

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson One

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Miscellany
 1. About this course
 2. On learning languages in general
 3. On learning arcane languages
 4. Old Norse? Which Old Norse?
 5. English grammatical vocabulary
2. Grammar
 1. Declension of pronouns
 2. Declension of nouns
 3. Article
 4. Gender of nouns
 5. Notes on word order
3. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronoun
 3. Verbs
 4. Adverbs
 5. Conjunctions
 6. Sample sentences
4. Exercises
 1. Mark the pronouns' cases (optional)
 2. Translate the phrases into English
 3. Translate the phrases into Norse
 4. Translate the text into English
 5. Translate the text into Norse
5. Looking at real texts
 1. A few words from Snorra-Edda
 2. Two lines from the Völuspá

0. Miscellany

0.1 About this course

This course is designed for speakers of English. No previous knowledge of Old Norse or any other language is needed or expected.

The aim of the course is to aid beginning students of Old Norse in building up sufficient basic knowledge for the student to be able to start studying on his own after the course. The method is to focus on building up a firm

understanding of the grammatical basics of the language, having the student use the language as much as possible.

We will try throughout the course to spice it up with background information, as most students of Old Norse have strong interest in Old Norse culture as well as language. We will also refrain from using nonsensical sentences, preferring "real" made-up sentences or simplified versions of actual texts.

Lessons are organised into four chapters. The first one (0) contains information that is not really the core of the matter but can be useful and interesting to read. The next one (1) contains the new grammar for the lesson, then (2) comes the vocabulary, all of which you should memorise, and then (3) exercises to help you get a hands on feeling for the subject. In the last chapter (4) we look at real texts or sentences from the literature. Do not get discouraged if this is difficult at times, you don't have to memorise everything there, just read through it.

0.2 On learning languages in general

The process of learning languages is often somewhat misperceived, especially in cultures with little tradition or need for it. Language learning is gradual, piece-by-piece, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, often rewarding, often frustrating. There is no black and white in language learning, no set stage where one "speaks the language", before which one understood and spoke nothing, after which one understands and speaks everything. It's an open-ended process, from which one can enter and exit at will, always benefitting from every minute effort. How this relates to our course, is to make you understand that you will not exit from it completely fluent in Old Norse, having "finished" that language, because there is no finish line; but neither will you have wasted your time, because time invested in language study is never "lost". You are to emerge from the course having achieved a certain point, a certain skill level, from which you can benefit, even if it cannot be considered fluency. Most importantly, the end results should be gratifying and the process fun, though unavoidably hard at times.

0.3 On learning arcane languages

The study of arcane languages such as Old Norse has certain marked differences to the study of modern languages; the most important factor is, naturally, that one can never hear anybody speak the language. That can be a significant psychological obstacle in memorizing words and reading text. Coming from an experienced language learner, the problem with learning arcane languages is that one has no access to the "sound of the language", its very soul. This makes it more difficult to get a feel for its structure, to become comfortable with it, even to develop feelings for it, all factors not to be taken lightly.

In studying arcane languages, one must deal with this by "reliving" and "realizing" the language, by familiarizing oneself with the culture of the language's former speakers and imagining the life behind it. One must understand that it was once the native language of a whole nation of people of all kinds, to whom it was as dear and natural as your first language is to you. Understand that those people thought in this language, expressed their needs in it, their love, their anger and hate, their first and last words; parent to child, friend to friend, husband to wife, foe to foe, any person to any other person. It was as living once as any given language of today, complete with slang, neologisms, swearing and nonsense, just as well as the more commonly known poetry and literature. Once one genuinely and truly understands this, one has gained an important psychological advantage in the learning process of an arcane language.

0.4 Old Norse? Which Old Norse?

The term Old Norse refers to the language spoken in Scandinavia and Scandinavian settlements from about 800 to about 1350. It should be obvious that it was not exactly the same language over a vast area and 550 years. It is usually split into two groups, which are then split into two dialects.

West Norse

East Norse

Old Icelandic Old Norwegian Old Danish Old Swedish

Of all these, the dialect which preserved the most interesting literature is Old Icelandic. This course will teach Old Icelandic from the 13th century; when such works as *Heimskringla* and the *Edda* were composed. The spelling of Old Icelandic words is normalised to the accepted standard. When texts that are not from the 13th century are quoted we will still use the same spelling. The term 'Old Norse' is sometimes used to mean specifically what we here call 'West Norse' or what we here call 'Old Icelandic'. It is sometimes applied to Icelandic up to the 16th century.

0.5 English grammatical vocabulary

It is quite possible to teach and learn languages without the use of grammatical terms. Indeed, a child does not learn to speak by first learning what a noun is. Yet, it is our opinion that it is practical to use grammatical vocabulary in describing the Old Norse language. This course assumes knowledge of the following words for parts of speech. Very short descriptions follow.

- Noun: A name of a person, place or thing (book, Paris, John).
- Adjective: A word that describes a noun (good, bad, ugly).

- Pronoun: A word used instead of a noun (he, we, which).
- Verb: A word that describes what someone is doing (do, kill, say).
- Adverb: A word that describes a verb (well, highly, badly).
- Conjunction: A connecting word (and, but, or).
- Preposition: A word placed before a noun to indicate place, direction etc. (to, from, in).

As new terms are introduced make an effort at understanding them; it is essential for making sense of the text.

1. Grammar

1.1 Declension of pronouns

In Norse, nouns and pronouns are declined in cases. What on earth does that mean? We will use English as a starting point to explain. Consider the English sentence: "She loves me." If you have learnt syntax you will know that the "subject" of this sentence is the pronoun "she" and the "object" is the pronoun "me". If you haven't learnt syntax I'll let you in on the trick; the subject in a sentence is the word that is doing stuff, the object is the word stuff is done to. So, in our sentence "she" is doing stuff and it's being done to "me". Simple. Now let's look at another sentence: "I love her." Okay, now "I" is doing stuff, so "I" is the subject, and it's being done to "her" which must then be the object. Now consider; how does the English language distinguish between subject and object in a sentence? As you will see from our example there are two methods:

1. Changing the word order. You will note that the word preceding the verb is the subject whereas the word following the verb is the object.
2. Changing the form of the words. Aha! This is where things get interesting. Of course the "she" in the first sentence is the same person as the "her" in the second sentence, similarly the "I" and "me" refer to the same bloke. We say the word itself hasn't changed, only the form of it. We'll make a little table:

Subject: I you he she it

Object: me you him her it

You will note that sometimes the word changes completely when switching between the roles of subject and object, like "I" to "me", sometimes it changes but remains recognisably the same, like "he" to "him", and sometimes it doesn't change at all, like "you" to "you".

Now we have seen that English uses different forms of pronouns to represent subject and object but those different forms are also used for other things.

Let's look at the sentence "I am he." Something strange has happened; preceding the verb there is a pronoun in the subject form, well and good, but

following the verb is a pronoun that is also in the subject form. The explanation lies in the verb we're using; the verb "to be" doesn't really describe "stuff being done" (as we have so eloquently put it in this passage). It's more like an equals sign: "I = he". In such cases the word following the verb is called neither object nor subject but "complement". Now that we've found a new use for our subject form we'll have to redo our table:

Subject, complement: I you he she it

Object: me you him her it

Now we might wonder whether there is another use for the object form as well. Indeed there is; consider the sentence "I saved it for him". Here "I" is the subject and "it" is the object, as you will have realised, but what about "him"? It's not following a verb so it can't be an object but it's still in the object form. We conclude that words following a preposition take the object form. Again we have to redo our table:

Subject, complement: I you he she it

Object, prepositional: me you him her it

Now that we've found more than one use for both of our forms we'll name those forms for easy reference. We'll call them nominative and accusative and we'll refer to them collectively as the cases of the pronouns. We'll call this changing of forms by the pronouns declension.

Nominative case: I you he she it

Accusative case: me you him her it

Remember what we stated at the beginning of this section? "In Norse, nouns and pronouns are declined in cases". Now we can state: "In English, pronouns are declined in cases". The beauty of it is that the Norse cases of nominative and accusative work exactly like the English cases we have been defining. Thus the nominative in Norse serves as subject and complement and the accusative as object and prepositional. The Norse table corresponding to the English table above looks like this:

Nominative case: **ek þú hann hon þat**

Accusative case: **mik þik hann hana þat**

You notice a slight resemblance between the two tables. You also note that, as with English, when the pronouns go from nominative to accusative they

sometimes change much (ek - mik), sometimes little (hon - hana) and sometimes not at all (hann - hann). Now you can do exercise 3.1.

1.2 Declension of nouns

In the Norse language, nouns, like pronouns, are declined in cases. Again we start by discussing English. Consider the sentence "Peter calls Maggie." Here the subject is "Peter" and the object is "Maggie". Now another sentence: "Maggie calls Peter." The roles of subject and object have been switched, but how? Not by changing the forms of the words, as with the pronouns, but solely by changing the word order. In contrast, Norse solves the problem of distinguishing between subject and object with case endings and not word order.

Now to the good stuff. Norse nouns are declined in cases. That is, the form of the nouns change depending on whether they play the role of nominative or accusative. The wonderful science of grammar puts nouns into different groups depending on their declension pattern. The first group we will look at is called "strong masculine"; accept those terms as arbitrary for now.

The pattern of the strong masculine word is that they have the ending -r in the nominative. We'll look at some examples from our vocabulary in 2.1.

Singular of the strong masculine declension:

Nominative: **álfr baugr Haukr konungr**

Accusative: **álf baug Hauk konung**

Note that proper names (like Haukr here) are declined in cases like any other nouns.

1.3 Article

In English there are two kinds of articles; the indefinite article "a and an" and the definite article "the". The Norse language has no indefinite article, thus "draugr" by itself means "a ghost". Norse, however, does have a definite article though it doesn't work quite like the English one. Rather than being a small unchanging word preceding nouns the Norse article is a suffix depending on case, gender and number. For the masculine words we've introduced the article in both nominative singular and accusative singular is "-inn" tacked on to the words. Thus:

Indefinite Definite

Nominative **álfr** **álfrinn**

Accusative **álf** **álfinn**

or in so many words:

álfr = an elf (nominative) álfrinn = the elf (nominative)

álf = an elf (accusative) álfinn = the elf (accusative)

1.4 Gender of nouns

We said before that the group of nouns we're looking at is called strong masculine. The "strong" classification is arbitrary but we're going to let you in on the masculine thing. Every word in Norse has an arbitrary "gender", masculine, feminine or neuter. When we refer to a word with a certain gender we have to use the pronoun with the same gender. Thus masculine nouns take the masculine pronoun (hann=he), feminine nouns take the feminine pronoun (hon=she) and neuter nouns take the neuter pronoun (þat=it). Since all the nouns used in this chapter are masculine you'll be concerned with "hann" for now.

1.5 Notes on word order

Word order in English is quite rigid. For a simple sentence it's always "subject-verb-object". In Norse this is not so, the word order is quite free, mainly because the information about which word plays which role is given by grammatical endings (cases and more) whereas English relies on word order to convey this information. Remember to check the grammatical ending of Norse words to find their place in the sentence.

This is not to say that there aren't certain conventions on word order in Norse. Most often there is one thing that is most natural but be prepared to meet anything.

In Norse, titles usually follow the name they refer to; thus 'king Óláfr' is 'Óláfr konungr'.

2. Vocabulary

2.1. Nouns

All nouns here are of the strong masculine declension.

álfr	elf
------	-----

baugr	ring
-------	------

brandr	sword
--------	-------

dvergr	dwarf
draugr	ghost
hest	horse
haukr	hawk
hjálmr	helmet
konungr	king
knífr	knife
ormr	worm, serpent
úlfr	wolf

Names:

Haukr

Óláfr

Sigurðr

Tyrfingr

2.2 Pronoun

hann he, it

We gloss the word as both "he" and "it" as it can refer both to men and to things with masculine gender. Remember that all the nouns given in this lesson are of masculine gender.

2.3 Verbs

The forms given here are the third person singular of the verbs. This corresponds with the English s-form (like "sees" and "hears"). This is all you need to know for now.

á owns

er is (takes a complement!)

heitir is called (takes a complement!)

sér sees

segir says

tekr takes

vegr kills (usually in battle), slays

Sometimes the subject is dropped and the verb alone gives the meaning. Thus 'vegr' alone might mean 'he kills'.

2.4 Adverbs

hér here

eigi not

ok also

2.5 Conjunctions

These conjunctions are used much as in English. Note that 'ok' can be either an adverb or a conjunction, depending on context.

ok and

en but

2.6 Sample sentences

The following sentences represent one approach to tackling Norse sentences. If you're comfortable with it you can employ it yourself in the exercises.

1. Vegr orminn Óláfr.
 - Subject: Óláfr [nominative, proper name]

- Object: orminn [accusative, with article]
- Meaning: Óláfr kills the serpent
- 2. Baug á dvergr
 - Subject: dvergr [nominative, without article]
 - Object: baug [accusative, without article]
 - Meaning: A dwarf has a ring.
- 3. Draugrinn sér konunginn.
 - Subject: draugrinn [nominative, with article]
 - Object: konunginn [accusative, with article]
 - Meaning: The ghost sees the king.
- 4. Heitir konungrinn Óláfr.
 - Subject: konungrinn [nominative, with article]
 - Complement: Óláfr [nominative, proper name]
 - Meaning: The king is called Óláfr.

After you finish studying the vocabulary you should take on the remaining exercises.

3. Exercises

3.1 Mark the pronouns' cases (optional)

In the following bible quotes there are many pronouns. Locate them and find out what case they're in. Also note the reason they are in that case.

- a) I am he that liveth.
- b) Take now thy son whom thou lovest and offer him there for a burnt offering.
- c) And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her: "Come lie with me, my sister".
- d) Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat.
- e) Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.

3.2 Translate the phrases into English.

- a) Dvergrinn á baug.
- b) Hjálm á Haukr.
- c) Álfrinn sér draug.
- d) Hann er konungrinn.
- e) Hann sér dverginn.

3.3 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- a) The ghost kills the king.

- b) The elf kills a wolf.
- c) The king sees a hawk.
- d) Óláfr is a king.
- e) A king is named Óláfr.

3.4 Translate the text into English

Óláfr heitir konungr. Hann á brand. Heitir brandrinn Tyrfingr. Úlf sér Óláfr ok segir: "Hér er úlf!" Óláfr tekur brandinn ok veigr úlfinn. En hér er ok ormr. Óláfr sér hann eigi. Ólaf veigr ormrinn.

3.5 Translate the text into Old Norse

A king is called Sigurðr. He owns a sword but not a horse. Óláfr is also a king. He owns a horse. Sigurðr kills Óláfr and takes the horse.

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 A few words from the Snorra-Edda

En er Jörmunrekkr konungr sá haukinn...

Glossary:

er when

sá saw (past tense of 'sér')

Meaning: "But when king Jörmunrekkr saw the hawk..."

The subject of the sentence 'Jörmunrekkr konungr' is in the nominative case whereas the object 'haukinn' is in the accusative case.

To find out just what happened when king Jörmunrekkr saw the hawk you will have to look up chapter 50 of the Skáldskaparmál.

4.2 Two lines from the Völuspá

In Völuspá (The Prophecy of the Seeress) the seeress says:

Ask veit ek standa.

Heitir Yggdrasill.

Glossary:

askr ash tree

veit ek I know

standa (to) stand

There are some things you should notice here. The first word of the sentence, 'ask', is the object. You can see that because it is in the accusative form. Then comes the verb 'veit' and then the subject 'ek'. Thus the word order is 'object-verb-subject'.

The second sentence has no subject. Instead of 'Hann heitir Yggdrasill.' we have only 'Heitir Yggdrasill.' It is quite normal in poetry that the subject be dropped.

Meaning:

"I know an ash tree to stand.

It is called Yggdrasill."

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Two

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Grammar
 1. First and second person personal pronouns
 2. Plural of third person pronouns
 3. Plural of nouns
 4. Slightly irregular nouns
 5. Maðr - an irregular noun
 6. Verbal conjugation
 7. "Er" - an all purpose relative pronoun
 8. The present tense
 9. Word order
2. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronouns
 3. Verbs
 4. Adverbs
 5. A greeting
 6. Yes or no questions
 7. Sample sentences

3. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English
 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 3. Translate the text into English
 4. Translate the text into Old Norse
 5. Translate the play into English
 6. Translate the play into English
4. Looking at real texts
 1. Half a stanza by Snorri Sturluson
 2. Two half-strophes from the Sigdrífumál

1. Grammar

1.1 First and second person personal pronouns

Now you have to learn those singular personal pronouns:

1.person 2.person

Nominative **ek** **þú**

Accusative **mik** **þik**

The corresponding English table looks like this:

1.person 2.person

Nominative I you

Accusative me you

The forms 'þú' and 'þik' are the relatives of the English forms 'thou' and 'thee'. And then there are the plural pronouns, still fairly similar to English:

1.person 2.person

Nominative **vér** **þér**

Accusative **oss** **yðr**

1.person 2.person

Nominative we you

Accusative	us	you
------------	----	-----

And finally a concept that doesn't exist in Modern English, dual pronouns:

1.person	2.person
----------	----------

Nominative	vit	þit
------------	------------	------------

Accusative	okkr	ykk
------------	-------------	------------

1.person	2.person
----------	----------

Nominative	we two	you two
------------	--------	---------

Accusative	us two	you two
------------	--------	---------

1.2 Plural of third person pronouns

We will now introduce the plural of the third person pronouns. As before we begin with English.

