

“Kanska”
A Faroese cultural keyword?

Master’s thesis

Arnfríð Petra Mamangun

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Summary

This thesis explores the word *kanska* and whether it can be considered a Faroese cultural keyword, i.e. being a culturally significant word within the Faroese linguaculture, which can point to particular perspectives and views within the Faroese culture (cf. Goddard & Ye 2015). *Kanska* has been observed by visitors to the Faroe Islands as being frequently used by the locals, while to locals, it is simply a natural addition to a sentence. The thesis takes its starting point in the field of ethnopragmatics, and additionally provides an intercultural, contextual and critical perspective, where it includes the entanglements of the historical and cultural context of the Faroe Islands (cf. Pennycook 2022). The thesis primarily draws on the concepts of *linguaculture* (cf. Risager 2015) and *language-culture nexus* (cf. Risager 2006), and additionally the concept of *language-culture-environment nexus* (cf. Reo et al. 2019), in order to articulate the intricate connection between language and culture as well as the linkage between language, culture and environment evident in the Faroe Islands. In order to explore areas relevant for cultural keywords within ethnopragmatics, the methodology is based on the collection and analysis of song lyrics, quotes from literature, a poem, and artworks as empirical materials, due to the inclusion of *kanska* in their titles as well as subject matter. To gather further perspectives and insights on the word *kanska*, two conversations were additionally held with two different conversation partners.

The main findings include *kanska* as having a unique position within Faroese linguaculture and as further illustrating the links between the Faroese language, culture and environment, i.e. the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus. This was found to be a result of the extended language contact with Danish as well as the interaction between the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus.

The study concludes that *kanska* can be considered a cultural keyword in Faroese linguaculture due to its high saliency in the titles as well as contents of the empirical materials, in addition to the frequency of *kanska* in spoken Faroese. The findings contribute to the limited studies on the Faroese language and linguaculture and additionally shed light on the linguistic purism present in the Faroe Islands and the need to account for the multilingualism present in the Faroes (cf. Petersen 2010; Holm 2024; Knudsen 2010).

While advocating for the continuation of the creation of Faroese neologisms, the thesis argues for a change in perspective regarding viewing other languages – Danish and English in particular – as exclusively corrupting the Faroese language. Instead, the thesis points to *kanska* as being an example of an enrichment from Danish language contact, and notes that no

linguacultures can be considered free from external influence (cf. Thomason & Kaufman 1988).

1. Introduction

Eingin veit á morgni at siga, hvar hann á kvøldi gistir.
'No one knows in the morning where he will stay at night'
– Faroese proverb

This Faroese proverb reflects a particular mindset in the Faroese way of life, which can be considered shaped by the uncertainty and unpredictability of the Faroese weather conditions, which the Faroe Islanders have had no choice but adapt to. It is an approach that has been especially apparent to visitors, who particularly note a shift in pace upon arrival, where one has little choice but “adapt to the rhythm of the islands.” (Gaini 2013:33)

Sydney Norgate (1943), a British soldier stationed in the Faroes (Ecott 2020), attributed this mindset to the unpredictable weather, and considered it reflected in the word *kanska* ‘maybe’; heard in almost every Faroese sentence.

To further explain this intricate connection between language and culture, I refer to two concepts: **language-culture nexus** and **linguaculture**, where I adhere to Risager’s (2006, 2015)’s definitions (which I further describe in Chapter 3). Referring to Kramsch (1998), Risager (2006:192) highlights the connection between language and culture as the following: firstly, “language *expresses* cultural reality”, secondly “language *embodies* cultural reality”, and thirdly “language *symbolises* cultural reality” (Risager 2006:192, italics mine). The first point refers to the concept of **language-culture nexus** while the second and third points refer to **linguaculture**. Altogether these points describe and underscore that “language in itself is culture” (Risager 2006:192). Language as expressing cultural reality in the first point is what Risager (2006:192) considers “the meaning and reference potential of the individual language,” which “[go] beyond language”. The second point then reflects the semantic-pragmatic aspect of linguaculture, and the third point its identity aspect, both referring to “properties of language itself” (Risager 2006:192). The core of the language-culture nexus can be defined as:

“... the meaning and reference potential of language. It is via its meaning and reference potential that language ‘goes beyond itself’ and links up with (the rest of) physical, social and cultural reality.” (Risager 2006:191)

The concept of linguaculture can also be considered to relate to the study of **cultural keywords** within the field of ethnopragmatics. These cultural keywords are words that are considered culturally significant and may indicate certain aspects and perspectives present in the culture in question (Goddard & Ye 2015). These words are however considered natural within the linguacultures in question, despite not being common elsewhere (Levisen 2012). An example of a cultural keyword in Danish linguaculture is *hygge* (Levisen 2012).

For my thesis topic, I intend to explore the frequently used adverb *kanska* ‘maybe’ within Faroese linguaculture as a possible Faroese cultural keyword. My thesis will take its point of departure within the field of ethnopragmatics, while providing an intercultural, critical and contextual angle, including the entanglements of the Faroese historical and linguacultural context (cf. Pennycook 2022). I answer the following research question: Can *kanska* be considered a Faroese cultural keyword?

While *kanska* ‘maybe’ as a concept can be theorised as existing in all languages (cf. Goddard and Ye 2015), I intend to explore the particular realisation of *kanska* in Faroese linguaculture as well as describe what entanglements *kanska* entails within the Faroese linguaculture.

My thesis can be considered as a piecing together of fragments, where different forms of expression of *kanska* found in poems, literature, artworks, song lyrics and perspectives in conversations are collected and pieced together, forming a mosaic of a part of the Faroese linguaculture. These types of empirical materials are explored due to being considered salient areas for cultural keywords within ethnopragmatics (Levisen et al. 2022; I will describe this further in Chapter 3). To provide additional perspectives on *kanska* I also hold two conversations, one with Guðrið Højgaard, Director of Visit Faroe Islands and one with Kalpana Vijayavarathan, Dean at the Department of Education of University of the Faroe Islands.

My topic is driven by my own belonging to the Faroese linguaculture. As someone with a Faroese background, I have the advantage of speaking Faroese, which allows me to access Faroese texts and materials, which people without a Faroese language background would find difficult.

Faroese is a comparatively small language, with an estimated 75,000-80,000 speakers, 54,845 of which reside in the Faroes (Anon n.d.; Statistics Faroe Islands April 2025). Faroese has endured language contact with Danish for centuries during Denmark’s dominion over the Faroe Islands (Petersen 2019) and is currently listed as “endangered/unsafe” by UNESCO (UNESCO n.d.). Whereas Danish was previously the main threat to the cultivation of Faroese,

English now appears to provide further challenges, despite Faroese being the official language of the Faroe Islands (cf. Faingold 2023; Knudsen 2010), and the influence of English has become more widespread within Faroese society (Faingold 2023).

In Zieseler's (2024:15) words:

“[N]ot only is Faroese the smallest and still least researched modern-day Scandinavian language, but it is also one of the most complex ones both in terms of its structure as well as its recent history and sociolinguistic status.”

Research on the Faroese language largely focuses on the linguistic features of Faroese and the historical influences evident from Danish and is mainly conducted by or in cooperation with Faroese linguists such as Hjalmar P. Petersen and Jógvan í Lon Jacobsen, while there also are cases of non-Faroese linguists undertaking studies on the Faroese language. The linguistic studies mainly focus on the structure and characteristics of Faroese language, while more recent studies incorporate migrants' perspectives and take more contextual approaches. The linguistic studies concern Faroese phonetics and phonology (Petersen & Voeltzel 2025) Faroese dialects (Jacobsen 2023; Bugge 2018; Petersen 2022), the integration of non-native Faroese nouns (Zieseler 2024), English loanwords in Faroese (Jóansson 1997), comparative studies of Danish and Faroese (Parrott 2009), and of Faroese and Icelandic (Árnason 2011; Angantýsson & Jónsson 2024).

In more recent years, as the number of migrants has increased, studies of Faroese as a second language are starting to build, for instance regarding the teaching of Faroese as a second language (Rasmussen et al. 2024); comparative study on migrant's experiences of learning Faroese and Icelandic (Hoffmann & Holm 2022); and migrants' perspectives on the multilingual situation in the Faroe Islands (Holm 2024) and the Faroese language policy (Faingold 2023). There have additionally been studies conducted concerning the efficiency of the Faroese language policy regarding the need for the Faroese population to be multilingual (e.g. Knudsen 2010).

To the best of my knowledge, no studies related to Faroese linguaculture, or Faroese cultural keywords have been previously conducted. It is therefore my understanding that my thesis can be the first contribution to explore a Faroese cultural keyword as understood within the field of ethnopragmatics.

My thesis consists of seven chapters. In the following Chapter 2, I first provide a historical context of the Faroe Islands regarding the first settlers, the origin of the Faroese language, and how the Faroe Islands became a part of the Danish kingdom. Next, I describe

the language conditions that followed and how Faroese went from being only spoken in homes to becoming the official language of the Faroe Islands. I then describe the current language conditions within the Faroese society as well as outline the Faroese language policy. The chapter ends with a description of the major influence of English as well as how it challenges the balancing act of cultivating Faroese while maintaining the bi- and multilingualism in Faroese society.

In Chapter 3, I lay out the theoretical foundations of my thesis, in which I first provide examples of how one can view the connection between language and culture as well as provide an outline of how the language and culture connection has historically been viewed within academia. I additionally describe how technological developments, and global interconnectedness further complicated the language-culture connection, i.e. **linguaculture**. Next, I describe linguistic purism and its ideological basis as well as relate it to the Faroese context. I then describe and outline **linguaculture** relying on Risager (2015) as well as the ideas that led up to the development of the concept. Then I move on to the concept of the **language-culture nexus**, adhering to Risager (2006), which considers the language-culture nexus as occurring in “every new communicative event”, and can be categorised as either convergent or divergent (Risager 2006:185). Within the language-culture nexus, I additionally include the dimension of environment, and define **the language-culture-environment nexus**, as well as exemplify how it can be viewed in the context of Faroese linguaculture.

In Chapter 4, I first outline my written empirical materials (quotes, artworks, poem, and song lyrics), followed by a description of my oral empirical materials, being my two conversations with two conversation partners, GH and KV respectively, where in addition to the reasons for selecting these empirical materials. I then consider and compare the literature on unstructured interviews with conversations as method, where I first outline the different types of interviews and thereafter argue for my viewing my conversations in terms of unstructured interviews. Next, I describe my reasonings for having the conversations online as well as compare literature on online versus in-person conversations. I then consider my own position as researcher and compare my background to the background of my conversation partners. I consequently describe power relations and what can be done to alleviate them in conversations. After this, I outline my ethical considerations regarding my conversation partners and the artists in terms of getting permission to using their artworks. I additionally describe how I approached my conversation partners as well as outline the details surrounding our conversations in addition to the translation and transcription. Finally, I end this chapter by

describing the possible perceptions of empirical material gained from conversations as outlined by Block (2000) and reflect on how I will use these in my analysis.

In Chapter 5, I first provide an etymological account of *kanska* and provide the translations *kanska* can be realised as in English. I then provide examples of the use *kanska* in Faroese sentences, relate *kanska* to the surrounding linguacultures of the Faroes, where the related languages also have cognates of *kanska*. I then move on to analyse my empirical materials outlined in Chapter 4: quotes from literature, two artworks, a poem, two song lyrics, and my two conversations with GH and KV, wherein I also incorporate the defined theoretical concepts from Chapter 3.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings from my empirical materials and relate them to the Faroese context outlined in Chapter 2 as well as the theoretical concepts described in Chapter 3. I additionally evaluate my use of methodology and consider what my findings signify. Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide a conclusion where I summarize what I have done, which methods I have used as well as what my main findings have been, wherein I provide an answer to my research question.

2. Background

The history of the Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands, an archipelago of 18 islands, are located between Iceland, Norway and the Shetland Islands in the North Atlantic Ocean (Faingold 2023). The Faroe Islands are comprised of a tight-knit society, where:

“[T]he same persons meet on many different arenas with different agendas and societal roles. At one moment your cousin could be your daughter's school teacher and the next moment, he is the chair of the Board at your workplace. The same cousin could also be the treasurer of your trade union as well as the coach of the handball team in town.” (Gaini 2013:35)

The first people to settle the Faroe Islands are considered to be Irish monks who arrived around 400 AD (Faingold 2023). The Norse Vikings followed and claimed the islands in the mid-ninth century when they arrived from Norway (Faingold 2023; Kočí & Baar 2021). The Faroese language is derived from Norse, the language of the Norse Vikings, and developed as a separate language through the mid-ninth century up to the fifteenth century (Williams 2020). Faroese is closely related to Icelandic, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish as they also derive from Old

Norse, and are considered cognates, i.e. they share the same linguistic origins, and are therefore closely related (Bandle et al. 2002; Williams 2020).

The Faroes became a part of Norway as a tributary state in 1135 (Faingold 2023). When Denmark subsequently took over Norway and incorporated it in the Danish kingdom in 1380, Denmark also gained authority over the Faroe Islands (Faingold 2023). With the arrival of the Protestant Reformation in 1538, Danish became the official language in the Faroes, and was spoken in Faroese churches, administration, and in 1846 also became the language of schools (Petersen 2010). The Faroese population then gradually became bilinguals, as the Faroe Islands entered a state of diglossia, i.e. where the same population used different languages for different contexts, where Danish was considered the High variant, being the public language, and Faroese was the Low variant spoken in homes (Petersen 2010; Sanders 2017).

The first Faroese orthography was created in 1846 and later revised and finalised in 1896 by V. U. Hammershaimb, a Faroese priest (Petersen 2010). The orthography was etymologically based (Petersen 2010) which ensured Faroese would appear “maximally different” from Danish (Faingold 2023:223 referring to Leonard 2011). This deeply reflected the need for the Faroese population to disassociate from Danish.

Jakob Jakobsen (1864-1918), a Faroese linguist and philologist, who after studying the extinct language Norn of the Shetlands worried that Faroese would endure the same consequence as Norn (Petersen 2010; Faingold 2023). Jakobsen then encouraged the creation of neologisms, either by returning to ‘pure’ old Faroese words or creating new words, rather than using Danish loanwords in colloquial Faroese (Petersen 2010).

The Faroese national movement, also called the language movement, gained a significant momentum in 1888, which sparked national pride, as well as an increase of awareness of the Faroese language and politics (Petersen 2010; Holm 2024). What followed was a promotion of Faroese by the means of writing poetry, literature, creating newspapers, political parties and cultural events, which can be viewed as “a form of resistance to the dominance of Danish” (Holm 2024:21).

As Denmark was occupied by Germany during the Second World War, British soldiers came to set up a protectorate, and the Faroese government was in charge of the local politics along with the Danish prefect located in Tórshavn (Faingold 2023; Petersen 2010). After the war, the Faroe Islands held a referendum in 1946, in which a small majority of the Faroese population voted for independence from Denmark (Faingold 2023). This was however declined by the Danish government, which instead issued a new referendum in 1948 (Petersen 2010;

Faingold 2023). This resulted in the Home Rule Act or *Heimastýrislóg*, which stated the Faroe Islands as a self-governing territory in the Danish Kingdom and granted the Faroese government executive and legislative authority over selected policy areas (Petersen 2010; Faingold 2023).

In 1938 Faroese finally became of equal standing with Danish, including being allowed in schools, followed by becoming the official language in 1948 with the Home Rule Act (Kočí & Baar 2021; Petersen 2010; Holm 2024). Today Faroese is spoken in all societal domains, i.e. schools, churches, administration etc., whereas Danish is used alongside Faroese only in courts (Petersen 2010). Danish is however still taught in schools and children are expected to develop a high proficiency in Danish (Petersen 2010).

