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FAROESE DIALECT CLASSIFICATIONS

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Abstract

This paper provides a historical overview of Faroese dialect classifications. Debes (1673) distinguished the southern from the northern dialects, separated by Skopunarfjørður. Svabo (1773) mentioned in addition to the northern and southern dialects, the dialect of the capital Tórshavn as being “the most corrupt” dialect. A decade later, Svabo distinguished a fourth dialect in the central part of the islands. In 1823 the dialect situation is shortly commented in a dispute on a translation of the gospel of St Matthew into Faroese, also distinguishing two dialects. Hammershaimb (1854) distinguished three main dialects: the Southern dialect, the dialect of Streymoy and the Northern dialect, but in 1891 he returned to the distinction between north and south. In 1996 and 2022 Petersen proposed a new classification, where he classified the dialect of Vágur as part of a North-Western group.

Keywords: dialect classification, isoglottic dialectology, Faroese

Name: Føroyar [fœɹjaɹ]

Language-code: ISO 639-1: fo, ISO 639-2: fao

CLASSIFICACIONS DIALECTALS DEL FEROÈS

Resum

Aquest article ofereix una visió històrica de les classificacions dels dialectes feroès. Debes (1673) va distingir els dialectes del sud dels del nord, separats per Skopunarfjørður. Svabo (1773) va esmentar, a més dels dialectes del nord i del sud, el dialecte de la capital Tórshavn com el dialecte “més corrupte”. Una dècada més tard, Svabo va destacar un quart dialecte a la part central de les illes. L’any 1823 es va reprendre la situació dialectal en un debat sobre una traducció de l’evangeli de sant Mateu al feroès, i es van distingir també dos dialectes. Hammershaimb (1854) va distingir tres dialectes principals: el dialecte del sud, el dialecte de Streymoy i el dialecte del nord, però el 1891 va retornar a la distinció entre el nord i el sud. Els anys 1996 i 2022 Petersen va proposar una nova classificació, on va situar el dialecte de Vágur com una part d’un grup del nord-oest.

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Paraules clau: classificació dialectal, dialectologia isoglòtica, feroès

FLOKKING AV FØROYSKUM DIALEKTUM

Úrtak

Henda greinin vísir eitt søguligt yvirlit yvir flokking av føroyskum dialektum. Debes (1673) býtti dialektirnar sundur í sunnanfjørðsmál og norðanfjørðsmál, har markið var Skopunarfjørður. Svabo (1773) nevndi umframt sunnan- og norðanfjørðsmál dialektina í høvuðsstaðnum, Tórshavn, sum “ta mest spiltu dialektina”. Tíggju ár seinni nevni Svabo eina fjórðu dialekt miðskeiðis í landinum. Í 1823 verða dialektirnar stutt umrøddar í einum kjaki um eina týðing av Matteusar evangelií til føroyskt, har skilt verður millum tvær dialektir. Hammershaimb (1854) skilir millum tríggjar høvuðsdialektir: sunnanfjørðsmál, streymoyarmál og norðoyamál (íroknað norðara og eystara part av Eysturoy og allar Norðuroyggjar), men í 1891 nevni hann bara tvær dialektir, sunnanfjørðsmál og norðanfjørðsmál. Í 1996 og í 2022 skeyt Petersen upp eina nýggja flokking, har ið hann roknaði Vágar sum part av útnyrðingsøkinum.

Lyklaorð: dialektflokkning, føroyskt

1. Introduction¹

Faroese is the official language of the Faroe Islands (Føroyar),² a North Atlantic archipelago, located 320 kilometres north-northwest of Scotland and about halfway between Norway and Iceland (See Map 1).

¹ I would like to thank Iben Nyholm Debess for drawing the maps and editorial assistance.

² The Faroese form is Føroyar; *oyar* represents the plural of *oy* (Old Norse *ey*, *eyjar* (pl.) older Faroese for islands. The first element, *før*, may reflect an Old Norse word *fær* ‘sheep’, although this analysis is sometimes disputed. The meaning of the name is most likely Islands of sheep.



N O R T H E R N E U R O P E

Map 1. The Faroe Islands and Northern Europe (<https://ian.macky.net/pat/map/neur/neurblu.gif>)



Map 2. The Faroe Islands (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_the_Faroe_Islands/)

The Faroe Islands are an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. The islands (Map 2) cover a total area of about 1,400 square kilometres with a population of around 53,000 (February 2022). Between 1035 and 1814, the Faroe

Islands were part of the Kingdom of Norway, which was in a personal union with Denmark from 1450. In 1814, the Treaty of Kiel transferred Norway to the King of Sweden, whereas Denmark retained the Faroe Islands, along with Greenland and Iceland. While part of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Faroe Islands have been self-governing since 1948.

