

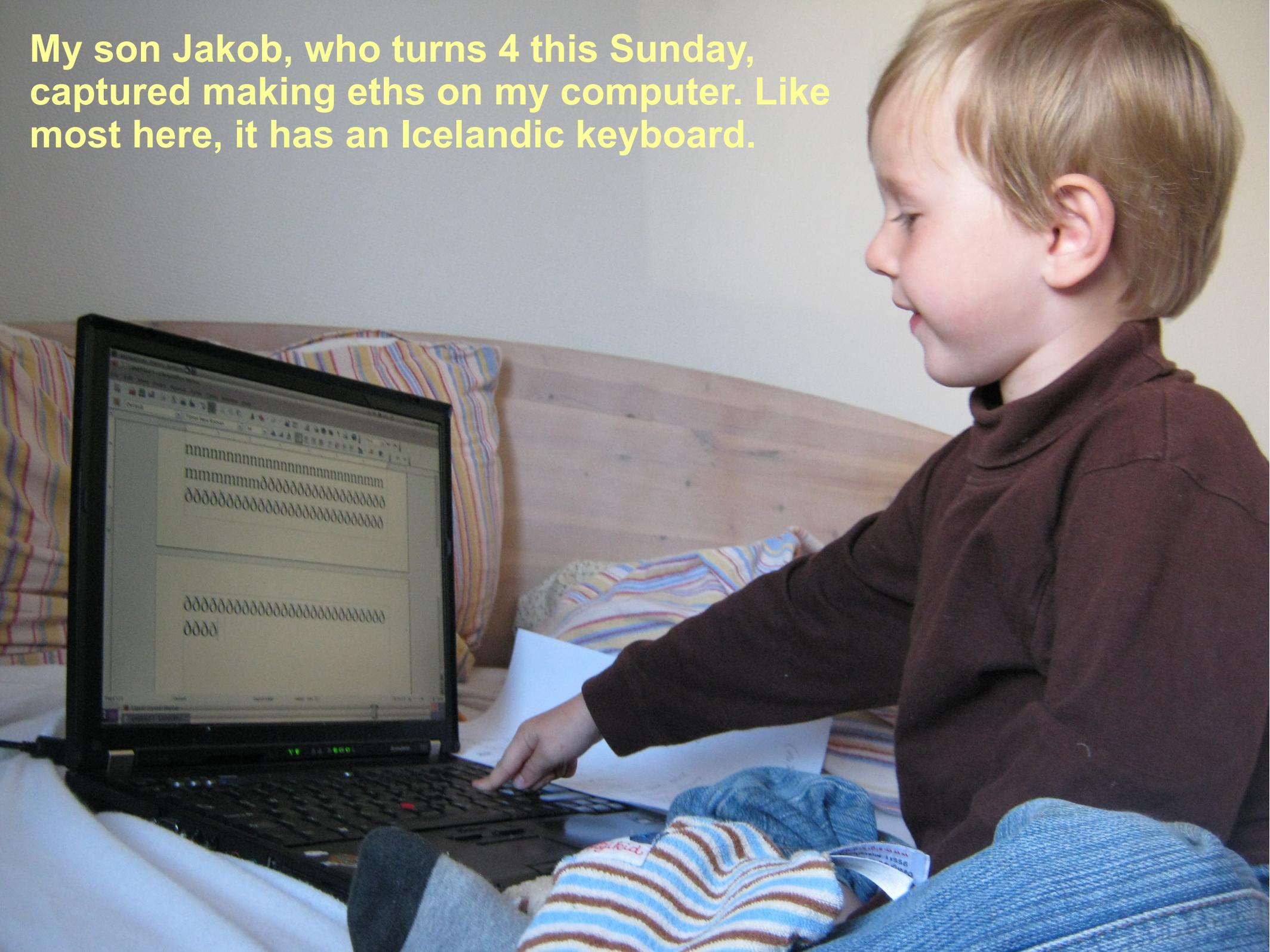
THE USE AND AVOIDANCE OF Ð, Þ, AND Æ

A report from everyday life in Iceland

Ian Watson – Bifröst University – Atypl 2011



My son Jakob, who turns 4 this Sunday, captured making eths on my computer. Like most here, it has an Icelandic keyboard.



from Kristin Gylfadottir★

subject **Fw: Ritgerðin**

to ian@ianwatson.org★

saell Ian, er erlendis en thu fekkst orugglega ritgerdina er that ekki?
kvedja,

Kristin Edda

USING COMPUTERS ABROAD

"Reduced" written Icelandic: an e-mail sent from a computer in another country whose keyboard doesn't support Icelandic characters. The writer explains in the e-mail that she is abroad.

