is most natural to assign to these examples the meaning ‘loiter, kill time’ etc., but the distance to the meaning of the younger loanword, Eng. *fuck*, especially in the expression *fuck around*, is not great, as it seems.

3.2.2. The noun

A neuter noun, *fokk* ‘idleness, loitering, a lowly job’ etc., semantically corresponding to the verb in its later meaning, is probably derived from the verb through conversion or zero-derived nominalization (see Katamba & Stonham 2006: 56–57, 118 ff.; cf. Booij 2007: 58; Bauer 2008: 207), which would suggest that the verb was in use with its younger meaning earlier than examples in the examined texts may indicate.

In *Íslensk orðabók*, 3rd edition (2002), the noun is marked as informal and the meaning listed is ‘a lowly job, time wasting, pottering’. The dictionary gives also an example of a fixed phrase, *allt í fokki*, with the explanation ‘in a mess’, which probably is an example of a semantic intermixture of this word with the younger loanword from English (see 3.3).

The newspapers and magazines have examples of the noun from 1935 and onwards. In all some 80 examples of the noun were excerpted. The oldest is this one:

- 19) Þú vinnur við Alþingi, karlinn. Hvernig líkar þér það fokk? (1935)
 (‘so, you are working at the parliament, mate. How do you like such time wasting?’)

Very often the noun *fokk* is preceded by a strengthening and often negative adjective:

algert ‘complete’, *alls konar* ‘all sorts of’, *annað eins* ‘anything like’,
bara ‘just’, *einskisvert* ‘worthless’, *gagnslítið* ‘useless’, *hálfger* ‘sort of’,
hálfgildings ‘sort of’; *andskotans* ‘damned’, *bölvæð* ‘damned’,
djöfulsins ‘damned’, *helvítis* ‘damned’ + *fokk*.

There are many examples of this in the texts, and this underlines the special, value-laden and partly negative meaning of the noun. This becomes even more obvious when we look up the noun in Icelandic dictionaries of today. To be sure, many Icelandic-foreign dictionaries have

neither the noun nor the verb, probably because of the generally negative view of loanwords which has been one of the principles of Icelandic language policy throughout the twentieth century. Thus, neither word is to be found, for example, in the Icelandic-Danish dictionary from 1976 (Widding, Magnússon & Meulengracht Sørensen 1976) nor in the Icelandic-English dictionary from 1989 (Hólmarsson, Sanders & Tucker 1989), and the noun is not in the Icelandic-English dictionary of 1970 nor in the Icelandic-Faroese dictionary from 2005 (Sigurðsson 1970; Magnússon 2005). But in a new dictionary, the Icelandic-Scandinavian web-dictionary *ISLEX*, we see, on the other hand, examples of usage such as the following:

- 20) Þetta er ekki almennileg vinna heldur hálfgerð fokk
(‘this is not a real job, just a sort of time wasting’)
- 21) Ég er í bölvuðu fokki með ritgerðina
(‘I am having terrible trouble with the dissertation’)

Examples of the noun in the collections of the Department of Lexicography are all from the twentieth century, the oldest one in a book published 1950. As with the verb, the aforementioned database of Icelandic private letters from the nineteenth century has no examples of the noun.

3.3. The English loanwords enter the landscape

As was touched upon in the introduction, the English words *fuck* and *fucking* have entered Icelandic and are now a part of colloquial language, especially among young people, and are used in a variety of expression and phrases, of which most reflect the modern international use of the words. Their normal surface forms are *fokk* [fɔhk] (noun/interjection), *fokka* [fɔhka] (verb) and *fokking* [fɔhkin] (adverb/interjection).

The verb is in *Íslensk orðabók* (2002) attributed a headword of its own, *fokka*, homonymous with but separate from the older verb, and is

marked as informal language. There is, though, no explicit reference to the English source word other than what can be inferred from the usage example that is given: *fokka e-u upp (fyrir e-m)*, explained as “klúðra e-u, spilla e-u (fyrir e-m)”, which is best translated as ‘fuck sth up (for somebody)’. The noun/interjection is not treated as a separate headword in the dictionary. In the expression *allt í fokki* (best translated as ‘all in a mess, all fucked up’), given as an example under the headword for the older noun *fokk*, the meaning, however, clearly belongs to that of the new word and not the older one. This is further supported by the fact that phrases of that kind are very recent and first show up in texts from around 2000 and later. The participle *fokking* is a headword of its own, marked both with two question marks, meaning ‘a foreign word that may not be considered Icelandic’ (p. xiii), and as ‘rude’. The meaning given is Icel. “leiðinda, djöfulsins”, both genitive forms used in compounds and as strengthening expletives, literally ‘trouble-gen.’, ‘the devil-gen.’