Faroese belongs to the North Germanic language family as the other Nordic languages do. Structurally Faroese is most related to Icelandic, though less archaic than Icelandic, but more archaic than Danish. Torp (1998: 56-60) classifies Faroese as the Central Nordic language with Icelandic and Danish as the two opposite extremes. Characteristic for Faroese is three active cases in nouns and adjectives (Icelandic four). The Faroese verbs have personal inflection only in singular, while Icelandic has personal inflection in plural too.

Faroese has its roots in Old Norse, which was the common language used in the Northern countries during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages. The first Faroese settlers came presumably from Western Norway. Thus, Faroese has several traits in common with West Norwegian dialects and Icelandic as well. Faroese is traditionally characterized as a West Nordic language, structurally close to Icelandic with respect to inflectional morphology, but with differences in phonology and lexicon. Due to political development in the Middle Ages the Faroe Islands were brought under Danish rule, and Danish became the official language until the middle of the 20th century. Danish influence on Faroese is hence rather obvious, especially in the lexicon.

Because of the history of the language and the islands, and because of the position of Faroese between Icelandic on the one hand and the mainland Scandinavian languages on the other, both geographically and linguistically, Faroese is very interesting from a linguistic point of view (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 13).

The Nordic languages are traditionally divided into two main subgroups, East Nordic, and West Nordic. Faroese is usually classified as a West Nordic language together with Icelandic and Norwegian, as opposed to the East Nordic languages, Danish and Swedish. Such a classification is based on their historical linguistic relationship. From a synchronic point of view, however, it is problematic to consider

Norwegian as a West Nordic language, because it is more similar to Danish and Swedish than to Faroese and Icelandic. In another model, Faroese and Icelandic are classified as Insular-Scandinavian languages in contrast to Mainland Scandinavian (Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian). The main boundary in the Nordic languages today goes between Icelandic and Faroese on the one hand and Mainland Scandinavian on the other. These two areas are regarded as separate dialect continua, i.e., areas with different languages despite of common origin (Torp 1998: 46). Faroese is sometimes referred to as the Central Nordic language. This intermediate classification is based on typological studies.

Danish was the official language (and written language as well) in the Faroe Islands from the Reformation around 1540, until the middle of the 20th century. Danish was used by government officials, in school, church, court, etc. The Danish influence is obvious, especially in the spoken language with a lot of Danish loan words (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 13). In 1846 the Faroese orthography was established as a result of co-operation with Nordic linguists (Matras 1951, Lindqvist 2018, Lindqvist 2019). The orthography is strongly historical-etymological and in fact a reconstruction, based on the Old Norse language system.

Since the 17th century, scholars have paid attention to the dialects spoken on the Faroe Islands. The very first remark is a short note by the Danish minister and scholar and then provost of the Faroe Islands Lucas Jacobson Debes (1623-1675) in a book published 1673 in Danish, entitled *Færoæ et Færoa Reserata* (Debes 1673, Rischel 1963). The book is a topographic description of the islands and its inhabitants. Debes describes the language situation as follows:

They speak the Language of Norway, though in these times most Danish, having nevertheless many Norwegian words. There is also a great difference between the Northern Islands Dialects and those that live in the Southern Islands.³
(Sterpin 2017: 313)

³ The original Danish text: “Deris Spraaek er Norsk/ dog udi i disse Tjder meest Dansk/ dog hafve de endnu beholdne mange gamle Norske Ord/ oc er der ellers stoer Forskiel mellem deris Tale hos det Folck som boer Norden i Landet/ oc hos dem som boe udi Suderøerne”.

A few comments are needed here on the language situation in general. The vernacular language in the Faroe Islands was Faroese, however, it only existed as a spoken language at that time.⁴ Danish was the high-status language in the Faroe Islands and used as the written language. In addition, Danish was used in church and administration. It has been pointed out that although Debes called the Faroese spoken language Norwegian, he did not deny the existence of a Faroese language. He called it Norwegian because the Faroese language shares the same origin as Norwegian. Faroese was not recognized as a specific language at that time and could thus be (mis)interpreted as a variety of Norwegian like other Norwegian varieties and dialects. When Debes claims that the language was 'most Danish', it probably refers to that Danish was established as an official language in the Faroe Islands. Debes does not refer to the everyday language, but to the language of the church and administration. Concerning the dialectal situation, Debes only states dialectal differences between the northern and southern islands.