Singular	Plural
----------	--------

Nominative	he	she	it	they	they	they
------------	----	-----	----	------	------	------

Accusative	him	her	it	them	them	them
------------	-----	-----	----	------	------	------

The reason for writing "they" out three times is that the plural of "he" is the same as the plural of "she" or the plural of "it", unlike Old Norse :

Singular	Plural
----------	--------

Nominative	hann	hon	þat	þeir	þær	þau
------------	-------------	------------	------------	-------------	------------	------------

Accusative	hann	hana	þat	þá	þær	þau
------------	-------------	-------------	------------	-----------	------------	------------

Thus, many "hons" make a "þær" and many "hanns" make a "þeir" (to put it in silly terms). We are still only using the masculine pronoun as all nouns we have introduced are masculine.

1.3 Plural of nouns

Nouns, of course, have a plural form. The plural form declines in cases and can be with or without definitive article. We'll write up a table showing the

declension of our strong masculine words. This time we will use a {stem + ending} scheme. The grammatical stem of a word is the word without grammatical ending.

	Without article		With article	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	stem + r	stem + ar	stem + r + inn	stem + ar + nir
Acc.	stem	stem + a	stem + inn	stem + a + na

And then with the good old elf as the example.

	Without article		With article	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	álfr	álfar	álfrinn	álfarnir
Acc.	álf	álfa	álfinn	álfana

Now you know eight different forms of each noun. This might be a bit overwhelming at first but if you immediately begin memorising the table above and work hard at the exercises it will soon be very familiar.

1.4 Some slightly irregular nouns

Some words of the strong masculine declension lack the nominative singular ending 'r'.

In order to make it completely clear what we mean we decline a sample word from this group. The word is 'jarl' and means 'earl'. The reason is probably that pronouncing "jarlr" would not be comfortable.

	Without article		With article	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	jarl	jarlar	jarlinn	jarlarnir
Acc.	jarl	jarla	jarlinn	jarlana

The vocabulary also introduces the word 'geirr'. It is completely regular, so do not get confused by the two r's at the end. The first r is part of the stem whereas the second one is the nominative singular ending.

1.5 Maðr - an irregular noun

We will now introduce a masculine noun that in its declension does not follow the patterns already described. The word is 'maðr' and means 'human being' or 'person'.

	Without article		With article	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	maðr	menn	maðrinn	menninir
Acc.	mann	menn	manninn	mennina

Notice how the irregularity is similar to that of the corresponding English word, 'man'. Also notice that the endings for the article are very similar to those for the regular words. This is no coincidence, in fact the article declines in the same basic way for every word of the same gender.

The word 'maðr' is a very useful one and will help us make more interesting sentences.

1.6 Verbal conjugation

The form of a verb depends upon the subject in the sentence, so in Old Norse as it is in English. Let us give an example

Infinitive: (to) be

I am we are

thou art you are

he/she/it is they are

We will now give the corresponding Old Norse verb; like its English counterpart, it is completely irregular.

Infinitive: (at) **vera**

ek **em** vit/vér **erum**

þú **ert** þit/þér **eruð**

hann/hon/þat **er** þeir/þær/þau **eru**

Remember what everything means here. The plural of 'hann' is 'þeir' et cetera. Also note that the dual pronouns have the same conjugation as the plural ones. Now we will look at more regular verbs. We don't have to remember every form of every verb; for now it will be sufficient for us to remember two; the infinitive and the first person singular. The endings are tacked on in the following way.

Infinitive: [form 1]

ek [form 2] vit/vér [form 1] - **a** + **um**

þú [form 2] + **r** þit/þér [form 1] - **a** + **ið**

hann/hon/þat [form 2] + **r** þeir/þær/pau [form 1]

This code may be a bit cryptic. When I say "- a + um" I mean "subtract 'a' and add 'um'". This is best illustrated with examples:

vega, veg

ek **veg** vit/vér **vegum**

þú **vegr** þit/þér **vegið**

hann/hon/þat **vegr** þeir/þær/pau **vega**

heita, heiti

ek **heiti** vit/vér **heitum**

þú **heitir** þit/þér **heitið**

hann/hon/þat **heitir** þeir/þær/pau **heita**

taka, tek

ek **tek** vit/vér **tökum** (explained below)

þú **tekr** þit/þér **takið**

hann/hon/þat **tekr** þeir/þær/pau **taka**

segja, segi

ek segi	vit/vér segjum
þú segir	þit/þér segið (explained below)
hann/hon/þat segir	þeir/þær/þau segja

kalla, kalla (to call)

ek kalla	vit/vér köllum
þú kallar	þit/þér kallið
hann/hon/þat kallar	þeir/þær/þau kalla

hafa, hefi (to have, wear, carry)

ek hefi	vit/vér höfum
þú hefir	þit/þér hafið
hann/hon/þat hefir	þeir/þær/þau hafa

And now for one verb that is almost regular, but not quite:

sjá, sé (to see)

ek sé	vit/vér sjám (not *sjáum)
þú sér	þit/þér séð (not *sjáið)
hann/hon/þat sér	þeir/þær/þau sjá

- A u in a grammatical ending always changes a preceding 'a' to an 'ö'. This is known as u-mutation and is treated in more detail later.
- The letters 'j' and 'i' cannot coexist; for this reason we have 'segið' and not '*segjið'.
- We won't use the infinitive just yet but it is still one of two forms of each verb you need to memorise.

- The verb 'á' does not follow this pattern, it is conjugated in lesson 3.
- The forms 'sjáum' and 'sjáið' are correct in later Icelandic.

1.7 "Er" - an all purpose relative pronoun

Relative pronouns are words like 'who, which, that'. In Norse we have one very useful word that can play the role of all those. The word is 'er' and it should not be confused with the 3rd person singular of the verb "to be". An example will be in order.

*The people (that) he sees are
Norwegians.*

Relative pronoun can be
dropped.

Menninir, er hann sér, eru Norðmenn.

Relative pronoun cannot be
dropped.

We say that the relative pronoun represents a word from the main sentence in the case appropriate for the verb in the relative clause. Since the word 'er' is the same in all cases this is mostly a technical thing and need not be worried overly about. We will, somewhat arbitrarily, separate all relative clauses in Norse with commas.

1.8 The present tense

So far we have only been discussing the present tense of verbs. The ON present tense actually corresponds to two forms in English.

Vikingarnir koma. The vikings come.

Vikingarnir koma. The vikings are coming.

When translating remember to use the most natural English form.

1.9 Word order

While word order in Old Norse is fairly free there are usually some things that are more normal than others. The normal word order in a simple sentence is, as in English: "subject verb object". Another common word order is "verb subject object". The greatest emphasis in a sentence is usually on the first word. Thus, if we want to draw special attention to the object we can use "object verb subject". Other word-order schemes are usually reserved for elaborate poetry.

Where do you put the negating word "eigi"? Those examples will illustrate the variety of normal structures. Do not be overwhelmed by this, there is little

need to memorise every possible pattern, you will slowly become familiar with normal word order in reading the translation exercises.

- Subject-verb-object
 - Hann sér eigi úlfinn.
 - Hann sér úlfinn eigi.
- Verb-subject-object
 - Sér hann úlfinn eigi.
 - Sér hann eigi úlfinn.
 - Eigi sér hann úlfinn.
- Object-verb-subject
 - Úlfinn sér hann eigi.

All the legal sentences above have one thing in common: "The verb is always the first or the second word in the sentence." This phenomenon is known as V2 and is treated in more detail later in the course. Other adverbs are usually placed in the same way.

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

maðr person, man, human being (declension described in 1.5)

Norðmaðr Norwegian (declines like maðr)

Then two words whose declension we described in 1.4.

hrafn raven

jarl earl

The rest of the words given are regular strong masculine.

bátr boat

geirr spear

Íslendingr Icelander

vargr wolf

víkingr viking

þjófr thief

And for good measure we also list the names used in the lesson. You should never forget that names behave as any other nouns. They decline according to their declension group.

Eiríkr

Erlingr

2.2 Pronouns

er that, which, who, whom

Also remember to memorise the masculine pronoun in plural.

Nom. þeir (they)

Acc. þá (them)

2.3 Verbs

The verbs from lesson one are reiterated here for easy reference.

hafa, hefi have, hold, wear

hata, hata hate

heita, heiti be called

deyja, dey die

bíða, bíð wait

koma, kóm come

mæla, mæli talk

sjá, sé see

vega, veg slay

segja, segi	says
taka, tek	take
sjá (irregular)	see
vera (irregular)	be
á	owns (only form of this verb yet presented)

2.4 Adverbs

nú now

þar there

2.5 A greeting

The following forms can be used as greetings. This is actually an adjective that is declining according to gender and number but we'll talk about that later.

Heill! - to greet one man

Heil! - to greet one woman

Heilir! - to greet a group of men

Heilar! - to greet a group of women

Heil! - to greet a group including both sexes

2.6 Yes or no questions

To change a statement into a question you use the word order
Verb-subject-(object/complement)
And often you add the word 'hvárt' in front.

Hvárt er hann hér?

Er hann hér?

But it's not good fashion to answer a yes or no question with yes or no! That's almost never done in the Old Icelandic texts. Instead you just repeat the question as a statement.

Question: *Hvárt er hann hér?*

Answer: *Hann er hér.*

Oh, alright, we can tell you the words:

já yes

nei no

2.7 Sample sentences

1. Norðmenn hata Íslendinga.
 - Subject: Norðmenn [nominative, plural, without article]
 - Object: Íslendinga [accusative, plural, without article]
 - Meaning: Norwegians hate Icelanders.
2. Hatar konungrinn úlfa.
 - Subject: konungrinn [nominative, singular, with article]
 - Object: úlfa [accusative, plural, without article]
 - Meaning: The king hates wolfs.
3. Þeir eru Norðmenn.
 - Subject: þeir [nominative, plural]
 - Complement: Norðmenn [nominative, plural, without article]
 - Meaning: They are Norwegians.
4. Brandrinn, er hann á, heitir Tyrfingr.
 - Subject in main sentence: brandrinn [nominative, singular, with article]
 - Complement in main sentence Tyrfingr [nominative, singular, proper name]
 - Subject in relative clause: hann [nominative, singular]
 - Object in relative clause: er [accusative, singular]
 - Meaning: The sword which he has is called Tyrfingr.
5. Vit höfum hjálma.
 - Subject: vit [nominative, dual]
 - Object: hjálma [accusative, plural]
 - Meaning: We two have (are wearing) helmets.

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- Sjá jarlarnir konungana.
- Álfrinn á knífa.
- Úlfar heita ok vargar.
- Baugana sjá menninir.
- Hrafnarnir deyja.

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- The raven sees a hawk.
- The king hates thieves.
- A viking is called Erlingr.
- The earls are called Erlingr and Eiríkr.
- You (pl.) are coming.

3.3 Translate the text into English

Note: As our vocabulary and knowledge of grammar expands we will find better things to do with our exercises than killing Óláfr.

Norðmenn hafa konung; hann heitir Óláfr. Maðr heitir Eiríkr; hann er jarl ok víkingr. Ólaf hatar Eiríkr. Óláfr á bát. Hann heitir Ormr. Nú sér Eiríkr bátinn. Segir hann: "Hér er bátrinn, er Óláfr á." Eiríkr hatar Ólaf en hann tekr eigi bátinn, er Óláfr á. Hann bíðr. Óláfr kœmr. Eiríkr segir: "Nú deyr þú, Óláfr konungr! Ek veg þik!" ok vegr Ólaf. Óláfr segir "Þú vegr mik! Ek dey! Á! Á! (exclamation of pain)

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

A man is called Eiríkr. He owns (some) helmets, (some) boats and a spear. He is a viking. He kills people and takes boats. But Eiríkr is not a thief. Thieves don't kill. Now Eiríkr sees Óláfr and the Serpent. He kills Óláfr and takes the Serpent.

3.5 Translate the play into English

[Óláfr bíðr.]

Óláfr: Ek sé mann!

[maðr kœmr]

Maðr: Heill Óláfr konungr! Ek heiti Eiríkr ok ek em Íslendingr.

Óláfr: Heill Eiríkr!

Eiríkr: Hvárt sér þú orminn þar, konungr?

Óláfr: Eigi sé ek orm.

Eiríkr: En hann er hér!

[nú sér Óláfr orminn]
Óláfr: Ormr! Ek sé orm!
Ormr: Óláfr! Ek sé Ólaf!
Eiríkr: Segir ormrinn "Óláfr"?
Ormr: Nei. Ormar mæla eigi.
[Óláfr ok Eiríkr flýja]

3.6 Translate the play into English

[Eiríkr, þjófr ok víkingr, sér Orm, bát er Óláfr á]
Eiríkr: "Þar er bátur!"
[Haukr, Íslendingr, mælir]
Haukr: "Óláfr á bátinn."
[Óláfr kómr]
Óláfr: "Menn sé ek!"
Eiríkr ok Haukr: "Vit erum hér."
Óláfr: "Hvart takið þit bátinn?"
Eiríkr ok Haukr: "Vit tökum hann eigi."
Óláfr: "Ormr heitir bátinn. Ek á Orm"
[Eiríkr ok Haukr kalla]
E & H: "Úlfr! Úlfr! Þar er úlfr!"
Óláfr: "Úlfr? Ek hata úlfa!"
[Úlfr, Norðmaðr ok þjófr, kómr]
Óláfr: "Ek sé eigi úlf. Hvart er hér úlfr?"
Úlfr: "Hér em ek, Óláfr konungr."
[Eiríkr, Haukr ok Úlfr taka bátinn ok flýja]
Óláfr: "Þjófar! Ek hata þjófa!"
E, H & Ú: "Vér erum víkingar, vér höfum bát er heitir Ormr!"

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 Half a stanza by Snorri Sturluson

Drífr handar hlekkur

þar er hilmir drekkur.

Mjök er brögnum bekkur

blíðskálar þekkur.

This half-stanza will not look recognisable to you, indeed it shouldn't, it is a complicated poetic passage. But we will apply the principles set forth earlier [The Norse and English tongues] to help us with individual words.

Some we can guess at without thought; 'handar' looks like it's a cognate of 'hand' and 'drífr' could be a cognate of 'drive'. We are right on both accounts; 'handar' means 'of hand' but while 'drífr' is indeed related to 'drive' in this case it means 'snows'. Compare with the English word '(snow)drift'.

The next word is 'hlekk'. Doesn't look familiar. But English dropped all h's in front of consonants, maybe if we change it to 'lekk'. Looks better but we need to do more. The cluster 'nk' was frequently assimilated to 'kk' in Old Norse, maybe we need to reverse such a change. Then we've got 'lenk'. Of course English doesn't have r as a grammatical ending, out it goes. New result 'lenk'. Still not an English word but let's remember that vowels are more prone to change than consonants. If we change the 'e' to an 'i' then we've finally made it to 'link' which is the right word.

It's a good and correct guess that 'þar' means 'there'. In this context 'þar er' means 'where'.

What might 'hilmir' be? No way to figure that one out, it means 'king'. The word is related to 'hjálmr' and refers to the fact that kings tend to bear helmets. Then there's 'drekk'. We apply the same rules as before; Norse 'kk' can be English 'nk' and English doesn't have 'r' as a grammatical ending. Then we've got 'drenk'. Maybe if we change the vowel to 'i' as before. Hocus-pocus we've got 'drink' which is correct. More specifically 'drekk' means 'drinks'.

Let's look at that first sentence in toto.

"Drífr handar hlekk þar er hilmir drekk."

The subject is 'handar hlekk' which means 'link of the hand'. And what does _that_ mean? It is a poetic paraphrase for 'gold'. The verb is 'drífr' which means 'snows'. Then 'þar er' means 'where', 'hilmir' means 'king' and 'drekk' means 'drinks'.

"(The) link of the hand [gold] snows where (the) king drinks."

This sentence is quite typical of Norse court poetry; praise of the king's generosity in florid language.

Let's look at the second sentence.

The word 'mjök' means 'very'. The English cognate is 'much'. You already know that 'er' can mean 'is'. Such is the case here. The word 'brögnum' doesn't have an English cognate. It means 'for men' and is a poetic word.

Then there's 'bekk'. In with the n, out with the r! We've got 'benk'. Hmm...

The correct cognate is 'bench' and the meaning is the same.

The word-form 'blíðskálar' is made out of 'blíð' and 'skálar'. The first is an adjective cognate to English 'blithe'. The second is the possessive form of 'skál' which means 'bowl'. Modern Scandinavians can often be heard shouting this word. Skál! Skál! Toast!

Last word: 'þekk'. Once more we change 'kk' into 'nk' and get 'thenk'. The correct cognate is 'thank' but the word means 'comfortable' rather than 'thankful'.

If we draw together the second sentence.

"Mjök er brögnum bekkur blíðskálar þekkr."

Meaning: "The bench of the blithe bowl is very comfortable for men."

And who doesn't like sitting and drinking...

In summary we could guess correctly at the meaning of many words: 'handar, drekkr, blíð, hlekkur, bekkur' but we also had some whose cognates didn't help us much: 'drífr, þekkr'. This is quite typical.

Do not rely on cognate trickery but use it, where it applies, as an aid to memory.

4.2 Two half-strophes from the Sigdrífumál

- - -

Heill Dagr!

Heilir Dags synir!

Heil Nótt ok nipt!"

- - -

- - -

Heilir Æsir!

Heilar Ásynjur!