Þ > TH	þú > thu, það > that (sic)
Ð > D	ritgerðina > ritgerdina, kveðja > kvedja
Æ > AE	sæll > saell
Ú > U	þú > thu
É > E	fékkst > fekkst
Ö > O	örugglega > orugglega

from the death of his mother, Böddi finally snaps and, with his unpublished book in one hand and a gun in the other sitting on the back of a horse, he intends to start a revolution in Reykjavík.

Director: Marteinn Thórsson

Scriptwriter: Marteinn Thórsson

Principal cast: Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, Elma Lís Gunnarsdóttir, Stefán Hallur Stefánsson

Production company: Pegasus Pictures

Release date: Jan 14th 2011

or the common-place vicissitudes of life, *Out of Oslo* finds compassion in its characters' struggle for the fundamental human aspirations of love and a better life.

Director: Reynir Lyngdal

Scriptwriter: Thorsteinn Gudmundsson

Principal cast: Thorsteinn Gudmundsson, Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, Hilmir Snaer Gudnason

Production company: Ljósband ehf.

Release date: March 4th 2011

ICELANDAIR INFLIGHT MAGAZINE

"Reduced" written Icelandic, here with the "broddstafir" (vowels with acute accents) are preserved. The article reviews recent Icelandic films.

Here the goal seems to be not to disturb the cognitive tranquility of paying foreign visitors by forcing strange graphic forms onto them.

Þ > TH Þorsteinn > Thorsteinn, Þórsson > Thórsson

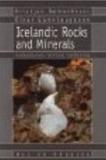
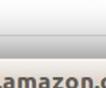
Ð > D Guðmundsson > Gudmundsson, Guðnason > Guðnason,
Guðjónsdóttir > Gudjónsdóttir

Æ > AE Snær > Snaer

Department Books (47)
Shipping Option (What's this?) Free Super Saver Shipping

Listmania! create your list HERE learn how
Create a Listmania! list
Search Listmania! GO!

"sæmundsson"
Showing 1 - 16 of 47 Results Choose a Department to enable sorting

1.  **Icelandic Rocks and Minerals** by K. Saemundsson and E. Gunnlaugsson (Paperback - Dec 31, 2002) - Import
2 used from \$164.50
Books: See all 47 items
2.  **Synopsis of the Fishes of Iceland.** by Bjarni Saemundsson (Paperback - 1927)
2 used from \$20.00
Books: See all 47 items
3.  **Galdur á brennuöld** by Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson (Unknown Binding - 1996)
1 used from \$22.50
Books: See all 47 items
4.  **Guðmundur skipherra Kjærnested** by Sveinn Sæmundsson (Unknown Binding - 1985)
1 used from \$8.80
Books: See all 47 items
5.  **Galdur á brennuöld** by Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson (Unknown Binding - 1992)

Source of: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-key...
File Edit View Help
<meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1" />

GOOD NEWS: book search engines have got their reduction algorithms mostly coordinated.

Sækja um einkanúmer

Til að sækja um einkanúmer þarf fylla út [umsóknareyðublað fyrir einkamerki](#).