The Faroe Islands today: postcolonial perspectives

Faroese linguist, Jens Christian Svabo had bleak prospects for Faroese in 1781-1782, expecting the language to become extinct, as he considered it had “been broken to pieces and lost all of its former glamour” (Petersen 2010:37). The report in 2012, however, was that the language was “alive and well” with an estimated 50,000 speakers (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2012:65 in Holm 2024:18).

The survival of Faroese can be credited to the stability of the language contact and to Faroese parents who passed Faroese on to their children, despite Danish being the public language (Petersen 2019; Petersen 2010). The Faroe Islands were also more isolated in the past, and fewer people were migrating to the islands, resulting in a relatively homogenous society (Petersen 2019). The standardisation of Faroese as well as revitalisation efforts have additionally contributed to Faroese “gaining the position and high status it has in society today” (Holm 2024:23).

Gaini (2009 in Gaini 2011:134) characterises the modern post-colonial relationship between the Faroe Islands and Denmark as “persistently ambiguous.” Denmark can be considered as having an increased presence in the Faroe Islands since the establishment of the Home Rule Act (Kočí & Baar 2021), as the Danish society essentially was replicated into the Faroese society during the early post-colonial period (Hoydal 2006 in Kočí & Baar 2021). The Faroes continue to receive an annual subsidy from Denmark, which accounts for 3.3% of the Faroese GDP (Faroeislands.fo N.d.), which according to Kočí & Baar (2021) can be considered neocolonialism.

Gaini (2011:134) notes:

“This troubled Danish-Faroese ‘dualism,’ especially the extremely emotional language question, has influenced all Faroese discussions on culture and identity since the national ‘awakening’ of the late nineteenth century...”

In Faroese public discourse, the Faroese language persists as the strongest symbol of the Faroese cultural identity (Gaini 2011). In a study consisting of interviews with migrants in the Faroes related to a feeling of belonging, Schug & Hayfield (2019:395) found that migrants noted the locals placing a high importance on them learning the Faroese language and, in this way, “pledge allegiance to Faroesehood.”

Inspired by Jakobsen, the current Faroese language policy is characterised by language purism (Faingold 2023), where the aim can be described to be ‘purifying’ Faroese from Danish loanwords as well as creating new neologisms and terminology (Holm 2024; Holm 2003 in Holm 2024). English loanwords are currently also discouraged, while Icelandic, which serves as a significant inspiration in terms of purism, is accepted as a base for the creation of neologisms (Faingold 2023).

Regarding the ongoing language maintenance efforts, there is a national Faroese Language Council, called *Málráðið*, established in 2012 (which replaced the previous Language Committee from 1985), to mainly advise and make decisions regarding questions related to the Faroese language in addition to developing neologisms and new terminology (Language Board Act 2012 in Holm 2024). It does not, however, hold legislative powers (Faingold 2023).

Despite these initiatives in preserving the Faroese language, Faroese still faces pressure from other languages in a variety of ways:

“[T]he Faroese language community is surrounded by other languages on a scale that large nations cannot imagine, for example through all kinds of imported consumer goods (food products, toys, technical manuals, children’s films, video and computer games), books, tabloid magazines, travel, mass media and so on.” (Holm 2003:275 in Holm 2024:23)

While the Faroe Islands have always been linguistically diverse through e.g. Danish language contact, globalisation has brought further interconnectedness and a more extensive linguistic diversity through an increase in migration, globalised economy and accelerated spread of information (Holm 2024).

Speaking several languages is critical to the cultural and “mobility capital” (Corbett 2007 in Holm 2024:39) of Faroe Islanders, as these skills provide them ease of movement both within society and abroad (Holm 2024). The challenge is however to balance the need for bi-

and multilingualism within Faroese society as well as protecting the continuity of the Faroese language (Sandøy 1992 in Holm 2024).

Petersen (2006) highlights that the language purism has partly failed due being an ideology only for the few, and that it is not “willing or capable of accepting the reality that Faroe Islanders are bilingual” (Petersen 2006:17, my translation). Knudsen (2010) similarly adds that the wish to regulate the Faroese language creates a barrier towards reaching a multilingual orientation within the Faroese language policy.

Whereas Danish was the main concern in colonial and early postcolonial times, English now seems to have taken the place of Danish, where Faingold (2023) notes that the past twenty years have been marked by a rise in English influence, challenging the cultivation of Faroese throughout Faroese society (Mortensen 2015 in Faingold 2023). Due to a lack of Faroese youth media (Knudsen 2010), English mainly dominates the digital platforms which Faroese children and youth are immensely exposed to (Holm 2024), which has found to result in Faroese youth to increasingly use English (Knudsen 2010; Petersen 2019). English is also used in a rising number of contexts within the Faroese society, e.g. among migrants as a lingua franca (Holm 2024; Petersen 2019), wherein migrants are considered lacking sufficient opportunities in learning Faroese (Petersen 2019). For these reasons, there are raised concerns of English replacing Danish as a second language in the Faroes or even taking over Faroese as the main language of the Faroes in the future (Holm 2024).

3. Theory

In this chapter I first describe different contexts and perspectives, illustrating the connection between language and culture, and how this has been studied within academia. Next, I briefly describe language purism and how it is evident in the Faroe Islands. I then further outline the two main concepts in relation to the language-culture connection mention in the Introduction, being linguaculture as well as the language-culture nexus in addition to the language-culture-environment nexus and how these are evident in the Faroese context.

The connection between language and culture

Language and culture have been found in several historical contexts and academic disciplines to have an intricate connection (cf. Risager 2015). When indigenous languages were lost due

to the effects of colonialisation, this also meant a loss of culture and sense of identity (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party 1989 in Sivak et al. 2019), resulting in feelings of disempowerment, psychological distress, poor mental health, and high suicide rates among indigenous peoples (Zuckermann 2020).

Language revitalisation efforts in indigenous communities have fortunately been found to have a significantly positive impact on peoples' mental and physical well-being, where numerous studies have confirmed the critical importance of language to culture and (ethnic) identity (Whalen et al. 2022; Zuckermann 2020; Reo et al. 2019) and belonging (Sivak et al. 2019; Antonisch 2010). Justin Neely, a speaker of the Native American language, Potawatomi, describes his experience of the language and culture connection in an interview with CNN: "Language is the key to understanding our culture... Our history, our dance, our ceremonies, our food — that makes us Potawatomi — but the language is what ties it all together" (Morava 2021).

According to Kramersch (2023), language and culture have been studied as separate entities through history, up until the 1970's. Within academia, the idea of connecting language and culture stems from a cultural movement in the late eighteenth century, which brought the notion of language to be viewed in relation with the idea of nation as well as people and culture (Risager 2015).

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century strengthened the newly developed national-romantic notion of a connection between language and "nation/people", which consisted of "a mysterious, intimate connection between language, people, and national soul" (Risager 2015:88). This view is also evident in the Faroe Islands today, as illustrated in Chapter 2.

The late 1990s brought increased possibilities for cross-cultural communication through the developments of computer technologies, being multimodal technology, virtual exchange and hypermedia (Kramersch 2023:179). The question of whether language reflected or represented culture or if culture was constructed by language in discourse became prominent as views of language and culture through structuralist ("culture as product") and constructivist lenses ("culture as process") (Kramersch 2023:180).

Linguistic purism

Pennycook (2022) considers languages as “political before they are linguistic” (Pennycook 2022:10 referring to Joseph & Newmeyer 2012), whereas Gal & Irvine (2019) consider language statements as ideological:

“Statements about language are never merely statements. They entail ideological positions that are made evident in multiple sites of social life, often in contradictory and contested ways, and they have wide-ranging consequences in the material world.” (Gal & Irvine 2019:1)

In a similar vein, there is the notion of linguistic purism, which Jacobsen (2021) describes as a language policy enforced by a language community as well as a type of language cultivation, with a subjective and prescriptive language ideology. Douglas (1966 in Jacobsen 2021:30) notes that purism attempts to create a boundary between what is ‘pure’ and what is ‘unpure’ in order to determine what is part of one’s culture and what is not, wherein only what is ‘pure’ belongs to the culture. This can also be considered a way of distinguishing *us* from *them*. Purism is often directed at selected languages which are considered a threat towards the language in question, which in the Faroese context can be considered Danish and English, but not Latin nor Greek (Jacobsen 2021).

One result of linguistic purism and the creation of neologisms is the option of having more words to choose from in speech or writing and therefore also increasing the vocabulary of a language (Jacobsen 2021). In Faroese one can e.g. choose between *musikkur* or *tónleikur* when mentioning ‘music’ (Jacobsen 2021). In most cases in Faroese, the neologisms are reserved for written Faroese (in this case *tónleikur*), while the more commonly used words (here *musikkur*) are for colloquial contexts (Jacobsen 2021). While linguistic purism is also intended to protect the language from outside influences, it does not respect the loanwords present in the spoken language and therefore unnecessarily “widens the gap between speech and writing” (Jacobsen 2021:31, my translation).

A condensed definition of the term *schizoglossia* coined in 1962 by Einar Haugen, has also been used to illustrate the Faroese situation (cf. Jacobsen 2021). Schizoglossia is defined as:

“... a linguistic term used to refer linguistic insecurity or language complex about one's mother language. It is common in societies where there are two language varieties and one is seen as incorrect and the other as proper... In these cases, one variety is seen as ‘bad’ and its speaker might want to correct some uses that are representative of it for some of the prestigious one.” (Findwords.info 2025; cf. Haugen 1972[1962])

In the case of Faroese, the more prestigious Faroese is its written version, while the spoken version is viewed as 'incorrect'. Jacobsen (2021) states that linguistic purism is built on the idea that a language should remain unchanged, but that this is not possible for a living, spoken language. It is only dead languages that can stay constant, as they are no longer spoken; while living languages are meant to evolve and change over time (Jacobsen 2021).

Linguaculture

I now turn to the first concept regarding the connection between language and culture: **linguaculture**, which Risager (2015:89) defines as "a concept that lies in the interface of language and culture." Risager (2015) accredits the coinage of linguaculture as concept to linguistic anthropologist Paul Friedrich, who wrote an article on the connection between political economy, language and ideology (Friedrich 1989 in Risager 2015).

Michael Agar (1994 in Risager 2015), a linguistic anthropologist, modified the concept of linguaculture to *languaculture* in order to assimilate it to the sound of "language," a more commonly used term (Agar 1994:265 in Risager 2015:89). Linguist Karen Risager has previously also used the term linguaculture (Risager 2006), similarly to Agar, but has more recently shifted to using *languaculture* in order to better align the concept with linguistics (Risager 2015).

Similarly to Hannerz (1992 in Risager 2015), Risager (2015) also considers language as having an external and internal loci, the external locus being oral or written linguistic practice, and the internal locus being a person's linguistic resources developed throughout their life trajectories. Risager (2015) however further incorporates a less organic third locus, being the notion of language as a system or a "coherent whole" (Risager 2015:91). The external and internal loci are mutually dependent, where linguistic resources are needed to be acquired in order for people to produce and receive linguistic practices, and familiarity with linguistic practices are needed for people to build their linguistic resources (Risager 2015).

Despite not being naturally occurring, the third locus of the language system also has implications for the other two loci, as it can be considered a "more or less conscious – normative factor" for both linguistic practice and linguistic resources (Risager 2015:91). It is defined as "a family of historically and discursively constructed notions ('French', 'Arabic', etc.)" (Risager 2015:91).

The practice of a language can according to Risager (2015) be perceived as flows within people's social networks and groups, either physically or virtually enacted (e.g. through

telephone or the internet). Like Sapir (1921 in Risager 2015) who notes that languages are not confined to national borders, Risager (2015:92) adds that the transnational flows of languages give rise to complex local multilingual circumstances, marked by power struggles between speakers, struggles for recognition as well as language hierarchies. This view allows for a description of a situation where language and culture can be considered distinct entities, as languages can be spoken in different cultural contexts and social networks anywhere in the world (Risager 2015).

In addition to Agar's (1994 in Risager 2015) semantic and pragmatic stance regarding linguaculture in discourse, Risager (2015:92) includes two additional aspects being "the poetics of language" and the "identity dimension of language", which together are intended to cover "the full range of culturality of a language" (Risager 2015:92).

The poetics of language refer to "the kinds of meaning created in the exploitation of the interplay between form and content in the language in question", such as puns and rhymes (Risager 2015:92). The inherent difficulties in translating poetry across languages demonstrate the difference in the poetic conventions and possibilities in languages (Risager 2015).

The identity dimension essentially concerns the sociolect and idiolect, i.e. the individual and sociolinguistic variations of a language. When one for instance speaks in a certain accent, one identifies oneself as well as enables others to identify one in relation to their own perceptions and understandings (Risager 2015).

Unlike Pennycook (2022), Risager (2015) asserts that regardless of proficiency, language is always cultural: "Using a language always involves linguaculture for the simple reason that linguistic practice produces and reproduces meaning" (Risager 2015:93). This also includes using a language in non-native contexts, Risager (2015) claims. For instance, when a person is learning another language, he or she will refer back to his/her own experiences of their language shaped by their sociocultural context (Risager 2015). Apart from grammatical as well as semantic and pragmatic knowledge to be learned, one's linguaculture can serve as a natural foundation when learning another language (Risager 2015). The carrying of subjective connotations of words and phrases ("linguacultural matter") to the foreign language is what Risager (2015:93) terms "language mixture."

Risager (2015:94) notes that despite having a high proficiency in a language, A person's linguaculture will "always be the result of an accumulation of experiences during his/her entire life history, some of which may have taken place outside the target language community." The concept of linguaculture therefore enables an articulation of language as

never being “culturally neutral” (Risager 2015:94). Additionally, “[a]ny language (and language variety and language mixture) carries meaning potentials that are to some extent specific for this language” (Risager 2015:94).

Differentiating between language proficiency, whether being a native or non-native speaker indicates the linguacultural and linguistic flows to follow slightly different courses (Risager 2015). Regardless of where a person is in the world and which language he/she speaks as well as proficiency, he/she will tend to draw on their linguaculture (Risager 2015).

Language-culture nexus

The second concept relating to the connection between language and culture is the **language-culture nexus**. To elaborate further on the definition provided in Chapter 1, Risager (2006:185) describes the language-culture nexus as being “created in every new communicative event” while “the core of the ‘connection’ between language and culture is the meaning and reference potential of language in relation to physical, social and cultural reality.” Risager (2006:185) further concludes the interpretation of the communicative event as “[t]he basic unit” linking language and culture. The communicative event thus is “a social/cultural event” where all types of languages (including body language, paralinguistic and written language; encompassing linguaculture, cultural and discursive practice) are used to communicate a certain topic with a certain aim (Risager 2006:186). Risager (2006:186) additionally defines the communicative event as “a linkage of various flows coming from various places,” e.g. linguacultural, linguistic, cultural and discursive flows in various social networks.

The language-culture nexus is thus realised through the communicative event, which additionally can involve codeswitching and be multilingual (Risager 2006). In oral language, the communicative event is situated in a composite macro- and micro-context, while in written language, it can be in multiple contexts (Risager 2006). Risager importantly notes that:

“Local integration is a dialogical process in which the participants co-construct, negotiate or struggle for meanings and identities. There is always a power dimension in the communicative event.” (Risager 2006:187)

In the language-culture nexus, Risager (2006:187) considers language and culture to mix in a wide range of ways and distinguishes between a **convergent** and a **divergent** blend of language-culture nexus. A **convergent** language-culture nexus concerns a communicative event involving a high volume of the same categories (Risager 2006). Risager (2006) provides the context example of a native Danish teacher in Denmark, teaching Danish as a second

language to students with a range of linguistic backgrounds. In the classroom, they speak in Danish and discuss an article on the production of pork, written by a native Danish journalist (Risager 2006).

