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The acceptability of a non-root phenomenon in different types of adverbial clauses in Icelandic

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relatively marked and uncommon subject-initial V3 word order in adverbial clauses in Icelandic and presents results from an online acceptability judgment survey conducted for this study. Following Badan and Haegeman (2022)'s typology, the V3 order was investigated in three types of adverbial clauses: central adverbial clauses (CACs), peripheral adverbial clauses (PACs) and non-integrated adverbial clauses (NON-ICs). Previous work, based on Haegeman (2012)'s typology where adverbial clauses were classified into two binary categories (CAC and PACs), indicates that CACs tend to resist main clause phenomena such as topicalization in V2-languages like Icelandic, while PACs tend to permit such phenomenon. Furthermore, it was observed in the Variation in Icelandic Syntax Project (Bráinsson et al. 2015a) that there seems to be a negative relationship between embedded topicalization and subject-initial V3. Given that subject-initial V3 is generally not an option in main clauses in Icelandic and less acceptable in complement clauses than in relative clauses, for instance, one might expect that it receives different judgments in different types of adverbial clauses, depending on the embedding level of the adverbial clause in question. Thus, it is hypothesized that non-integrated adverbial clauses (NON-ICs) allow such V3 orders less freely than PACs, and that PACs in turn allow it less freely than CACs. Results from the acceptability judgment data suggest that the NON-ICs indeed received lower overall rating than the other two types. However, very little difference was observed between CACs and PACs.

Keywords: adverbial clauses, experimental syntax, Icelandic, acceptability judgments

1 Introduction

Adverbial clauses are more diverse than other subordinate clauses in terms of their different semantic properties and levels of syntactic integration. The main objective of the present research is to see whether certain types of adverbial clauses are more flexible than others in allowing an apparent non-root phenomena, namely the subject-initial V3 word order which is restricted to certain embedded environments in Icelandic. In order to achieve this objective, a pilot study on this type of V3 in adverbial clauses in Icelandic was conducted, using quantitative methods. An online questionnaire was administered in order to obtain an overview of the acceptability

judgments towards these variants in Icelandic. As a pilot study, this research also serves as a baseline of quantitative research in experimental syntax in Icelandic for future studies.¹

In Icelandic, the finite verb usually holds the second position (V2) in main clauses as it also does in the Germanic languages in general, with the exception of English (Holmberg 2015). Furthermore, Icelandic is a symmetric V2-language as opposed to the Mainland Scandinavian asymmetric V2-languages, meaning that subject-initial V2 is the default word order both in matrix and embedded clauses:

- (1) a. Jón **hefur ekki** lesið bókina. (Vfin-Adv / V2)
John has not read book-the
- b. * Jón **ekki hefur** lesið bókina. (Adv-Vfin / V3)
John not has read book-the
- (2) a. Ég held að Jón **hafi ekki** lesið bókina. (Vfin-Adv / V2)
I think that John has not read book-the
- b. ?* Ég held að Jón **ekki hafi** lesið bókina. (Adv-Vfin / V3)
I think that John not has read book-the

In the general case, the finite verb must precede the sentence adverbials in embedded clauses such as the complement clauses in (2). However, there are quite well documented exceptions in the literature (see for instance Thráinsson 2010; Viðarsson 2019; Angantýsson 2007). Thus, even though the finite verb usually precedes the sentence adverb in Icelandic, the adverb can quite easily precede the verb in certain types of embedded clauses as shown in (3–4):

- (3) a. Það er bara ein íslensk kvikmynd sem hann **hefur ekki** séð
there is only one Icelandic movie that he has not seen
- b. Það er bara ein íslensk kvikmynd sem hann **ekki hefur** séð
there is only one Icelandic movie that he not has seen
- (4) a. Ég veit hvaða kvikmynd hann **hefur ekki** séð
I know which movie he has not seen
- b. Ég veit hvaða kvikmynd hann **ekki hefur** séð
I know which movie he not has seen

The word order as illustrated in (3a) and (4a) is definitely the unmarked one, but as seen from the b-examples, the V3 order is also possible.²

¹The raw dataset from the questionnaire as well as two R scripts for importing and formatting of the survey data are published under a CC BY 4.0 license and are available at Open Science Framework repository (Xu 2023).