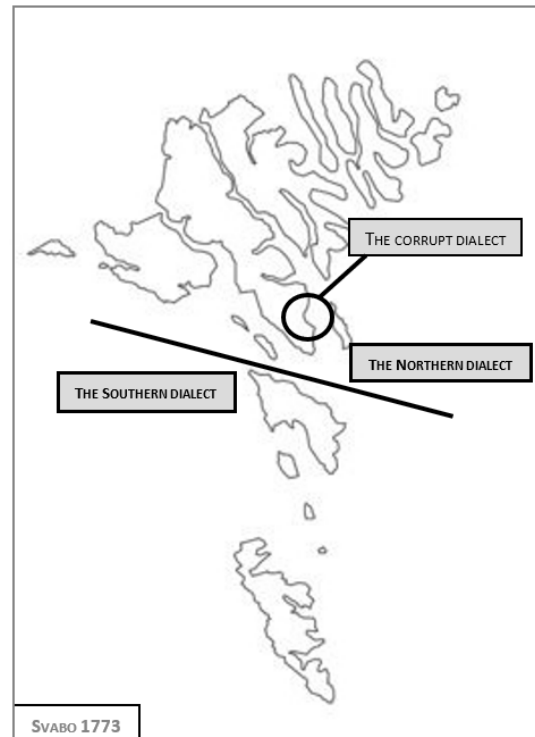
Jens Christian Svabo (1746-1824) was a dedicated collector of Faroese cultural heritage. He collected words for the first Faroese dictionary, *Dictionarium Færoense*, a multilingual dictionary (Faroese-Danish-Latin) (Matras 1966). The reason why he compiled a Faroese dictionary was that he worried about the future of the Faroese language, because it was heavily influenced by Danish. However, as a dedicated rationalist, he recommended his countrymen to drop Faroese and take Danish as national language in the Faroe Islands. With rationalistic arguments he said: As the Faroese pray to the same God as Danes and being part of the Danish Kingdom, it would be natural that the Faroese spoke the same language as Danes.⁵ He was a spokesman for a linguistic unification: Danish should be used in all countries belonging to the Danish Kingdom. At that time, around 4,000 inhabitants lived in the Faroe Islands.

In a manuscript of his dictionary (1773), Svabo describes the Faroese dialects only in five lines. He is doubtful about the number of dialects, and he says that it is

⁴ It was not until the second half of the 19th century that Faroese was established as a written language with a standard orthography.

⁵ Svabo's formulation is: "Jeg kan desuden ikke andet end forestille mig det som en langt større Fuldkommenhed, at Kolonien [i.e. the Faroe Islands] saalænge den med Dannemark tilbeder en Gud, knæler for en Konge, ogsaa talte med samme tunge som det [i.e. Denmark]" (Matras 1970: xv).

difficult to define the dialects and their boundaries. He points out three dialects: the southern dialect, the northern dialect, and the dialect of the capital Tórshavn, which is the most corrupt, as he says (See Map 3).

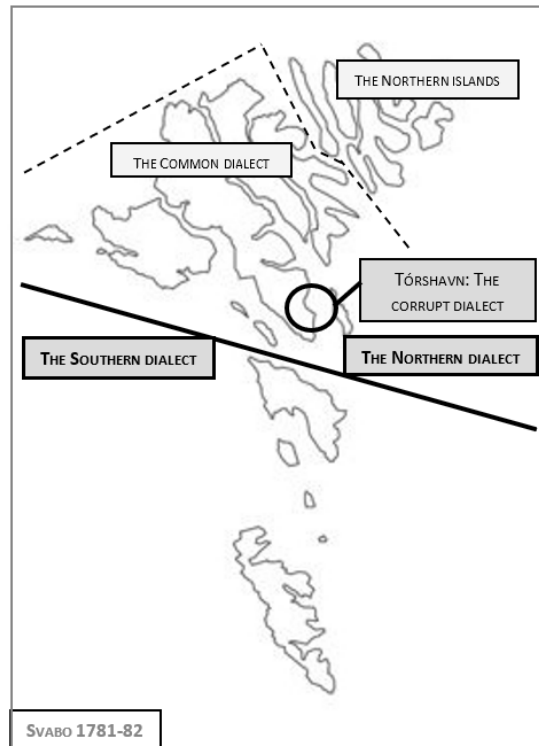


Map 3. Svabo's division of Faroese dialects 1773

It is unclear what Svabo's division is based upon. The only linguistic item he mentioned is the pronunciation of the diphthong <ó> as [ɔu:] in Tórshavn (elsewhere in this area [œu:]) (Matras 1970: xvii; Weyhe 2012a: 341).