Heil sjá in fjölnýta fold!"

- - -

Compare the greeting carefully with chapter 2.5; notice how it changes according to gender and number.

"Hail, Day!

Hail, Day's sons!

Hail, Night and [her] sister!"

"Hail, Æsir (gods)!

Hail, Ásynjur (goddesses)!

Hail, bountiful earth!"

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Three

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Miscellany
 1. Spelling
2. Grammar
 1. Adjectives - indefinite form
 2. Usage - accusative with infinitive
 3. Usage - auxiliary verbs
 4. The masculine article
3. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronouns
 3. Adjectives
 4. Verbs
 5. Adverbs
 6. Conjunctions
4. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English
 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 3. Translate the text into English
 4. Translate the text into Old Norse
5. Looking at real texts
 1. A strophe from the Völuspá

0. Miscellany

0.1 Spelling

When the Latin alphabet was introduced to write Old Norse the spelling used was not very consistent and not very precise. To improve readability the spelling of the preserved manuscripts is usually "corrected" in modern editions. For example, there are few manuscripts that distinguish between short and long vowels but this distinction is, as a rule, made now when Old Icelandic texts are published.

The spelling used in this course is the standardised spelling used in the "Íslensk fornrit" edition of the sagas. That spelling, in turn, is based on suggestions from a 12th century treatise called The First Grammatical Treatise, because it is the first of four in its manuscript.

There are two exceptions to this. What we here write as 'ö' should be an o with a tail and what we here write as 'oe' should be an oe-ligature. This is due to letter code difficulties.

1. Grammar

1.1 Adjectives - indefinite form

In Modern English an adjective, such as 'fresh' will have exactly the same form no matter what its grammatical context is. This was not so in Middle English. Let's look at a part of Chaucer's description of the Squire.

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede

Al ful of **fresshe** floures, whyte and reede.

Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al þe day;

He was as **fressh** as is þe monþ of May.

We see that two forms of the same adjective occur; '**fressh**' and '**fresshe**'. The first form goes with 'he' and the second with 'floures'. We could guess, correctly, that the Middle English adjective has a plural ending of 'e'. We have more examples of this above. The flowers are '**whyte**' and '**reede**' whereas the meadow is '**ful**' of them.

After this sidestep it should come as no surprise to you that in Old Norse adjectives have different forms depending on the number and case of the noun they describe. Their form also depends on the gender of the noun and whether it is definite or indefinite (explained below). The masculine indefinite declension is exemplified here.

	Sg.	Pl.
Nom.	reiðr	reiðir
Acc.	reiðan	reiða

The word 'reiðr' means 'angry'. As always you must memorise the table. We will immediately give examples of the usage. Note that the adjective can come either in front of the noun or behind it. Both types of usage are natural.

Hér eru reiðir menn. Here are (some) angry people.

Hann sér reiðan mann. He sees an angry person.

Óláfr er maðr reiðr. Olaf is an angry person.

Note carefully, however, that ON has a separate declension for adjectives that apply to nouns with a definite article. That is called the definite declension, while the one presented here is the indefinite. Be careful thus, not to use the forms above with a definite noun, for that is (under normal circumstances) wrong.

The definite declension of adjectives is not presented here yet, since it is modelled on a noun declension not yet introduced (the weak one); the indefinite forms above, however, are similar to the declensions of strong masculine nouns and various pronouns, all of which are being presented now. We will have to make do with only indefinite adjective forms for a while.

1.2 Usage - accusative with infinitive

Having learnt infinitive forms of verbs and accusative forms of some nouns, we're ready for a very useful sentence construction. First, let's take a look of the English equivalent.

I saw him come.

He sees it fly.

This construction, usually with a main verb meaning to see, watch, hear, feel, sense, etc, indicates that the subject sees/hears/senses the object performing an action, which is put into the infinitive form (without any marker). ON examples:

Ek sé Ólaf konung koma. I see King Olaf come.

Vér sjám manninn kalla. We see the man shout.

Hann heyrir drauginn mæla. He hears the ghost speak.

Modern English speakers will often say "I see it coming." instead of "come." The ON construction may be translated either way.

1.3 Usage - auxiliary verbs

ON has much in common with English in its use of auxiliaries. To begin with, some examples of English auxiliary constructions with infinitive:

It wants to go.

He has to go.

The man does see.

Birds can fly.

The dogs must leave.

The beast will sleep.

The auxiliary verbs are the ones that conjugate, 'want', 'can', etc, always coming first in an English sentence (but not necessarily in ON). The other verbs are all in infinitive.

Note how some of the infinitives are marked with 'to', but some not. This is a feature of English as well as ON. It is inherent in the auxiliaries themselves, if the following infinitive is marked or not. Among the auxiliaries above only 'want' and 'have' take a marker. ON verbs that have no infinitive marker, are easily recognized because they all belong to a special conjugation group. Below you will learn 'vilja', meaning 'want', which is one of those "special" auxiliaries.

Konungrinn vill vega mennina. The king wants to kill the men.

Þeir vilja taka hestinn. They want to take the horse.

Ek vil mæla. I want to speak.

Eta vil ek eigi. I don't want to eat.

1.4 The masculine article

It may annoy speakers of many languages that the definite article is attached to the end of words rather than being a separate word in front. It may be some consolation that it is originally a separate word. Its declension (in the cases and gender we have learnt so far) follows:

sg pl

nom **inn inir**

acc **inn ina**

When we tack the article on to words it sometimes appears in its full majesty:

maðr + **inn** = **maðrinn**

menn + **inir** = **menninir**

But if the noun ends with a vowel or 'r' the 'i' of the article is dropped:

ormar + **inir** = **ormarnir**

orma + **ina** = **ormana**

And now a masculine noun from a declension group (the weak one) which you haven't learnt.

(nom sg) **hani** + **inn** = **haninn**

(acc sg) **hana** + **inn** = **hanann**

Though it is a separate word, 'inn' cannot be freely put in front of a word as an article; it always follows the noun (with some important exceptions to be learnt later).

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

matr food (always in singular)

fiskr fish

ostr cheese

Names:

Svartr

Kormákr

2.2 Pronouns

There is a group of pronouns called 'indefinite' pronouns; here are two useful ones:

allr all, whole

margr many, multitudinous

As said above, many pronouns decline like the indefinite adjectives that have been presented. Thus, 'allr' is declined (in masculine):

sg pl

nom **allr** **allir**

acc **allan** **alla**

Exactly like the adjectives above.

But since 'allr' is available both in singular and plural, how would each translate in English? The plural form translates directly to the English cognate 'all', while the singular means 'all of', 'whole'. Examples:

Allir mennir eru norskir. All the men are Norwegian.

Hann sér allan manninn He sees all of the man.

'Margr' declines in the same way. Its singular form means 'one of many', while the plural means 'many'. To explain the singular, consider this example:

Margr maðr á hest. Many a man has got a horse.

What students should perhaps realize, is that there is little difference between these so-called pronouns on the one hand, and adjectives on the other. For other adjectives can stand independently just as these pronouns can; examples:

Allir eru glaðir. All are happy.

Hræddir eru ok ragir. Scared [ones] are also cowardly.

Dauðir sjá dauða. Dead [ones] see dead [ones].

Ef blindr leiðir blindan falla báðir í gryfju.

If a blind [one] guides a blind [one], both fall into a pit.

However, traditional grammar defines these so-called pronouns as such, and other adjectives as such; we will adhere to this system in our lessons, in order not to confuse students refer to other sources.

Regarding word order, adjectives usually postcede personal pronouns; thus:

Ek et hann allan. I eat all of it.

2.3 Adjectives

danskr	Danish
dauður	dead
góður	good
hræddr	afraid
illr	evil
íslenzkr	Icelandic
norskr	Norwegian
reiður	angry
ragr	cowardly
stórr	big (note that the first r is part of the stem)
svangr	hungry

2.4 Verbs

Regular verbs:

eta, et	eat
veiða, veiði	hunt/fish
flýja, flý	flee, run away
spyrja, spyr	ask
svara, svara	answer
kenna, kenni	recognize, know (a person, place, or object)
elta, elti	follow, chase

heyra, heyri hear

fara, fer go

deyja, dey die

Note that ON has different words for the English concept "know"; "kenna" above indicates familiarity, while "vita", mentioned above, is the "absolute" knowing, i.e. it means awareness of a fact or event.

An irregular verb - vilja:

This irregular verb, meaning "want", is the second in a small group of verbs with an anomalous conjugation (the first being "vera"), but also highly useful meanings. It is a cognate of English "will", and behaves in similar ways as that English verb (e.g. in auxiliary constructions, see 1.3 above). It conjugates thus:

Infinitive: (at) **vilja**

ek **vil** vit/vér **viljum**

þú **vilt** þit/þér **vilið**

hann/hon/þat **vill** þeir/þær/þau **vilja**

2.5 Adverbs

brátt soon

oft often

hví? why? (word-order: hví + verb + subject)

mjök very, very much, greatly

'Mjök', being an adverb, can also be used with verbs, in which case it means 'very much'. For example,

Óláfr hatar mjök úlfa. Olaf hates wolves very much.

Another example, from a real text, Völuspá:

Geyr nú garmr mjök. Now [the] dog howls greatly.

2.6 Conjunctions

því at because (word-order: því at + subject + verb)

er when

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the sentences into English

Ragir menn sjá reiðan úlf koma.

"Ek sé svangan mann taka ost."

"Hvárt sér þú íslenzka menn koma?"

Maðrinn er oft hræddr.

Illir menn vilja vega góða menn.

Allir vilja bátinn taka því at Óláfr á hann.

Íslendingar eru eigi menn ragir. Þeir eru ok góðir en eigi illir.

Maðrinn veiðir fisk ok etr hann brátt allan.

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

"Do you two eat the whole cheese?"

"We see hungry wolves chase the man."

"The ravens want to eat all of him, for they are very hungry."

King Olaf sees the thieves take the boat.

"I see many thieves! I want to kill them all!"

Olaf wants to kill the thieves, but they see him coming.

As the thieves hear Olaf speak, they all flee. The king chases them.

"Many a thief wants to take the boat."

3.3 Translate the texts into English

Illr draugr vill vega Óláf konung. Hann eltir konunginn ok er hann sér hann, kallar draugrinn, "Óláfr, þú ert maðr illr mjök ok ragr. Ek hata þik, því at þú vegr góða menn." Óláfr er hræddr ok flýr.

Svartr heitir danskr maðr. Hann veiðir oft fiska ok etr þá því at fiskar eru matr góðr. Svartr ferr ok veiðir marga stóra fiska er hann vill eta. Er Svartr veiðir fiskana, kómr maðr. Er maðrinn sér Svart veiða fiskana, segir hann, "Heill, ek heiti Kormákr." Svartr heyrir Kormák mæla ok svarar, "Heill. Svartr heiti ek ok em danskr maðr." Kormákr spyr Svart, "Hvart veiðir þú fiska, Svartr?" "Marga stóra fiska veiði ek, því at þeir eru góðr matr." Kormákr segir, "Ostr er ok góðr matr, Svartr. Ek hefi hér ost góðan. Hvart vilt þú ost eta?" "- Ek vil fisk ok ost eta, því at ostr er ok góðr matr. Hvart vilt þú fisk eta, Kormákr?" "- Fiskr er góðr," svarar Kormákr ok tekr fisk. Svartr tekr ok ost ok etr. Menninir eru mjök svangir. Þeir eta nú alla fiskana ok allan ostinn, ok eru brátt glaðir menn en eigi svangir.

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

A worm sees a wolf coming. When it sees the wolf, it says, "Sss - wolf, why do you come? I own the fish here, which you want to take." The wolf is not scared and replies, "hail worm, I'm a hungry wolf now and I want to eat fish. You have much fish (many fishes) there, which you aren't eating (don't eat)." The worm is angry and says, "I own all the fish there, wolf. Wolves who eat the fish all die (deyja allir)!" Now the wolf is scared, because an evil worm wants to kill it. "- You are an evil worm! You fish (hunt) much fish but do not eat it (them) all. We wolves are very hungry and don't have fish. We also want to eat fish, worm!" The worm sees the wolf flee. The wolf is very angry and shouts, "I hate evil worms!" But the worm does not chase the wolf, for it is happy but not angry.

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 A strophe from Völuspá

In this course we use standardised Old Icelandic spelling, geared to the 13th century. In this format we would give one of the last strophes of Völuspá like this.

"Sér hon upp koma

öðru sinni

jörð ór ægi

iðjagroena;

falla forsar,

flýgr örn yfir,

sá er á fjalli

fiska veiðir."

This, however, is not what how the main manuscript of Völuspá, Codex Regius, reads. The same strophe is spelled in the following way in the manuscript (I change e with tail to æ and o with tail to ö).

Ser hon upp koma avðro siNi iord or ægi ipia gröna. falla

forsar flygr avrn yfir sa er afialli fisca ueiðir.

Lots of interesting points.

- The manuscript doesn't distinguish between short and long vowels.
- It sometimes uses capitals for double consonants.
- It does not differentiate between i and j.
- It does not differentiate between u and v.
- It uses c for k.
- The grammatical ending 'u' is written 'o'.
- It does not split the poem into lines.
- It uses capitalisation and punctuation in a way different from ours.
- It divides words in a way different from ours.
- It writes 'ð' as 'þ', 'd' or 'ð'.
- It uses 'av' for 'ö'.

In all those respects Codex Regius is quite normal. Indeed, the standardised spelling is by no means an average of the spelling systems in the various

manuscripts. Rather, it is intended to write Old Norse in a way that distinguishes its different sounds.
We can now look at the same strophe respelled into modern Icelandic.

"Sér hún upp koma

öðru sinni

jörð úr ægi

iðjagræna;

falla fossar,

flýgur örn yfir,

sá er á fjalli

fiska veiðir."

Not many changes because the spelling of Old Icelandic and the spelling of Modern Icelandic are based on the same basic system. You should note that the ending 'r' has changed to 'ur'.

We have now shown you the same strophe in three different spellings. All of them are quite plausible and many more. The morale? When you encounter a text 'in the original Old Norse' be sure to notice which spelling is used.

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Four

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Grammar
 1. Dative Case: Giving & Receiving
 2. Dative Case: Forms
 3. Word Order: Indirect Objects
 4. Verb Imperative
 5. Pronoun trick - We Olaf slay a worm
2. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Adjectives
 3. Verbs

4. Adverbs
3. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English
 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 3. Translate the text into English
 4. Translate the text into Old Norse
4. Looking at real texts
 1. A stanza from the Höfuðlausn

1. Grammar

1.1 Dative Case: Giving & Receiving

Until now, we have been working with two opposing cases: nominative and accusative. By now you should understand clearly the concept behind them and the difference between them. Consider this English sentence,

John tells a story.

That's complete. It's clear to you that John is the subject and the story is the object; if it were ON, John would be in nominative form and the story would be in accusative form.

John tells a story to Mary.

John's still the subject, the story's still the object; but the new participant, Mary, serves as a yet unidentified role. Let's consider the following incomplete sentence,

John gives the dog...

As stated above, the sentence is not complete; we need to know to whom John gives the dog. So,

John gives the dog to Mary.

Again, Mary's a third participant in the sentence; but how does Mary relate to John and the dog? Again, before we answer that, let's consider what word order has to do with it;

John gives to Mary the dog.

To Mary the dog gives John.

The first version is not obviously incorrect, merely unconventional; the second one is wrong, especially for our purposes, because it makes it seem like the dog is giving John away, and thereby being the subject.

In any case, it is clear that Mary has a different role from the dog, and John clearly has a different role from both of them. We know that John is the subject and the dog is the object, so what does that make Mary? She's an object all right, but not in the same way as the dog. The dog's a direct object; it's being directly affected by John. Mary is an indirect object; she's merely being affected by John's actions involving the dog.

The bottom line is, Mary's role is special, and it is practical to mark this role in a separate way. How does English mark this role? Usually, in sentences like

the ones above, by fixing "to" to the indirect object. Note how the "to" would stay with Mary no matter how the word order got arranged.

You might have figured out by now that we're dealing with a new case. You might also have guessed that ON marks this case with special endings, not merely with words like "to" and a special word order. This case is called the dative case; the "da" part of the word is the stem of the Latin word "give", which is the logic behind the term for the primary usage of the dative case is to mark the receiver of a "gift" (note, though, that "gifts" can also be thrown, shoved, transmitted, told, etc to their receivers).

1.2 Dative Case: Forms

Now that you understand the basic idea behind the dative, you require only the ON endings to start using it.

First, the strong masculine noun declension:

	Sg	Pl
Nom	dvergr	dvergar
Acc	dverg	dverga
Dat	dvergi	dvergum

The -i ending there is characteristic of the dative in the strong masculine; some words in this declension don't have it (i.e. they are the same in acc and dat), e.g. "matr", but you should not worry about it now. The -um in the dative plural is characteristic of all declensions; it is thus important that you learn to recognize it.