An example of a **divergent** language-culture nexus with a considerably diverse blend of cultural categories occurs for instance in the context of a telephone conversation regarding lions, spoken in German, where an Aalborg Zoo employee with a Danish linguaculture (Risager 2006 writes 'linguaculture', but later refers to this as linguaculture in Risager 2015) is talking to a Berlin Zoo employee who speaks with a Hungarian linguaculture (Risager 2006), being a Hungarian migrant. This is an example of transnational processes causing a local complexity facilitated through the telephone (Risager 2015).

Objectively, the language-culture nexus can be considered a practice formed in interaction (or text production and reception for written communicative events), in which the linguacultural, discursive and linguistics practices within social networks modify or support the language-culture nexus (Risager 2006). When changes occur within the communicative event, the interrelation can however be disrupted, e.g. if the discourse topic changes; someone with a different linguaculture joins; or someone leaves the physical setting but carries on with the conversation through a different medium such as the Internet (Risager 2006).

Subjectively, Risager notes, the language-culture nexus may be discursively built on mentalities such as "us" and "them", and "our culture" or "our language", which can lead to formation of conceptions (likely connected with national ideology) with natural or causal connections between language and culture (Risager 2006:189).

The language-culture nexus is mainly connected to "small-scale experiences communities" at the micro-level, which can be considered within e.g. a nuclear family, a school class or a workplace, where Risager (2006:190) considers the language-culture nexus to be "created in linguistic practice" (Risager 2006:190).

Risager (2006:191) states the core in the connection between language and culture within the language-culture nexus to be "the meaning and reference potential of language" and that it is through this "that language 'goes beyond itself' and links up with (the rest of) physical, social and cultural reality."

Language-culture-environment nexus

Another dimension to add to the language-culture nexus, relates to the intricate connection between the land, culture and language in a given area, and can be termed the **language-culture-environment nexus** or the “land-language nexus” (Reo et al. 2019:216).

Studying the effects of climate change on Iñupiat and SLI Yupik communities, Reo et al. (2019:221) found that “the land (and ice), Indigenous lifeways, cultural identity, and Indigenous languages are all tightly bound together,” and that any changes happening to one dimension, being either the environment, cultural or linguistic practices, impact the other two dimensions.

The Faroese language-culture-environment nexus and linguaculture

In the case of the Faroe Islands, there is also an intricate connection between the language, culture and environment, as the unpredictable weather of the Faroes greatly influences what is possible in people's day-to-day lives as well as what is available to hunt and eat. British journalist and author Tim Ecott (2020:18-19) notes:

“The mutability of the weather here has shaped not just the land, but the way [Faroese] people look at the world. It is why they band together and still value community. The persistent wind means they have no trees on the high ground and precious few at sea level. The only animals that thrive are the hardy sheep that remain central to their lives. Surviving in that severe physical environment is why people customarily ate pilot whales and seabirds and why they still seem immune to some of the worst excesses of modern life.”

Faroese anthropologist Firouz Gaini (2013:11) further describes:

“Islanders, notably residents of small sparsely populated islands, are often confronted with and influenced by a strong ideational dualism between land and sea, culture and nature, life and death. They are fearful and humble when they think of powers of nature.”

Natural forces have been the cause of many men losing their lives especially at sea, and many have also fallen off cliffs while being up in the mountains. Faroe Islanders are therefore acutely aware of the dangers at sea as well as in the mountains. In a poem named *frá Desembermorgun* ‘from *December* morning’, Faroese poet and scholar Kim Simonsen (2021[2015]) writes:

“Eitt land er ein konstruktión,
sum má endurskapast hvønn dag,
staturin og tjóðin,

‘A country is a construct’
‘that has to be recreated each day;
‘the state and the nation -

men ikki landslagið.	'but not the landscape'
(...)	(...)
Tað er ein megi í fólkunum sum vilja búa her,	'There's a strength in the people who want to
	live here'
ein sorg eisini."	'but also a sorrow.'
(Simonsen 2021[2015]:196-197)	

Simonsen (2021[2015]) describes how the idea of nation is a construct, whereas the environment or the landscape cannot be tamed, but can only be adapted to. It is not possible to mould it to one's desire. Gaini (2013:33) similarly writes:

"Once in touch with the ground [in the Faroe Islands] there is no need to hurry... And if a Torshavn businessperson is waiting for a guest, he will not blame the traveller for delays due to the weather or anything else. There is nothing to do but adapt to the rhythm of the islands."

Due to the weather ruling the islands, Gaffin (1996:225 in Gaini 2019:7) describes life in the Faroes as characterised by an unusual mixture of "known elements of nature and humanity with the ultimately unpredictable and enigmatic." He therefore considers the temporal orientation by Faroese locals to be "fluid but deep", where "exactitude in space" is more important than "exactitude in time" (Gaffin 1996:226 in Gaini 2019:7), i.e. Faroese are less concerned about being on time compared to arriving at the intended destination.

Ethnopragmatics

Ethnopragmatics was first termed cross-cultural pragmatics and developed in the late 1980s by linguist Anna Wierzbicka (Goddard & Ye 2015). Cross-cultural pragmatics was however reconceptualised in order to "highligh[t] the claim that there is an explanatory link between indigenous values and social models, on the one hand, and indigenous speech practices, on the other" (Goddard & Ye 2015:66). Ethnopragmatics can be considered a field within ethnolinguistics (Sharifian 2015).

Goddard and Wierzbicka (2004:157 in Levisen 2012:75) describe ethnopragmatic analysis to concern "articulating the unwritten scripts of a given culture by capturing 'background norms, templates, guidelines or models for ways of thinking, acting, and speaking in certain cultural contexts'". In terms of practical applications, ethnopragmatics can e.g. foster

intercultural understanding as well as preserve endangered languages and their unique concepts (Goddard & Ye 2015).

Cultural keywords are the main interest of ethnopragmatics. These are the “translation-resistant words”, which can be considered “culture rich”, as they “occupy focal points in cultural ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking” (Goddard & Ye 2015:70). These are e.g. words for ideals and values, emotions, sociality concepts, social categories, and more, which can occur either in isolation or in a related key word cluster (Goddard & Ye 2015:71). Levisen (2012:70) describes the idea of cultural keywords to “sugges[t] that a number of words in a language are ‘guiding words’ to the culture; that is, they embody underlying shared assumptions which are at work in a speech community.”

Levisen et al. (2022:16-18) list the following criteria for identifying cultural keywords:

1. Frequency in language use
2. Salience (most important criterion). The word will tend to be included in e.g. signs, song titles, book titles, and metapragmatic discourse (Levisen (2012) also includes proverbs, narratives and slogans).
3. Productivity: Cultural keywords often contribute to the expansion of a language's lexicon, leaving behind a trail of set phrases, compound words, and idiomatic expressions. These keywords can also appear across different word classes, as seen with the Danish noun *hygge*, the adjective *hyggelig*, reflexive verb *hygge sig*, and the phrase *du må hygge dig!*
4. Untranslatability: The cultural keywords tend to be difficult to translate, however, there may exist similar or even semantically identical words in neighbouring linguacultures. They represent a culture-specific concept that lacks direct translational equivalents in most other languages.
5. Value-indexing: These words serve as fundamental concepts within specific linguacultures or linguistic worldviews, often embedding an inherent evaluative component in their meaning, such as distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad.’

Levisen (2012:71) additionally includes “phraseological elaboration” also termed “interactional routines” (such as greetings, Goddard & Ye 2015:71), which refers to how deeply a word is integrated into fixed expressions and constructions, where some words receive special attention in a language, appearing frequently in idioms, formulaic phrases, and common phrases. An example is the parting phrase in English “have fun!” which according to Levisen

(2012) suggests “fun” to be a cultural keyword in English and “having fun” to be “a modern Anglo ideal” (Levisen 2012:71).

Wierzbicka (1997:16) however notes that the goal of the ethnopragmatic study of cultural keywords is not to prove whether a particular word can be considered one of the cultural keywords within a culture, the aim is to “be able to say something significant and revealing about that culture by undertaking an in-depth study of some of them.”

In order to “decompos[e] cultural notions and captur[e] cultural norms in terms of simple meanings that appear to be shared between all languages” (Goddard & Ye 2015:66), the methodology of ethnopragmatics is based on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), which is comprised of 65 easily translatable concepts called semantic primes (Levisen et al. 2022) (see Table 1). The semantic primes are simple, ordinary words such as “you”, “I”, “feel”, “think”, “big” and “small,” which have been found to “have exponents across all languages” (Goddard 2018a in Levisen et al. 2022:5), and which have “word meanings that are maximally simple, and maximally translatable” (Levisen et al. 2022:4).

The NSM provides a way to standardize description of terms in addition to preventing Anglocentrism (Goddard and Ye 2015). Other types of methods include mainly linguistic evidence such as corpus techniques (displaying usage patterns), specialized lexicogrammatical constructions, routines in interactions, as well as life writing and anecdotes by the cultural insiders (Goddard and Ye 2015:66). Levisen (2012:9) notes that within the NSM framework, language and culture are considered as having an intricate connection, while still being viewed as distinct “social constructs.”

Table 1 Semantic primes, Faroese and English exponents

<i>EG~MÍN, TÚ~TÍN, ONKUR, OKKURT~TING, FÓLK, KROPPUR</i> I~ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
<i>SLAG~SLØG, PARTUR~PARTAR</i> KIND, PARTS	Relational substantives
<i>HETTA, TAÐ SAMA~LÍKA, ANNAÐ</i> THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	Determiners
<i>EITT~EIN, TVEY~TVÆR~TVEIR, NÓGV~NÓGVIR~NÓGVAR,</i> <i>LÍTID~FÁ~FÁIR~FÁAR, NØKUR~NAKRAR,</i> <i>ALT~ØLL~ALLIR~ALLAR</i>	Quantifiers

ONE, TWO, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW, SOME, ALL	
<i>GOTT, RINGT</i> GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
<i>STÓRT~STÓRUR~STÓR, LÍTIÐ~LÍTIL</i> BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
<i>HUGSA, VITA, VILJA, IKKI VILJA, FØLA~KENNA, SÍGGJA, HOYRA</i> THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
<i>SIGA, ORÐ, SATT</i> SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
<i>GERA, HENDA, FLYTA SEG, NEMA</i> DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	Actions, events, movement, contact
<i>AT VERA (ONKUSTADNI), HAR ER, VERA (ONKUR/OKKURT), AT VERA (X HJÁ ONKRUM)</i> BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), BE (SOMEONES')	Location, existence, specification, possession
<i>LIVA, DOYGGJA</i> LIVE, DIE	Life and death
<i>NÆR~TÁ~TÍÐ, NÚ, ÁÐRENN, AFTANÁ, EIN LANG LØTA, EIN STUTT LØTA, EINA LÖTU, LØTA</i> WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	Time
<i>HVAR~STAÐ, HER, UPPIYVIR, UNDIR~NIÐURUNDIR, LANGT BURTUR, NÆR~NÆR VIÐ, SÍÐA, INNI</i> WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	Space
<i>IKKI, KANSKA, KANN, TÍ, UM</i> NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	Logical concepts
<i>SERA~ORDILIGA, MEIRA</i> VERY, MORE	Augmentor, intensifier
<i>LÍKA~EINS</i> LIKE	Similarity

Adapted from Goddard & Ye (2015:67). ~ indicates other variants, i.e. alloloxes (Arab 2020)

The semantic primes illustrate that *maybe* (and therefore also *kanska*) is considered to be a concept thought to exist across all linguacultures.

4. Methodology

Empirical material

In order to adhere to the criteria of identifying cultural keywords within ethnopragmatics, I have collected quotes describing *kanska* in literature, as well as a poem, two song lyrics, and two paintings, which include *kanska* in their titles.

The quoted literature entails "*Kanska*" or *the land of maybe* by British soldier Sydney Norgate, published in 1943. This can be considered one of the earliest mentions of the use of *kanska* in Faroese and the Faroe Islands. Another outsider perspective is brought from British journalist Tim Ecott's *The land of maybe: a Faroe Island year* from 2020, which provides another view on the use of *kanska*. The third quote is by the late Faroese politician Kári á Rógvi, which offers an insider perspective from a political angle in the edited book *The Right to National Self-Determination: the Faroe Islands and Greenland* published in 2005.

The fourth and final quote is by Dagmar Warming written in a summer exhibition booklet in 2008. *Kanska* was the title of the Faroese summer art exhibition, where thirteen artists (of which twelve are Faroese and one is French) exhibited artworks in the Faroes inspired by the word *kanska*. From this booklet, I have additionally selected two artworks by two renowned Faroese artists, based on their imagery, symbolism and salience of *kanska*. This entails *Foreign body* by Edward Fuglø as well as *The family* by Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir. I have received written permission from the artists to include their artworks in my thesis (see Appendix 1).

The selected poem is written by Sjúrdur Hansen in 1982, entitled *Kanska í nátt* 'maybe tonight', whereas both selected song lyrics are written in recent years. As there were multiple song titles featuring *kanska*, the two which included *kanska* most frequently were chosen. The first song lyrics stem from the song *Kanska* written by Heiðrikur á Heygum and Lea Kampmann, a duo jointly called *Einangran*, in 2020. The second song lyrics, *Kanska er í vónini* 'Maybe is in hope', are written by Steintór Rasmussen in 2021.

To further explore *kanska* as a potential Faroese cultural keyword, I have additionally held two conversations with two conversation partners, Guðrið Højgaard (GH) and Kalpana

Vijayarathan (KV) to gather further perspectives and deeper insight into the scope and significance of *kanska* and its role in Faroese linguaculture.

Through her work, GH connects with many journalists from around the world writing about the Faroes, and has also worked closely with Tim Ecott, the author of *The land of maybe: a Faroe Island year*, where Ecott (2020) thanks GH in his acknowledgements. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the Faroe Islands are a tight-knit society, and GH happens to also be my aunt.

KV is the Dean at the Department of Education of University of the Faroe Islands, where she teaches English Language Teaching (ELT). Having migrated from India, KV has lived in the Faroes since 1991 and speaks Faroese fluently. In the following sections, I will elaborate on the theoretical aspects of my conversations as well as argue for referring to them as conversations rather than interviews.

Conversations in relation to unstructured interviews

As the conversations I held with my conversation partners can be considered similar to an unstructured interview, I adhere to theoretical descriptions of unstructured interviews due to the absence of literature on conversations as method. While the literature distinguishes between interviewer/researcher and interviewees/participants, I consider myself a researcher as well as conversation initiator and GH and KV my conversation partners, due to the nature of the held conversations.

Interviews, and particularly unstructured interviews, are described as having a “qualitative nature” (Fontana & Frey 2000:652), which lends them the potential to yield a broader range of empirical material, and a more expansive discussion compared to e.g. questionnaires (Valentine 2005). Being qualitative, the goal is not for the interview to be representative but to gain an understanding of the experiences of individuals (Valentine 2005), in addition to gaining insight to their “subjective values, beliefs and thoughts” (O’Connell Davidson & Layder 1995:125).