In his description of the Faroe Islands 1781-1782, Svabo is more precise. Now he is operating with four dialect areas (See Map 4). He says that the southern dialect includes the two southernmost islands, Suðuroy and Sandoy. He does not make explicit what the northern dialect is covering. The dialect of Tórshavn is still characterized as "the most corrupt". The fourth dialect area he mentions is "the common" dialect (in Danish: "Den Almindelige") without further comments. This dialect seems to cover the central part, geographically located between the southern and the northern dialects (we must assume that the "corrupt" capital dialect is not included). This Central Faroese variety he used as the basis for the standard orthography in his manuscripts.

He doesn't mention any concrete dialect features except *a* in front of *ng/nk*, for example *Tangji-Tengji* <tangi> 'tongue of land' with *a*-pronunciation in the southern dialect and *e*-pronunciation in the northern dialect (Weyhe 2012a: 342).



Map 4. Svabo's division of Faroese dialects 1781-1782. The bold blue line marks the main division between the northern and the southern dialect

The border between the northern (*norðanfjørðsmál*) and southern (*sunnanfjørðsmál*) dialect area is a natural one: Skopunarfjørður, the strait separating Sandoy and Streymoy. The so-called common dialect in the central part of the country is a subdialect of the northern dialect. It is a challenge how to interpret the negative description of the dialect of Tórshavn as the most corrupt dialect (in Danish: "den mest fordærvede"). Svabo only mentions one single feature of the dialect of Tórshavn: the pronunciation of <ó> as [ɔu:] instead of [eu:]. In the same passage Svabo says that the southern and northern dialects are cleaner (more pure or unaffected) than the dialect of Tórshavn (Weyhe 2012a: 341). The reason is presumably the fact that the Tórshavn variety was much affected by Danish, because of very intense language contact with Danish in the capital. Most of the government officials in the town were Danes. Thus, the Danish language had high prestige, in addition the written language was Danish.

So, from a linguistic point of view this variety was not a geographical variety, but rather a social one. The classification of the capital dialect is hardly founded on objective dialectal features, but rather on subjective puristic values.

In 1823 the first biblical translation was published in Faroese (Matras 1973). It was a translation of the gospel of St Matthew,⁶ by the minister Jóhan Hendrik Schrøter (1771-1851). The translation is written in dialect, because there was no Faroese standard orthography at that time. Schrøter used the Central Faroese dialect in his translation. A few years later a Danish minister in the Northern Islands (Norðuroyggjar), Søren Sørensen, made a new translation of the same gospel in the northern dialect.⁷ Weyhe says that:

...Sørensen does little more than amend Schrøter's text. However, he not only gives it a more northern flavour but also brings it into closer harmony with Danish. These texts are among the first attempts to write Faroese prose, although the two translators take different linguistic paths. (Weyhe 2012b: 434)

In the preamble to the translation, Schrøter claims that the northern dialect has more archaic features than the southern one. One of the main differences observed by Schrøter is that the northern dialect distinguishes between plural and dual⁸ in the personal pronouns (*vit* in dual and *vær* in plural) and has personal inflexion of verbs in the plural (Weyhe 2012b: 458), and the southern dialect not. One of the differences mentioned by Schrøter is the phoneme *á* [ɔa:] which is pronounced [a:] on the Northern Islands (Norðuroyggjar). However, Schrøter does not mention one of the most obvious differences between north and south: the pronunciation of [ai] <ei> as [ɔi:] in north: [sdɔi:nɔɹ] <steinur> 'stone'. Schrøter says that the northern dialect is more similar to Old Icelandic in the language structure and probably also in phonology (ibid.). This historical comparison to Old Icelandic is interesting in terms of attitudes to dialectal innovations and archaisms, but unfortunately Schrøter doesn't discover

⁶ In everyday speech this book was called the Faroese book, because it was the first book published containing Faroese text.

⁷ This translation was never published.

⁸ In present-day Faroese dual forms do no longer exist.

anything more about this interesting question. On the one hand, the oldest descriptions of Faroese dialects are incomplete and accidental to present-day dialectological standards. On the other hand, they offer interesting insights in the development of Faroese dialects and are the basis for the dialect classifications in the 19th and 20th century by Hammershaimb and Petersen.

2. Classifications

2.1 *Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb (1854)*

The minister and philologist V.U. Hammershaimb was the first to classify Faroese dialects based on a set of linguistic features. He was a key figure in the Faroese nation building in the 19th century. Hammershaimb was part of the linguistic team that created the Faroese orthography in 1847 in Copenhagen, Denmark (Vrieland 2023). The orthography is strongly historical and etymological, founded on the Old Norse language. The orthography is therefore in good harmony with the Romantic movement at that time. In a Faroese context Hammershaimb is recognized as the father of the Faroese orthography (see Lindqvist 2018, 2019).