The first occurrences of these words in our texts are from 1971. The examples we have from the next ten years do not suggest that they were particularly widespread and it probably took around two decades for them to become more or less established as proper foreign words. Until that, they only seem to have been quoted words – or instances of code switching when used in spoken language. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing of their use in the spoken language, which to some extent must have preceded use in the written language. In 1985, an Icelandic musician (born 1949) is cited as saying in an interview that Icelandic ‘kids no longer swear in Icelandic but use *fuck* and *shit* without hesitation’ (*Morgunblaðið* 13.4. 1985: 52), and it is tempting to believe that his words bear at least some truth.

The use of the words in Icelandic will probably not surprise linguists. I will therefore keep examples short in the following sections and mainly try to shed light on the history of the words’ arrival in Icelandic and their transition from foreign words to adapted and established loanwords – with a gradual ‘take-over’ of the form (and to some extent function) of the older words. Authentic text-citations will be kept to a minimum,

as a quick search on *Tímarit.is* will in most cases directly lead to such examples for those who are interested.

3.3.2. With English spelling

Initially, these words always arrived with English spelling. For example, the first known example of the interjection “fuck” in an Icelandic context is in a translated interview with John Lennon from 1971: “En svo hugsaði ég með mér: ‘Fuck, til helvítis með það’”, ‘but then I thought: Fuck, to hell with it’ (*Vikan* 1971/16: 20). In the same interview, the editor of the magazine *Vikan* feels the need to explain in a note for his readers that *fucking* has nothing to do with sex in English street language, but is a swearword. This may reflect that the words were not generally well-known for the Icelandic public as (obscene) expletives or swearwords at that time. Some knowledge of them has though, of course, been present in the early 1970s, and Icelandic columnists and writers allow themselves, for example, to cite a person shouting “Fuck it” (translation, 1971), to tell the readers without any explanation that the abbreviation *F.T.A.*, which is a name of a film from 1972, may stand for “Fuck The Army”, and to cite an American child saying “Fuck you” to a journalist (translation, 1973).

With English spelling, the two words appear several times in newspapers and magazines in the 1970s, the word *fuck* eighteen times and *fucking* thirteen times, if no examples have escaped me. Most of the examples of *fuck* come in various English citations; one is a name of an American rock band, one is in the title of an American jazz song, two are from the translated interview cited above. Only one can be said to be in a context that does not reflect an underlying English original text; this one is in a review of an Icelandic novel, where the main person is said not to know what “fuck me” and “survival of the fittest” means (*Dagblaðið* 8.12. 1977: 12). The same can be said about the examples of *fucking*, most of them are in English quotations.

The words do not seem to have been established as expletives or

swearwords at that time,¹⁴ but they are clearly on their way into the language as can be seen by the expanding exposure of them as English words and quotations in texts. Between 1980 and 2000, a little more than 200 examples of the English spelling *fuck* and about 190 of *fucking* are to be found in the examined texts, a lot of them in direct quotations and in various types of names, titles and the like. After 2000, about 230 examples of *fuck* appear in the texts and around 730 of *fucking*. The majority are from English contexts or appear in English or English-sounding names, film titles and so on. Most of the examples of these spellings from the last ten to twelve years are from the Icelandic English-language magazine, *Reykjavík Grapevine*, published since 2004.

3.3.3. Icelandic forms

Shortly after 1980, these new loanwords begin to show up, sporadically in the beginning, in newspapers and magazines in the written forms *fokk*, *fokka* (verb) and later *fokking*. There is no doubt that it has to do with the new loanwords, not the older ones, as they clearly reflect the English meanings and usage and have often direct parallels to English phrases and compounds.