An interview in turn allows the interviewees to describe and explain their experiences in greater detail and provides the researchers the opportunity to explore areas in greater detail and return to a previously mentioned topic and rephrasing one’s questions (Bryman 1988 in Valentine 2005). More importantly, the interview format allows participants to introduce other matters relevant to the researcher (Silverman 1993 in Valentine 2005:111).

Bernard (2017) distinguishes between four types of interviews: informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. Informal interviews are on one end of the spectrum, being characterised as having a complete absence of structure or control, where the researcher simply writes down notes from memory when returning home from being in the field (Bernard 2017). Unstructured interviews (or “conversational interviews” in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998:64) are similarly defined as having minimal control over the responses of participants, despite the interview having a clear plan or intension (Bernhard 2017). Semi-structured interviews adhere to a list of questions and topics while still being considered open-ended (Bernard 2017). Finally, on the other end of the spectrum, fully structured interviews are similar to an oral questionnaire, where participants are e.g. presented with the most identical questions or stimuli possible (Bernard 2017).

For my method, I have employed conversations similarly to unstructured interviews, in which my conversation partners and I can be considered “partners, collaborators, or co-constructors of knowledge” and therefore “challenge[ing] the conventional construction of the interview as a setting for data gathering by a researcher from the researched” (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998:64). These “[c]onversational interviews are a powerful way of gaining access to an individual’s interpretations of their personal experiences (i.e. their social world)” (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998:64). Here, the experiences of the conversation partners form the basis of the study (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998).

There appears to be a consensus among researchers on the conversational nature of interviews. Rapley (2004:16) describes qualitative interviewing as “draw[ing] on the everyday practices of asking and answering questions and the everyday identities of questioner/answerer and interviewer/interviewee.” Rapley further describes the nature of interviews as: “social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) *accounts* or *versions* of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts” (Rapley 2004:16, italics in original).

Kvale (1996:6) defines an interview as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose.” He however views the conversation to be between unequal partners; due to the control that’s in the researcher’s hands. Kvale (1996) additionally notes that unlike the impromptu nature of ordinary conversations, the conversation held in an interview involves more attentive listening and inquiry with clear aim to acquire knowledge.

Like conversations, Bernard (2017:163) argues that unstructured interviewing “goes on all the time” and takes place “just about anywhere”, providing examples such as at home, by

bus stops, walking by the road, or in a field. Bernard (2017) however distinguishes between informal and unstructured interviews, despite both types being characterised as being unstructured. He claims that:

“There is nothing at all informal about unstructured interviewing, and nothing deceptive, either. You sit down with another person and hold an interview. Period. Both of you know what you’re doing, and there is no shared feeling that you’re just engaged in pleasant chitchat.” (Bernard 2017:164).

Bernard (2017:164) notes that despite unstructured interviews being guided by an underlying plan, one cannot control the responses of one’s conversational partner. The aim of the interview is to create a space for one’s conversational partner to share their thoughts and experiences freely in their own time (Bernard 2017). Bernard considers everyday conversations to be unlike unstructured interviews, as casual conversations tend to be characterised by balanced turn-taking between conversation partners as well as not revolving around a certain topic (Bernard 2017).

Bernard’s statements regarding unstructured interviews however also share similarities with workplace meetings, for instance, despite the differences in number of participants in the meetings as well as in a more private conversation, there is a certain agenda and there are certain topics to cover. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term conversations, as they had a more explorative and open aim compared to what I have outlined above regarding unstructured interviews. The conversations I have held with my two conversation partners can be considered similar to an appointment or a meeting with a pre-agreed theme or topic.

Online versus in-person conversations

In order to collect perspectives of locals living in the Faroe Islands, and due to time and geographical constraints, the conversations took place online, on the preferred platforms of the conversation partners (cf. de Villiers et al. 2022). This was in order to ensure my conversation partners would be as comfortable as possible. Several researchers have found the benefits of online interviews to allow them to speak to people in distant locations, as well as saving time and travel costs (de Villiers et al. 2022; Prior & Lachover 2023; MacNamara 2024).

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in literature, discussing and even advocating for online interviews, due to their wider use and availability, after the pandemic forced the whole world to maintain social distancing and have an increased online

presence (Prior & Lachover 2023; de Villiers et al. 2022). There are, however, both advantages and disadvantages with having conversations online rather than in the same physical space as one's conversation partners.

In an interview setting, participants may feel more at ease when provided the opportunity to be in the comfort of their own home, rather than at a location selected by the interviewer (MacNamara 2024). The same can also be considered to apply to conversations held with new conversation partners one has yet to meet. This also provides the conversation partner and conversation initiator "a greater degree of equality" (MacNamara 2024:194). Having conversations online is also considered to give conversation partners "greater agency, creating more symmetrical power relations" (Hanna & Mwale 2017 in Prior and Lachover 2023:1) as well as creates a sense of informality which "nurtures a sense of ease and closeness" (Weller 2017 in Prior and Lachover 2023:2). Being at home can, however, cause those involved to become distracted (Deakin and Wakefield 2014 in MacNamara 2024), highlighting the importance of conversation partners having a suitable location if having conversations online. Participants in online interviews have however overall been found to find it easier to locate a quiet location for the interview (Khalil and Cowie 2020 in MacNamara 2024).

There have been concerns raised regarding the building of rapport between interviewer and interviewees when conducting interviews online (Deakin & Wakefield 2014 in Prior and Lachover 2023). Deakin and Wakefield (2014 in MacNamara 2024), however, had the opposite experience and found online interviews to have better rapport-building compared to in-person interviews. MacNamara (2024) however concludes that rapport building, whether online or in-person, will depend on the personalities of those involved in the interview to a greater degree due to all conversations being "interpersonal" (Johnson and Rowlands 2014 in MacNamara 2024:196).

Rapport building was also considered challenged due to an absence of body cues (Hart 2021 in Prior and Lachover 2023) and mutual senses (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst 2017). De Villiers et al. (2022) however found that video-based communication platforms facilitated rapport building, as it helped the interviewer to use body language, including hand gestures and facial expressions. This is also one of the reasons why Hyde & Rouse (2022) argue for online interviews to surpass in-person interviews overall, especially for encountering the other. Hyde & Rouse (2022:880) note that when the researcher only has the conversation partner's face to fix their gaze on, it is in a manner "more penetrating" than in an in-person conversation,

as it helps prevent potential distractions and allows the conversation initiator to “meet the other in all of her or his alterity” (Hyde & Rouse 2022:880).

In-person conversations are described as offering “a ‘special insight’ into subjectivity, voice and lived experience” (Atkinson and Silverman 1997 in Rapley 2004:15). Critics of online interviews have pointed out the absence of eye contact in video-conversations, which can restrain the possibility in reading each other’s emotions (Hyde & Rouse 2022, Khalil & Cowie 2020 in MacNamara 2024). MacNamara (2024) however argues that even in-person interviews don’t guarantee eye contact, as it largely depends on the interviewee and their linguacultural background. Emotional intelligence also varies from person to person (MacNamara 2024).

Online conversations have been found to require considerably more attention from both conversation partners in order to “process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, and body language” which “consumes a lot of energy” (Jiang 2020). This can in turn cause fatigue in conversation partners but can be alleviated by reducing the duration of the conversations (Jiang 2020).

There are however also other drawbacks noted by Jiang (2020) such as how being on camera also causes an awareness of being watched, resulting in becoming uncomfortable or self-conscious regarding how to act facing the camera (Jiang 2020). While natural in in-person conversations, silence additionally can cause anxiety and discomfort in online video conversations (Jiang 2020). Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst (2017:153) also argue that in-person interviews “tend to be stabilised by patterns of flow that produce rhythms or ‘atmospheric atmospheres’ that can feel comfortable” such as sharing a hot drink or food.

In line with Archibald et al. (2019 in MacNamara 2024), MacNamara (2024) not only argues for online interviews as being on par with interviews conducted face-to-face, but considers them even better, wherein his main reason is the possibility of audiovisual recordings rather than audio recording. I however opted for only audio recordings, as adding audiovisual recordings would require an additional layer of analysis, as well pose an additional awareness for my conversation partners which could cause them to be hesitant in participating in the conversations (in addition to being recorded) (cf. MacNamara 2024).

Considering the perspective of the conversational partners, Peasgood et al. (2023) did a study, where they offered participants in a health evaluation to choose whether the interview should be online or in-person. While 12.7% preferred in-person interviews over online (mainly due to providing a feeling of being at ease), online interviews were preferred by a significant

number (37.4%) of the participants (with reasons stated as mainly due to its convenience). The majority of the participants (49.9%) did not mind. Peasgood et al. (2023:10) additionally found that online interviews allowed them to gain “a broader geographical sample” of participants while the in-person interviews were considerably more time-consuming and costly (Peasgood et al. 2023).

MacNamara (2024) and Peasgood et al. (2023) argue that both online and in-person interviews are equal in terms of participant responses. Jenner & Myers (2019 in MacNamara 2024) even found online interviews to be more desirable when discussing sensitive matters, due to the conversation partners having the possibility to be in a safe and private space.

Ethical concerns have been raised regarding data security in online conversations (Lobe et al. 2020 in MacNamara 2024), concerning where the data is stored, whether on a computer or an online storage space (MacNamara 2024) but if only relying on an audio recording in terms of recorded conversation data, the concern would be the same regardless of interview mode. MacNamara (2024:197) notes the main importance regarding ethical considerations is for the conversation partners to have “fully informed consent... and freedom to withdraw at any time.”

My position as researcher and conversation initiator

While I considered myself as being a conversation initiator, I simultaneously had the role of the researcher, due to the aim of the conversations to be gathering perspectives for my thesis. Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick (1998:64) describe a researcher as: “an active and reflexive learner listening to stories, reconstructing them, embellishing them, censoring them, and conveying them to others.” A researcher is also considered to be influenced by her or his historical and social context, which in turn affects the interpretations of one's empirical materials (Harding 1987 and Yeatman 1991 in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). This also implies that two researchers may reach different conclusions despite conversing with the same conversation partners (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). As Schoenberger (1992:218) notes:

“... questions of gender, class, race, nationality, politics, history, and experience shape our research and our interpretations of the world, however much we are supposed to deny it. The task, then, is not to do away with these things, but to know them and learn from them.”

Valentine (2005:113) found that it may be beneficial for the researcher to have a similar or shared background or identity to the conversation partners, as this may foster rapport between conversation partner and researcher, which in turn can lead to “a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy and mutual respect and understanding.” Valentine however also notes that differences are not necessarily a hindrance in rapport-building or creating a shared understanding (Rose 1997 in Valentine 2005). As previously mentioned in the Introduction, I have a Faroese linguacultural background, which I share with one of my conversation partners, GH. I am also a woman, which I share with both GH and KV.

Power relations

Within qualitative interviews and therefore also conversations, power relations are inherent aspect to be aware of (Prior & Lachover 2023). Power relations are shaped “by active subjects with different agendas, different social horizons, and different stories to tell” (Bengtsson & Fynbo 2018:33 in Prior & Lachover 2023:2), and significantly influence the atmosphere and inter-relational dynamics in conversations (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009 in Prior & Lachover 2023). Power relations also affect the production of knowledge in terms of development and outcome (Ben-Ari & Enosh 2012 in Prior & Lachover 2023).

Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick (1998:64) note that “[v]iewing research as a collaborative inquiry contains an inherent danger of neglecting the dynamics of power between researcher and participant.” They further argue power differentials to be an inherent aspect of social relationships which in turn also influence the power dynamics between conversation partners (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). In conversational interviews Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick (1998) note conversation partners as having a greater degree of agency, due to the researcher or conversation initiator adapting according the conversation partners, as well as allowing them to choose whether or not to participate; time and place of the conversations; what they would like to share as well as how much time to offer the researcher (Limerick et al. 1996 in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998).

Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick (1998) have found the power of the researcher to vary depending on the stage of the research process, wherein the conversation partner is considered covertly disempowered due to the controlled nature of the conversation as well as the conversation topic being for the researcher's benefit (Minichiello et al. 1990 in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). The power of the researcher is at its peak in the analytical

stage, where the researcher can select which interpretation to include (Geiger 1990, Ribbens 1989 and Stacey 1988 in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998).

Self-disclosure has been found to help in balancing the power dynamics between conversation partner and researcher, whereas answering questions posed by one's conversation partners as well as sharing one's research topic to one's conversation partners in conversations and interviews have been found to build rapport (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998).

Ethical considerations

I was transparent to my conversation partners regarding my research topic and additionally informed them of which empirical material had been collected beforehand (being song lyrics, quotes from literature, a poem and artworks) (cf. Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). Both of my conversation partners agreed to share their names and did not express a wish to be anonymous. Both GH and KV signed the AU consent forms regarding the processing of personal data prior to the conversations. Prior to starting the audio recording, I received oral confirmation from my conversation partners granting me permission to record. The audio recordings are safely stored on my AU OneDrive.

As previously mentioned in the Introduction, due to copyright, I have received permission from the artists, Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir and Edward Fuglør, to reproduce their artworks as well as analyse them for the purposes of my thesis. They were both contacted through e-mail, while Gunnarsdóttir was additionally contacted through her Facebook art page, due to no response through email. The permissions from the artists are included and translated in Appendix 1. The artists were both informed that my thesis will not be published but only will be read by my supervisor and external examiner.

Conversations and conversation partners

When approaching my conversation partners, Guðrið Højgaard (GH) and Kalpana Vijayarathan (KV), KV was contacted through email, while GH was contacted through Facebook Messenger due to our relations. In my message, I informed them of my thesis topic, providing a short description of cultural keywords, and provided the Danish cultural keyword *hygge* as an example in order to provide them a familiar concept to compare. I additionally informed them of the empirical materials I had, and that they had the possibility to influence

which areas related to *kanska*, they would like to touch upon. This gave them time to reflect on *kanska* and its meaning and use in their daily lives in addition to what thoughts they would like to share before having our conversations. My conversation partners were therefore aware of our conversations being for the benefit of my thesis.

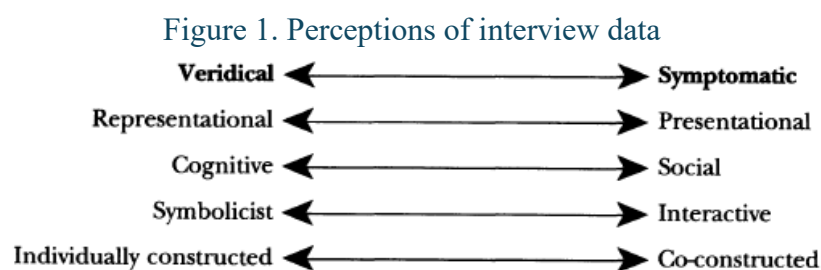
The first conversation was held with GH on the 30th March, on Teams, and the second with KV on the 8th April on Zoom. The conversations were both in Faroese, and all quotes have been translated to English. A transcription as well as a translation of the quotes used in my analysis are included in Appendix 4.

I have the following notes for my transcriptions:

1. An asterisk * indicates uncertainty of what has been said.
2. A hyphen - indicates words spoken in close succession or overlapping speech.
3. **Bold** is used when particular emphasis is put on a word in the conversation.