Hammershaimb's first dialect classification is published in his Faroese grammar (1854) in the Danish magazine *Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 'Annals for Nordic Antiquity and History'. This grammar was revised and republished in *Færøsk Anthologi* 'Faroese Anthology' (1886-1891) (Marnersdóttir & Sigurðardóttir 2011: 289). His grammar is based on data collected in the Faroe Islands 1847-1848 (Hammershaimb 1847).

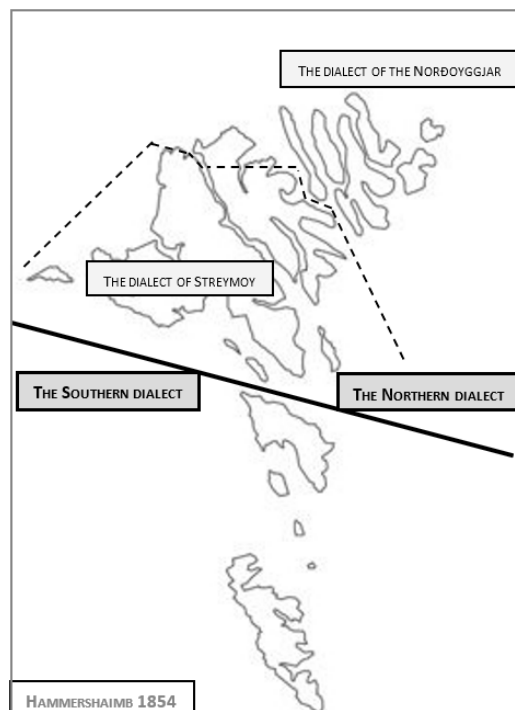
2.1.1 Framework: Isoglottic dialectology

Hammershaimb based his classification on phonological features, for instance: <ang> [aŋg] in the southern dialect (south of Skopunarfjørður) and [ɛŋg] outside this area, for example [laŋgʊ] <langur> 'long' in Suðuroy and Sandoy, and [lɛŋgʊ] in the

other dialects. The dialect of Streymoy (with Vágur and Eysturoy) is very heterogeneous with big differences inside this area. The diphthong <ei> is pronounced [ai:] in the southern part of Streymoy and Vágur, [ɔi:] in Norðuroyggjar and Eysturoy and the northern part of Streymoy, [bai:n], [bɔin:] <bein> ‘leg’. Norðuroyggjar and the northern part of Eysturoy have [a:]-pronunciation of the diphthong á [ɔa:]; outside this area the pronunciation is [ɔa:], for example [bɔa:htʊ] [ba:htʊ] <bátur> ‘boat’.

2.1.2 Classification of dialects and subdialects

In his first classification in 1854 Hammershaimb distinguished three main dialect areas: 1) The southern dialect (Suðuroy, Sandoy, Dímun, Skúvoy), 2) the Streymoy-dialect with Vágur and most of Eysturoy included, 3) The dialect of the Norðuroyggjar (Northern Islands) with the northernmost part of Eysturoy included (Map 5). Their main phonological characteristics and the islands where they are spoken are presented in Table 3.



Map 5. Hammershaimb's Faroese dialect classification (1854)

Dialects	Subdialects	Characteristics
Southern	Suðuroy, Sandoy, Skúvoy, Stóra Dímun	old <a> = [a] before <ng, nk> old <ei> = [ai:] old <á> = [ɔa:]
The Streymoy-dialect	Streymoy (incl. Tórshavn), Vágar, part of Eysturoy	old <ei> = [ai:], but on Northern Streymoy and Eysturoy old <ei> = [ɔi:] old <á> = [ɔa:]
Northern	The Northern islands and North-east Eysturoy	old <ei> = [ɔi:] old <á> = [a:] Intonation

Table 3. Hammershaimb's first classification (1854). The three dialects and their main characteristics

Each of these main areas can be divided into different subdialects. Within the southern dialect (south of Skopunarfjørður) covering Suðuroy and Sandoy there are big differences. There are two main criteria to distinguish between the southern dialect area (Suðuroy, Sandoy) and the rest of the islands: the pronunciation of *a* in front of *ng*, on Suðuroy and Sandoy pronounced [aŋg], in the north pronounced as [ɛŋg], <ganga> 'walk', <fanga> 'catch', and the pronunciation of short *o*, in the south pronounced as [ɔ], and in the north as [œ], [fɔlk], [fœlk] <fólk> 'people'.⁹ However, the internal differences in the southern area are obvious. Some examples: The Suðuroy pronunciation of *ó* in front of *gv* is [ɔ], [rɔgva] <rógva> 'to row', on Sandoy it is pronounced [ɛ], as it is elsewhere on the islands. The diphthong [ɛa:] <æ>, is pronounced [e:] on Suðuroy, [le:ra] <læra> 'learn', while Sandoy shares the same pronunciation as the northern dialects, [ɛa:]. The use of the pronouns in 1st and 2nd person plural nominative are *okur* 'we' and *tykur* 'you' on Suðuroy compared to *vit* 'we' and *tit* 'you' in all the other dialects. The 1st personal pronoun in nominative singular on Suðuroy is [je:] <eg> 'I', in all the other dialects it is [e:] (Weyhe 2012a: 343-344).