The oldest examples of the noun in its new, adapted form are from 1985. They are in an article about graffiti in Reykjavík, written by a known language enthusiast, a onetime host of a language programme on Icelandic radio. The article is accompanied by pictures of graffiti with slogans such as “fokk off”, “FOK” and “Fouck is all I kear about”, that undoubtedly reflect the pronunciation which this word had among young people at that time. The author himself uses the word-form *fokk* in the rubric, “‘Fokk’ er farandminni”, that is, ‘fuck is a wandering motif’, and also once in the article text (*Vikan* 1985/40: 4-7).

Another example that may shed some light on how far the development had come about one decade later is in an article in *Stúdentablaðið* 1994 (a journal published by the Student Association at the University of

Iceland). The author, a literary student, discusses the English word *fuck* and related words and writes that he had heard the phrase Icel. “fokkast upp”, meaning ‘to be messed up’, ‘to be screwed up’, used by a journalist at the Icelandic national radio in an interview with a politician earlier that year. He calls it, a little dramatically, ‘a remarkable event in the history of the modern language’, by which he probably means that a phrase which has previously belonged to the register of slang is now beginning to move up into higher registers of the language. It is also of interest in this context that the author claims (maybe only in a rhetorical sense, though?) that the old noun *fokk* has disappeared from daily use (“er horfinn úr daglegri notkun”, Sigþórsson 1994: 12). I am not convinced that this was correct, but it is, however, an interesting statement.

In all, some 170 examples of the noun/interjection are found in the texts. As a strengthening expletive or interjection, we find *fokk* used around 90 times from the middle of the 1980s till 2015. The rest appears in various other and mostly familiar phrases, such as *fokk jú* (and *fokk þú*) ‘fuck you’, *fokk it*, *fokk off*, *fokk upp*; *að gefa ekki fokk* ‘don’t give a fuck’, *hvað í fokkinu* (dative with definite article) ‘what the fuck’, *að vera fokk sama* ‘don’t give a fuck’ (a sort of a transformation of Icelandic *að vera alveg sama* ‘not to care at all’). In addition, there are examples that seem to show a contamination of the older and the newer words, for example in phrases such as *allt komið í fokk* ‘all in a mess, all fucked up’ and *allt er í fokki* ‘everything is in a mess, all is fucked up’. The majority of the examples are from the late nineties or from this century.

The new verb form *fokka* shows up earlier in the texts than the noun/interjection. The Icelandic dictionary of slang (Árnason, Sigmundsson & Thorsson 1982) has the verb (but not the noun/interjection) and gives the example phrase *fokka e-u upp fyrir e-m* ‘screw sth up for somebody’, and compares it to Eng. *fuck up*. One isolated example of the verb in the construction *fokka sth upp* ‘fuck sth up’ from as early as 1968 did in fact turn up, in a short story in a weekly magazine, translated from English: “Þú hefur fokkað þessu upp”, ‘you have fucked this up’ (*Vikan* 1968/37:

22), but besides that, the verb is absent from the texts until in the 1980s. This example may suggest that the verb (or this construction) has been floating around in spoken language (or written, even if examples have not shown up) for some fifteen years or so, but nothing certain can be said about this, however.

The next example in the examined texts is from 1983, in an interview with a punk-rocker (the interview is made by another young punk-rocker) who uses the verb phrase *fokka með* + object: “að fokka með landið”, ‘to fuck with the country’ (*DV Helgarblað* 20.8. 1983: 14). Other examples from the 1980s are mostly of the phrase *fokka* + object + *upp* ‘fuck sth up’ and until 2000, around 25 examples of this phrase are to be found. In this expression the verb behaves like a transitive verb, *fokka* + object in dative + *upp*: “Þeir eru að fokka þessu öllu upp” ‘they are fucking all this up’ (*Þjóðviljinn* 21.12. 1991: 12) or *fokka upp* + object in dative: “[hann] fokkaði upp hlutunum” ‘[he] fucked things up’ (*Helgarpósturinn* 5.2. 1987: 2). From a contact linguistic view it is though probably more appropriate to view the English phrase *fuck sth up* in its whole as the direct import source for the corresponding phrase structure in Icelandic.