Analysing the conversations:

Block (2000:762) describes interviews as “complex social and sociolinguistic events” and provides a combined and more complex way of viewing the gathered empirical material, basing on multiple researchers, in order to encourage others to consider the entangled and interconnected realities present in interviews, which also can be considered relevant to conversations, due to the conversational characteristics of interviews. The combined perceptions by Block (2000) are illustrated in Figure 1 below:



Reproduced from Block (2000:759)

Block (2000) notes how Kvale (1996) distinguishes between **veridical** and **symptomatic** readings of empirical material gained from interviews. **Veridical** refers to viewing the statements of the conversation partners as trustworthy and the conversation partners as people with good intentions (Block 2000). **Symptomatic** reading refers to the researcher perceiving

the statements in relation to how the participants view the topic and the context of the interview, rather than being in relation to the topic in question.

The distinction between **representational** and **presentational** refers to the empirical material from the conversation to as either **representing** “real events” (Block 2000:758 referring to Freeman 1996) or being **presentational** in regards to the statements of how the conversation partners present themselves in terms of “the presentation of self, such as how the interviewee constructs the interviewer, their relationship, and the purpose of the interview” (Block 2000:758 referring to Freeman 1996).

The empirical material gained from conversations can additionally be viewed as a **cognitive** phenomenon, i.e. representing the conversation partners’ recollections of events, or a **social** phenomenon in terms of how conversation partners “relate to the interview context as actors in a particular context” (Block 2000:758-759). When viewing the empirical material as a social phenomenon one takes on an interactionist perspective (as opposed to the symbolicist perspective) in terms of viewing the empirical material as “a product of the interaction” between conversation partner and researcher, and therefore co-constructed by both parties (Block 2000:759).

There is additionally the concept of voice to bear in mind, which essentially refers to how one's words are the products of the words of one's discourse community (Block 2000). In a conversation context Block (2000:760) notes:

“[O]ne could see any statement provided by a research participant as originating in a particular community that conforms to a particular Discourse and that may be classified as the kind of thing one is allowed to say in that community and within that Discourse. It is, therefore, data representative of that community, a particular voice that a particular research participant has adopted momentarily when providing an account.” (Block 2000:760)

Conversation partners may additionally take on “different roles in response to their perception of being positioned in particular ways by particular questions” (Block 2000:760 referring to Holstein & Gubrium 1995), which also may vary throughout the conversation (Block 2000). This then results in empirical material, which may be viewed as a:

“symptomatic of a particular state of mind and even ephemeral, ongoing social interaction than as a reflection of underlying memory or mental models of particular domains of knowledge and experience.” (Block 2000:760)

This combination of perspectives will be taken into consideration when interpreting and analysing my empirical material gained from the conversations with my conversation partners and will be further discussed in the Discussion Section.

5. Analysis

The story of *kanska*

“I can, for fun, mention a Danish word that has become so Faroese that it has never occurred to anyone to show it the door, and that is the word KANSKA, which comes from Danish ‘kan ske’ [‘can happen’], merged into one word.” (Davidsen & Mikkelsen 2021:45)

These are the words by Kári Davidsen and Jonhard Mikkelsen in a book called *Ein ferð inn í føroyskt* ‘A journey into Faroese’ published in 2021, which concerns linguistic and grammatical aspects of Faroese and is intended as a guidebook for Faroese teaching at upper secondary school as well as university and college of education. Both Davidsen and Mikkelsen can be considered adhering to the linguistic purism on the bases of the book as well as the quote above. Since the national awakening and the establishment of the Faroese Language Council, the goal has been to ‘purify’ Faroese of Danish influence (cf. Chapter 2), and it is striking how Davidsen & Mikkelsen (2021) note how *kanska* has slipped through their fingers due to being so engrained in the Faroese language and therefore also the Faroese linguaculture.

The Faroese adverb *kanska* is in the Faroese-English dictionary translated to “perhaps”, “maybe”, “possibly” and/or “could be” (Sprotin.fo N.d.a). In the Faroese-Faroese dictionary, the definition translates to ‘with greater or lesser probability, it could be, it might happen, possibly... (hardly, barely)’ providing example sentences *vit síggjast kanska í morgin* ‘we might see each other tomorrow’ and *úrslitið er kanska ikki so gott* ‘the result might not be so good’ (Sprotin.fo N.d.b). Other example sentences to further illustrate the wide range in types of uses of *kanska* in the Faroese language are from the Faroese speech bank (2020), which is comprised of natural Faroese speech gained from interviews:

(1) *Nei, tað er tað **kanska** ikki*

’No, **maybe** it isn’t’

(2) *Eg hugsi, at tá hevur tað **kanska** tikið einar fyra fimm tíma*

’I think at that time it **probably** would have taken four to five hours

(3) *Mann fer **kanska** onkran túr suður við honum*

'I/one **might** go for a trip south with him'

(4) *Teir høvdu **kanska** kunnað farið ein túr til Suðuroynna*

'**Maybe** they could go for a trip to the South Island

It is unknown, when *kan ske* became *kanska* in the Faroese language, but the earliest recorded instance appears to be in a Faroese newspaper *Føringatíðindi* dated 1891 (Anon 1891:2 in Timarit.is). *Kan ske* also became a joint word in Danish, *kanske*, but has fallen out of use and has now been replaced by *måske* 'maybe' and *muligvis* 'possibly' (Ordnet.dk N.d.). As mentioned in Chapter 3, *kanska* is the Faroese exponent of the semantic prime that in English is realized as *maybe*, indicating that it theorized to have equivalents across all languages. *Kanska* also has cognate forms (i.e. closely related due to having the same linguistic origins) in the other Nordic languages. In Icelandic, *kanska* is *kannski*, in Swedish *kanske*, and in Norwegian bokmål as well as Nynorsk it is *kanskje*, all with seemingly identical uses and meanings (Islex.is N.d.).

Kanska in literature

Sydney Norgate, a British soldier stationed in the Faroes (Ecott 2020) during the Second World War, can be considered the first who wrote about the frequent use of *kanska* in Faroese. Norgate (1943:3) writes:

"'Kanska' is the Faroese word for 'maybe' — it is the most used word on the islands. They are ruled under a despotism — the not so benevolent despotism of the weather. Five times as much rain as the wettest part of the British Isles — five hundred times as much wind as the windiest part. Maybe we'll go fishing tomorrow — maybe we'll try and do a bit of haymaking — maybe we'll get married. All and every one of these things is conditional — you see maybe it will be too wet to bother with the hay and a rough sea makes it alike impossible to go fishing or get married — if the boat can't get in the priest won't be here so we'll get married another day..."

Norgate relates the use of *kanska* to the changing weather conditions in the Faroes, and how most activities are subjected to the weather. The weather has the final say on whether locals can go fishing, do haymaking or even get married. And so, people rely heavily on the use of *kanska* in their daily conversations. This also reflects the language-culture-environment nexus and how its visibility in the Faroese linguaculture.

British journalist and author, Tim Ecott (2020:50) notes the following observations:

“On each visit here, I seem to gain new insight into the Faroese concept of *kanska* – maybe. *Kanska* doesn't imply that Faroese people are unreliable, or that they take a casual attitude to plans and arrangements. It is not *laissez-faire*, or even *mañana*, but rather an acceptance that human plans may be displaced by a greater power. *Kanska* acknowledges that nothing can be guaranteed on an island, or in life. More subtly, the Faroese have learned not to waste precious time fretting about whether a future event will actually happen. Even today, there is a reluctance to commit to arrangements too far ahead.”

Ecott approaches *kanska* as a more general stance of life or worldview, offering a more optimistic tone compared to Norgate. Ecott perceives *kanska* as a means of acknowledging that one does not hold power over what the future may bring. Ecott similarly illustrates the presence of the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus, where the environment influences the attitude regarding future events.

The late Faroese politician Kári á Rógvi (2005:13), referring to Norgate (1943), has the following statement regarding *kanska* as well as the Faroe Islands being described as *the Land of Maybe*:

“To this outsider, everything that happened amongst the Faroese seemed to depend on the whim of the ever-changing weather. This had influenced the collective psyche of the entire nation, giving them the pretext to always hedge their plans with a "maybe - if the weather permits." In some way that pretty much sums it all up: in political and constitutional terms, too, the Faroe Islands seem to depend on shifting outside forces as well as an indecisive national character - a Land of Maybe.”

Á Rógvi agrees with Norgate's view and description of *kanska* and relates the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus to also influence its political approach. Contrary to the Ecott (2020), á Rógvi (2005:13), however, considers the Faroese national character as “indecisive”, rather than fully being influenced by stronger, natural forces.

Kanska art exhibition

In the summer art exhibition folder, entitled *Kanska*, Warming (2008:7, my translation) describes the title of the art exhibition:

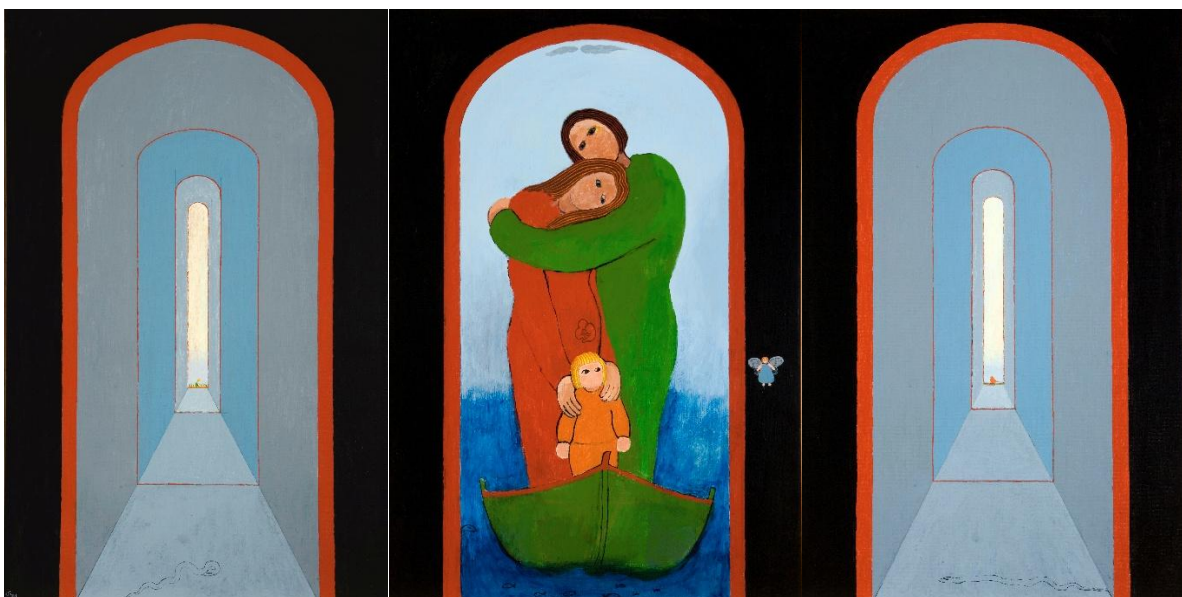
“Nature plays a significant part in daily life in the Faroes. Here, the weather holds more power over people than elsewhere. This is why the little word “*kanska*” is uttered in almost every

conversation. Because we never know for sure. We make plans, and yet, nothing is certain—it all depends on so many things. Travellers soon learn that their plane may or may not arrive or depart on time. Maybe, maybe not, but everything will no doubt work out anyway. Time will tell. The little uncertainty in the word *kanska* is almost unbearable for the active and modern person, who prefers to have everything under control. That's why the word itself is a challenge.”

Similarly to Norgate (1943) and á Rógvi (2005), this statement argues for the Faroese weather to be a cause of the frequent use of *kanska*, ultimately indicating Faroese linguaculture to be conditioned by the Faroese nature and weather conditions, and therefore also reflecting the link between the Faroese linguaculture and the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus.

While statements of this kind communicate a clear message, works of art tend to be open to interpretation, where the intension behind the art tends to have multiple possibilities. The title of the artworks, however, provides a helpful frame for the viewer, regarding the possible message by the artist. The *Kanska* art exhibition encompasses a wide range of interpretations of *kanska*, depicting inter alia family life, emotion, choices, decisions, stories, tourism, shapes, birds, lifestyle, buildings, landscapes and nature. Here the viewer is invited to not only consider the limitations and uncertainty, *kanska* can entail, but also the possibilities and value in the word.

Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir: *The family*



Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir: "The family" 2008. Acrylic on canvas. Images courtesy of the artist. Originally reproduced in Warming (2008:40-41). Reprinted with permission (see Appendix 1).

Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir (born 1950) is well-loved in the Faroes and internationally. She paints in a slightly naivistic style (Warming 2008) and is known for her uses of symbols. *The family* by Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir features three of her re-occurring symbols: the lily, the sparrow, and the angel (Nordatlantens Brygge 2024). Often depicting family life, she paints according to her own worldview and is inspired by her own experiences as well as the people in her life (Warming 2008).

The family consists of three panels, which involve a family of three, a mother, a father, and a child, in the centre painting, a lily on the left and a sparrow on the right. The family is standing together in a boat, sailing on the open sea, where the boat may symbolize their journey through life together (also suggested by Warming 2008). Here, the mother is embraced by the father, and she is holding on to their child. The mother also appears to be carrying twins in her womb and is looking at and holding on to her child in front of her, as well as the twins she is carrying within. The father appears to be fixing his gaze on what is beyond them and their 'lifeboat', while holding his spouse in a protective embrace, as if looking out for any dangers ahead. The child, however, has noticed the angel in the periphery, which appears to be unseen by her parents, and is inspecting it with curious eyes.

The boat shares the same red and green colours as the parents, while the child has light red clothes, and appears to be a girl, judging from the long hair, and the similar coloured clothes as her mother. The angel shares the same blue and grey colours as the side panels and has red hair, similarly to the child's clothes.

Each panel of the art piece is framed by a "Romanesque arch", resembling church windows (Warming 2008:38), where the side panels possibly depict two separate entrances or life paths with two different destinations, with a snake crossing each path, perhaps indicating an obstacle. Judging from the angel, what is beyond the frame could represent all that is unseen, i.e. the spiritual realm.

The artwork by Gunnarsdóttir appears to be advocating for curiosity and openness through the use of *kanska*. Here, *kanska* appears to be perceived in the context of an unknown future while simultaneously being open to possibilities and choices life may bring. The depiction of the family on the boat on the ocean depicts a connection between the Faroese linguaculture and the environment, i.e. the language-culture-environment nexus, as *kanska* is placed in relation to journeying through life, not knowing what the future will hold. The artwork appears to indicate that difficulties may show up in life, but that *kanska* gives way to hope and life's possibilities.

Edward Fuglø: *Foreign body*



Edward Fuglø. Foreign body, 2008. Acrylic on canvas (Warming 2008:23).

Reproduced with permission (see Appendix 1).

Unlike traditional Faroese artists who base their art on the Faroese nature and landscape, Edward Fuglø (born 1965) uses the Faroese landscape as a symbol of “Faroese-ness” and employs a “narrative visual language” in his art (Warming 2008:22).

Currently displayed in a municipal primary and lower secondary school in Tórshavn (Fuglø, private correspondence. See Appendix 1), *Foreign body* by Fuglø depicts a red Swiss army knife with a Faroese landscape in the backdrop. Here, Fuglø has recreated an exact model of a particular type of Victorinox Swiss army knife, one among many variations that range from a simple knife-only design to more complex versions including multiple tools.

During the periods of peasant and hunter-gatherer societies, carrying a knife in the Faroe Islands was of utmost importance, and knives were used by men, women and children (Petersen 2017). They were utilized during mealtimes (since most traditional Faroese food requires a sharp knife), as well as slaughtering and flensing sheep, cattle, fish, and whales (Petersen 2017). Knives were also used for carving, mending tools, and crafting clothes, shoes, and toys (Petersen 2017). The Faroese proverb *knívleysur maður er lívleysur* ‘a knifeless man is lifeless’ also reflects the prominence of knives as crucial tools in the Faroes (Petersen 2017).