The northern dialect area also contains subdialects. The pronunciation of the diphthong [ai:] <ei> is realised as [ɔi:] in Eysturoy, Norðuroyggjar and the northern part of Streymoy. In this area there is syncretism between <ei> and <oy>, realised as [ɔi:],

⁹ The island of Nólsoy belongs to the southern part.

<bein> [bci:n] ‘leg’ and <royn> [rçi:n] ‘try’. Another isogloss is the pronunciation of the long <ó>, in the northern area (Eysturoy, Norðuroyggjar, the northern part of Streymoy and Vágar) pronounced eu:], in the south pronounced [ɔu:].

2.2 *Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb (1891)*

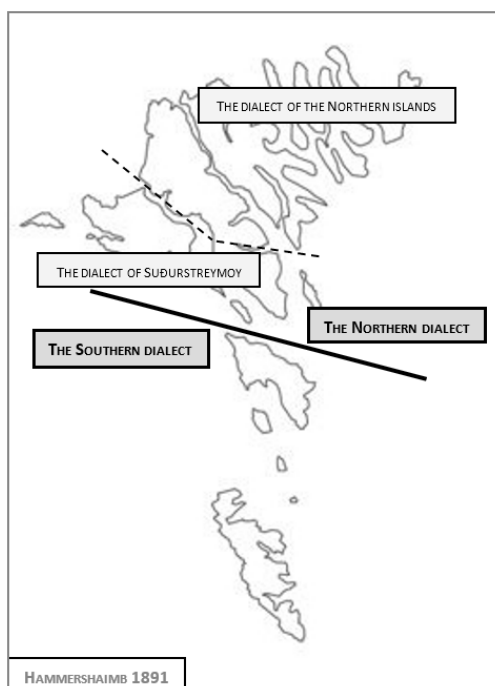
Hammershaimb revised his grammar from 1854 and published it in *Færøsk Anthologi* ‘Faroese Anthology’ (1886-1891) (Marnersdóttir & Sigurðardóttir 2011: 289). A new classification of Faroese dialects was presented in volume II (Hammershaimb 1891).

2.2.1 Framework: Isoglottic dialectology

The grammar from 1891 in *Færøsk Anthologi* is mainly based on the same data set, used for the 1854 publication of the grammar. Hammershaimb does not mention explicitly, why he changes the classification from three to two dialect areas, but according to Linn (1998) one reason could be that he puts more stress on standardization and uniformity than dialects and variation. Linn says: “Variety has a lower profile in 1891 than it did in 1854 (...) Hammershaimb changes modes of description to reinforce the idea of unity within the language” (Linn 1998: 114).

2.2.2 Classification of dialects and subdialects

In his second classification Hammershaimb distinguished two main dialect areas: The southern dialects (*Søndenfjordsmålet*) and the northern dialects (*Nordenfjordsmålet*) divided from each other by Skopunarfjørður (Map 6 and Table 4).



Map 6. Hammershaimb's second Faroese dialect classification (1891)

Dialects	Subdialects	Varieties	Main characteristics
Southern dialect	Suðuroy	Suðuroy	[aŋg], [ɔgv], <i>okur, tykur</i> 'we, you' p, t, k unspir. after long vowels short <ó> = [ɔ] <ei> = [ai:]
	Sandoy	Sandoy, Skúvoy, Stóra Dímun	[aŋg], [ɛgv], <i>vit, tit</i> 'we, you' p, t, k unspir. after long vowels short <ó> = [ɔ] <ei> = [ai:]
Northern dialect	Suður-streymoy	Streymoy Tórshavn, Vágur, Nólsoy, Hestur, Koltur	[ɛŋg], [ɛgv], <i>vit, tit</i> p, t, k aspir. after long vowels (Tórshavn most b, d, g) short <ó> = [œ] (Nólsoy: [ɔ]) <ei> = [ai:]
	Norður-oyggjar	Norður-streymoy, Eysturoy, Norðuroyggjar	[ɛŋg], [ɛgv], <i>vit, tit</i> 'we, you' p, t, k aspir. after long vowels short <ó> = [œ] <ei> = [ɔi:]