Next, the pronouns:

	Sg	Du	Pl
Nom	ek	vit	vér
Acc	mik	okkr	oss
Dat	mér	okkr	oss

	Sg	Du	Pl
Nom	þú	þit	þér
Acc	þik	ykk	yðr

Dat	þér	ykkur	yör
	he	it	they (masc) they (neut)
nom	hann	þat þeir	þau
acc	hann	þat þá	þau
dat	hánum	því þeim	þeim

You may find it disconcerting that "hánum" has an -um ending (coupled with a minor stem change), similar to the plural of nouns; that is however characteristic of masculine pronouns in general. Since the article is originally a pronoun, its masculine form also features this, see a strong masculine word declined with the article attached:

	Sg	Pl
Nom	dvergrinn	dvergarnir
Acc	dvergin	dvergana
Dat	dverginum	dvergunum

The main anomaly here is the plural dative form; you might, systematically speaking, expect something like "dvergunum". Roughly speaking, that's the original form, but a combination like "mn" in that position would very easily get simplified to a more convenient "n"; which is what happened. Finally, adjectives in masculine:

	Sg	Pl
Nom	reiðr	reiðir
Acc	reiðan	reiða
Dat	reiðum	reiðum

Again, same pattern as with the pronouns, since the boundary between pronouns and adjectives is often not that clear in ON.

As you have seen happen with verbs, endings like -um that have an u in them, will modify any a in the immediately preceding syllable, changing it to ö. This is called u-umlaut, or u-mutation ("umlaut" is a German term; "um" is a preposition meaning "about/around", while "laut" means "sound" - "sound-

about" if you like). Practically speaking, this means that you must take care with words containing an "a" in the root. For example, (Example noun)

Sing Pl

Nom maðr menn

Acc mann menn

Dat manni mönnum

(Example adjective)

Sing Pl

Nom glaðr glaðir

Acc glaðan glaða

Dat glöðum glöðum

(Example pronoun)

Sg Pl

Nom allr allir

Acc allan alla

Dat öllum öllum

Note the "a > ö" changes where the -um ending is present (always in dative plural and In dative singular of masculine adjectives and pronouns).

1.3 Word Order: Indirect Objects

The most conventional order in ON prose, is to put the indirect object *before* the direct object.

Maðrinn gefr konunginum bátinn.

You should stick to this word order, though you can expect just about any word order to appear in skaldic poetry.

1.4 Verb Imperative

We commonly command or suggest for people to do something:

Leave, find the car and then bring it here.

All the verbs there are in "imperative". English verbs do not have any separate form for the imperative. ON verbs do not have any endings for the imperative, but rather the infinitive stem is used without the -a ending. For example,

Veg þú orminn ok tak bauginn er hann hefir.

An exception is verbs that end with -a in 1st person singular present, "kalla".

Those keep their a in the imperative.

Kalla þú mik Hauk!

(From the verb infinitives "vega" and "taka")

As can be seen, the pronoun "þú" (or "þit" or "þér") may be inserted and usually is, especially in spoken language. It need not be repeated for the following imperative verbs, though it may be done ("...ok tak þú bauginn..."). To command more than one person, the "-ið" ending (as in the verb active) is used:

Vegið þér orminn ok takið bauginn er hann hefir.

The imperative is seen in some greetings:

Ver (þú) heill! be whole/healthy

Verið heilir! be whole/healthy (plural)

Far vel! go well (fare well)

But "negative commands" are also used, as in English

Don't go!

In ON, this is simply expressed by adding a negative adverb such as "eigi".

Far þú eigi!

1.5 Pronoun trick - We Olaf slay a worm

In English we can say sentences like this:

Olaf and I are slaying a worm.

Old Norse has an idiomatic way of expressing the same:

Vit Óláfr vegum orm.

We could also have:

Vér Óláfr vegum orm.

Meaning:

Olaf, I, and some other people are slaying a worm.

Some more examples:

Þeir Óláfr vega orm.

Þit Óláfr vegið orm.

Þér Óláfr vegið orm.

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

hattr hat

grautr porridge

Names:

Einarr

Fjalarr (dwarf-name)

Gandálfr (dwarf-name)

2.2 Adjectives

glaðr happy, glad

langr long

gylltr golden, gilded

2.3 Verbs

gefa, gef give

foera, foeri bring

finna, finn find

hlæja, hlæ laugh

2.4 Adverbs

þá then

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- Svartr gefr Kormáki fiska. Þá er Kormákr glaður.
- Mennirnir foera þeim góðan mat.
- "Vit foerum góðum manni ost."
- Svartr spyr, "Hví gefr þú mér eigi ost, Kormákr?"
- Kormákr svarar, "Ek gef þér eigi ost, því at ek hefi hann eigi."
- Kormákr etr allan ostinn en gefr Svarti hann eigi.
- Konungurinn foerir Norðmönnum knífa ok geira.
- Þá gefa Norðmennirnir hánum langan bát ok gylltan baug.
- Maðrinn gefr hánum hatt góðan.

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- Then they give a golden ring to an evil king.
- The dwarves bring the king a golden ring.
- The king says "You are good dwarves."
- The king takes the ring and gives the dwarves a big cheese.
- The dwarves don't want any cheese, but they take it and go.
- "Why do I give them cheese which they don't eat?" King Olaf asks the ghost.
- The ghost replies "Olaf, you're a good man. But do not give cheese to dwarves."

3.3 Translate the text into English

Óláfr gefr Svarti hatt, kníf ok hest góðan. Hann segir, "Far þú nú, Svartr, ok finn bauginn er dvergarnir Fjalarr ok Gandálfr hafa." Svartr svarar, "En Óláfr, hví gefr þú mér eigi mat? Ek em svangr ok vil mat eta." Óláfr gefr hánum ost, graut, ok fisk ok segir, "Hér hefir þú mat. Far nú ok finn bauginn." Svartr etr matinn er Óláfr gefr hánum. Hann segir, "grautrinn er þú gefr mér er góðr, Óláfr. Þú ert góðr konungr."

Svartr ferr nú ok finnr dvergana er hafa bauginn. Hann segir, "Dvergar, gefið mér bauginn. Óláfr konungr vill hann." Dvergarnir svara, "Vit viljum eigi gefa Óláfi konungi bauginn. Hann er illr konungr." Svartr er reiðr ok segir, "Gefið mér bauginn eða ek veg ykk!" Dvergarnir eru eigi hræddir. Þeir hlæja ok Fjalarr segir, "Þú ert ragr maðr, Svartr. Þú vegr okkr Gandálf eigi. Vit gefum ykk Óláfi eigi bauginn, ok far þú nú!" Svartr hefir eigi brand. Hann hefir kníf, en knífrinn er eigi stórr. Hann vegr eigi dvergana ok foerir Óláfi eigi bauginn.

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

Eric, a thief, sees some men eat. They eat good porridge, many fish, and a big cheese. Eric wants the food, for he is hungry. He says "Hail, I am hungry."

Will you (use "þér") give some good food to a hungry man?" They reply "Take some food. We give it to you. But the elves are hungry too. Take some porridge and give it to them. Eric finds some elves. He brings hungry elves food, for he is a good man.

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 A stanza from the Höfuðlausn

Again we practice our etymology but in a less verbose manner than before. A stanza from the Höfuðlausn:

Beit fleinn floginn

þá var friðr loginn

var álmr dreginn

varð úlfr feginn.

Stózk fólk-hagi

við fjör-lagi

gall ý-bogi

at egg-togi.

The main etymological lesson here is that g inside a word is gone in modern English; resulting in a change of the original vowel.

floginn flown

loginn lied

dreginn drawn

feginn fain

lagi (dative) lay

Other cognates:

álmr elm (bows were made of elm)

stózk (middle voice)	stood
beit	bit (bíta = bite)
gall	yelled (Old English "geall", the 'g' is pronounced as 'y' in ME)
egg-	edge (Old English "ecg" was pronounced "edge")
ý-	yew-

Words without English cognates:

fleinn arrow

friðr peace

fjör life

I have included most of the cognates in this translation but enclosed them in quotation marks when they didn't seem to fit the context.

A flown arrow bit

then peace was "lied" [broken]

the elm [bow] was drawn

the wolf became fain.

The folk-leader stood against

a "lay" [blow] to his life

a yew bow "yelled" [twung]

at the "tow" [pull] of edges.

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Five

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Grammar
 1. Prepositions and Case Usage
 2. Dative Case: Command
 3. Accusative Case: Qualifying
 4. Assimilative Verb Conjugation
2. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Conjunctions
 3. Adjectives
 4. Verbs
 5. Adverbs
 6. Prepositions
 7. Pronouns
 8. Phrases
3. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English
 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 3. Translate the text into English
 4. Translate the text into Old Norse

1. Grammar

1.1 Prepositions

So far we have been managing entirely without prepositions. But prepositions are an important part of ON as well as English, and not using them calls for much unnecessary circumlocution and paraphrasing. ON prepositions, however, largely involve use of the dative case, which is why we have not started using them until now.

Why would prepositions involve the dative case? Our first acquaintance with this case introduced it as a case for "giving & receiving". But the dative case has many different functions in ON. The reason is that ON's dative case was (and is, in Icelandic and Faroese) the final result of a fusion of many different cases. In the farthest "known" (projected by comparative linguistics) ancestral language of both ON and English, "Indo-European" (so called because it is the ancestor of most European languages and Persian and North-Indian languages as well), all those different cases served one specific purpose only. Four Indo-European cases served as the basis for the ON dative:

- *Locative: The case for marking places or objects where the subject of the sentence is positioned; associated with prepositions meaning 'in', 'on', 'at', etc.*
- *Ablative: Marks places or objects whence the subject comes; associated with prepositions meaning 'from', 'out of', etc.*
- *Instrumental: Marks objects that are being used in the verb action; e.g. a sentence meaning 'he weighed the book with a scale', would mark the word 'scale' with the instrumental; English primarily marks the instrumental with the preposition 'with', but sometimes with 'by', e.g. 'he came by ship'.*
- *Dative: Marks the indirect object, usually the receiver of a gift of some kind (whether negative or positive); English usually marks this with 'to', e.g. "he gave it to him" or simply by word order, e.g. "he gave the man a chance", where "the man" would be in dative.*

In Indo-European, those cases (supposedly) had separate forms, i.e. separate endings, for each of them. But ON had united all those cases into one form, while retaining all of those different uses for that single case.

It may be evident by now why the dative case is so strongly affiliated with prepositions in ON. Most prepositions have meanings that would be associated with the locative and ablative cases mentioned above.

You might wonder what case category prepositions like 'into' and 'onto' fit.

While locative answers 'where?', and ablative answers 'whence?/where from?', the 'into' case would answer 'whither?/where to?'. This case is called "allative" by grammarians, and is the opposite of the 'ablative'. Even Indo-European did not have a separate form for this case; instead, it was assigned to the accusative case. This is significant, because some ON cases involve accusative, and they are all essentially allative in meaning.

From now on, prepositions are introduced in the Vocabulary section in the following format:

með + dat with, by, using

Or that is, the prepositions are shown with a "+ [case]" following it. It is very important to note the case that a preposition takes, especially because a few ON prepositions may take either accusative or dative, with different meanings according to which case follows. These are cases of prepositions with either locative or allative meanings; compare English "in", locative, which would take dative in ON, to "into", allative, which would take accusative. Both are represented by the ON preposition "í", but the meaning differs according to the case that follows.

1.2 Dative Case: Command

Now that you have learnt how to mark the dative case in all words we have yet introduced, it is time to learn more useful ways of using it. One useful construction involves verbs meaning "tell" or "command".

Consider this English sentence,

I told him to stop.

As opposed to,

I gave him a watch.

And then consider

I told it to him.

I gave it to him.

The sentences both exhibit the same pattern, at close inspection. We already understand that the second sentence, involving giving, has an indirect object, and therefore a dative case. By re-arranging the sentence, the abstract "to" preposition pops up, which is a sure sign of the dative in English. "He" is the indirect object, the receiver of the "gift", and is marked with the dative.

What we are interested in now, however, is that the first sentence, not obviously involving any "giving", merely "telling", behaves in the same way. "He" is also an indirect object, and is marked with dative. What does he receive? "To stop". Hardly a noun, but verb infinitives are tricky in that they often behave as nouns. Without dwelling on that, we have at least found that this is a significant "new" way of using the dative, although it is in principle the same as the "giving" usage we already know.

Common English verbs that can function in this way are "tell", "command", "order", and others of similar meanings.

The good news is that ON does the exact same thing. In ON, we know the verb "segja"; it means "say", but it also means "tell", since ON does not distinguish between those two meanings. Let's make ON constructions analogous to the ones above:

Ek gef hánunum mat.

Is already familiar. Using the command-type construction,

Ek segi hánunum at eta.

However, in examining 13th century Icelandic texts, it seems to us that such constructions with "segja" were not altogether usual, though not wrong. The idiomatic usage of the text writers was to use the verb "bjóða, býð" = 'offer'. Thus, they'd rather say:

Ek býð hánunum at eta.

But Nordic men of authority often made "offers" that couldn't be refused; 'bjóða' sometimes means simply 'order'/'command'.

Evidently, verb infinitives can function like nouns in other dative contexts than commanding, both in English and ON. English says,

I give him to eat. (usually elaborated to, say, "I give him something to eat")

ON would say,

Ek gef hánunum at eta.

1.3 Accusative Case: Qualifying

There still remain some useful ways of employing accusative in ON. One common construction is what we off-hand dub "qualifying". Again, being closely related to ON, English has an analogous construction:

I call him cowardly.

In ON, both "him" and "cowardly" come in accusative:

Ek kalla hann ragan.

ON often uses the verb "segja" in this way:

Ek segi hann ragan.

Another use is with the verb "vilja", as English uses "want":

Ek vil hann dauðan. I want him dead.

1.4 Assimilative Verb Conjugation

Verbs that do not conjugate with a vowel ending, and whose stems have a long vowel (acutes, diphthongs, ae and oe) and end in 's' or 'n' never have an -r ending; instead, the -r assimilates to the 's' or 'n' and becomes an -s/-n ending:

blása, blaes to blow

ek **blæs**

þú **blæss**

hann **blæss**

skína, skín to shine

ek **skín**

þú **skínn**

hann **skínn**

But verbs that end in vowels are of course not affected:

reisa, reisi to construct, to raise something/someone (to vertical position)

ek **reisi**

þú **reisir**

hann **reisir**

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

skógr forest

vágr small bay, cove

hólmr isle, small island

garðr palisade/stone wall, city, city-state, garden, yard

haugr mound, dung, pile, grave (see below)

eldr fire

vindr wind

vangr field (not farming), meadow, clear patch of ground

brunnr well

heimr home, homeland, world

oddr point, spike

fors waterfall

sandr sand

- Norse people made great piles over the graves of important men.

Ragnarr

Hjálmar

Oddr

Úlfarr

Noregr Norway

Geirshólmr "Geir's Isle"

Geirshaugr "Geir's Grave"

Heiðvangr "Clear Field"

Skógarfors "Forest's Falls"

Úlfarsheimr "Úlfar's Home"

Hólmgarðr "Island City", a Nordic (Swedish) colony in Russia, now called Novgorod ("gorod" = "garðr")

Austrvegr "Eastway" (Russia)

2.2 Conjunctions

ef if

þar er where (relative)

2.3 Adjectives

djúpr deep

ungr young

ríkr rich

heiðr clear

bjartr bright, fair (of light complexion and/or blonde hair)

sterkr strong

víðr wide, extensive

breiðr broad

feigr doomed to die, "dead already", fey

spakr wise

2.4 Verbs

sigla, sigli sail

ganga, geng walk

bjóða, býð offer (sometimes 'command', see 1.2)

sýna, sýni show

búa, bý live in, inhabit

brenna, brennr be burning

blása, blæs blow

falla, fell fall

skína, skín shine

standa, stend stand

lifa, lifi live

2.5 Adverbs

meðan while

svá so, such, then (immediately following)

heim homewards

vel well

sem as, like

2.6 Prepositions

í + acc into

í + dat in(side)

á + acc onto

á + dat on (top of)

ór + dat out of

með + dat with, by, using; with, accompanying

2.7 Pronouns

fáir (pl) few (note: "fám" in pl dat, not "fáum")

sumir (pl) some

báðir (pl) both

hvat? what?

2.8 Phrases

"gefa grið" grant/give mercy, spare, pardon (from death)

Example: "illr maðr gefr mér eigi grið." (an evil man gives me no mercy)
Dictionaries will reveal that "grið" is a plural neuter, but do not let that disconcert you. It will not need to be declined to any form not known to you. Just use the phrase.

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- a. Úlfrinn gengr í skóginn.
- b. Úlfrinn gengr í skóginum.
- c. Eldr mjök bjartr brennr í garðinum.
- d. Ragnarr ferr með víkingum í váginn.
- e. Þar vegr hann úlfana með geirinum.
- f. Ragnarr kómr í Eiríksheim með bátinum.
- g. Með hánnum eru fáir menn.
- h. "Hví eru sumir eigi glaðir?" spyr Oddr.
- i. "Fám mönnum, er mik feigan vilja, gef ek grið," segir Úlfarr jarl.

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- a. A young man sails in the cove.
- b. He walks out of the boat and into the isle.
- c. The vikings wait with the earl in a big forest, in the isle.
- d. The man finds the vikings and the earl in the forest.
- e. The earl says: "Some men want me dead. Do you want so?"
- f. "That I do (so I want), earl. Here I stand and fall."
- g. "Few men do I spare. If you do not leave (go), I kill you."
- h. The vikings say: "Go home, or be doomed."

3.3 Translate the text into English

Oddr ok Ragnarr heita menn. Oddr er maðr ungr ok bjartr, ok sterkr mjök. Ragnarr er maðr mjök ríkr. Ragnarr á bát góðan ok langan mjök. Þeir eru báðir Norðmenn ok búa í Noregi.