The expression *fokka með* + object, ‘fuck with sth’, appears several times over the course of the following years. At least one example is probably grounded semantically in the older, secondary meaning ‘kill time’, or something like that, but most likely also morphosyntactically under the influence of Eng. *fuck with*. It is commented on in an angry complaint by a member of the Icelandic parliament and cited in one of Iceland’s newspapers. The MP is uneasy about another MP’s use of the words *fokka með* when the latter shouted that it was necessary to carry out more important tasks than just “fokka með mál” – ‘kill time / fuck with matters’ – which was only a hindrance for the educational system (*Morgunblaðið* 13.12. 1988, 46). It is likely that the MP who made the original comment was not consciously thinking of Eng. *fuck with* – he was a well-known, middle-aged language purist and so was his critic – but the construction *fokka með* is at least not an old one with roots in the older verb.

In the late 1990s, the expression *fokka í* + object ‘fuck with sth, fuck in sth’ comes to light. After 2000, the most common expressions are *fokka í* and *fokka upp*, both with around 30 examples, and *fokka sér* ‘fuck oneself’ and *fokkaðu þér* ‘fuck yourself’, 8 examples.

Present participle *fokking* is used as a strengthening adjective in the same way as in English, and it can split phrases in a similar way: *Ég fokking hata heiminn* ‘I fucking hate the world’ (2007). Morphological expletive infixation of the type “abso-fucking-lutely” or “un-fucking-believable” (see e.g. Aronoff 1976: 69–70; Plag 2003: 101 ff.) does not occur in the examined texts, but *nákvæmfokkinglega* ‘exact-fucking-ly’ (Gunnlaugsson 2016: 31) and similar constructions such as *þokka-fokking-lega* ‘relatively’, *sannar-fokking-lega* ‘certainly’ and *klár-fokking-lega* ‘clearly’ appear when we search for the string “fokkinglega” on the Internet. The expression *fokkingfokk* (53 examples), usually reinforced with the swearword *helvítis* ‘damned’, is particularly frequent in the texts; the expression became extremely popular in Iceland after it was used on a protest poster in 2008 (see Óskarsson 2010), and was repeated over and over again in newspapers and other media the following years. A little surprising is the adverbial form *fokkings* (ca. 20 examples from 2002–2014, one from 1996), with an *s* that is similar to an ordinary Icelandic genitive ending. One can presume that this is an attempt to let the word look like Icelandic swearwords in genitive, such as *djöfulsins*, *andskotans* and *helvítis* ‘damned’.

Examples of icelandicized versions of English compounds are *fokkari* (2005, 2006) = fucker, *fokkfeis* (2005) = fuck face, *moðerfokker* (7 ex., 1994–2005) = motherfucker, *hólyfokk* (2009) = holy fuck; other compounds are for example *fokkorð* (1996) ‘fuck word’, *fokkfingur* (2005) ‘fuck finger’, *fokkmerki* (33 ex., 1986–2010) ‘fuck sign’, *fokkjúmerki* (2008) ‘fuck-you sign’ and *fokkjúputti* (2009), ‘fuck-you finger’. Even longer phrases such as *what the fuck* appear in icelandicized versions, *vottðe fokk* (2008). No such words or phrases spelt with ‘ö’ have come to my knowledge.

A further discussion of this subject would be a topic for another article, and these examples are hopefully sufficient to show how the English

loanwords have become established in Modern Icelandic and that their use is more or less predictable.¹⁵

What is common to a great many of the examples in the examined texts of the new loanwords *fokk*, *fokka*, *fokking*, and especially of the compounds, is that they are especially to be found in articles written for young people, for example in weekend sections and interviews with rock musicians. This is of course both expected and unsurprising. It shows, however, perhaps better than many words how central these loanwords are becoming in spoken Icelandic, that they are now frequently used by novelists in dialogues to give the discourse a casual aura. One of the oldest example of this that I know of is in a novel from 1989, by the prestigious female author Vigdís Grímsdóttir (born 1953);

22) Og öll fífl eiga að fokka sér

(‘and all the fools should fuck themselves’) (Grímsdóttir 1989: 91)