Table 4. Some features in Hammershaimb's classification (1891)

2.3 Hjalmar P. Petersen (2022)

In 1996 Hjalmar P. Petersen published a study on the dialect of the westernmost islands of the Faroe Islands, Vággar og Mykines. Earlier works in Faroese dialectology, e.g., *Færøsk Anthologi* (1891) consider this dialect as part of the central dialect in Suðurstreymoy. Petersen (1996) argues that the Vággar dialect should be seen as a separate dialect, based on the following linguistic criteria that do not exist in the surrounding dialects:

1. A special intonation called *drynjing*,¹⁰ i.e., the tone of an unstressed syllable is approximately the same as of the stressed syllable. “The drynjing is one of the reasons for very clearly articulated vowels at the end of a word” (Petersen 1996: 5 and 19). This intonation is specific for Vággar and Mykines.
2. Diphthongization and glide insertions in structures like a/æ-a > [ei:-a] (hagan > [hei:jan] ‘outfield’; á-a > [ɔu-a] fáa > [fɔu:wa] ‘get’, ø-a > [yu:-a] kvøða > [kvyu:wa] ‘chant a ballad’. This phenomenon occurs also sporadically in Norðurstreymoy and perhaps in Eysturoy.
3. The Vággar dialect distinguish between the diphthongs <ai> [ai:] and <oy> [oi:]; these diphthongs have been merged in Eysturoy and Norðurstreymoy to [oi:].
4. The pronunciation of the diphthong <ó> is in the Vággar dialect [ɛu:], in Suðurstreymoy [ɔu:].
5. The Vággar dialect does not have lenition of intervocalic and postvocalic plosives as is the case in Suðurstreymoy. Vággar dialect: [t^hea:^hka], Suðurstreymoy: [t^hea:ga] <taka> ‘take, Vággar dialect [bø:^hkɔɹ], Suðurstreymoy [bø:gɹ] ‘books’.
6. The dialect of Vággar has distinct pronunciation of *i* and *u* in unstressed ending syllables, compared to Suðurstreymoy with syncretism of *i* and *u*. The distribution of the endings *-ir* and *-ur* is different in Vággar compared to Suðurstreymoy. Because of that the dialect of Vággar has a different morphology compared to Suðurstreymoy.

¹⁰ *Drynjing* means originally ‘lowing from cows’.

In his study of the Faroese dialects (Petersen 2022), see below, the dialect of Vágur is classified as part of the North-Western area (together with Norðurstreymoy and Eysturoy).

2.3.1 Framework: Isoglottic dialectology

Petersen's (2022) classification is conducted within the framework of isoglottic dialectology, primarily based on phonological features and to a lesser extent on morphological ones.

2.3.2 Classification of dialects and subdialects

Petersen (2022) distinguishes four main dialect areas: North-Western Faroese, Central Faroese, Northern Faroese (Norðuroyggjar), and Southern Faroese. The main criteria are as follows: ending vowels, stressed vowels, and pronunciation of *p-t-k* after long vowels (Map 7 and Table 5).



Map 7. Faroese dialects reclassified by Petersen (2022: 11)

Dialects	Subdialects	Characteristics
North-Western Faroese	Vágar	Diphthongization and glide insertion, ^h p, ^h t, ^h k, <ei> = [ai:], <ó> = [œu:], [œ]
	Norðurstreymoy Eysturoy	<ei> = [ɔi:], ^h p, ^h t, ^h k, <ó> = [œu:], [œ] <ei> = [ɔi:], ^h p, ^h t, ^h k, <ó> = [œ:], [œ]
Central Faroese	Tórshavn, Hestur, Koltur	<ei> = [ai:], p, t, k, <ó> = [ɔu:], [œ]
	Nólsoy (in a transition area)	<ei> = [ai:], p, t, k, <ó> = [au:], [ɔ]
	Kaldbak (in a transition area)	<ei> = [ɔi:], p, t, k, <ó> = [œu:], [œ]
Northern Faroese (Norðuroyggar)	Norðuroyggar	<ei> = [ɔi:], <á> = [a:], p, t, k, <ó> = [œu:], [œ]
	Kalsoy (southern villages in a transition area ¹¹)	<ei> = [ɔi:], <á> = [a:] and [ɔa:], p, t, k, <ó> = [œu:], [œ]
	Gjógv, Eiði	<ei> = [ɔi:], <á> = [a:], ^h p, ^h t, ^h k, <ó> = [œu:], [œ]
Southern Faroese	Suðuroy	<ei> = [ai:], p, t, k, <ó> = [ɔu:], [ɔ] <ang> [aŋg], <ógv> [ɔgv], <okur> ‘we’, <tykur> ‘you’
	Sandoy, Skúvoy, Stóra Dímun	<ei> = [ai:], p, t, k, <ó> = [œu:], [ɔ] <ang> [aŋg]