Ragnarr býðr Oddi ok mörgum víkingum at fara í bátinn. Þeir fara nú allir ok sigla. Þeir sigla í stórum vági. Ór bátinum sjá þeir hólmi. Þar er sandr ok skógr. "Hólmrinn heitir Geirshólmi," segir Ragnarr Oddi. "Í skóginum þar er ok Geirshaugr, en þar býr Geirr, illr draugr." Þeir sjá ok vang mjök víðan ok heiðan. Oddr spyr, "Hvat heitir þá vangrinn, svá heiðr?" "Hann heitir Heiðvangr. Þar blása vindar sterkir," svarar Ragnarr hánnum. "Þar á ek marga hesta, ok eta þeir vel í vanginum. Í Heiðvangi er ok brunnr mjök djúpr," segir hann. Oddr sér fors breiðan ok spyr, "Hvat heitir forsinn, er þar fellr?" Ragnarr svarar hánnum, "Forsinn heitir Skógarfors, ok er breiðr mjök." Ragnarr sýnir Oddi vága, hólma, skóga, sanda, forsa, ok vanga, meðan þeir sigla. Oddr segir, "Þú ert maðr mjök spakr ok mælir vel, Ragnarr, ok kenni ek nú marga vága ok vanga hér í Noregi."

Brátt koma þeir í Úlfarsheim, þar er Úlfarr jarl býr. Úlfar hatar mjök Ragnarr ok vill hann feigan. Er þeir ganga ór bátinum ok á sandinn, segir hann, "Hér í Úlfarsheimi býr Úlfarr, jarl illr ok ríkr. Hann gefr eigi góðum mönnum grið." Þeir ganga nú í Úlfarsheim ok sjá stóran garð. Ragnar mælir, "Garðrinn er mjök stórr. Hann er svá stórr sem Hólmgarðr." Þá svarar Oddr, "Eigi kenni ek Hólmgarðr." Ragnarr segir hánnum, "Þú ert ungr maðr, Oddr, ok eigi spakr. Hólmgarðr er stórr garðr í Austrvegi. Þar eru margir vargar í víðum skógum."

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

When Úlfar sees Ragnar coming with a young man and many vikings, he says, "Many fires burn in me, while Ragnar lives. I grant him no mercy if he does not leave (go) [out of] Úlfarsheim soon." The men are afraid, who are with him, as they hear him speak so. Úlfar takes a sword and a horse, and leaves. As they walk, Oddr asks Ragnar much (= many questions, use "mjök"). But Ragnar does not answer him. He says: "Úlfar comes soon. Do not speak, he wants all of us ("oss alla") dead." But Oddr and the vikings do not speak. They stand and are afraid. Now Ragnar also sees what they see.

He sees Úlfar on a horse. The wind blows as he speaks: "You are all dead ("feigir") men. I don't spare men like you." As he is coming, they see the fire [that is] burning in him.

Oddr and the vikings flee. They do not want to die in Úlfarsheim. Ragnar sees them flee and shouts: "You are all cowardly! But now I flee too, for Úlfar grants no mercy." Then he flees with the men. Úlfar does not pursue them. He says: "Some men I do grant mercy - cowardly men."

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 A few words from the Heimskringla

Þá varð Óláfr konungr reiðr mjök ok mælti bráðliga: "Hví mun ek vilja eiga þik hundheiðna?"

varð became

bráðliga angrily

mun will (conjugated in lesson 8)

eiga own, marry

hund-heiðna dog-heathen, heathen like a dog

Then king Olaf became very angry and spoke angrily:

"Why will I want to marry you {when you are} heathen like a dog?"

4.2 A question and an answer from Brennu-Njáls saga

Hann spyrr hvat þeim væri þar gefit.

"Ostr," segja þær.

væri gefit = was given

He asks what was given there to them.
"Cheese," they say.

4.3 Half a strophe from Helgakviða Hundingsbana:

Hvárt eru þat svik ein

er ek sjá þykkjumk?

Eða Ragnarök?

Ríða menn dauðir!

svik (plural noun) = betrayal, illusion

ein = one, only

þykkjumk = seem to

ríða = ride

Ragnarök = "the fate of the gods", the end of the world

Are that only illusions

which I seem to see?

Or the end of the world?

There are dead men riding!

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Six

by Haukur Þorgeirsson and Óskar Guðlaugsson

1. Grammar
 1. Umlauts
 2. Article Usage

3. Word Order
4. Reference
2. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronouns
 3. Adjectives
 4. Verbs
 5. Adverbs
 6. Prepositions
 7. Conjunctions
 8. Phrases
3. Exercises
 1. Translate the text into English

1. Grammar

1.1 Umlauts

"Umlaut" is a feature of Old Norse, and other Germanic languages; it potentially causes the greatest difficulty to foreign learners, of all the features in the language. It may be best, in order to thoroughly tackle this phenomenon, to understand its origin, workings, occurrence, and function. First, perhaps, we need to understand the term; "umlaut" is a "nonsensical" (German) term that probably adds to the difficulty experienced by English speakers. In German, "um" is a preposition meaning "about, around" (just as the corresponding ON word); "laut" is a noun, meaning "sound". "Umlaut" means, roughly, "sound change/shift/mutation" (or, for better memorization, "sound-about"!), and is often called by one of those terms in English literature.

The umlaut was, to begin with, a pattern of changes within the Germanic languages, where their speakers sought to reduce the bulk of the endings, by dropping them and replacing them with vowels of changed quality (the 'quality' of vowels is simply their nature, like 'a' vs 'i' vs 'u', etc, while 'quantity' is their length). Until then, the Germanic vowels systems are thought to have been simple, with (approximately) the 5 basic vowels as in Latin, 'a, i, u, e, o', and various diphthong combinations of those. Through umlaut, a vowel ending might be dropped, but its preceding stem vowel would be affected by it in a certain way, changing to a new type of vowel. This introduced many new vowels to the language, called the "umlaut vowels". The umlaut vowels in ON are 'y, ý, æ, ø, oe, ö'. In older Norse, the ON 'e' was two different vowels, one of which was an umlaut; but they merged to yield the ON 'e', which is then "only sometimes" a case of umlaut.

There are three basic umlauts: a-, i-, and u-umlaut, according to the vowel of the disappearing ending which caused the sound change. They were not active

all at the same time, but rather appeared in the order given above. A-umlaut is not important to us, and only one type of u-umlaut is significant. The details of those will therefore be left out here.

I-umlaut caused vowels to become fronted, and in that way, drawn towards the 'i'. This umlaut is of great functional importance, because in many declensions and conjugations, the stem alternates between having it and not having it. In orthographic terms, these are the i-umlauts:

a > **e**

á > **æ**

o > **ø**

ó > **oe**

u > **y**

o > **y**

ú > **ý**

jú > **ý**

jó > **ý**

au > **ey**

We have some examples from verbs that we have been using:

h**a**fa > h**e**f

bl**á**sa > bl**æ**s

k**o**ma > k**ø**m

r**ó**a > r**oe**

b**ú**a > b**y**

b**jó**ða > b**y**ð

And also in noun declensions:

áss, áss, æsir

maðr, manns, menn

The i-umlaut is a prominent feature in verb conjugations, some noun declensions, adjective comparisons, and finally, in word derivations. This will be encountered and further discussed in future lessons.

The u-umlaut, then, has only one form that we need concern ourselves with:

a > ö

We have seen this in the verb conjugation, especially in the 1p pl, such as "höfum" or "tökum". Also in the dative forms, where the -um ending is common, e.g. "rögum mönnum". This is called "preserved" u-umlaut, because the ending that caused it is still present, making it easy to predict.

Other types of u-umlauts, which need to be explained, are to be encountered, but since they occur in declension forms that we have not yet dealt with, they will be discussed later.

1.2 Article Usage

As it happens, a concept in one language seldom corresponds exactly to the same concept in another. In that way, the concept of the definite article in ON is by no means an exact counterpart of the same concept in English. Let's consider some of the special ways in which the ON article is used.

To begin with, the ON article is used considerably less, overall, than the English one. In poetry, it's not used at all. As a rule of thumb, if you are in doubt whether to use the article when writing ON, do not use it. When translating ON to good English, you must thus be ready to add the article into your translation where you see it fit.

Our definite article is a complex concept to define. Generally speaking, it is used to make a reference to something familiar to the reader, either from a previous sentence within the text, or from outside sources (i.e. the author presumes the reader to know it, e.g. "the Santa Claus"). An English sequence of introduction and reference might go like this:

1. *There is an earl in Norway.* (introduction)

2. *The earl is rich.* (reference)

If it were:

2. *An earl is rich.* (another introduction)

The reader would be confused, because this would indicate another, wholly unrelated, earl, leaving the sentences irrelevant to each other. Continuing the text:

3. *The earl is called Ragnar.*

Now we have another way to refer to the earl, apart from 'he' of course, which would normally have been used in the third sentence; but we'll leave personal pronouns out of this, for convenience. At this point, the language will find it preferable to refer to this earl by his name, instead of "the earl"; compare how we might continue:

4. *One day, the earl goes hunting.*

5. *One day, Ragnar goes hunting.*

Having introduced the earl's name, we have reached a "third level" of reference. We might identify three such levels of "familiarity":

1. unknown (indefinite article used)
2. introduced (definite article used)
3. known by name (name used)

This is the English pattern. Applying this system to ON, we find slight differences; consider a similar sequence of introduction in ON:

1. "Í Noregi býr jarl." (introduction)
2. "Jarlinn heitir Eiríkr." (reference)

Now we have reached the third level of familiarity with Eric, since we know him by name; from now on, we can refer to him by name:

3. "Gengr nú Eiríkr í skóg."

However, unlike English, we can also refer to him by his "title", but without an article:

3. "Gengr nú jarl í skóg."

This is very common in ON texts; it should be translated into English with an article. By "title" in this context, anything relatively specific is meant. "Maðr" will rarely be used in this way, but anything more specific, such as "sveinn" (young man) or "karl" (older man) will commonly be used for close reference, instead of names.

1.3 Word Order

We have hitherto stated, loosely, that Old Norse has a "free" word order. This is true, as opposed to English, of the relation between the "noun phrases" (= the noun with all attached to it, such as adjectives and prepositions, or = a pronoun). In English, the order of the noun phrases is a strong indication of their case, i.e. which of them is the subject and which the object (direct or indirect). ON leaves the word order free there, indicating the case by changing the endings of the noun phrase's components.

'Syntax' is the study of word order. There is more to the syntax of a language than the relation between its noun phrases ("noun syntax"); going from noun syntax to verb syntax, we find that ON has a rigid set of word order rules, in the relation between the verb phrase and the rest of the sentence's components. We need to start dealing with this phenomenon's immediate implications. (Technically, the noun phrase containing the object is subordinate, or contained within, the verb phrase; for our practical purposes, that is irrelevant.)

Consider these sentences:

"The wolf walks out of the forest."

"Then the wolf walks out of the forest."

The order of the sentences is identical; we merely add "then" in the beginning of the latter. But this won't work in ON:

"Úlfrinn gengr ór skóginum."

"Nú gengr úlfrinn ór skóginum."

Not *"Nú úlfrinn gengr ór skóginum."

As we add the adverb "nú", the verb shifts in its relation to the other words, and "insists" on maintaining its position as the second component of the sentence, following the adverbial phrase ("nú").

In that sentence, the verb phrase is composed of only one word, "gengr".

Consider a sentence with a more complicated verb phrase:

"Nú vill Úlfrinn ganga ór skóginum."

The verb phrase here is "vill ganga"; "ganga" is a verb infinitive, while "vill" is conjugated, and therefore called the "finite" verb.

But you notice that in this sentence, only "vill" stubbornly maintains its position, while "ganga" maintains its relation to the noun phrases; thus, the verb phrase has been split up.

A practical rule may be deduced, which, if well understood and thoughtfully applied, will result in correct word order in most cases:

The finite verb within an Old Norse sentence must always be the first or the second component, while the rest of the verb phrase retains its relation to the noun phrases even if that involves splitting it away from the finite verb.

This is admittedly complicated; but a student who keeps this in mind while reading ON texts, should get a feel for this.

This phenomenon is called "Verb-Second", or "V/2"; all Germanic languages except for English remain V/2 languages today, more or less. The origin and inner cause of the V/2 phenomenon is not all too well understood by linguists, though their knowledge of its function will suffice for our practical purposes.

The V/2 characteristics has different manifestations within the Germanic family, however, so speakers of German or even modern Scandinavian languages should not always trust ON to have the same rules of verb syntax as their native languages do.

An important fact in the V/2 procedure is that conjunctions are not members of the sentences which follow them; consider these examples:

"Menninir vilja flýja."

"Svá vilja menninir flýja."

"Því at menninir vilja flýja."

"Svá" is an adverbial phrase, while "því at" is a conjunctive phrase. As can be seen by the finite verb's position in the third sentence, "því at" has no effect on its position; sentence-wise, the third sentence is identical to the first, but with a conjunction tacked in front (which doesn't count into the sentence).

It is therefore important to note whether such "structural words" (like "þá" and "ok", etc) are conjunctions or adverbs; note that "ok", for instance, may either be an adverb (when it means 'also') or a conjunction (when it means 'and'):

"-ok þú ert maður feigr, jarl." (conjunction)

"-and you are a doomed man, earl."

"Þú ert ok maður feigr, jarl." (adverb)

"You're also a doomed man, earl."

Also note that in a string of sentences which "share" some components, i.e. when the latter sentences omit one or more of their noun or adverbial phrases when it is clear that they are the same as in the first sentence, V/2 applies as in the first sentence, which may be confusing. Best displayed in an example:

"Þá ferr hann, ok [þá] vegr hann marga menn."

"Þá" is being omitted in the second sentence (after the "ok" conjunction), but it still affects the word order as if it were there. In the same way:

"Ef maðrinn sér úlfa, [þá] flýr hann."

Often the "þá" will be omitted from "if-then" sentences, even while the V/2 effects of it remain.

Direct speech is, for syntactic purposes, an adverbial phrase within the "frame sentence". A whole paragraph of direct speech can be the adverbial phrase of a "he says"-type sentence:

"Maður heitir Haukr. "Eigi em ek norskr maður," <speech>, segir Haukr.

It cannot be

* "...", Haukr segir.

since that would violate the V/2 rules just as much as

* "Nú Haukr segir."

1.4 Reference

Strong masculine nouns:

(without article)

sg pl

nom **haukr** **haukar**

acc **hauk** **hauka**

dat **hauki** **haukum**

(with article)

sg pl

nom **haukrinn** **haukarnir**

acc **haukinn** **haukana**

dat **haukinum** **haukunum**

Stems that end in "consonant + 'n', 'r', 'l', 's'" don't add -r in nom sg:

sg pl

nom **jarl** **jarlar**

acc **jarl** **jarla**

dat **jarli** **jörlum**

Note u-umlaut: 'a' becomes 'ö' before endings with 'u' (such as the -um in dat pl)

Irregular:

maðr (man)

(without article)

sg pl

nom **maðr** **menn**

acc **mann** **menn**

dat **manni** **mönnum**

(with article)

sg pl

nom **maðrinn** **menninir**

acc **manninn** **mennina**

dat **manninum** **mönnum**

Personal pronouns:

1st person:

sg dual pl

nom **ek vit vér**

acc **mik okkr oss**

dat **mér okkr oss**

2nd person:

sg dual pl

nom **þú þit þér**

acc **þik ykkir yðr**

dat **þér ykkir yðr**

3rd person :

(masc)

sg pl

nom **hann þeir**

acc **hann þá**

dat **hánnum þeim**

(neut)

sg pl

nom **þat þau**

acc **þat þau**

dat **því þeim**

Adjectives, indefinite (strong) masculine:

sg pl

nom **ragr** **ragir**

acc **ragan** **raga**

dat **rögum** **rögum**

Verbs:

hafa, hef (have)

infinitive: haf-a

imperative: haf! (sg) hafið! (pl)

sg pl

1p **hef-i** **höfum**

2p **hefir** **hafið**

3p **hefir** **hafa**

kenna, kenni (know)

inf: kenn-a

imp: kenn! (sg) kennið! (pl)

sg pl

1p **kenni** **kennum**

2p **kennir** **kennið**

3p **kennir** **kenna**

kalla, kalla (call, shout)

inf: kall-a

imp: kall-a! (sg) kall-ið! (pl)

sg pl

1p **kalla** **köllum**

2p **kallar** **kallið**

3p **kallar** **kalla**

In some verbs with long vowels (acute, diphthong, 'æ' or 'oe'), whose stems end in 'n' or 's', assimilation of the -r ending occurs:

blása, blæs (blow)

inf: blás-a

imp: blás!

sg pl

1p **blæs blásum**

2p **blæss blásið**

3p **blæss blása**

skína, skín (shine)

inf: skín-a

imp: skín!

sg pl

1p **skín skínum**

2p **skínn skínið**

3p **skínn skína**

Irregular verbs:

vera (be)

inf: ver-a

imp: ver!

sg pl

1p **em erum**

2p **ert eruð**

3p **er eru**

vilja (want)

inf: vil-j-a

imp: (vil!) (N/A)

sg pl

1p **vil viljum**

2p **vilt vilið**

3p **vill vilja**

sjá (see)

inf: sjá

imp: sjá!

sg pl

1p sé sjá-m

2p sér sé-ð

3p sér sjá

2. Vocabulary

This vocabulary section will introduce very few new words (specially noted), but rather only list all the words introduced so far (in lessons 1-5).