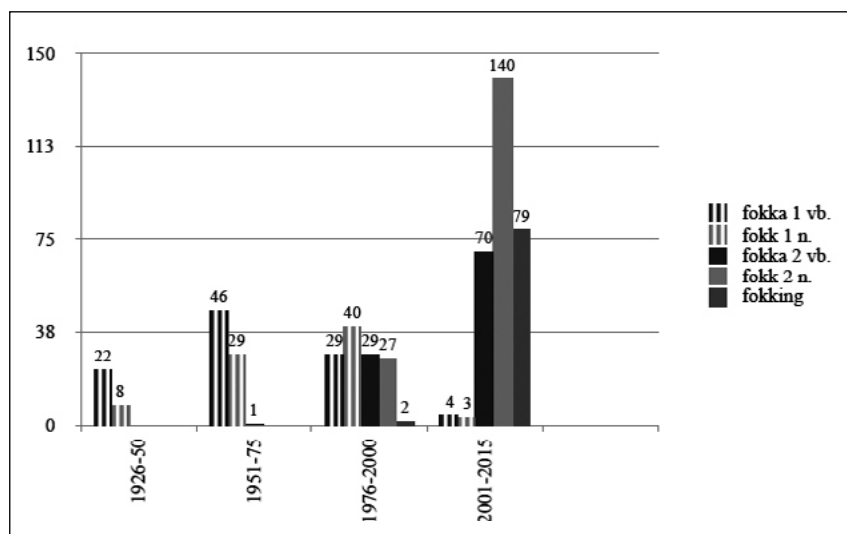
In a recent book by another prominent female writer, Steinunn Sigurðardóttir (born 1950), *Gæðakonur* ‘Warm-hearted women’ (2014), there are no fewer than four examples of *fokking*, used in dialogues. It would be a rather easy task to find more such examples in other novels.

3.4. Chronological distribution of the older and younger loanwords

The examples that form the basis for the discussion in the previous sections all belong to one text genre. This, of course, lessens somewhat their value as a means of obtaining a reliable perspective of the chronology of the words in question. In spite of that, it can be of interest to contrast the two word-groups against each other and show the outcome graphically and thus get a better view of how these two groups evolved chronologically. This is demonstrated in Figure 1. The source, the digital library *Tímarit.is*, is unfortunately not optimal for the study of vocabulary as it contains rather many errors, especially wrong OCR-readings, so several examples

may be missed or overlooked. The numbers in Figure 1 are, therefore, only as accurate as the data allow. The increased quantity of text material and the number of printed pages in newspapers and magazines in recent decades may, of course, skew the picture.¹⁶

Figure 1. *The chronological distribution of the older and younger loanwords in the texts.*



The older words (verb and noun) are marked with 1 and the younger with 2. Examples of *fokka* 1 from before 1926 (30 examples) are omitted so as to make the figure more readable. A distinction is not made between the two different meanings of *fokka* 1 ('let go' vs. 'loiter': 1926-50 = 21+1; 1951-75 = 39+7; 1976-2000 = 23+6; and 2001-15 = 2+2). Neither do we distinguish between the different functions of *fokk* 2 as a noun and as a strengthening expletive or interjection. Recorded examples of *fokk* 2 are 167, examples of *fokka* 2 are 100 and examples of *fokking* (and *fokkings*) are 81. Icelandified versions of English compounds and other domestic compounds are omitted. A few examples from articles that were reprinted

in later issues or were originally printed simultaneously in more than one newspaper or magazine, have been omitted.

It should be emphasized that the numbers in Figure 1 cannot be used to draw general conclusions about the frequency of the words, nor about their use in other genres. We know, for example, little or nothing about the use of the words in the spoken language.

The figure shows how the use of the verb *fokka* 1 in *this* material increased until the third quarter of the twentieth century (before that, first slowly from 1850 to 1926, not shown in the figure), and has since been going down. The first example of the noun *fokk* 1 in these texts is from 1935 and its use increased in the following decades. The use of both of these older words has decreased in the last years (note, though, that the last columns only show fifteen years, not twenty five). The increase in the use of the English loanwords after year 2000 is striking.

4. Discussion and closing words

In this section, the main results of the previous parts are summarized and discussed.