The traditional Faroese knives had a sheath made of either leather or wood (Petersen 2017). The more practical knife-only pocketknife has in recent times gradually replaced the traditional Faroese knife, as the pocketknife is smaller and easier to store in one's pocket. Now, however, it is mainly men who tend to carry them.

The Swiss army knife depicted in the painting is one of the most advanced models on the market and has significantly more functions than what Faroese men would typically use. The pocketknife is placed in the foreground of the painting. Here it takes a threatening position, resembling a machinelike animal, perhaps bearing likeness to a sheep, but appearing to be on the hunt to destroy everything in its way. Rather than being utilized for good, here the pocketknife appears to be an instrument of destruction.

The Faroese landscape in the background is blurred, leaving the Swiss army knife to appear sharp in the foreground, enhancing the contrast between the landscape and the pocketknife. The red colour and the sharp edges from the multitude of tools further add to the divergence. Three little *sóljas* (yellow marsh marigold- the Faroese national flower) are also positioned in the foreground, and are spread over the painting, leaving one up in the air and the two others on the ground. The yellow colour of the *sóljas* enhances their prominence in the painting. The flowers appear soft with their rounded edges, especially in comparison to the sharp-edged pocketknife. The *sóljas* are tiny while the pocketknife is enormous, leaving a stark contrast between micro and macro.

The shape of the *sólja* positioned in the air appears as if it is gently falling down, but it could also possibly be going upward as if being cut off by the pocketknife. Another option could be that the *sólja* is on its way down to defend itself and its surroundings.

The word *foreign* can bring negative connotations of something alienating or something that does not belong, while the title *Foreign body* seemingly indicates that the pocketknife creature is not someone or something natural or local. This artwork by Fuglør can be viewed from a linguistic angle in terms of outside influences to the Faroese language and linguaculture, as something that is a threat to "Faroeness" (cf. Warming 2008:22). Here, the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus is more of a symbol within the Faroese landscape and the *sólja*, where *kanska* is used to depict a threatening present or future, unlike the previous artwork by Gunnarsdóttir.

Poem

Like artworks, poems and songs can also have multiple meanings which do not seem crystal clear. In the following sections, I provide a possible interpretation of the selected poem and song lyrics. I have taken the liberty to do more or less literal translations and not adjust wordings according to tone or rhyme in order to carry the Faroese meaning to the English translations.

Kanska í nátt 'Maybe tonight' by Sjúrdur Hansen

Faroese version (excerpt):

English translation:

Kanska í nátt

Maybe tonight

Men kanska í nátt
fer títt lív
fer mítt lív
saman við hondum
úr fjarastu londum
aftur at kenna hita
úr kavafohn ið glitrar

But maybe tonight
will your life
will my life
along with hands
from the most distant lands
feel the warmth again
from the glinting snowdrift

Kanska í nátt.

Maybe tonight.

Sjúrdur Hansen (1982:67)

The poem *Kanska í nátt* 'Maybe tonight' (*nátt* being the time period between evening and morning) by Sjúrdur Hansen was published in 1982 (see full text in Appendix 2). The poem follows the train of thought of the narrator and its duration can be interpreted as lasting only a few minutes. The narrator appears to be downtrodden in the first and second stanza, where a bleak possible future of the coming night is described. In the third stanza, however, the tone and outlook shifts with *Men kanska...* 'but maybe...', where the narrator chooses a more hopeful narrative.

Kanska is mentioned five times, if including the title, and only occurs in the sentence *kanska í nátt*, and no other contexts. The poem contains the half-rhymes *kavin-foldin* 'snow-earth', *hvíta-kavaklædda* 'white-snowclad', *hita-glitrar* 'warmth-glistens' as well as the rhyme *hondum-londum* 'hands-lands.' There is also a repetition of *fer títt lív* 'will your life' and *fer*

mitt lív 'will my life'. The title *Kanska í nátt* is repeated in each of the four stanzas of the poem, resulting in the poem beginning and ending with the same phrase. This repetition indicates the narrator placing an importance placed on the phrase. The only full stop in the poem comes after the very last sentence of *Kanska í nátt*, which emphasises the ending of the narrator's train of thoughts. There is something special about *í nátt* 'tonight', but the reader is not informed of what makes tonight different from other nights.

The poem contains a few opposites or contradictions, such as the snow becoming black and the snowdrift emitting heat. The possibility of the snow becoming 'blackier than the earth' could be due to the cars spreading the asphalt from the road or it could symbolise something beautiful being corrupted. With the description 'feel the warmth again/ from the glinting snowdrift', the narrator longs for a return to warmth from the sun, while describing the snowdrift to be a source of heat. As it glints in the sunlight, the snowdrift may also provide the narrator a source of comfort.

Being situated 62 degrees North, winter in the Faroes equals long and dark days, where the sun rises at around 9:30 in the morning, and sets at around 15:00 in the afternoon, leaving less than six hours of daylight each day (Weihe n.d.). Most winters have a few days with snow, but the snow tends to come and go; usually staying only a few days at a time, as it dissipates at the arrival of rain and when temperatures rise above zero degrees. When the white snow covers the mountains and the surrounding landscapes, the night however appears a lot less dark during winter. Perhaps this is what the narrator considers in this poem and views the snow as something that illuminates the dark winter night. Snow can also be perceived as a hassle, especially during a snowstorm if one needs to use the car or bus, when one is even more dependent on the weather permitting travel or events to happen.

Here, *kanska* is used to depict a bleak future, as well as to contrast a future of hope. *Kanska* instils a certain possibility, where the poem indicates that with *kanska* one can be both expecting good things or bad things; it all depends on one's perspective. Using the snow, *kanska* is again put in relation to the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus, where the environment in this case can be considered a source of joy and comfort rather than an obstacle or something that dominates.

Song lyrics

Kanska er í vónini by Steintór Rasmussen

Faroese version (excerpt):

English translation:

Kanska er í vónini

Maybe is in (the) hope

Kanska er í vindinum

Maybe in the wind

Vónin besta segl

Hope is the best sail

Og í tíðareyganum mítt spegl

And my mirror in the eye of time

Kanska undir stjørnunum

Maybe under the stars

Eg finni røttu kós

I will find the right course

Um tú vilt visa veg og ert mítt ljós

If you will show the way and be my light

(Rasmussen 2022:156)

The music and lyrics of *Kanska er í vónini* (lit. 'Maybe is in the hope' or 'maybe is in hope') are written by Steintór Rasmussen (full lyrics are included in Appendix 3)(Rasmussen 2022). The song was released in 2021 on a CD named *Eftir Klaksvíksvegnum* 'Along the Klaksvík road' and is characterised as folk-rock (Apple music 2021).

Kanska er í vónini is written in first person: *eg/I* and is directed at the second person *teg/tær* 'you'. The song depicts the narrator's life, where the narrator first looks back on his/her life in the first verse and then looks ahead to the future in the second verse. The song includes the rhymes *ffart-kært* 'far/distant-dear', *sagt-tilrættislagt* 'said-arranged', *svar-tær* 'answer-you', *spegl-segl* 'mirror-sail', *kós-ljós* 'course-light', *tíð-sky* 'time-cloud', and the half rhyme *vindinum-stjørnunum* 'the wind- the stars.' Words with multiple meanings, such as *biði* have multiple translation possibilities, in which both 'asking' and 'praying' are included.

Kanska is mentioned four times in the song lyrics (five times when including the song title, similarly to the poem) twice in each verse, providing a certain emphasis on the word. *Kanska* occurs along with *bert ein tanki* 'just a thought', *bert ein dreymur* 'just a dream', *er í vindinum* 'in the wind', and *undir stjørnunum* 'under the stars'. The title *Kanska er í vónini*, 'Maybe is in hope' however, doesn't occur in the song lyrics. This could suggest the overall view of *kanska* present as being a word of hope, and of looking for possibilities.

These song lyrics also illustrate the Faroese linguaculture as being influenced by the powerful forces of nature, where *kanska* is used throughout the song lyrics in order to emphasize the unknown element of the future. Through the poetic language and descriptions,

Kanska is also (albeit slightly indirectly) put in relation to the wind as well as the stars, which provides *kanska* an additional connection to the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus.

In these song lyrics, *kanska* is used in a hopeful manner, as a way of looking ahead to a hopeful future, and a way of being open to what the future may bring. Here, the narrator characterises the Faroese linguaculture, wherein he/she doesn't mind not knowing the answer to the future or to his/her past and is merely happy and thankful for the past as well as present. The narrator chooses to "let the day rule" and not fret about everything happening according to schedule (cf. Gaffin 1996 in Gaini 2019), because the end is expected to be good regardless. This reflects Warming's (2008:7, my translation) description of *kanska*: "Maybe, maybe not, but everything will no doubt work out anyway."

Kanska by Lea Kampmann and Heiðrikur á Heygum

Faroese version (excerpt):

English translation:

Kanska

Maybe

Sigur bæði ja og nei

(You) say both yes and no

Møguliga, kanska, sikkurt

Possibly, maybe, probably

Broytir meining ja og nei

(You) change your mind, yes and no

Heitt og kalt

Hot and cold

Tekur og gevur

Taking and giving

Kanst tú geva hjarta mínum svar?

Can you give my heart an answer?

Millum heitt og kalt

In between hot and cold

Standi eg í stað

I'm in a standstill

Millum dag og nátt

In between day and night

Og bíði eftir ja

And (I) wait for a yes

(Kampmann & á Heygum 2020, emphasis in original)

Kanska by Lea Kampmann and Heiðrikur á Heygum (jointly called Einangran) was written during the corona pandemic in 2020 (see full song lyrics in Appendix 3). Their genre is described as a blend of acoustic and electronic music (Tutl Records N.d.) and their song can be characterised as a tragic love song.

The song lyrics of *Kanska* narrate a state of frustration when a person within a relationship can't make up their mind regarding where the relationship stands, leaving the other person involved feeling troubled and conflicted, as he/she is waiting for the other to decide. The lyrics contain a lot of opposites: *hot and cold*, *yes and no*, *taking and giving*, indicating the person being thrown around (figuratively and emotionally) back and forth. In the end the person waiting admits that he/she is hoping, the other person will say yes rather than no. Hoping to be chosen, the person wishes the other person will make a decision rather than constantly relying on *kanska* or maybe.

The lyrics contain the rhymes *venda-kenda* 'turn-familiar', *liva-iva* 'live-doubt', *stað-avstað* 'place-away', *síggja-skíggja* 'see-screen', *stað-ja* 'place-yes', and the half-rhyme *einki-sakni* 'nothing-missing'. Out of the three reoccurring words from the sentence: *møguliga*, *kanska*, *síkkurt* 'possibly, maybe, probably', *kanska* is selected for the song title, perhaps because of its in betweenness – it's not a yes or a no, which can be used as a way to keep a person expectantly waiting for a reply. 'Possibly' and 'probably,' are much less certain compared to 'maybe,' as *kanska* remains more open to possibilities, without knowing or being certain of the final outcome. The in-betweenness of *kanska* is especially evident in the final bridge, where the narrator is describing, how he/she is standing in between yes and no.

These lyrics exemplify another way to interpret and use *kanska* compared to what has previously been analysed, and how *kanska* can also cause psychological affliction, when used excessively, especially when one is constantly being given mixed signals or messages. The phrase *Øsir meg* can be understood in two different ways, which can significantly change how one would understand the song. *Øsir* can either mean 'exasperate/stir up' or 'excite/arouse'. If the intention is for the 'excite/arouse' meaning, this amplifies the ambivalence and emotional uncertainty experienced by the narrator.

The song lyrics illustrate the agony of not knowing for certain – of being bound to the uncertainty of *kanska* and actively show how *kanska* can be at work in the Faroese linguaculture. Unlike the gathered empirical materials analysed above, these song lyrics do not involve the Faroese nature or environment, but place *kanska* in relation to an experience of (infinite) uncertainty.

Conversations

In this section, I will first analyse my conversation with GH, followed by my conversation with KV. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the transcriptions and translations of the conversations are included in Appendix 4.

Guðrið Højgaard

My first conversation was with Guðrið Højgaard (GH), the director of Visit Faroe Islands. Since GH also is my aunt, our hour-long conversation starts with exchanging updates on our respective families. After this is done, GH immediately starts recounting how she believes the Faroe Islands became known as *the land of maybe*. She tells me the title comes from the Second World War, and notes that some believe the name was coined by Winston Churchill, of this, however, she is uncertain. We then move on to the topic of *kanska* and its role in Faroese linguaculture:

“But at least [*kanska*] is, I think, still very closely connected, also today, to weather and wind. That is, the fact that you always need a plan B, because it could be that your plan A or plan B or C- because your plan A maybe doesn't work for some reason, and that's when it often has something to do with wind and weather, right?”

The conversation then shifts to how visitors in the Faroes experience a difference in the local way of life:

”And I also think that this is something that people often, for instance journalists and people who come to the Faroes et cetera, well they learn to understand that this is how it is in the Faroes and then they also adapt the lifestyle a bit, you know, they slow down a bit and realise that, *OK, maybe I'm not the biggest [person] in the universe, maybe it is nature that rules over me*, or something like that, right. Meaning that in the Faroes, the nature is so dominating... over humans and that's fine that one as a human being also is reminded of that. That there is something that is bigger than oneself...”

She continues:

“... and that means that one also for example like business tourism guests, that you know, that maybe when they come to the Faroe Islands, if something gets cancelled or plans get changed or something like that, then they maybe become a bit stressed at first or something, because they're not used to that. They're not used to that like, *maybe* or something, or that something unpredictable is kind of like a part of daily life in that way... Of course, it could be that their

train becomes cancelled or something, but it's rarely due to like natural phenomena or something like that... but it has a lot to do with our geographical placement and our climate and things like that... That it is a bit like *maybe*."

From *kanska* the conversation shifts to the Arabic expression *inshallah* 'God willing', which was added to the Danish dictionary in March 2025 (Kranf 2025):

"They talked about it in *Aftenshowet*, I don't know maybe one or two weeks ago or something like that, about the fact that some people were so outraged that [*inshallah*] had entered the Danish dictionary and someone just said *Yes, it's because we need this word in Danish, because if you say*, they said, *Om Gud vil* ['God willing'], that it was like, well, then it felt like a sentence that didn't quite belong in this day and age, or which wasn't something anyone was using... but you still would have been able to say it."

We then move to placing *inshallah* in relation to *kanska*:

"But *kanska* in particular is- is not like religiously conditioned in that way... Like both that Arabic word and yes *God willing* is, right? *Kanska* is just like *Yes, maybe we'll come* or *Maybe we will do that* or *Maybe we're not coming* or something right?"

The conversation then shifts back to *kanska* in relation to the Faroese linguaculture:

"I believe that like, it is very, very closely connected to our entire culture. This thing about us being much more like informal and less structured... in that way compared to many others... it can also be that people sign up for some event and then they don't come anyway or something like that right? Because *Maybe I will come* or I don't know. And that is both good or bad, in a way... that we take things a bit less formally because, I don't know, something can always come up, or something like that, I don't know."

We then immediately move to the topic of the etymology of *kanska* and when it entered the Faroese language. We discuss how old the word is and from which language it originates. From here we discuss the origins of *kanska* in Swedish and Norwegian, and of the similar meanings and uses.