2.1 Nouns

(No new)

<td<norwegian< td="" style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-family: 'Times New Roman'; font-size: medium; font-style: normal; font-variant: normal; font-weight: normal; letter-spacing: normal; line-height: normal; orphans: 2; text-align: -webkit-auto; text-indent: 0px; text-transform: none; white-space: normal; widows: 2; word-spacing: 0px; -webkit-text-size-adjust: auto; -webkit-text-stroke-width: 0px; "></td<norwegian>

álfr

elf

bátr

boat

baugr

ring

brandr	sword
brunnr	well
dvergr	dwarf
draugr	ghost
eldr	fire
fiskr	fish
fors	waterfall
garðr	palisade/stone wall, city, city-state, garden, yard
geirr	spear
grautr	porridge
hattr	hat
haugr	mound, dung, pile, grave
haukr	hawk
heimr	home, homeland, world
hestr	horse
hjálmr	helmet
hólmr	isle, small island
hrafñ	raven
jarl	earl

konungr	king
knífr	knife
maðr	person, man, human being
matr	food (always in singular)
oddr	point, spike
ormr	worm, serpent
ostr	cheese
sandr	sand
skógr	forest
úlfr	wolf
vágr	small bay, cove, creek
vangr	field (not farming), meadow, clear patch of ground
vargr	wolf
víkingr	viking
vindr	wind
þjófr	thief
Íslendingr	Icelander
Norðmaðr	
Einarr	

Eiríkr

Erlingr

Fjalarr (dwarf-name)

Gandálfr (dwarf-name)

Haukr

Hjálmar

Kormákr

Oddr

Óláfr

Ragnarr

Sigurðr

Svartr

Tyrfingr

Úlfarr

Austrvegr	"Eastway" (Russia)
-----------	--------------------

Noregr	Norway
--------	--------

Geirshólmr	"Geir's Isle" (made up name)
------------	------------------------------

Geirshaugr	"Geir's Grave" (made up name)
------------	-------------------------------

Heiðvangr	"Clear Field" (made up name)
-----------	------------------------------

Hólmgarður	"Island City", a Nordic (Swedish) colony in Russia, now called Novgorod ("gorod" = "garður")
Skógarfoss	"Forest's Falls"
Úlfarsheimr	"Úlfar's Home" (made up name)

2.2 Pronouns

(No new)

See the reference in 1.3 for personal pronouns.

allir (pl) all

báðir (pl) both

er that, which, who, whom

fáir (pl) few

hvat? what?

margir (pl) many

sumir (pl) some

2.3 Adjectives

(No new)

bjartr bright, fair (of light complexion and/or blonde hair)

breiður broad

danskr Danish

dauður dead

djúpr deep

góðr	good
glaðr	happy, glad
gylltr	golden, gilded
feigr	doomed to die, "dead already", fey
heiðr	clear
hræddr	afraid
illr	evil
íslenzkr	Icelandic
langr	long
norskr	Norwegian
ragr	cowardly
reiðr	angry
ríkr	rich
stórr	big (note that the first r is part of the stem)
spakr	wise
sterkr	strong
svangr	hungry
ungr	young
víðr	wide, extensive

2.4 Verbs

New:

elda, elda cook

á owns (only form of this verb yet presented)

bíða, bíð wait

bjóða, býð offer; command

blása, blæs blow

brenna, brennr be burning

búa, bý live in, inhabit

deyja, dey die

elta, elti follow, chase

eta, et eat

falla, fell fall

fara, fer go, leave

finna, finn find

flýja, flý flee, run away

foera, foeri bring

ganga, geng walk

gefa, gef give

hafa, hefi have; hold; wear

hata, hata hate

heita, heiti be called

heyra, heyri	hear
hlæja, hlæ	laugh
kenna, kenni	recognize, know (a person, place, or object)
koma, kóm	come
lifa, lifi	live
mæla, mæli	talk
sjá, sé	see
vega, veg	slay
segja, segi	says
sigla, sigli	sail
sjá (irregular)	see
skína, skín	shine
spyrja, spyr	ask
standa, stend	stand
svara, svara	answer
sýna, sýni	show
taka, tek	take
vera (irregular)	be
veiða, veiði	hunt, fish
vilja (irregular)	want

2.5 Adverbs

brátt soon

eigi not

heim homewards

hví? why?

hér here

meðan while

mjök very, very much, greatly

nú now

oft often

ok also

sem as, like

svá so, such, then (immediately following)

vel well

þá then

þar there

2.6 Prepositions

í + acc into

í + dat in(side)

á + acc onto

á + dat on (top of)

ór + dat out of

með + dat with, by, using; with, accompanying

2.7 Conjunctions

ef if

en but

er when

ok and

þar er where (relative)

því at because, for

2.8 Phrases

"gefa grið" grant/give mercy, spare, pardon (from death)

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the text into English

Í Noregi eru margir vágar, sumir djúpir, sumir langir. Norskir víkingar sigla í vágana, í löngum bátum. Í vágunum eru ok oft hólmar. Í hólmunum vega víkingarnir menn. Þar eru ok haugar, þar er illir draugar búa. Draugarnir eru oft reiðir, ok hata alla menn.

Í Noregi eru ok skógar víðir, vangar heiðir ok forsar breiðir. Í skógunum búa góðir álfar, en ok illir vargar. Menn er ganga í skóga eru oft hræddir, því at vargarnir vilja vega þá ok eta. Ef vargar finna menn í skógunum, eru mennirnir feigir. Í vöngunum eru hestar, er eta þar ok lifa vel. Í forsunum er falla eru margir fiskar, er menn veiða.

Dvergar eru þar ok, er hafa gyllta bauga. Dvergarnir vilja eigi gefa mönnum baugana.

Þar í Noregi búa margir menn. Sumir eru jarlar mjök ríkir, sumir víkingar sterkir. Fáir eru konungar, fáir eru illir ok fáir ragir. Sumir menn eru spakir mjök, ok mæla vel. Spakir kenna marga heima ok marga menn.

Fiskr er norskum mönnum ("for Norwegian men") góðr matr. Þeir fara í vágana ok forsana ok veiða fisk. Svá elda þeir fiskinn í eldi, er brennr. Meðan þeir elda hann, mæla þeir ok hlæja. Ostr er ok góðr matr, ok eta menninir ok ost með fiskinum. Góðir menn gefa svöngum ost ok fisk at eta. Svangir eta allan mat, er góðir gefa þeim.

Ragnarr er jarl spakr. Hann kennir Austrveg, heim mjök stóran. Í Austrvegi eru margir garðar, víðir skógar ok vargar mjök illir. Garðr í Austrvegi heitir Hólmgarðr. Fáir garðar eru svá stórir, sem Hólmgarðr er. Í Noregi eru eigi garðar svá stórir. Í Hólmgarð sigla víkingar er vilja vera ríkir. Því at í Hólmgarði eru margir ríkir.

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Seven

by Óskar Guðlaugsson and Haukur Þorgeirsson

1. Supplement
 1. Alternative forms
2. Grammar
 1. Genitive Case: Possession
 2. Genitive Case: Forms
 3. Article Usage with the Genitive
 4. Reflexive Pronouns
 5. 3rd Person Possessives
3. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronouns
 3. Adjectives
 4. Verbs
 5. Adverbs
 6. Prepositions
 7. Conjunctions
 8. Phrases
4. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English
 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 3. Translate the text into English
 4. Translate the text into Old Norse

0. Supplement

0.1 Alternative forms

We have stated that the language taught in this course is "standardised" 13th century Icelandic. People using other material to supplement this course (or using this course to supplement other material) often find that their books do not always use the same spelling or form of every word. It is perhaps high time that some of those variants be discussed.

To begin with it is difficult to "pin down" a language as it was at any particular time and location. We say that we're teaching the Icelandic language 13th century but even that is not all too precise - Icelandic underwent many changes in the 13th century. Some of our forms may reflect early 13th century language while others mirror that of the late part of the century. Perfect consistency is very hard to achieve (and is certainly not in evidence in any manuscript - even the same scribe would often spell the same word in more than one way) but we prefer to have some kind of standard.

Thus our choices are arbitrary here and there and may not exactly reflect that of any other study material. Don't panic.

That said the interested student may find a discussion of variant forms to be of some value. The variations can be grouped into two categories.

1. Variations in space

We have already mentioned that the West Norse language forms are different from those of East Norse. But how different are they? This question is best answered by providing examples. One of the better known East Norse texts is "The Legendary History of Gutland". It starts with those words:

Gutland hitti fyrsti maþr þan sum þieluar hit. þa war gutland so eluist at þet daghum sanc Oc natum war uppj. En þann maþr quam fyrsti eldi a land Oc siþan sanc þet aldri.

Translated word for word into English this produces: "Gutland found first {a man} that who Thieluar {was called}. Then was Gautland so bewitched that it {during days} sank and {during nights} was up. But that man put first fire on [the] land and since sank it never."

Note that the spelling is that of the original manuscript. No normalisation has been undertaken. This is in line with the usual trend that Old Icelandic texts are normalised but other Old Norse texts are not - or to a lesser extent. This makes comparison with our "standardised" language more difficult but we will attempt it nevertheless. So here we provide those lines as they would look in our Norse Course spelling:

*Gautland hitti fyrst maðr sá sem Þjalarr hét. Þá var Gautland svá *elvíst at þat dögum sökk ok náttum var uppi. En sá maðr kvám fyrst eldi á land ok síðan sökk þat aldri.*

Most of the differences are insignificant differences between manuscript spelling and normalised spelling - but some of them are quite interesting. Let's take a better look at those:

Old Gutnish Old Icelandic

þan sá

daghum dögum

sanc sökk

The word "þann" is actually not as far from "sá" as it might seem. The declension paradigm of "sá" is like this:

nom sá

acc þann

dat þeim

gen þess

In essence, what has happened in Old Gutnish is that the accusative form has been generalised to include the nominative. As a side note it might be mentioned that the exact same thing happened in English. This pronoun is the origin of the English definite article, 'the'. The Old English paradigm was like this:

nom se

acc þone

dat þám

gen þæs

The "irregular" s-form was thrown out in favor of the þ-forms to (eventually) yield "the".

The next word on our list is "daghum", as opposed to "dögum". First we note that the 'gh' is a common East Norse way of spelling the "soft" g (see pronunciation guide). It also sometimes occurs in Icelandic manuscripts. In any case the difference between 'gh' and 'g' is merely one of spelling. The other difference is much more interesting. Instead of the umlauted ö-vowel the Gutnish text has the un-umlauted 'a'. This reflects a general tendency. The u-

umlaut effect, while remaining in full force in Icelandic up to the present day, was much less prevalent in other Old Norse dialects - and it is completely lacking from the dialect of Guta saga.

The third difference is no less interesting. Instead of the Old Icelandic "sök" we have the much more English form "sanc". Again we have not an exception but a general tendency. The assimilation of 'nk' to 'kk' happened to a lesser extent in East Norse than in West Norse. In this case English and Old Gutnish maintain the more archaic forms. Again the u-umlaut has not taken place in the East Norse form.

There are many small differences between East Norse and West Norse. One that might interest the English reader is that West Norse dropped the 'v' in 'vr' clusters early on but East Norse has preserved it to the present day. Where West Norse has "reiðr" East Norse had "vréðr" and Modern Danish has "vred". English has preserved this consonant in its spelling but dropped it in the pronunciation. The English cognate is "wrath".

Now let's turn our attention to Old Norwegian. We already know that Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic are collectively known as West Norse. We might wonder what the key differences between the two dialects are. For the student of Old Norse the most visible difference is that Old Norwegian texts are usually published in their manuscript spelling - unlike Old Icelandic texts which are usually normalised. For the linguist the difference is mainly that Old Icelandic is in some instances slightly more conservative than Old Norwegian.

One example where Old Icelandic is more conservative is in keeping the 'h' in the consonant clusters 'hr' and 'hl'. Those were dropped in Old Norwegian before the writing age. One stanza from the Norwegian Rune Poem illustrates this.

Reið kveða rossum vesta,

Reginn sló sverðit besta.

(A wagon is said to be worst for horses,

Reginn forged the best sword.)

You notice the alliterative triad reið-rossum-Reginn. This would be destroyed in "translating" into Icelandic since *rossum* would become *hrossum*.

2. Variations in time

No living language is static and Old Icelandic underwent many changes from 1200 to 1400. Major changes include the merging of the phonemes ö and ø and æ and oe respectively. Both happened in the 13th century.

ö + ø -> ö

æ + oe -> æ

Other noteworthy changes include the "softening" of final 't' and 'k' in several common words. Thus:

ok -> og

ek -> eg

þik -> þig

þat -> það

hvat -> hvað

vit -> við

-it -> -ið (neuter article)

The absence of ø and oe and the "soft" consonants in the common words are two features that can easily be used to differentiate between Old Icelandic and Modern Icelandic spelling at a glance

The forms of many individual words changed with time according to arbitrary rules; we have had to decide in each case which form to use as our standard one. Our choices are not entirely consistent. In cases where this course gives another form than other grammar references you can rest reasonably assured that both forms are correct - though one may be older than the other. A few common variants are listed below.

it - þit

ér - þér

hon - hón - hún

hánun - honun

ek hef - ek hefi

1. Grammar

1.1 Genitive Case: Possession

The fourth and last remaining case in Old Norse declension is called 'genitive'. English has the following relations:

John owns an expensive computer.

John's computer is expensive.

Bill steals John's expensive computer.

The orthographic -'s ending here is one part of the English genitive. It is the characteristic role of the genitive to mark the owner of a following item. Words marked with the -'s genitive stand in the same position as normal adjectives, as can be seen above.

In ON, the strong masculine nouns we have encountered so far are also marked with -s in the genitive singular; thus, the full singular declension of a word like 'hestr' is:

nom **hestr**

acc **hest**

dat **hesti**

gen **hests**

In the plural, the ending is -a for all masculine nouns, and most other nouns as well:

nom **hestar**

acc **hesta**

dat **hestum**

gen **hesta**

Again, the article must be declined with the noun. Now that we have all the cases, let's see the full masculine declension of the suffixed article:

sg pl

nom **inn** **inir**

acc **inn** **ina**

dat **inum inum**

gen **ins anna**

And combined with a noun:

sg pl

nom **hestinn hestarnir**

acc **hestinn hestana**

dat **hestinum hestunum**

gen **hestsins hestanna**

There! Now you have the full declension of the normal strong masculine noun. We'll look at the full declension of our only irregular noun to date as well.

sg pl

nom **maðr menn**

acc **mann menn**

dat **manni mönnum**

gen **manns manna**

1.2 Genitive Case: Forms

Section 1.1 already has the forms of most strong masculine nouns. Here is the full declension of most of the personal pronouns encountered so far:

'I' 'you' 'he' 'it' 'we two' 'we' 'you two' 'you'

nom ek þú hann þat vit vér þit þér

acc mik þik hann þat okkr oss ykkar yðr

dat mér þér hánun því okkr oss ykkar yðr

gen mín þín hans þess okkar vár ykkar yðvar

'they' (masc) 'they' (neut) 'they' (fem)

nom	þeir	þau	þær
acc	þá	þau	þær
dat	þeim	þeim	þeim
gen	þeira	þeira	þeira

The personal pronouns all have a special form for the genitive, often a very distinctive one, so extra attention must be paid here. Note that the 3rd person plural pronouns all have the same dative and genitive forms. The only pronoun not presented in this table is 'hon' (she), since we won't be using it just yet. The full declension of adjectives in masculine form:

sg pl

nom **reiðr** **reiðir**

acc **reiðan** **reiða**

dat **reiðum** **reiðum**

gen **reiðs** **reiðra**

Note especially the plural genitive ending: -ra. To students' relief, the plural dative and genitive forms are the same for all genders, so make sure you learn them well.

1.3 Article Usage with the Genitive

In English "titles", such as:

The king of Norway.

The lord of men.

The sound of battle.

The keel of the ship.

There, the titled entity always has an article attached to it. However, if we change the titles to a different type of genitive, the -s marked one, the article disappears:

Norway's king.

Men's lord.

Battle's sound.

The ship's keel.

But with titles, it is more customary to use the prepositional genitive (with "of" and article). In Old Norse however, the genitive is only marked with an inflection, where the same rule applies; i.e. no article should be attached to the "titled entity":

Konungr Noregs.

Drottinn mannanna.

But if this were to be paraphrased into a title with a preposition, we would have an article just as in English:

Konungrinn í Noregi.

It is merely that such usage is not the norm in ON, unlike in English.

1.4 Reflexive Pronouns

When the object of a sentence is the same as its subject the reflexive pronouns come into play. In English it works like this:

I see myself.

You see yourself.

He sees himself.

We see ourselves.

You see yourselves.

They see themselves.

Old Norse, however, is content with letting its first and second person personal pronouns perform this duty.

Ek sé mik.

Þú sér þik.

Vit sjám okkr.

Þit séð ykkur.

Vér sjám oss.

Þér séð yður.

But when it comes to the third person it has a special pronoun.

Hann sér sik.

Hon sér sik.

Þeir sjá sik.

Þær sjá sik.

This 'third person reflexive pronoun' has the following declension:
'himself/herself/itself/themselves'

acc sik

dat sér

gen sín

It observably declines just as 'ek' and 'þú' do. This pronoun has exact equivalents in many other Indo-European languages that you may be familiar with. German has "sich". French, Spanish and Latin have "se".
Let's have more examples of usage:

Hann kallar sik konung. He calls himself a king.