Listi yfir frátekin merki

Veldu tegund merkis:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A	Á	B	C	D	E	É	F	G	H	I	Í	J	K	L	M	N	O	Ó	P	Q	R	S	T	U	Ú	V	W	X	Y	Ý	Z	Þ	Æ	Ö										
Þ 0										Þ 2022											Þ 3913								Þ 68																	ÞH 24								
Þ 1										Þ 21												Þ 40								Þ 7																		ÞH 99						
Þ 10										Þ 214												Þ 401								Þ 70																		ÞIDRIK						
Þ 1010										Þ 215												Þ 405								Þ 741																			ÞINGEY					
Þ 1026										Þ 220												Þ 407								Þ 75																				ÞJH				
Þ 1048										Þ 2213												Þ 410								Þ 77																				ÞJP				
Þ 107										Þ 2222												Þ 415								Þ 79																				ÞMB				
Þ 111										Þ 226												Þ 42								Þ 791																				ÞODDI				
Þ 114										Þ 227												Þ 422								Þ 80																					ÞORMAR			
Þ 1188										Þ 228												Þ 4224								Þ 81																						ÞORRI		
Þ 122										Þ 23												Þ 423								Þ 817																						ÞORST1		
Þ 123										Þ 230												Þ 4259								Þ 822																								ÞOTAN

THORN'S MARGINAL EXISTENCE IN ICELANDIC NUMBER PLATES

Since 1988, Þ has become a steadily rarer sight on Icelandic license plates. Until 1988, all numbers for cars from Þingeyjarsýsla (north-east Iceland) began with Þ. Today, Þ Ð and Æ (as well as the accented vowels) are not normally used, except that they are permitted on vanity plates that you pay extra for.



The field key `tegund_þjónustu` is invalid. Please include only lowercase alphanumeric characters and underscores.

Label *

This is used as a descriptive label when displaying this form element.

Field Key *

Enter a machine readable key for this form element. May contain only alphanumeric characters and underscores. This key will be used as the name attribute of the form element. This value has no effect on the way data is saved, but may be helpful if doing custom form processing.