²The relevant adverbs in our discussion on subject-initial embedded V2/V3 (*ekki* ‘not’, *alltaf* ‘always’, *aldrei* ‘never’) are pre-VP sentence adverbs, i.e. adverbs that precede the VP and cannot follow it when there is an auxiliary in the clause. Compare *afur* ‘again’, which can follow the auxiliary:

- (i) a. María hafði **afur** séð Jón
Mary had again seen John
- b. María hafði **aldrei** séð Jón
Mary had never seen John
- c. María hafði séð Jón **afur**
Mary had seen John again

In traditional grammar, adverbial clauses are usually categorized based on their semantics. The most common categories of adverbial clauses include causal clauses, conditional clauses, temporal clauses, concessive clauses, purpose and result clauses (see a thorough overview and typology in Hetterle 2015). This type of classification is for the most part based on the conjunctions that are used to introduce the adverbial clauses. Conjunctions such as *af því að* ('because') usually introduce causal clauses, while conjunctions such as *ef* ('if') usually introduce conditional clauses. On the other hand, a clause introduced by the same conjunction can have different interpretations. In previous studies, Haegeman (2012) used a binary classification method for adverbial clauses: central adverbial clauses (CAC) and peripheral adverbial clauses (PAC). Following Frey (2018, 2020), Badan and Haegeman (2022) added a third type of adverbial clauses: non-integrated adverbial clauses (NON-IC). See (5) for examples of the three types of adverbial clauses according to Badan and Haegeman (2022).

- (5) Adverbial clauses with the conjunction *while* in different syntactic types. (Badan and Haegeman 2022: 698)
- a. ***While*** *we were talking about Theresa May*, the BBC announced her resignation.
 - b. ***While*** *Theresa May may be viewed as a conservative*, some of her proposals are innovative.
 - c. ***While*** *we are talking about Theresa May*, some of her proposals were innovative.

According to Badan and Haegeman (2022), the subordinate clause in (5a) is a central adverbial clause because the conjunction *while* has a clear temporal meaning and indicates the time of the event in the main clause. In (5b), the subordinate clause is a peripheral adverbial clause because the same conjunction *while* indicates contrast between the subordinate clause and the main clause rather than having a temporal meaning. It provides a background assumption which enhances the relevance of the following host clause. In (5c), the conjunction *while* does have a temporal meaning, but it does not directly modify the state-of-affairs in the main clause, rather it indicates the time of the speech. This is also called a speech-event modifier. Different adverbial clauses exhibit different characteristics in terms of internal and external syntax (see discussion in Haegeman 2010, 2003 and references cited). Central adverbial clauses are assumed to be structurally more integrated with the host clause and hence syntactically subordinated by the features in the host clause, while peripheral adverbial clauses are more independent from the host clauses. This claim is supported by the scope effects of tense, aspect and adverbial adjuncts in the host clauses. Furthermore, it has been observed that central adverbial clauses tend to disallow argument fronting while peripheral adverbial clauses easily accept it. This has also been observed both in judgment data and written sources in Icelandic and Faroese (Angantýsson and Jonas 2016).

Regarding the subject-initial V3 order, it was observed in Angantýsson (2020) (see also Angantýsson and Jonas 2016; Þráinsson et al. 2015a and references cited) that sentence types

d. * *María hafði séð Jón aldrei*
 Mary had seen John never

The examples in (i) show that both the adverbs can precede the non-finite verb but only *afur* can follow it.

that prohibit embedded topicalization are more likely to accept V3 order in Icelandic. Based on this and Haegeman’s observations, one might postulate that there is a difference between CACs and PACs in terms of subject-initial V3 order in Icelandic embedded clauses. More specifically, given that subject-initial V3, with a sentence adverb like the negation intervening between the subject and the finite verb, is generally not an option in main clauses in Icelandic and less acceptable in complement clauses than in relative clauses, one might expect that it receives different judgments in different types of adverbial clauses, depending on the embedding level of the adverbial clause in question. Thus, we hypothesize that such V3 orders are least restricted in the most deeply embedded clause type, i.e. CACs.

The paper is organized as follows. After a brief background discussion (section 2), we describe the design of the acceptability judgment survey (section 3) and methodology (section 4). In section 5 we present the results from the online questionnaire and show, among other things, that the Non-ICs indeed received lower overall rating than the other two types. However, very little difference was observed between CACs and PACs. Finally, we discuss the results and conclude the paper in section 6.

2 Previous research

2.1 The V3 construction in Icelandic subordinate clauses

Previous research (Angantýsson 2007, 2020; Þráinsson et al. 2015a) has shown that judgments towards the subject-initial V3 construction can be different depending on the type of subordinate clauses. Four types of subordinate clauses were investigated in the Variation in Icelandic Syntax Project in terms of V3 construction and topicalization (Þráinsson et al. 2015a): explanatory clauses (1), relative clauses (6a–6c), adverbial clauses (6d–6g) and interrogative clause (6h). Furthermore, two more aspects were taken into account in relation to judgments towards the V3 word order: the subject type in the subordinate clause, i.e. whether the subject is a noun (1) or a personal pronoun (6a), and the type of matrix verb taking an explanatory clause as its complement, i.e. whether it is a propositional attitude verb such as *halda* (‘think’) or a factive verb such as *leiðast* (‘get bored’).