The verb *fokka* entered Icelandic in the early seventeenth century. In the beginning, it seems to have had the same or similar meaning as comparable words in related languages, that is ‘move’, ‘move fast’. Few examples of the verb have, however, come to light in preserved Icelandic texts from before the middle of the nineteenth century. It became gradually more usual in the course of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The verb is most common as a part of the infinitive expression *láta* + sth + *fokka*, which has semantically laden connotations of the meaning ‘let sth go’, ‘let sth drop’, and it is especially employed to give an utterance a careless and/or spontaneous appearance. Early in the twentieth century the verb began to show up as a regular impersonal verb, meaning ‘loiter, kill time’, and about the same time a noun was formed from it with a corresponding meaning, ‘time wasting, pottering’ etc. This

secondary meaning has certain semantic connotations in common with the younger loanword *fuck*, which was borrowed from English and began to show up in texts in the 1970s or perhaps a little earlier. Also, the old verb in its secondary meaning and the new loanword have some shared phraseological similarities, that is, verb + prepositional phrase *í* + sth ‘in sth’, *við* + sth ‘with sth’, even if they are not comparable semantically.

The intention with this article was in particular to clarify the landscape that awaited the English loanword *fuck* when it entered Icelandic, and to identify the reason why in pronunciation and spelling it turned out to become different from what was to be expected, that is, got the manifestations *fökk*, *fökka* rather than *fökk*, *fökka*. (To be sure, examples of the spelling ‘fökk’ do occur in the texts that were examined, but they are relatively few.)

In short, the new loanword was close enough to the older words, the verb and its nominal derivation, to gradually take these over. There is rather much that is needed for this to be able to take place, that is, for a new loanword to “steal” both the outward guise or manifestation of an existing lexeme as well as its meaning and function, or parts of these, while at the same time the old word continues to live on, at least to some extent, eventually ending with the speakers gradually ceasing to perceive the differences between the older and the younger words. It is not unusual that the ‘same’ word is borrowed twice at different times, sometimes from the same language, sometimes through different languages, and that it then has slightly different meanings depending on the age. This has been discussed repeatedly by scholars, see e.g. an old but still readable discussion of doublets and compounds in Walter Skeat’s *Principles of English Etymology* from 1887, pp. 414–416, and, from recent years e.g. short discussion in Crystal (2004: 63 and 64) and van Gelderen (2006: 94) about loanwords in English from Latin, only to mention two randomly chosen works, near at hand. But that a new imported word is close enough to older existing words to gradually take these over, seems to be much more unusual, even if it surely cannot be unique. I have done a

brief search for something resembling this, but I am at present not aware of anything exactly comparable in other languages.

In Icelandic, the prerequisites were at hand, an old borrowed verb and a younger nominal derivation, with connotations and especially a younger semantic development that made it possible – or at least easier – for a new loanword to blend in. Phonemically, the differences were minimal, even if it was necessary to overrule a certain phonetic-phonemic constraint. Interestingly, the older and the younger loanwords have historically the same etymological source, even if the time distance between their borrowing into Icelandic is too great and the borrowing route too different for this to be of any actual interest.

It has undoubtedly helped that the old words seem to have been held in low esteem; they are, for example, not listed in many Icelandic-foreign dictionaries and in the main monolingual dictionary for Icelandic – the dictionary that for years has been considered as giving the ultimate verdict for what is supposed to be ‘good’ language – the words are marked as informal and even with a question mark suggesting that they be avoided. There are also several examples that the words are printed within apologetic quotation marks.

It can be difficult to decide whether some of the excerpted examples of the noun *fokk* belong to the older lexeme or the new one. The older word has the meaning ‘idleness, loitering’ (or connotations of this meaning) while the younger one has the expected and international meaning of the English word.

When the examples from the newspapers and magazines are examined, we see that at the end of last century, examples of the old verb *fokka* decrease greatly. On the other hand, the expressions *fokka upp* and *fokka við* have become increasingly more common, especially in those issues of newspapers and magazines that are specially made for young people. Today, many Icelanders undoubtedly believe that the old words are the same as the new ones. I have at least had discussions with young people that assume this, and who (maybe only half-heartedly, though) oppose

fokk and *fokka* in the old meanings because they consider them to be English ‘bad’ or ‘dirty’ words. “I would never use *láta eitthvað fokka* in front of my children,” a young woman said to me, without knowing that she was using a verb-construction at least 150–200 years old. Whether this reflects a general view is unknown to me at present, but it would be interesting to examine further the old and the new words, their use and the attitude towards them. It would not surprise me if the younger generation today does not use the verb *fokka* in the old meaning and function at all.