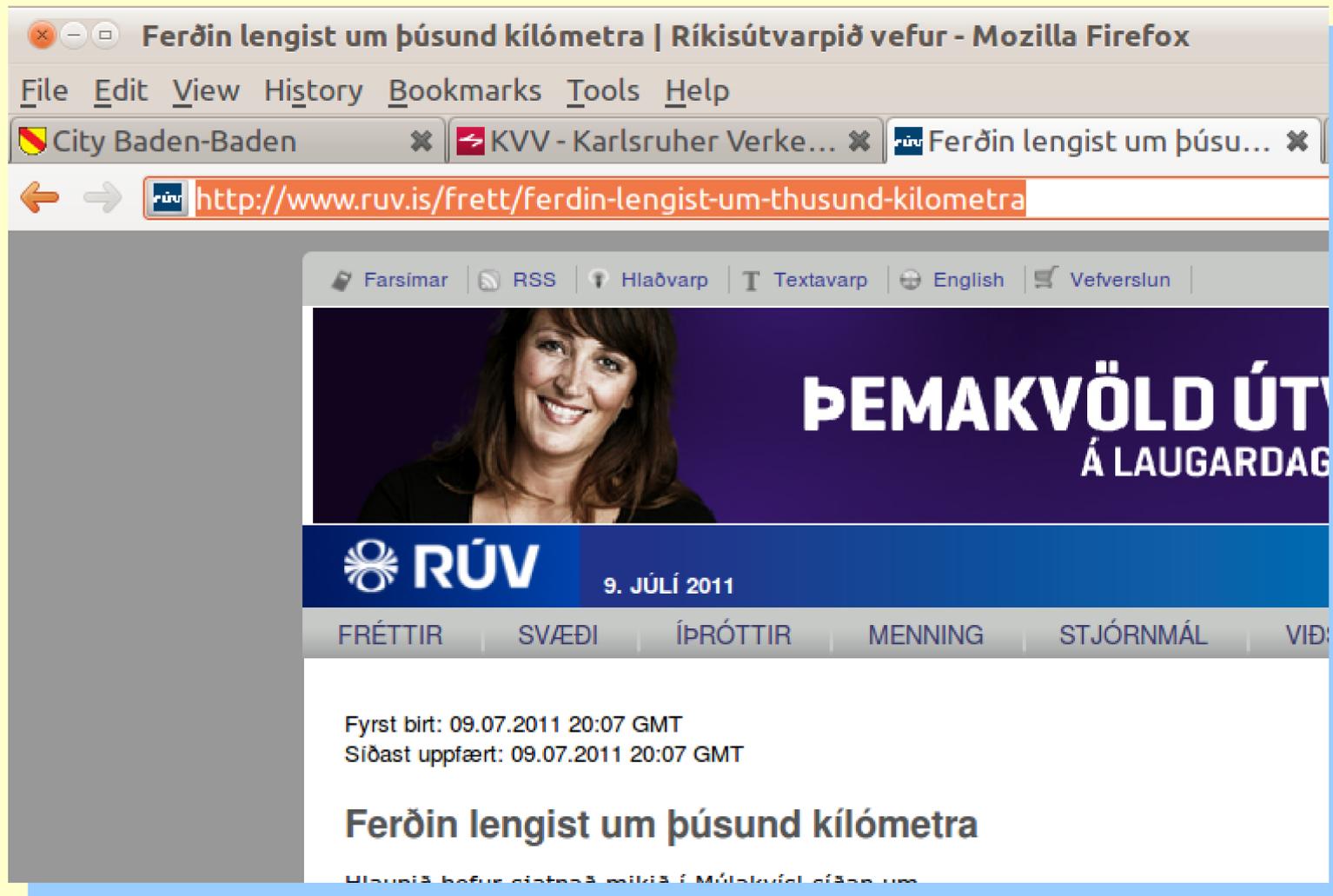
Default value

The default value of the field.

TOKEN VALUES