When I initially asked GH to join me for a conversation, I used the Danish word *hygge* as an example to describe cultural keywords. GH mentions that *kanska* can also be thought to be a part of the Faroese lifestyle, similar to the Danish *hygge*:

“... then it is more than just a word, then it is just like a type of part of our lifestyle in the Faroes... just like you're saying with *hygge*, right?”

Towards the end, we return to the etymology of *kanska*, which GH actively suggests I should include. For the remainder of our conversation, as a caring aunt, she lists people I can contact to get this information, given the apparent lack of Faroese etymology resources.

Kalpana Vijayarathan

My second conversation was with Kalpana Vijayarathan (KV), ELT educator and Dean at the Department of Education of University of the Faroe Islands. Prior to our conversation, I was unaware that she has also participated in interviews on Faroese radio and TV, invited to speak about her immigrant background and share her perspective on life in the Faroe Islands.

Our conversation moves back and forth, revolving around the use of *kanska* in various contexts, familiar to KV. Before starting the recording, we introduced ourselves and shared our respective backgrounds; where we lived, and our marital status. After hearing that I lived near Aarhus, Kalpana mentioned that she did her PhD at Aarhus University. The conversation then moves on to an exchange of backgrounds, starting with how KV came to the Faroes, had children and gained various work experiences there. From this we then move on to my own background and why I currently am in Denmark. As we build rapport, we cover what our husbands do for a living, where our parents-in-law live, and how often we visit the places of our birth.

We then turn to the topic of my thesis —*kanska*— and discuss two distinct ways in which it can be used in Faroese:

“... *Kanska* is used in two ways in the Faroe Islands, I think. Sometimes it doesn't mean anything, sometimes it does. It's almost used as a phrase called, *I don't know*... or... used because we mean *maybe*.”

When it comes to usage of *kanska*, KV adds that it depends on the relation between one's interlocutor:

“... also because often when Faroese speak, or ethnic Faroese speak, then I think, depending on who it is and depending on their social relation... with the person they're speaking with and power relations, if they don't want to sound very decisive, and maybe *maybe* acknowledge, that they don't know much about the area they're talking about, then they use *kanska* much more often, than they normally would. That's something I have noticed... And then I have also seen,

when they try to read a person, and they can maybe see, that they are sceptical over what they're saying, then they say *kanska*, right?"

KV continues and notes that she finds *kanska* to sound more natural in a Faroese sentence, especially when doing television or radio interviews.

"I use *kanska* quite often when I'm like in an interview... **Maybe** because I feel that it sounds much more natural to use *kanska* often in a sentence, right?"

She continues describing how she prefers *kanska* over *I don't know*:

"... I use *kanska* more often than *I don't know*... because in English, *I don't know* is because I don't know something, right, so I maybe have a **strong** reaction, when I hear that from my students. I would rather say *I will try*, right... With me, I want that you would like to **try**; not give up and say *I don't know*. So in that way it's easier for me to use *kanska*."

Reflecting further over her own usage of *kanska*, KV, notes that she rarely uses *kanska* during meetings, as a Dean, in order to maintain her authority. She will, however, use *kanska* at the university in certain situations:

"... *kanska*, I think, in my mind, is quite informal... in my case when I stand there as the leader of my staff, then I feel that if I use *kanska*, when I speak, then I don't sound decisive, right, so that, I feel that it undermines the seriousness of what I'm talking about. But it could be that an employee would ask me, they say *Kalpana, is it possible that tomorrow*... then I can decide to say *kanska*, because I **mean** maybe... And, of course, sometime a discussion can get a bit heated, and, maybe people are agitated then I often *begin* my sentence with *kanska* and say: *Maybe it would be good if we can talk about it later*... Communication must be proper; *Maybe we need a break*, because here I want to soften my leadership role by using *kanska*, right?"

We move to the topic of intonation and how it matters when using *kanska*:

"Or if someone jokes with me and says *Yes, next time you'll come and visit me*, then I say *Kanska!*... I mean it well, because I'm teasing the person... it's also because tone wise the word, of course intonation means something when *you're* using *kanska*, right?"

We return to her usage of *kanska* in interviews:

"... and if I have said something and... the journalist adds a different angle and if I'm willing to buy it and continue with that, then I will pause and say *Oh, maybe there's something about that*, and try to go to the path which they have opened and see and explore..."

We go back to using *kanska* with employees:

“... to soften a no-response, especially to my employees, then I might use *kanska*... if they say *Kalpana, we think this is very important*, and if I don't agree with them, and if I don't want to say *No* right away to give them opportunities to present their case, then I use *kanska*...”

She immediately continues to describe the sound of *kanska* and the possibilities *kanska* provides in communication:

“But strangely, *the sound of the word* *kanska*, it attracts me, especially in songs and things like that if the word pops up... there's something pleasant about the word *kanska*... I don't know how to explain it. It's not as negative as *I don't know*... *Kanska opens* up communication, I think.”

We move to the frequency of *kanska* in daily conversations, where KV asserts that it likely is one of the most spoken words in everyday Faroese:

“Probably if we should count [*kanska*] in regular communication, it's one of the most used words, I have no doubt about that.”

The conversation returns to the sound of *kanska* and moves back to its frequency:

“I like the sound of it, that I have noticed it a lot. And in telephone conversations, when I hear people talk, *kanska* is used extremely often... I do that myself in a telephone conversation, I think...”

She continues by describing that knowing when and how to use *kanska* is a sign of one's level of Faroese, and how it also can be used to continue the conversation:

“... I also think, as one who doesn't have Faroese as her first language or mother tongue to use [*kanska*] in one's own different way and knowing how to use it in context, that's also a sign of how well one knows Faroese...but if you're a beginner and someone asks you a question, when you don't understand it, and you don't want to admit you don't understand it... or, you don't know how to answer, then I have also used the word *kanska* at that time; when I first came and started learning the Faroese language... to keep the conversation going, yes, then I have used *kanska*, I remember.”

We proceed to KV's usage of *kanska* in Faroese versus *maybe* in English, where she believes she uses *kanska* more in Faroese compared to English (English being her mother tongue). This is the same with Tamil, her second language, which she started learning when she was twelve. During our conversation, she however can't recall the Tamil word for *kanska*:

“I use *kanska* more often in Faroese... I don't use it much in English... Of course in context... and the word makes sense right, as a cognate I would probably use it, but not for lubricating a conversation, I wouldn't do that... But in Tamil, if I see that word now, right, it's used just like I told you in English: *yes, no, maybe*.”

The topic then shifts to the reason for using *kanska* in Faroese, where KV suggests the small size of the Faroese vocabulary, whereas I bring up the book *The land of maybe: a Faroe Islands year* by Tim Ecott (2020). KV believes I refer to the book by Sydney Norgate (1943), similarly called "*Kanska*" or *the land of maybe*, which she was given when she came to the Faroes. KV agrees with me and notes:

“... he connects [*kanska*] with the changing weather... that one can't make definite plans, so *maybe* is a part of one's lifestyle, which we take for granted, because we are close to nature... yes, maybe that's what causes *kanska* to be used often... like he says, we can't really plan anything so we are so dependent on the weather, right?”

Towards the end of our conversation, KV lists the Faroese television and radio shows she has participated in, where she also has contributed her perspective on the Faroes and Faroese culture; all of which I was unaware of prior to our conversation.

6. Discussion

Throughout my exploration of *kanska* in relation to being a Faroese cultural keyword, my collection of empirical materials displayed different aspects and perspectives of *kanska*. *Kanska* has been found to be a single word in Faroese, which can have multiple English equivalents, while also having cognate forms in the other Nordic languages. *Kanska* can be considered a natural part of the Faroese linguaculture through its wide range of uses within daily speech, and it is mainly through the encounter with others that attention has been brought to its frequent use (cf. Levisen 2012). While *kanska* cannot be considered as “translation-resistant” due to being theorised as a semantic prime and therefore a concept existing in all languages (cf. Goddard & Ye 2015:70), the empirical material collectively illustrates how *kanska* “occup[ies] focal points in cultural ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking” (Goddard and Ye 2015:70), in terms of salience and frequency through mentions and inclusions of *kanska* in their titles.

Norgate (1943) has noted the frequency of *kanska* and relates it to the environment (and therefore the language-culture-environment nexus), as every activity in the Faroes is weather-dependent. Each sentence therefore includes *kanska* due to the ever-present uncertainty of whether an activity or event can take place or not. Norgate's (1943) views are echoed by Ecott (2020) and á Rógvi (2005), where Ecott considers the Faroese linguaculture as well as language-culture-environment nexus to be based on the respect for and acknowledgement of the powerful natural forces at work in the Faroes. Á Rógvi (2005) additionally considers the political position of the Faroes to reflect the language-culture-environment nexus present.

Like Norgate (1943), Warming (2008) also notes the frequency of *kanska* in everyday Faroese, and further elaborates on the reasons for its frequent use. Here she argues that even though one makes plans, there are so many factors which depend on whether the plans can take place or not. Warming (2008) indirectly describes how Faroe Islanders acknowledge that there are so many things out of one control, that are at play especially in the Faroe Islands, where the attitude despite everything is that “everything will no doubt work out anyway” (Warming 2208:7, my translation). Like Warming (2008), GH also notes the shift in lifestyle which travellers experience when they arrive in the Faroes, which they have no choice but adapt to – due to the weather being out of one's control. These observations by GH and Warming (2008) underline the differences between the Faroese lifestyle and others and also provide additional reasons for the use of *kanska* in Faroese linguaculture.

The family by Sigrun Gunnarsdóttir (in Warming 2008) additionally displays a relation between *kanska* and the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus through the display of the ocean and the family on the boat. In her artwork, *kanska* appears to be related to the unknown future as well as to the orientation towards possibilities rather than obstacles. Approaching *kanska* from a different angle, the artwork *Foreign body* by Edward Fuglø (in Warming 2008) places the Faroese landscape and national flower in relation to being Faroese, hinting towards the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus. The enormous Swiss army knife depicted in the foreground, appears to have the intention to destroy everything in its way, wherein *kanska* can be perceived to illustrate a negative possibility or current condition of foreign influences.

Similar to the artworks by Gunnarsdóttir and Fuglø, the poem *Kanska í nátt* by Sjúrdur Hansen (1982) also uses *kanska* to depict a future occurrence, reflecting the Faroese linguaculture, while relating the environment within the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus to positive connotations, providing comfort with the snow in winter, compared to its

dominating character mentioned in the quotes by Norgate (1943), Ecott (2020) and Warming (2008).

The song lyrics *Kanska er í vónini* by Steintór Rasmussen relate *kanska* to the future as do Gunnarsdóttir and Fuglø in their artworks as well as Hansen (1982) in his poem, wherein Rasmussen's future appears more hopeful. The song lyrics also illustrate the significance of *kanska* in the Faroese linguaculture, as well as indirectly connecting *kanska* to the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus through the mentions of *kanska* in relation to the stars and the wind.

Kanska by Kampmann & á Heygum (2020) is the only written empirical material which does not relate *kanska* to the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus but indicates a strong relation of *kanska* to the Faroese linguaculture through the repetition of and the contextual use of *kanska*. Through its title, the song lyrics provide *kanska* a central role in the negotiation or being in between yes and no as well as hot and cold, and therefore also its importance in Faroese linguaculture.

Turning to the entanglements of the written empirical materials (cf. Pennycook 2022) it is noteworthy to mention the political context at the time of their writing. Apart from the poem by Hansen (1982) all of my empirical materials are written during significant points in Faroese history. Norgate (1943) wrote his observations during the Second World War, when the British soldiers had established the protectorate in the Faroes, while the *Kanska* art exhibition took place in 2008, the year of a global financial crisis, which also was felt in the Faroes.

Kanska by Kampmann & á Heygum (2020) was written during a time of great uncertainty, when the Covid-19 pandemic had closed schools, workplaces and borders and everyone needed to take precautions and maintain a social distance. *The land of maybe: a Faroe Island year* by Ecott (2020) was also published during this time, when people were under significant travel restrictions. *Kanska er í vónini* was, on the other hand, written in 2021 after the initial concerns regarding Covid-19 were past in the Faroes and most of the population had been given vaccines, which gave an indication towards a more hopeful future.

The collected written empirical materials indicate the Faroese linguaculture as characterised by not worrying about the future, while also not having bleak prospects of what may happen. A slightly neutral state, while simultaneously also believing that "everything will work out" (cf. Warming 2008:7) and not fretting regarding the timeframe of one's plans (cf. Gaffin 1996 in Gaini 2019). This is what *kanska* appears to indicate through its use and

considering the Faroese linguaculture and the language-culture-environment nexus, in addition to the salience of *kanska* in both spaces within the written empirical materials, these seem to point to *kanska* as a Faroese cultural keyword.

Before evaluating the conversations with GH and KV, I briefly turn to the combined observations of Block (2000) mentioned in Chapter 3. I view and analyse the conversations with GH and KV in a combined manner of degree, which entails considering all possible perceptions described by Block (2000) regarding the empirical material gained from our conversations. I consider both GH and KV as trustworthy (taking the veridical stance, cf. Block 2000), while also considering the symptomatic possibility of the statements made by GH and KV as a result of the how they view the topic of *kanska* in the context of our conversation (cf. Block 2000). I also consider their perspectives simultaneously in the light of being representational of their own views as well as being presentational of how they view the context and purpose of our conversation in addition to how they presented themselves and viewed our conversational relationship (cf. Block 2000 and Freeman 1996 in Block 2000).

I additionally take a combined stance in viewing the empirical material from the conversations as a cognitive and a social phenomenon co-constructed within the context of the conversations (cf. Block 2000). Regarding the concept of voice, I consider the possibility of my conversation partners adopting the voice of the Faroese discourse community, although viewed from their two different perspectives based on their linguacultural backgrounds.

In the conversations I had with GH and KV, the two provided me two very different views and insights on *kanska*. GH, having a fully embedded Faroese linguacultural background, focused on the nature and environment aspect of *kanska* (simultaneously illustrating the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus). KV on the other hand, with an English-speaking Indian linguacultural background, who only later as an adult has become embedded in the Faroese linguaculture, provided a more sociopolitical perspective and considered the power relations existing between speakers as well as herself and the local Faroe Islanders, where using *kanska* was more a negotiation of who she is (non-native, but fluent Faroese speaker) in relation to the others (native Faroese speakers).

GH mentioned that in the Faroes, one needs not only a Plan B but also a plan C, due to the unpredictability of the weather, and further illustrates the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus, as she related the cultural behaviour of Faroe Islanders, being “informal” and “less structured” to be a result of the weather, because “something can always come up,”

and concluded with *kanska* being as a part of the Faroese lifestyle, comparing it to a similar status of *hygge* in Danish linguaculture.

In our conversation, GH additionally related *kanska* to the phrase *inshallah* ‘God willing’, commonly used in Arab cultures. Whereas both *inshallah* and *kanska* refer to a higher power in different ways, *inshallah* directly refers to a religious power, whereas *kanska* is not religiously conditioned, but mainly reflects a more general uncertainty. *Kanska* additionally indirectly reflects the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus, due to the power of nature ruling the Faroes.

Considering *inshallah* being added to the Danish dictionary; the mention of Danish lacking a concept relating to uncertainty; in addition to *Om Gud vil* being considered outdated by Danes, highlights the difference of use between the Faroese *kanska* and the Danish *måske* in their respective linguacultures. This also increasingly underlines the status of *kanska* as a Faroese cultural keyword.

Being a migrant and having learned Faroese and acclimatising to Faroese lifestyle as an adult, rather than being raised with it, KV brought forth different perspective compared to GH. In our conversation, KV focused on the uses of *kanska* and its dependency on social as well as power relations and displayed a more practical perspective rather than including the linguacultural aspects of *kanska*. This also reflects her own linguacultural background and her perspective as a migrant in the Faroes.