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Notes

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2. A discussion of English influence on Modern Icelandic is found in Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007), who e.g. is of the opinion that “the status of English in Iceland today may have more in common with a second language situation than a foreign language context”, but that it nonetheless fits neither definition (2007: 51).
3. A bachelor thesis on the same topic as is presented here was submitted at the University of Iceland in spring 2016 (Gunnlaugsson 2016). Focussing more on the use of the younger loanword, Eng. *fuck*, than what is done here, most of the results common to his study and the present one are essentially the same.
4. See a discussion of language learning in Flege (1987: 48) and Abrahamsen (2004: 85–86), which is also of interest for other types of linguistic exposure, such as the import of foreign words.
5. It is of interest here, that corresponding words in the nearest relative of Icelandic and Norwegian, Faroese, are pronounced (and mostly spelt) the same way as in Icelandic. According to Jóansson (1997: 85), the pronunciation [fɔk,] is “the closest Faroese approximation of the English [fʌk]”, and Faroese [ɔ] for English [ʌ] “is only an approximate to comply with the Faroese phonological system”.
6. See a short description of these in section 3.
7. This corpus is a part of the research project Language Change and Linguistic Variation in Nineteenth-Century Icelandic and the Emergence of a National Standard (http://www.arnastofnun.is/page/ord_19old_en).
8. It can be difficult to cover narrower meanings and nuances, and readers who have Icelandic as their native tongue may sometimes find my translations of examples to be a little simplified.
9. The dictionary differentiates between this verb and the younger, homonymous loanword from English, which is presented as a new headword. See section 3.3.

10. There, the meaning is preceded with a question mark, whose use is explained on p. XIX as ‘bad [i.e. not recommended] language, word or meaning that should be avoided in Icelandic’ (Íslensk orðabók 1983).
11. Dan. *fukke* seems to have been used in a similar meaning in the early twentieth century according to Supplement til Ordbog over det danske Sprog from 1992–2005, which lists an example from the poetry collection Dansens Almagt (1921) by Otto Gelsted (1888–1968). The meaning is “at kaste (med foragt, som værdiløst)”, that is, ‘to throw (with contempt, as worthless)’. The verb was probably unusual in Danish when the dictionary was compiled, as it was not included in Vol. 6 (Fri-Gramvægt), published in 1924. Other examples of the Danish verb have not come to my knowledge. The same or similar meaning, ‘sack, reject, dismiss’, is in Swedish *focka* (see Svenska Akademiens ordbok and Hellquist 1980: 228–229).
12. All emphasis in Icelandic examples is mine.
13. Just one year after the occupation, in 1941, there were 27,000 British soldiers in Iceland. They were partly replaced that year by US troops and in 1943 there were around 50,000 allied soldiers in the country, of these more than 39,000 American soldiers (Whitehead 2002: 113, 128). Most of these were located in Reykjavík or nearby. The population of Iceland in 1943 was 126,000, of which almost 49,000 lived in the capital region. In 1948, the population was around 138,500 and the inhabitants of the capital region were a little more than 61,000 (Jónsson & Magnússon 1997: 102–103).
14. The present author, who was a teenager in the 1970s, has, for example, only vague recollections of them, maybe mostly in connection to the movie Woodstock (originally run in Reykjavík 1971, rerun in 1974) and Joe McDonald’s performing a call-and-response with the audience, spelling the word “fuck” and yelling “what’s that spell?”, with the audience responding “fuck!”.
15. For readers who want to acquaint themselves with the usage of the word fuck in English, Beers Fägersten (2012) is a new and interesting sociolinguistic study of people’s swearing. Among other studies, McEnery & Xiao (2004) is worth mentioning as well as the more essayistic discussion in Wajnryb (2004).
16. See Jansson (2015: 90–91) who discusses a possible way to remedy this problem for just this data. A discussion of the digital library and its usefulness for investigation of Icelandic vocabulary, as well as its limitations, is to be

found in Jansson (2015: 4, 72, 89–91); see also Svavarsdóttir, Helgadóttir & Kvaran (2014).

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