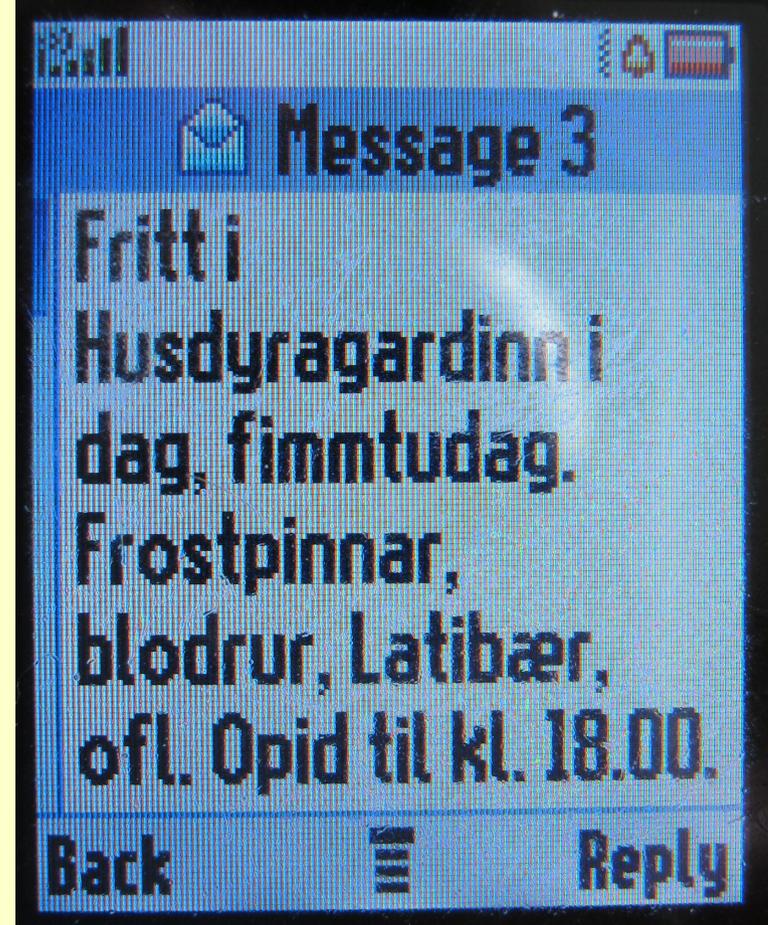
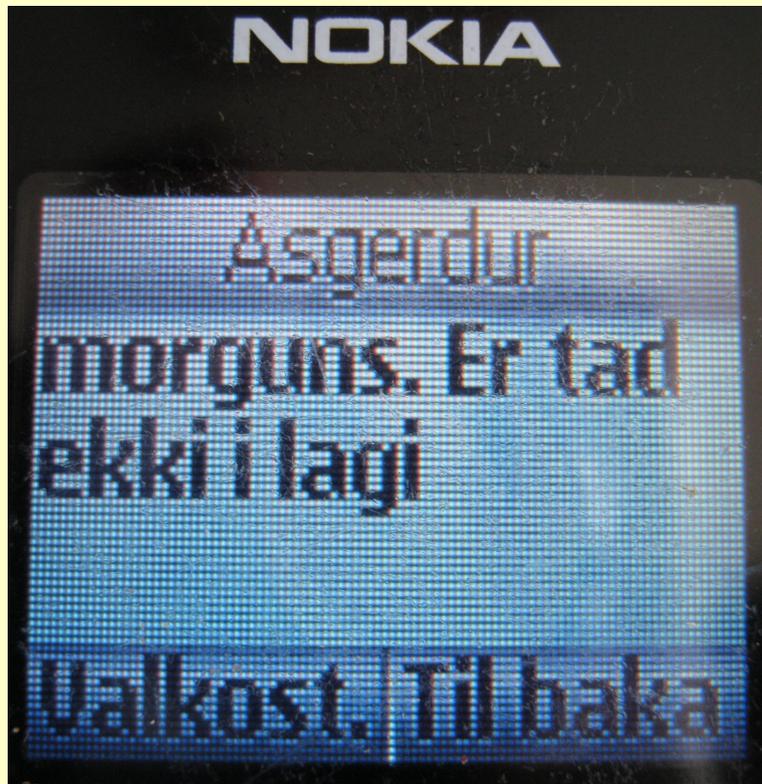
NO Þ/Ð/Æ ALLOWED IN DRUPAL KEYS