Similar to Warming (2008) and Norgate (1943), KV mentioned the frequency of *kanska*, and noted that it may be one of the most frequently used words in Faroese, like Norgate (1943). KV also noted herself using *kanska* much more in Faroese than *maybe* when speaking English, which provides additional indication towards the significance of *kanska* in Faroese linguaculture as a cultural keyword.

KV considered the practical uses of *kanska* as well as when and how to use it. She noticed *kanska* to also be used more frequently if someone spoke of a topic they did not know much about in addition to the use of *kanska* as depending on the power relations as well as social relations between the speakers. She found *kanska* also being used more if a person noticed another person becoming sceptical of what they are saying.

KV noted how *kanska* can either have the meaning of *maybe* or be used similarly to *I don't know* — not in a negative manner, but in a manner of leaving the conversation more open. She considered *kanska* an informal word which she mainly used in casual contexts rather than at work, due to having a view of *kanska* causing her to sound less decisive as a dean. KV noted

that she uses *kanska* if she intends to soften her leadership role or a no-response and that she also uses it frequently in interviews due to *kanska* sounding more natural when included in a Faroese sentence. KV also has observed that *kanska* can be an indicator of one's level of proficiency in Faroese. In this sense, KV displays Risager's (2015) idea of language as being an act of identity, where KV has attempted to assimilate to the frequent uses of *kanska* in Faroese conversations.

Risager (2006) considers communicative events as always having a power dimension, and despite the conversations having a clear aim and therefore a relative controlled nature (cf. Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998), this was not found to cause disempowerment in my conversation partners based on their choices and options in what they wished to share (cf. Limerick et al. 1996 in Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). Both GH and KV took the lead of our respective conversations, also reflecting both of their leadership roles in their work lives, and I opted not to disturb their flow or train of thought.

The conversations provided my conversation partners an opportunity to bring other observations and ideas to my attention (cf. Silverman 1993 in Valentine 2005), where GH additionally displayed 'the power of the other' as she actively suggests that I should include the etymology of *kanska* and considered the origin of the word to be an important aspect to include. She was found to be right as the single reference I found which described the etymology of *kanska*, noted its embeddedness within the Faroese language and considered *kanska* to be a word not yet discovered as Danish (cf. Davidsen & Mikkelsen 2021).

As both of my conversation partners were speakers of Faroese and since our conversations revolved around a Faroese concept, it appeared beneficial that our conversations were held in Faroese rather than in English, as it also gave them more opportunities to include the word in their speech, during our conversations. Sharing similar backgrounds also appeared beneficial (cf. Valentine 2005) in terms of myself being a woman like my conversation partners as well as having the Faroese language and insight to Faroese linguaculture in common. The linguacultural differences between KV and I did not prove to be any hindrance in our conversation. Sharing my thesis topic was additionally found to build rapport (Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998).

Self-disclosure was included in both conversations. My conversation with KV involved of self-disclosure as we built rapport, which also helped create more symmetrical power relations (cf. Burgess-limerick & Burgess-limerick 1998). With GH, being my aunt, there was self-disclosure involved on both ends, as we caught up with our respective families. The shared

self-disclosure also appeared to have a positive effect on the building of rapport between KV and I, as it gave us a more solid foundation as we carried on and began discussing *kanska* in our conversation.

Having our conversations online through Zoom and Microsoft Teams did not appear to have a negative influence on the outcome of our conversations or the noted perspectives of *kanska*, whereas it on the other hand offered us greater flexibility in terms of time and place as well as being cost efficient (cf. de Villiers et al. 2022; Prior & Lachover 2023; MacNamara 2024)). Opting for conversations rather than unstructured interviews, additionally appeared to have a positive effect, especially with GH, my aunt, while also allowing a more relaxed atmosphere with KV, which perhaps also was supported by having our conversations online. Both GH and KV appeared comfortable despite being on camera, which may indicate online conversations being a part of their work life.

Considering the criteria mentioned by Levisen et al. (2022) and Levisen (2012) in terms of identifying cultural keywords, being frequency in language use; salience (e.g. included in song titles, book titles etc.; productivity i.e. expanding the lexicon of the language.; untranslatability i.e. being difficult to translate (although semantically identical words may exist in neighbouring linguacultures); value-indexing (having an embedded evaluative component); and being integrated into fixed expressions etc.; *kanska* does not fulfil all criteria. While Wierzbicka (1997) has mentioned that the goal is not to prove the status of a cultural keyword but use the word as a means to analyse and gain insight about a culture, it is important to note, that *kanska* does fulfil the criteria of salience (considered the most important criteria); frequency in language; as well as being integrated into fixed expressions. Whether *kanska* is difficult to translate can be both considered yes or no, as *kanska* is considered a semantic prime, while also having a different use in the Faroese linguaculture compared to e.g. the English and the Danish linguacultures. The perspective brought forth by KV, additionally does not rule out *kanska* as a Faroese cultural keyword but provides the characterisation of *kanska* as a cultural keyword of another type, where *kanska* also becomes a way of negotiating the relation of those who come from outside of the Faroes.

When considering *kanska* in relation to being a cultural keyword within Faroese linguaculture it is also important to bear the history, the environment, the language contact, as well as the societal language struggles of the Faroe Islands in mind. In other words, it is necessary to be aware of all of the contextual entanglements (cf. Pennycook 2022). If we return to the quote by Davidsen & Mikkelsen (2021), which I consider central to my thesis topic:

“I can, for fun, mention a Danish word that has become so Faroese that it has never occurred to anyone to show it the door, and that is the word KANSKA, which comes from Danish ‘kan ske’ [‘can happen’], merged into one word.” (Davidsen & Mikkelsen 2021: 45)

This quote illustrates the linguistic purism that is ingrained within Faroese society, which has been established in order to primarily rid the Faroese language of all Danish influence, which happened through the long-standing language contact. This linguistic purism started with the intention to separate Faroese and Danish, first with the Faroese orthography and continued through the ongoing purification period e.g. through the creation of neologisms.

Petersen (2006) notes that due to the bilingualism in the Faroes and the convergence of Faroese and Danish, is not inherently negative but is a result of the language contact and the need for communication. It is a natural phenomenon when it comes to language contact, as it can be considered two separate language systems becoming one (Petersen 2006). Petersen asserts that what results from this is not corrupted (Petersen 2006). The Faroese spoken today is what Petersen (2006) considers language building, as the Danish language can be considered active within the Faroese language setting. The language contact between Danish and Faroese was also a case of linguacultural contact, and thus as properties of the Danish language influenced Faroese, so did the culture. This is also evident in *hygge* as being used both as *hygge* and *hugni* in Faroese linguaculture, as well as having cognate forms in Norwegian, being either *hygge* or *kos*. It is also important to bear in mind that no language or linguacultures are ‘pure’ or free from influence from other linguacultures (Thomason & Kaufman 1988). As Jacobsen (2021) notes, only dead languages remain the same, while spoken, living languages are bound to change.

In a similar vein, I would like to point out the time when the revival of Hebrew was undertaken, as the Jews wished to speak the Hebrew tongue again upon their migration to Isreal (which at that time only was the language of the Torah), the wide range of linguacultural backgrounds of the Jews (such as Yiddish, Arabic, and Polish) needed to be taken into account (Rawlings 2019). Israeli linguist and speaker of Modern Hebrew, Ghil'ad Zuckermann, who has closely studied the revival of Hebrew, notes that it would be impossible to revive the Hebrew language to its original form (Rawlings 2019). What resulted with Modern Hebrew can be characterised as a “hybrid language”, as it also is made up of the linguacultural influences from the Jews, shaped through generations (Rawlings 2019). Zuckermann importantly does not consider the hybridity negatively but views it as a “natural and necessary part of the process of reviving a language” (Rawlings 2019).

The current Faroese language situation can be considered a denying of the hybridity (cf. Bhabha 1994) that has occurred through the long-standing linguacultural contact with Denmark. *Kanska* can additionally be considered a symbol of this hybridity or transculturation that has resulted from this extended contact throughout the colonial period. What followed from the post-colonial period can be characterised by a power struggle for Faroese to be recognized as a valid official language in order to shift the dominance of Danish within Faroese society (cf. Risager 2015).

While language revitalisation can be considered a political issue, as language can be viewed as political (cf. Pennycook 2022), it is imperative to address the importance of protecting minority languages and therefore also linguacultures by the means of language maintenance established by language policies. It is however equally important to bear the linguistic conditions of the society in mind (cf. Knudsen 2010; Petersen 2019). As illustrated in Chapter 2, the Faroese linguaculture is complex and involves the use of several languages: primarily Faroese, but a Faroese that is highly influenced by Danish, as well as having an increasingly closer contact with English. Ideally, the Faroese language policy should aim for a level of language maintenance, which takes this multilingualism into account, in order not to maintain the present schizoglossia (cf. Haugen 1972[1962]), where the written Faroese language is considered having more prestige than the spoken language.

Returning to the theoretical concepts noted by Risager (2015), my empirical materials reflect the external locus of Faroese linguaculture in its oral and written form, wherein the song lyrics and poem can be considered encompassing the poetical dimension of the Faroese linguaculture (cf. Risager 2015). The language policy and linguistic purism at work in the Faroe Islands influences the third locus of the Faroese linguaculture, being perception of the language as system (cf. Risager 2015)

Apart from the artworks, my empirical materials can be considered communicative events in which language-culture nexuses are created (cf. Risager 2006), where language is used to communicate and link the flow of Faroese linguaculture with *kanska* as the common denominator. Whereas the language-culture nexus stayed constant within the song lyrics, the poem, and the selected quotes, the language-culture nexus was shifting throughout the conversations as the topic shifted (cf. Risager 2006). The language-culture nexus created in the conversation with GH can be considered convergent, being between two Faroese individuals, talking about Faroese matters, whereas despite covering the same topic, the conversation with KV is slightly divergent, as we come from different linguacultural backgrounds in addition to

the communicative event being characterised as being bilingual/multilingual (cf. Risager 2006), through the use of both Faroese and English.

Viewing and analysing *kanska* in terms of the main concepts, **linguaculture** and **language-culture nexus** with the addition of **language-culture-environment nexus**, provided me key conceptualisations in terms of viewing and analysing *kanska* as well as my empirical materials. It additionally appeared relevant to cultural keywords, despite ethnopragsmatics not including the concept of linguaculture within their theoretical framework. Risager (2015) herself mentions Wierzbicka (1997) working with linguaculture, which also is a concept I consider would be beneficial for the field of ethnopragsmatics to include, especially concerning cultural keywords, as cultural keywords also display instances of linguaculture. This would however possibly lead to a slight reconceptualization of cultural keywords or a renaming of cultural keywords as linguacultural keywords. The term 'cultural keywords' in itself also suggest an intricate connection between language and culture.

While the concept of linguaculture (cf. Risager 2015) can be considered increasingly relevant in our globalised world, which is filled with entanglements as people relocate within and across borders, it still needs refinements. The concept lacks specificity and depth regarding the linguaculture of e.g. those who are raised as bilinguals or multilinguals as the case of Faroe Islanders, as well as third culture kids, and those with more complex backgrounds, e.g. having parents with two different linguacultural backgrounds, and living in a country with a third majority linguaculture. Risager (2015) appears to base the concept of linguaculture on monolingual speakers with monocultural backgrounds, which then carry their knowledge from their linguaculture with them as their learning and/or speaking another language, which Risager terms "language mixture" (Risager 2015:93). The question then becomes whether these carry a more complex linguaculture or multiple linguacultures?

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the benefits of ethnopragsmatics and the study of cultural keywords can be used as a means of preserving endangered languages and their unique concepts as well as "fostering intercultural understanding" (cf. Goddard & Ye 2015), which I also deem apply to the case of *kanska*.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I explored *kanska* as a cultural keyword in Faroese linguaculture in line with the field of ethnopragsmatics while providing an intercultural, contextual and critical perspective. This was done by compiling empirical materials in the shape of song lyrics, poem, artworks

and quotes in order to comply with the theoretical foundation of ethnopragmatics. I additionally supplemented my empirical materials to include conversations, held with my conversation partners GH and KV, in order to gain additional insights and perspectives on *kanska*.

While the founder of ethnopragmatics, Wierzbicka (1997:16), notes that the aim of researching cultural keywords is not to “prove” whether a word is a cultural keyword, the empirical materials I have collected overall point to *kanska* as being a Faroese cultural keyword through fulfilling the criteria of frequency in language use (cf. Levisen et al. 2022), and fixed phrases (cf. Levisen 2012) as well as salience in terms of presence in song lyrics (which are considered most important)(cf. Levisen et al. 2022).

Whereas *kanska* overall cannot be considered difficult to translate, due to being a semantic prime, as well as cognate forms of *kanska* existing in neighbouring linguacultures, *kanska* appears to have a unique function and use within Faroese linguaculture. *Kanska* can be considered ingrained in Faroese linguaculture as a result of a combination of the contact with Danish linguaculture as well as the presence of the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus, in which I consider *kanska* to further illustrate the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus. Unlike *hygge* and *inshallah*, *kanska* appears to have a direct relation to the Faroese language-culture-environment nexus.

While I consider *kanska* as a Faroese cultural keyword, this does not rule out the possibility of it also being a keyword in other linguacultures, considering *hygge* also being a concept in e.g. Faroese and Norwegian linguacultures as *hugni/hygge* and *hygge/kos* respectively. I have described that *kanska* or ‘maybe’ has been theorised as a concept one can translate across all languages (cf. Goddard and Ye 2015), which increases this possibility, perhaps especially in other island linguacultures.

Kanska can be considered an example of how linguacultural contact can lead to hybridity (cf. Bhabha 1994) as well as linguacultural enrichment and can *perhaps* assist in raising the issue yet again, regarding the approach towards the Faroese language policy regarding the maintenance of the Faroese language. While this is a difficult balancing act, several Faroese researchers such as Petersen (2006), Holm (2024) and Knudsen (2010) have pointed out the need for the Faroese language policy to take the bi- and multilingualism into account, where the Faroe Islanders can be considered to have schizoglossia (cf. Haugen 1972[1962]), and perceiving their spoken language of less value and prestige compared to the written language (cf. Jacobsen 2021).

While still continuing with the development of neologisms, some initial actions may be to allow 'spoken Faroese' to be included in Faroese books, written dialogue, as well as in translated Faroese children's cartoons, rather than only using 'purified' written Faroese. Ending criticism regarding incorrect or 'Danicised' Faroese, as well as including Danish-influenced Faroese in Faroese dictionaries, would also be recommend.

In the meantime, viewing *kanska* as a Faroese cultural keyword, can *maybe* assist in shifting the perspective of Danish as well as other languages as exclusively damaging or corrupting the Faroese language. Instead, perceiving *kanska* as a cultural keyword in Faroese linguaculture may encourage the acceptance of the hybridity within the Faroese linguaculture, which has developed throughout the long-standing contact with Danish linguaculture.

Future directions may include to further explore *kanska* in the Nordic linguacultures as well as expand it to other island contexts, where the locals also can be considered significantly dependent on the weather. One could additionally conduct a combined study incorporating ethnopragmatics, linguistics and cultural anthropology, while maintaining the intercultural angle, in order to delve deeper into a comparison of frequency, and linguacultural importance.

Inshallah could additionally also be a concept of interest within cultural keywords, where one could compare within the Arab linguacultures as well as transnational speech communities with Arabic descent.

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