Þeir gefa sér góðan mat. They give themselves [some] good food.

And other reflexive usage:

Ek kalla mik Eirík. I call myself Eric.

Vit teljum okkr Norðmenn. We consider ourselves Norwegians.

Ek foeri mik brott. I move myself away. ('foera' = bring, move)

Hví foerir þú þik til mín? Why do you move yourself over to me?

('til' + gen = [over] to)

2. Vocabulary

This lesson is light on vocabulary and exercises - for historical reasons relating to the composition of the course.

2.1 Nouns

þegn thane, freeman, subject of a king, "citizen"

sporðr tail of a fish or serpent

2.2 Pronouns

sik himself, herself, itself

2.3 Adjectives

saðr / saddr sated, having had one's full

váðr evil, wicked

fastr fast, firm, stuck

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- Hvárt etr ormrinn sjálfan sik?
- Menn konungs eru þegnar hans.
- Eigi er sporðr fíks matr góðr.
- Ragnarr vill vega orm; hann hefir geirinn með sér.
- Ragnar vegr orminn en oddr geirs hans stendr fastr í honum.

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- The helm of the dwarf is gilded.
- The earl's hawk sees itself.
- People do not eat the tail of the serpent.

- d. Ragnarr's spear is broad.
- e. The point of Ragnarr's spear is big.

Sentences like the last one with "nested" genitives are actually not idiomatic in Old Norse.

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Eight

by Óskar Guðlaugsson and Haukur Þorgeirsson

- 1. Grammar
 - 1. Present-Preterite Verbs
 - 2. Assimilative Nouns and Adjectives
 - 3. Bisyllabic Stems
- 2. Vocabulary
 - 1. Nouns
 - 2. Pronouns
 - 3. Adjectives
 - 4. Verbs
 - 5. Adverbs
 - 6. Prepositions
 - 7. Conjunctions
 - 8. Phrases
- 3. Exercises
 - 1. Translate the phrases into English
 - 2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
 - 3. Translate the text into English
 - 4. Translate the text into Old Norse

1. Grammar

1.1 Present-Preterite Verbs

ON has a small group of verbs that conjugate in a special way. English has the same phenomenon, but less noticeable. The verbs are called "present-preterite", because their conjugation for the present is imitative of the preterite (= past) conjugation. This has to do with a development or shift that is believed to have happened early on in the ancestral Proto-Germanic language. To put this all into context we will state that the Germanic languages have three kinds of verbs. They are all still represented in English.

Strong verbs

1. Preterite formed with ablaut (certain type of vowel change)
2. Certain endings in the present (in English an 's' in third person)

Weak verbs

1. Preterite formed with a dental suffix (in English 'd' or 't')
2. Certain endings in the present (in English an 's' in third person)

Present-preterite verbs

1. Preterite formed like the preterite of a weak verb
2. Present formed like the preterite of a strong verb

We'll demonstrate by comparing a present-preterite verb ('can') with your garden-variety strong ('come') and weak ('love') verbs.

I **come** **came**

you **come** **came**

he **comes** **came**

I **love** **loved**

you **love** **loved**

he **loves** **loved**

I **can** **could**

you **can** **could**

he **can** **could**

Comparing the actual conjugations with the blurbs above we see that 'can' does not add an 's' in the third person of its singular present tense; just like the other verbs don't have an 's' in their preterite. We also see that it forms its preterite with a 'd'; just like the weak verb. The Old Norse cognate of 'can', 'kunna', is also present-preterite.

While the English difference in conjugation is minor, ON present-preterites are more divergent. We have learnt two irregular verbs whose conjugation is somewhat similar to this class of verbs, 'vera' and 'vilja'; they are not

historically present-preterites but it may be practical to speak of them in the same context:

ver
a

Sg. Pl.

1p **em erum**

2p **ert eruð**

3p **er eru**

vilj
a

Sg. Pl.

1p **vil viljum**

2p **vilt vilið**

3p **vill vilja**

The present-preterite verbs are some of the most useful and common in the language so you should be careful to learn their conjugation by heart. The first verb we'll look at is the auxiliary 'skulu' which is the cognate of English 'shall' and similar in meaning.

skul
u

Sg. Pl.

1p **skal skulum**

2p **skalt skuluð**

3p **skal skulu**

The change of vowels from 'u' to 'a' is not our everyday umlaut but something even more arcane called 'ablaut'. We'll look at that again later.

Our next auxiliary verb does not have an English cognate but it is most similar in meaning to English 'will'. One of its primary uses is to indicate the future.

mun

u

Sg. Pl.

1p **mun munum**

2p **munt munuð**

3p **mun munu**

Note the anomalous infinitives, with ending -u instead of -a. The verbs 'skulu' and 'munu' are the only verbs in the language with this infinitive ending.

In the Völuspá we have a lot of 'munu' where the seeress is speaking of the future. One example is "Baldr mun koma" which is easily translated as "Baldr will come".

By now you may have noticed something characteristic about present-preterites; in the singular, the only endings are -t in the 2nd person. In the plural, they have -uð and -u in the 2nd and 3rd persons.

Our next verb has the same ablaut as 'skulu' but now our normal infinitive is back.

kunn

a

Sg. Pl.

1p **kann kunnum**

2p **kannt kunnuð**

3p **kann kunnu**

The meaning of 'kunna' is related to that of its cognate 'can' but there are some differences. While English 'can' means to be able to do something either through ability or circumstances, ON describes only ability. Also, English 'can' is always an auxiliary, while 'kunna' can be a main verb with a simple direct object:

Ek kann þat. I know [how to do] it, I can do it

One more verb for now, 'eiga' (own):

eig
a

Sg. Pl.

1p á eigum

2p átt eiguð

3p á eigu

You should already be familiar with its 3p sg form, 'á', which has been used already. The vowel change between 'á' and 'ei' is actually neither ablaut nor umlaut but don't worry about it (it has to do with a phenomenon called Verner's law).

The verbs 'skulu', 'munu', and 'kunna' from above are some of the most common auxiliaries in the language, just as they are in English (substitute English 'will' for 'munu'). Just as in English, no infinitive marker is used with them when they are used as auxiliaries:

You will go. but not ***You will to go*

Þú munt koma. but not ***Þú munt at koma*

1.2 Assimilative Nouns and Adjectives

It often happens in languages that a consonant assimilates to a neighbouring consonant. We have already seen some examples of this in the etymological ponderings:

*benkr -> bekk (bench) (the 'n' has been assimilated to the 'k')

*áhta -> átta (eight) (the 'h' has been assimilated to the 't')

One type of assimilation is important in declensions; their nominative -r has been assimilated by the final consonant of the stem. This happens with three consonants, 's', 'l' and 'n', and only when the vowel of the stem is long. Let's look at some examples:

*ísr -> íss (ice)

*hólr -> hól (hill)

*steinr -> steinn (stone)

The complete declension of those nouns is as follows:

Singular

nom **íss hól steinn**

acc **ís hól stein**

dat **ísi hól steini**

gen **íss hól steins**

Plural

nom **ísar hól steinar**

acc **ísa hól steina**

dat **ísum hól steinum**

gen **ísa hól steina**

Quite simply, the nominative -r is replaced by one of the other consonants. Nothing else happens.

Then there are adjectives with the same feature, declining thus in masculine indefinite:

háss hoarse

háll slippery

groenn green

Sg.

nom **háss háll groenn**

acc **hásan hál groenan**

dat **hásum hál groenum**

gen háss háls groens

Pl.

nom hásir hálir groenir

acc hása hála groena

dat hásum hálum groenum

gen hássa hállassa groenna

Take special notice of the genitive plural, where the assimilation occurs. Remember that the assimilation only occurs in words with long-vowel stems, but not stems of short vowels:

gulr yellow

vanr accustomed

Sg.

nom gulr vanr

acc gulan vanan

dat gulum vönum

gen guls vans

Pl.

nom gulir vanir

acc gula vana

dat gulum vönum

gen gulsa vanla

1.5 Bisyllabic Stems

Some strong masculine nouns have a bisyllabic stem; observe their pattern of conjugation:

hamarr hammer (stem: hamar)

himinn sky (stem: himin)

sg pl

nom ham-ar-r ham-r-ar

acc ham-ar ham-r-a

dat ham-r-i höm-r-um

gen ham-ar-s ham-r-a

sg pl

nom him-in-n him-n-ar

acc him-in him-n-a

dat him-n-i him-n-um

gen him-in-s him-n-um

First off, 'himinn' is assimilative. What is happening in these nouns is that whenever there is an ending with a vowel in it, the vowel of the second stem syllable is deleted:

*(sg dat) hamar + i > *hamari > hamri*

Note that bisyllabic names, such as Ragnarr or Einarr, completely ignore this rule and decline normally.

Some adjectives are bisyllabic; they commonly have assimilation:

gamall old (stem: gamal)

sg pl

nom gam-al-l gam-l-ir

acc gam-l-an gam-l-a

dat göm-l-um göm-l-um

gen gam-al-s gam-al-la

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

áss ace, god, one of the Æsir

íss ice

þræll slave

vagn wagon, chariot

hamarr hammer

himinn sky

jötunn ettin, giant (mythological)

drottinn lord (or usually, "the Lord")

hringr ring, circle

hundr dog

níðingr villain, oppressor

viðr wood

Þórr Thor, the thundergod

Þórshamarr Thor's hammer

Ásgarðr	Asgard, the world of gods (Æsir)
Miðgarðr	Midgard, the world of men
Miðgarðsormr	Midgard's Serpent (the serpent that encircles Midgard)
Jötunheimr	Gianthome (the mythological home of the giants)
Vesturvegr	"Westway" (west across the North Sea; the British Isles)

2.2 Pronouns

annarr other, another

hverr? who, what (masc)?

hverr each

hinna the other

'Annarr' is a bisyllabic pronoun, with an irregular declension:

	sg	pl
nom	ann-ar-r	að-r-ir
acc	ann-an	að-r-a
dat	öð-r-um	öð-r-um
gen	ann-ar-s	ann-ar-ra

As happens in 'maðr', the sequence 'nnr' becomes 'ðr'. The main irregularity in the word is its sg acc form, 'annan', where we'd expect '*aðran'.

'Hverr' declines like an adjective with j-insertion:

	sg	pl
nom	hverr	hverir
acc	hvern	hverja

dat hverjum hverjum

gen hvers hverra

An alternative (old) form of sg. acc. is the more regular 'hverjan'.

'Hverr' is the interrogative that refers to masculine nouns or persons. It can also mean 'each':

"Hverr þeir segir þá öðrum..." Each of them then says to another...

sg pl

nom hinn hinir

acc hinn hina

dat hinum hinum

gen hins hinna

Declines just like the article ending; in fact, it is just a modification of the pronoun from which the article is derived.

2.3 Adjectives

sjálfr (him)self

írskr Irish

slíkr such

groenn green

háll slippery

heill whole, healthy, "hail" (greeting)

víss wise

gamall old

gulr yellow

vanr accustomed

2.4 Verbs

gjöra, gjøri do

aka, ek + dat drive

hringa, hringa wind around (as serpents do)

hjálpa, help help

róa, roe row (a boat)

leiða, leiði lead

vernda, vernda protect

reka, rek drive out, drive sth forward from behind (such as cattle)

verða, verður +
nom become

'verða' is followed by a compliment, i.e. a noun in nominative.
The object of 'aka' is in dative rather than accusative.

2.5 Adverbs

aftir again

saman together

bæði both

því næst then, thereafter, subsequently

né nor

2.6 Prepositions

við + acc by, next to

um + acc about, around, through

af + dat off

yfir + dat over

gegn + dat against, in front of

hjá + dat by, with, in the company of

til + gen to

2.7 Conjunctions

at that

svá at so [that]

"svá at" is sometimes contracted to "svát"

2.8 Phrases

[It seems to me that some modern phrases have crept into Óskar's text; I'll check on this later. - Haukur]

standa saman stick together, stand united

standa með + dat stick with someone, help someone

gefa sik give in, surrender

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- Peir ganga saman um víðan vang.
- Peir sjá menn standa við forsinn.
- Annarr spyr, "Hverir standa þar, við forsinn?"
- Þá svarar hinn, "Þeir kalla sik Eirík ok Hauk, ok eru norskir."

- e. "Hvat gjöra slíkir menn hér?", spyr annarr hinn.
- f. Jarlar Noregs eigu marga hunda ok þræla írska.
- g. Í Noregi er oft íss í vágum, svá at vísir menn sigla þar eigi.
- h. Hann gengr til groenna skóga, þar er álfarnir búa.
- i. Þeir ganga saman á hálum ísi, en falla eigi.
- j. "Hér er háll íss. Ek vil eigi ganga hér um."

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- a. "Lord, protect us," an Irish man says.
- b. "I am lord here, and protect you," says the earl.
- c. "[The] Lord in Heaven ("Drottinn á himni") will not help."
- d. "[The] Lord himself is with us," another Irish man says.
- e. "But is he not in Heaven? ("á himni?")", the earl asks.
- f. [The] Lord in Heaven protects the men while they sail.
- g. The earl calls (says) himself the lord of the slaves.
- h. Icelandic men protect themselves ("vernda sik sjálfa") against Norwegian kings.
- i. They take (go with) an old man to the boat.

3.3 Translate the texts into English

Þórr heitir áss, ok er sterkr mjök ok oft reiðr. Hann á hamar góðan. Þórr ferr oft til Jötunheima ok vegr þar marga jötna með hamrinum. Þórr á ok vagn er flýgr. Hann ekr vagninum um himininn. Þar er Þórr ekr, er stormr. Þórr kennir orm, er menn kalla Miðgarðsorm. Ormrinn er langr ok hringar sik allan um heim manna, Miðgarð. Þórr vill veiða orminn ok vega hann, því at hann er illr.

Þórr kennir ok jötun er á bát. Þórr tektr vagninn ok ekr. Hann ekr vagninum ór Ásgarði ok um himininn. Hann ferr til jötunsins. Er hann finnr jötuninn kallar hann til hans, "Jötunn, þú skalt taka bátinn er þú átt ok hjálpa mér. Vit munum fara ok veiða sjálfan Miðgarðsorm." Jötunninn er mjök hræddr, ok svarar, "Ek skal gjöra sem þú býðr, Þórr, því at ef ek gjøri eigi svá, vegr þú mik. En ormrinn mun eta okkr báða, því at hann er stórr ok illr." En Þórr er áss bæði djarfr ok reiðr ok vill fara gegn Miðgarðsormi.

Því næst róa þeir saman á báti jötunsins. Þá kómr slíkr stormr, at jötunninn verðr hræddr mjök. Er Þórr sér hann svá hræddan, mælir hann, "Sjá, jötunn, hér er hamarrinn er vegr þik ef þú roer eigi," ok sýnir hánun reiðr hamarinn.

Óláfr kallar sik konung alls Noregs. Jarlar Noregs skulu ok kalla hann konung. Ef jarl gjørir eigi svá, ferr Óláfr konungr gegn hánun ok rekr hann ór Noregi. En margir jarlar vilja eigi kalla Ólaf konung, svá at þeir standa saman gegn hánun.

Jarl heitir Ragnarr, er kallar Ólaf eigi konung. Óláfr konungr foerir marga menn gegn hánun ok segir: "Heill, Ragnarr jarl. Kalla þú mik Drottin, eða ek

mun reka þik ór Noregi." Svá býðr konungr jarli (translate: "the earl"). Ragnarr svarar, "Heill, Óláfr. Vit skulum eigi leiða svá marga menn hverja gegn öðrum. Ek skal nú fara ok leiða alla er standa með mér. Vér skulum sigla brott í bátunum ok vér skulum eigi koma aftir til Noregs, meðan þú lifir. En ek mun eigi kalla þik konung, Óláfr, því at þú ert eigi góðr maðr ok þú munt eigi góðr konungr verða."

Hinir jarlarnir standa eigi með Ragnari gegn Óláfi. Konungrinn hefir svá marga menn, at Ragnarr gefr sik hánunum ok ferr. Hann segir mönnunum er eru með hánunum: "Vér skulum nú fara, því at níðingrinn Óláfr leiðir marga menn gegn oss, ok hinir jarlarnir standa eigi með oss. Óláfr gefr oss grið, svá at vér skulum sigla brott ok finna oss nýjan heim." Margir menn fara með hánunum í bátana, en sumir gjöra eigi svá. Þeir fara til Óláfs konungs, því at þeir eru norskir menn ok vilja búa í Noregi.

Kormákr heitir þræll ok Svartr annarr. Kormákr er írskr maðr. Svartr er danskr, ok ungr mjök ok sterkr. Kormákr er gamall maðr ok spakr.

Jarl býðr nú bæði Kormáki ok Svarti at fara í skóginn ok finna við. Viðinn skal brenna hjá jarli.

Þeir fara nú báðir í skóginn. Við skóginn er stórr hóll, ok háll íss í vangi.

Svartr segir við Kormák ("to Cormack"), "Vit skulum ganga yfir ísinn."

Kormákr mælir þá Svarti, "Eigi skal þat svá, því at yfir ís svá hálán, sem þú sér þar, skal eigi ganga. Þar falla menn í ísinn, ok deyja. Kom þú með mér, ok göngum vér nú á hólninn."

Ganga þeir svá á hólninn ok af hánunum í skóginn. Kormákr mælir, "Í skógum eru oft illir vargar. En ver eigi hræddr, því at Drottinn himna verndar okkr."