I was creating a web form in Drupal, a popular PHP-based content management system, and had to name the submission fields. The label the user sees can include any Unicode character, but the back-end field key can only include "lowercase alphanumeric characters and underscores" – and þ and ð don't count as "lowercase alphanumeric characters."



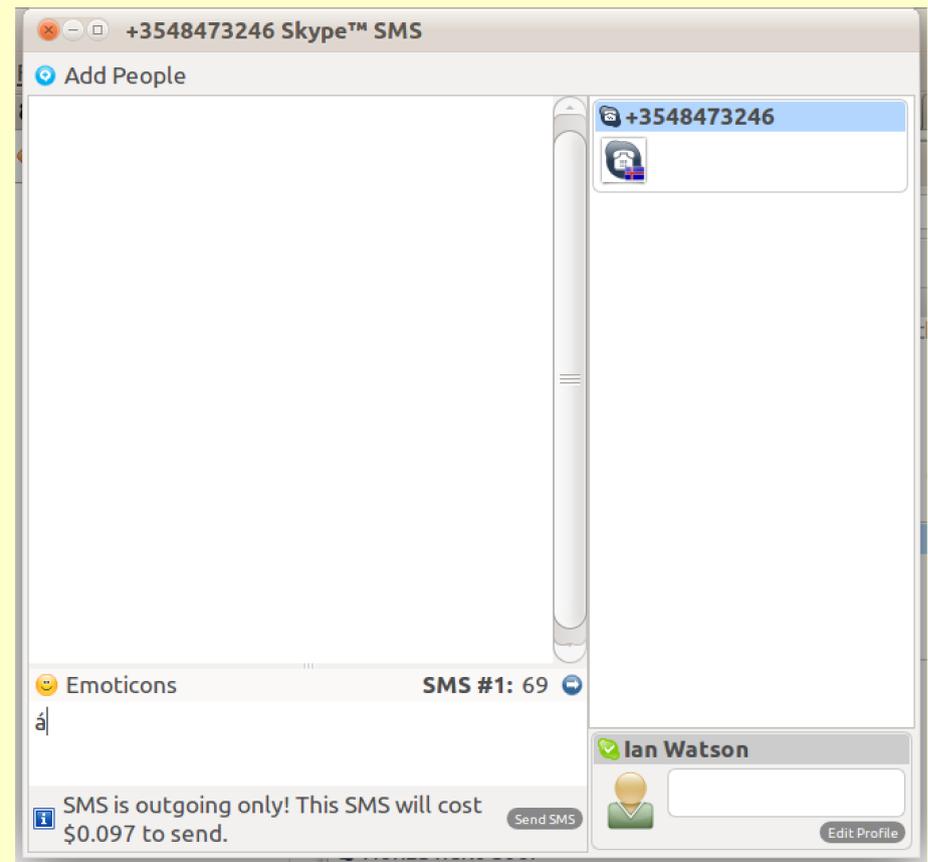
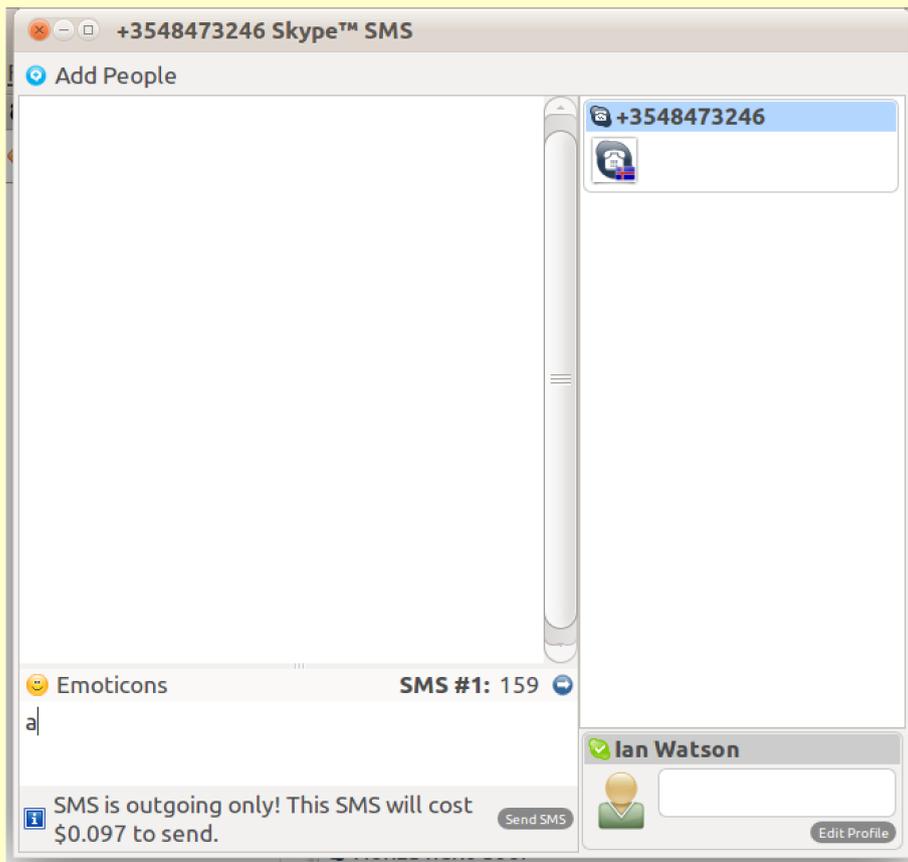
COMPUTER FILENAMES

When assigning a filename to a document whose internal title includes Þ Æ, most Icelanders "reduce" these letters. Although major operating systems now support full Unicode in filenames, they once didn't – and habits die hard. Plus, even today, Unicode support is not robust in all contexts. If a filename becomes a URL, it helps if it's free of special characters.



DOMESTIC TEXT MESSAGES

Some phones can create and display Þ and Ð; some can only display; some can do neither. Æ, used in other languages, is more robustly supported. Many people don't take any chances and make a point of writing all SMSs in "reduced" Icelandic. These messages show Ð > D and Þ > T. In both messages, acute accents and umlauts over vowels are also reduced. The right-side message includes an unreduced Æ.



ICELANDIC CHARACTERS IN SMSs CAN BE COSTLY

Another good reason to avoid Icelandic characters in text messages is that they can make the message cost more. Operating systems rarely tell you this or let you make an informed choice. Here we're sending an SMS through Skype, which gives users fairly robust price information. SMSs are limited to 160 characters. When the first character is A, 159 characters remain, as you'd expect. But if the first character is Á, only 69 characters remain. It's not clear how the extra 90 characters are used. (Note: the marginal cost to a mobile telephone company of sending an SMS is zero.)