Table 5. Some features in Petersen’s classification (2022)

3. Conclusion

Faroese has no spoken standard and dialect is used (and expected) in all spoken situations. The most significant dialect division separates the north from the south by means of a natural border, Skopunarfjørður, the strait separating Sandoy and Streymoy. However, recent dialect studies in Sandoy and Suðuroy show levelling of the dialects across this border, where Central Faroese forms to a great extent have replaced the dialect forms among the younger generations on these islands (see e.g.

¹¹ On the dialect on Kalsoy, see Staksberg (1991).

Jacobsen 2020).

The oldest note on Faroese dialects is in a topographical description of the Faroe Islands from 1673. It is not a dialect study, but a short parenthetical remark in a non-linguistic context. Debes did not mention any dialectal features or subcategories at all. He only distinguished the two main dialect areas, known as the language of *norðanfjørðs* 'north of the fjord' and *sunnanfjørðs* 'south of the fjord'. However, Debes' observation is interesting in respect to the relative age of dialectal splitting in the Faroe Islands.

Hundred years later, in the 1770'ies and 1780'ies, Svabo recognized three and four dialects, respectively. In addition to the south-north division, Svabo mentions specifically the corrupt dialect of the capital, Tórshavn. He separates the variety spoken in the capital from the surrounding dialect of the central part of the islands. This classification is problematic. From a dialectological point of view, the variety of the capital must be considered as part of the central Faroese dialect, because geographically Tórshavn is inside the central area. Therefore, I am inclined to interpret Svabo's wording as a sociolinguistic remark rather than a dialectal one. We must bear in mind that the variant used in Tórshavn was much affected by Danish, because of an extensive language contact with Danish. Most of the officials in high positions in Tórshavn were Danes, and Danish had high prestige. People in Tórshavn had to use Danish in contact with the officials, and a lot of Danish words were used in the spoken language in Tórshavn. So, from a linguistic point of view the variety spoken in the capital was not a geographical dialect, but rather a social dialect. These societal conditions must be taken into consideration in Svabo's classification of the dialect of Tórshavn.

In 1823 the Faroese dialects were brought into focus in connection with a translation of the Gospel according to St Matthew. This was before the written standard was established. In 1823 the gospel was published in a translation by Schrøter, minister on Suðuroy. Schrøter used the central (or southern) variety in his translation. Schrøter's colleague in Norðuroyggjar, Sørensen, disliked this translation, because of the dialect he used. He made a new translation in the northern dialect as a

reaction to Schrøter’s translation. Neither Schrøter, nor Sørensen classified Faroese dialects. Nevertheless, their translations are interesting from a comparative and a perceptual perspective, because they shed light on the question: which features are perceived as characteristic for the dialects in question (Matras 1973).

The first real attempt to classify Faroese dialects was made in Hammershaimb’s grammar (1854). He distinguished three dialect areas: 1) The southern dialect, south of Skopunarfjørður, 2) The Streymoy-dialect (Vágar and part of Eysturoy included), and 3) The dialect of Norðuroyggjar. This classification is mainly based on phonological differences (Hammershaimb 1854: 235-236). In the revised publication (1891), Hammershaimb distinguished two main dialect areas, each with two subdialects:¹² However, the classification problem is not solved by this division. Weyhe (2012c: 378) says: “We notice by Jakob Jakobsen the same uncertainty as by Svabo and Hammershaimb, when boundaries shall be drawn inside this area in Norðuroyggjar, Eysturoy, and Norðurstreymoy.”

Traditionally, the dialect of Vágar and Mykines has been classified as part of the dialect of Suðurstreymoy, despite phonological differences with the surrounding dialects. Petersen’s study (1996) demonstrates that the Vágar dialect ought to be classified as a separate dialect, because of some specific features, and Petersen points out five specific phonological and morphological features that differ from Suðurstreymoy. In a recent study, Petersen (2022) points out four dialects. His classification is mostly based on phonological features, for example ending vowels, stressed vowels and the pronunciation of *p*, *t*, *k*. The number of dialects can be put on a timetable like this:

<i>Year</i>	1673	1773	1781- 1782	1823	1854	1891	2022
<i>Number</i>	2	3	4	2	3	2	4

¹² The revised classification was made by a young student, Jakob Jakobsen (Weyhe 2012c: 377).

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