Svartr segir þá, "himna-drottinn kenni ek, er hefir hamar góðan ok flýgr í vagni um himininn. Sjá, Kormákr, hér hefi ek Þórshamar, en meðan ek hefi hann mun Þórr vernda okkr báða." Kormákr segir, "Eigi verndar okkr Þórr né hamarrinn; Drottinn á himni er með okkr, ok mun vernda okkr gegn illum vörgum." Finna þeir nú viðinn ok foera hann jarli.

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

Ragnar now leads many vikings into the boats and sails away. "We have no slaves, for Olaf the Oppressor takes them all. We shall go and find Irish slaves, in Westway. Then we shall find another homeland and live there." The vikings say "You shall lead us, Earl Ragnar, to Westway ("í Vestrveg"), and we will do as ("svá er") you bid."

As they sail away, out of the cove, they see many green meadows, broad cascades, and forests wide. Ragnar speaks, "Evil is the oppressor Olaf, to ("at") drive us out of Norway, with such green meadows and forests. We will not find such cascades in another home."

4. Looking at real texts

4.1 Half a strophe from Þrymskviða

Loki suggests the following to Þórr:

Mun ek ok með þér

ambátt vera.

Vit skulum aka tvau

í Jötunheima.

Notice the plural of 'Jötunheimr'.

ambátt female slave

tvau two

Notice the difference between 'munu' and 'skulu'. The first is a statement of fact (as far as a statement about the future can be) while the second is more like a suggestion. But in reality the verbs could be interchanged here with no real change in meaning. Thorpe, for example, translates both with 'will':

I will with thee

as a servant go:

we two will drive

to Jötunheim.

4.2 An answer from Gylfaginning

Hár segir: "Þat eru tveir úlfar, ok heitir sá er eftir henni ferr Skoll. Hann hræðisk hon ok hann mun taka hana. En sá heitir Hati Hróðvitnisson er fyrir henni hleypr ok vill hann taka tunglit, ok svá mun verða."

Remember the feminine pronoun, 'she':

nom. hon

acc. hana

dat. henni

gen. hennar

tveir two

eftir + dat behind, after

fyrir + dat in front of

hræðisk fears

tunglit the moon

sá the one

ferr goes, fares

Old Norse for Beginners - Lesson Nine

by Óskar Guðlaugsson and Haukur Þorgeirsson

1. Grammar
 1. Genitive Case: Partition
 2. Dative Case: Instrumental
 3. Verbs with Dative and Genitive
 4. Strong Masculine Declensions
 5. Infinitive Clauses
 6. Clauses of Purpose, Sequences
2. Vocabulary
 1. Nouns
 2. Pronouns
 3. Adjectives
 4. Verbs
 5. Adverbs
 6. Prepositions
 7. Conjunctions
 8. Phrases
3. Exercises
 1. Translate the phrases into English

2. Translate the phrases into Old Norse
3. Translate the text into English
4. Translate the text into Old Norse

1. Grammar

1.1 Genitive Case: Partition

There are some more uses to the genitive case than possession, presented last lesson. This can be seen through observation of the English genitive; in English, this case is marked by 's, for possession exclusively, but more commonly by the preposition 'of'. Examples:

'Norway's king is called Olaf.' 'The King of Norway is called Olaf.'

'Peter's car is blue.' 'The car of Peter is blue.'

Using the 's is normal for possession, except in the case of titles, like 'The King of Norway.' But there are other types of genitive, or at least other cases where the 'of' preposition is used abstractively:

'Three of us came over.' *'He saw all of them.'*

This is called 'partitive genitive'. There we're using the genitive to mark the whole whence an amount derives; 'hundreds of men.' - from an undefined mass called 'men', 'hundreds' are selected. The genitive would seem logical, as the extracted amount belongs to the original whole.

Luckily, Old Norse uses the genitive in the exact same way. Except, of course, its genitive is marked exclusively through inflection and not by the help of prepositions. So, first an example of the possessive usage we already know:

Bátr Óláfs er langr.

Then, an example of the partitive genitive:

Sumir vár vilja eigi vera í Úlfarsheimi. 'Some of us don't want to be in Úlfarsheimr.'

Note, by the way, that the verb conjugates in the third person in this example. Though it may seem to be a semantic first person, the verb refers to 'sumir', which is a third group. Remember that verbs always agree to the subject in the sentence, and the subject is always in nominative (like 'sumir', but unlike 'vár').

1.2 Dative Case: Instrumental

As detailed in lesson 5, section 1.1, the dative case in ON originates from a fusion of many different case forms. But the various functions of those originally different cases still remain in the dative case. One of those functions is called "instrumental", and marks the object with which the verb is executed. Examples:

*"He slays the dragon with the mighty sword." "He comes to England by ship."
"It's a Trial by Fire."*

In those sentences, "sword", "ship" and "fire" serve instrumental functions, and are marked in English by the instrumental case prepositions "with" and "by".

In ON, we have until now relied on the preposition "með" + dat, which marks instruments, among other things. But ON can also omit any preposition, relying on the naked dative form to identify the instrumental function.

Example:

"Þórr vegr jötuninn hamri." Thor slays the giant with a hammer.

This function of the dative is not very common, especially not in prose.

1.3 Verbs with Dative and Genitive

So far, we have used only verbs followed by a direct object marked with accusative. However, to complicate matters, the 'patients' of many ON verbs are not marked with accusative, but rather with dative or even genitive (rare), as illogical as it may seem:

"Ek kasta steini." 'I throw a stone.' (dative)

"Þeir moeta hánum." 'They meet him.' (dative)

"Hon saknar hans." 'She misses him.' (genitive)

The explanation to this phenomenon probably lies in the etymology of the individual verbs; a verb's original meaning may have logically called for such case marking, but then changed meaning while retaining the case use. The compulsory dative marking would in a great many cases stem from instrumental dative usage (see 1.2 above) which has "frozen" (become mandatory). At the same time, other verbs of similar meaning may then have changed to model themselves to the anomalous verb, so that all verbs of a similar "theme" meaning will govern the same case; e.g. all verbs that describe "projectile" meanings (like "kasta" above) tend to govern dative. In any case, by the time of Old Norse it is no longer practical to consider such (perhaps obscure) historical details; it is most practical to say that the grammatic case governed by an ON verb is one of its inherent variables, to be learnt as soon as one learns the verb itself.

Thus, from now on, verbs will be specifically identified with the case they govern:

vega, veg + acc slay kasta, kasta + dat throw

sakna, sakna + gen miss, feel the loss of

Most verbs learnt so far govern accusative; the only exception is:

sigla, sigli + dat sail

It may be of help to some students, however, to try to assign some minimal logic to some of the abnormal case use, perhaps especially with verbs that govern the genitive case. For example, with the example above of the verb 'sakna', one may assume something like this as an explanation:

"Hon saknar hans." "She misses his [presence]."

But this is only recommended as a mnemonic, for those whom it helps.

1.4 Strong Masculine Declensions

The strong masculine is certainly the most varied declension. Some strong masculines end in -ir in the nominative. They decline quite easily:

hilmir 'king'

sg pl

nom hilmir hilmar

acc hilmi hilma

dat hilmi hilmum

gen hilmis hilma

The dative cannot be 'hilmii', as 'ii' is not possible in ON.

A very large group of nouns within the declension are declined like this:

staðr 'place'

sg pl

nom staðr staðir

acc stað staði

dat stað stöðum

gen staðar staða

Strong masculines of this type are called 'i-stems'; the ones we know so far are called 'a-stems'. To summarize, i-stem declension is different in the following ways:

- a. a) gen sg -ar, not -s
- b. b) nom pl -ir, not -ar
- c. c) acc pl -i, not -a
- d. d) dat sg -Ø, not -i ('Ø' is commonly used to symbolize "no ending")

A few strong masculines' declension is a mix between i-stem and a-stem declension:

	sg	pl
nom	skógr	skógar
acc	skóg	skóga
dat	skógi	skógum
gen	skógar	skóga

That is, i-stem gen sg -ar, but otherwise just like other a-stems. The only such words we have encountered so far are 'skógr' and 'matr'.

Some i-stem nouns have -s in the sg gen.

So, as you'll be thinking by now, how do we keep track of all this? We intend to do so by using a new way to introduce future vocabulary from the strong masculine declension:

hestr, hests, hestar	horse
vinr, vinar, vinir	friend
skógr, skógar, skógar	forest
hilmir, hilmis, hilmar	king
áss, áss, æsir	god

These three case forms are what characterize and identify the different declensions, nom sg (as before), gen sg, and nom pl. From now on, make sure you learn to which declension each strong masculine noun belongs, before you continue. Names will also be presented this way, though not with the plural form, e.g.:

Njáll, Njáls

Haraldr, Haralds

Þorvarður, Þorvarðar

1.5 Infinitive Clauses

With verbs like 'claim' or 'believe', English can have full clauses following with all its main verbs in infinitive. In those clauses, the infinitive is always marked with 'to':

I believe him to be passed away.

I claim her to be my legal heir.

I believe it to have happened already.

In ON, such infinitive clauses are even more prolific. The difference to English is that the infinitive marker (at) is never used, and the verb infinitive tends to be idiomatically placed last in the sentence. As in the English example sentences above, the subject of the infinitive clause is not in nominative, but rather in accusative:

"Ek tel hann góðan mann vera." I believe him to be a good man.

"Ek segi þik illan konung vera." I claim you to be an evil king.

In lesson 3, section 1.2, infinitive clauses with sense words like 'see' and 'hear' were taught. They are analogous to the clauses presented above:

"Vér sjám þá ganga um skóginn." We see them walking around the forest.

"Þeir heyra konunginn mæla." They hear the king speak.

And as mentioned there, clauses with the word 'vita' (to know):

"Ask veit ek standa." An ash I know standing.

1.6 Clauses of Purpose, Sequences

Some subordinate clauses express purpose:

"They go to find the wood." ("they go - [in order] to find the wood")

In ON, such clauses are connected to the main clause by "til at":

"Þeir fara til at finna viðinn."

Alternatively, one might say:

"Þeir fara at finna viðinn."

This merely indicates a sequence of events, though purpose is strongly suggested. This omission of "til" is quite common.

2. Vocabulary

2.1 Nouns

vinr, vinar, vinir	friend
áss, áss, æsir	ace, god, one of the Æsir
askr, asks, askar	ash tree; small wooden pot
sveinn, sveins, sveinar	young man
peningr, penings, peningar	money
mátt, máttar, mættir	power
kaupmaðr, -manns, -menn	merchant
dómr, dóms, dómar	judgement, -hood ("state of being" suffix)
þrældómr, -dóms, -dómar	slavery
Kristr, Krists	Christ
Mjölñir, Mjölñis	Mjolner, Thor's hammer
Askr Yggdrasils	The Ash of Yggdrasil, the World Tree
Útgarðr	Outgard, alternate name for Gianthome
Surtr	Surt, the Fire Giant
Múspellsheimr	Muspellsheim, the World of Fire Giants
Ása-Þór	"Thor of [the] Æsir", alternate name for Thor

2.2 Pronouns

Demonstrative pronoun, masculine:

sá that, the one
 that

	sg	pl
nom	sá	þeir
acc	þann	þá
dat	þeim	þeim
gen	þess	þeira

Example of the demonstrative "that" function:

"Hvat heitir sá maður, er stendr hjá jarli?" "What is that man called, who stands by the earl?"

This also serves as a relative pronoun, "the one that"; for example

"Sá er fiska veiðir..." The one who catches fish...

Note how the plural simply uses the masc 3p pl personal pronoun.

2.3 Adjectives

heitr hot

norroenn Nordic

vittr wise

alvittr omniscient, all-knowing

frjáls free

sjúkr sick

blindr blind

2.4 Verbs

smíða, smíð craft, make

trúa, trúi + dat believe; believe in, have faith in

leita, leita + gen search; search for

kaupa, kaupi buy

halda, held + dat hold, keep

velja, vel choose

gjalda, geld + dat pay

sigla, sigli + dat sail

rísa, rís rise

lækna, lækna heal

And one present-preterite verb:

vita know (a fact)

sg pl

1p veit vitum

2p veizt vituð

3p veit vitu

It should be mentioned now that the character 'z' represents a combination of 't', 'd' or 'ð' + 's', just as 'x' is a combination of 'k' and 's'. This makes the form 'veizt' more understandable, as it essentially the stem 'veit' + the ending '-st'; 'veitst' > 'veizt'. The 'z' was originally pronounced 'ts', but tended to simplify to 's' in later ON and its descendant languages.

2.5 Adverbs

aldregi never

hvar where

hvaðan whence/where from

þaðan thence/there from

héðan hence/here from

heldr but rather

enn still

til more, yet more

2.6 Prepositions

undir + dat under

meðal + gen among(st)

frá + dat from

2.7 Conjunctions

svá sem such as

3. Exercises

3.1 Translate the phrases into English

- "Sumir yðvar fara aldregi heim til Noregs."
- "Veizt þú eigi, hvárt menninir skulu sigla brott?"
- "Eigi veit ek, hverir mannanna skulu sigla."
- "Kistr heitir drottinn sá, er verndar oss."
- "Ek veit annan, er verndar oss hamri gegn illum jötnum."

- f. "Hvárt mun sá Þórr heita, ok hamarrinn Mjöltnir?"
- g. "Eigi hefir sá Krístr slíkan hamar er Mjöltnir er."
- h. "Krístr hefir eigi hamra eða branda, því at hann er góðr ok vegr eigi menn né jötna."

3.2 Translate the phrases into Old Norse

- a. There are many villains among Olaf's friends.
- b. "That viking is such a villain, that he never spares good men."
- c. "Thor's might is in the hammer."
- d. "Do you know, slave, whence they come, who they are, and what they call themselves?"
- e. "They come from Westway, and are Irish men. They call themselves free."
- f. "No good men come from there. Take the sword and bring them to me."
- g. "Some of you are thieves, who take horses. Who are they?"
- h. "Those who know, shall bring me the thieves."
- i. "The thieves must give in. If they do not do so, I will kill you all."

3.3 Translate the text into English

Oddr segir við Ragnar jarl, "Seg mér, jarl, af heiminum, af jötnum ok ásum." Ragnar svarar, "Þat skal ek, Oddr."

"Í heimi stendr askr stórr er vér köllum Ask Yggdrasils. Við askinn eru heimar þeir er heita Miðgarðr, þar er vér bóm; Útgarðr, þar er jötnar búa, en hann heitir ok Jötunheimr; ok Ásgarðr, þar er æsir búa. Undir askinum búa dverggar, er smíða bauga ok branda."

"Drottin ása köllum vér Óðin, ok er hann áss mjök spakr. Hann hefir hrafna, er heita Huginn ok Muninn, ok fljúga þeir hrafnar um heimana. Þat, er hrafnarnir sjá, sér ok Óðinn. Því er Óðinn áss alvitr. Í Ásgarði býr ok áss sá er Þórr heitir. Þórr hefir hamarinn Mjöltnir ok flýgr hann oft til Jötunheims ok vegr með hánum jötna. Margir æsir búa í Ásgarði, ok vernda þeir allir mennina ok heiminn, gegn illum jötnum."

"Surt veit ek búa í Múspellsheimi. Sá er stórr ok illr jötunn elds. Í heimi þeim brenna heitir eldar ok mun Surtr leiða þaðan jötna gegn ásum. Hann mun vega æsi eldi ok brandi þeim, er hann hefir. Illr er mjök jötunn sá."

"Í Miðgarði bóm vér menninir. Um Miðgarð allan veit ek orm hringa sik, er vér köllum Miðgarðsorm. Ormr sá er illr. Ása-Þór vill veiða þann orm ok vega hann hamrinum."

Oddr mælir nú, "Kenni ek nú marga æsi. En sumir segja mér af öðrum, er þeir nefna Krístr. Hvárt er sá meðal ása?" Ragnar svarar, "Sá er eigi áss, heldr maðr. Menn segja hann lækna sjúka ok blinda, rísa aftr dauðr, ok koma af himnum. Margir norroenna manna trúa nú hánum, en sjálfr veit ek eigi mátt Krísts."

Fara nú Ragnarr ok víkingarnir at leita sér þæla meðal írskra manna. Þeir kaupa þar í Vestrvegi marga unga sveina af norroenum kaupmönnum, er halda sveinunum þældómi. Kaupmaðr segir, "Sveinarnir eru sterkir mjök, ok sá kaupir vel er þá velr. Tak þú, jarl, þá sveina er þar standa, þá gef ek þér annan til."

Ragnarr telr kaupmanninn bjóða sér vel, ok geldr hánun peningum. Býðr hann svá þælunum at ganga í bátana, ok siglir brott.

Er Svartr ok Kormákr foera viðinn heim til jarls, spyrr Svartr Kormák, "Hvárt eru allir írskir menn þælar, sem þú ert, Kormákr?" Kormákr svarar, "Eigi erum vér allir þælar en mörgum vár halda norroenir menn í þældómi."

3.4 Translate the text into Old Norse

Many (of) Nordic men believe in (the) Æsir, but not all of them. Some believe in Christ, Lord of Heaven. Irish men do not believe in the Æsir, but rather in Lord Christ.

The King of Norway commands all Norwegian men to call himself King. He also commands them not to have faith in the Æsir, but rather in Christ. Others, such as (the) earls of Norway, say that Thor will slay Christ himself ("segja Þór munu vega sjálfan Krist..."), with his hammer, Mjolner. Many of (the) Norwegians believe the earls.