TOP 50 FIRST NAMES FOR ALL
LIVING FEMALE ICELANDERS
1.1.2010 – THOSE WITH Ð Þ Æ

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Guðrún	5.053	3,20
3	Sigríður	3.693	2,34
14	Ragnheiður	1.332	0,84
15	Guðbjörg	1.316	0,83
19	Guðný	1.217	0,77
26	Auður	1.064	0,67
28	Þórunn	1.044	0,66
33	Þóra	991	0,63
41	Þórdís	846	0,54
46	Valgerður	751	0,48
47	Guðlaug	744	0,47

TOP 50 FIRST NAMES FOR FEMALE
ICELANDERS BORN IN 2009 –
THOSE WITH Ð Þ Æ

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
15	Guðrún	24	0,97
29	Ragnheiður	18	0,73
42	Auður	13	0,53
42	Þórdís	13	0,53

Source: Hagstofa Íslands, hagstofa.is

TOP 50 FIRST NAMES FOR ALL
LIVING MALE ICELANDERS
1.1.2010 – THOSE WITH Ð Þ Æ

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
2	Sigurður	4385	2.74
3	Guðmundur	4137	2.59
21	Þorsteinn	1.245	0,78
23	Guðjón	1.184	0,74
28	Davíð	1.001	0,63
42	Friðrik	782	0,49
43	Þórður	781	0,49
45	Hörður	773	0,48

TOP 50 FIRST NAMES FOR MALE
ICELANDERS BORN IN 2009 –
THOSE WITH Ð Þ Æ

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
4	Sigurður	36	1,41
11	Guðmundur	29	1,13
35	Davíð	15	0,59

Source: Hagstofa Íslands, hagstofa.is

Borrowing the term "diglossia" to describe the avoidance of Ð, Þ, and Æ

Charles Ferguson's classic definition of diglossia from *Word* 15 (1959): 325-340:

H and L are closely related languages or varieties of a language (*Ferguson was thinking of spoken language, but this can easily be applied to writing*)

H has higher prestige, is used in formal situations, is considered "standard" (*e.g. "proper" use of Ð and Þ*)

L has lower prestige, is used less formally, is considered "wrong," but is actually just as able to express meaning as H (*e.g. Ð>D, Þ>T/TH, Æ>AE*)

The two "dialects" of reduced Icelandic: Þ > T and Þ > TH

In SMSs, the T dialect is definitely prevalent. In some other contexts TH is preferred. Some people have strong preferences.

One of my informants for this talk was a young man named Þorsteinn. His e-mail address is thorsteinn@somewhere.net. He says that when he tells Icelanders his e-mail address verbally, people say "is that with a TH?" and he has to confirm that yes, it is. He feels that Þ > T is the default, assumed reduction, while Þ > TH is an exception to the rule for which people need reassurance. He prefers to be known as Thorsteinn and not Torsteinn in writing and says he would avoid the written form Torsteinn. Among friends and family, he goes by either of two nicknames he has, neither of which includes any special Icelandic characters.

Note that Icelanders do not reduce Ð to DH. One does see foreigners doing this, though. Examples are in geographical data and in Drupal's keyword reduction algorithm.

TWO VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

The pessimistic vision

Look at all the grief that these letters cause. Maybe we can even get rid of them. Looking into the history of Ð in particular shows how our world could have been otherwise – Ð-free – and better so. Ð is in complementary distribution with D and we don't need it. We can replace Þ with TH. With globalization processes at work in the world of communication, unusual graphic coordination norms are under pressure and it's natural if they disappear. (An example of this viewpoint: Anton Kaldal Ágústsson's senior thesis at LHÍ.)

The optimistic vision

The battle for character set equality is not finished and can still be won. We need increased Unicode penetration (not just ISO 8859-1) so that Ð, Þ and Æ can be used on an equal footing with other characters in all kinds of computer and mobile operating systems. If the lack of Unicode support in PHP is resolved, that will ripple through many other contexts. Surely we can put an end to SMS discrimination against multibyte characters and poor disclosure of the extra costs that result. We can easily educate Icelanders better about how to avoid using "reduced" spelling. Overall, there is every reason to preserve unusual coordination norms; they make the world more interesting, it is a matter of fairness to those who use them, and supporting them is not so costly -- it just takes diligence and consideration.