(6) List of sentences tested with the V3 construction in other types of subordinate clauses in Icelandic (Þráinsson et al. 2015a):

- a. Það var margt fólk sem hann **ekki þekkti**. (relative clause)
It be.PST many people that he **NEG know.PST**.
- b. En það sem hann **ekki sagði** skipti meira máli. (relative clause)
But that which he **NEG say.PST** distribute more matter.
- c. Ég veit bara um eina mynd sem hann **ekki sá**. (relative clause)
I know just about one.ACC film that he **NEG see.PST**.
- d. Það er ómögulegt þegar formaðurinn **ekki mætir**. (temporal clause)
It be.PT impossible when leader.the **NEG turn-up.PT**.

- e. Henni líður miklu betur þegar hann **ekki mætir**. (temporal clause)
she.DAT feel much better when he **NEG turn-up.PT**.
- f. Vala tók bókina svo að Haraldur **ekki gat** lesið hana. (result clause)
Vala take.PST book-the so that Haraldur **NEG can.PST** read.PP her.
- g. Hann lagði prófið fyrir þótt nemendurnir **ekki hefðu** lesið bókina. (concessive clause)
He administer.PST exam-the for although student.M.PL **NEG have.PST.PL** read.PP book-the
- h. Kennarinn spurði hverja hann **ekki vildi** leika við. (interrogative clause)
Teacher.the ask.PST who.ACC he **NEG want.PST** play with.

Figure 1 shows the results about judgments towards the V3 word order from the Variation in Icelandic Syntax Project.

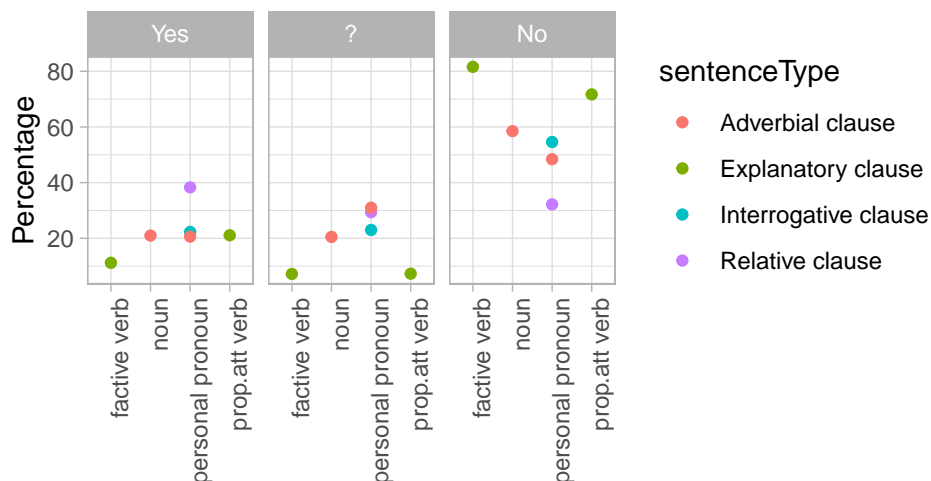


Figure 1: Results on the V3 construction in Icelandic subordinate clauses.

Although negative judgment was common across different types of subordinate clauses that were examined, several things are worth noting. First of all, the V3 word order in relative clauses seems to stand out. It has the highest overall acceptance rate among the subordinate clauses examined (38.3%) and the positive judgment is higher than the negative judgment (32.2%). Second, the V3 word order in explanatory clauses received the worst judgment, especially when the embedded clause follows a factive verb. The positive judgment for the explanatory clauses is only about 11.2%, compared to 81.6% with the negative judgment (see green points in figure 1). However, it must be pointed out that only one sentence with factive verbs with V3 word order was judged by the participants in the survey and two with propositional attitude verbs.

In addition to the V3 word order, topicalization in subordinate clauses in Icelandic was also examined in the Variation in Icelandic Syntax Project (Þráinsson et al. 2015a). It was observed among other things that topicalization received better judgment in explanatory clauses than in relative clauses. V3 word order, on the other hand, received better judgment in relative clauses than in explanatory clauses. Furthermore, participants' age seems to have an effect on their judgment in V3 order in embedded clauses in Icelandic. Younger speakers seem to be more likely to accept V3 word order in explanatory clauses while in other types of embedded clauses, it is the older speakers who are more likely to consider them to be normal. Based on these results, one would expect that there is some negative correlation between topicalization and V3 word order (see also Angantýsson 2011; Þráinsson et al. 2015b; Viðarsson 2019).

2.2 Ternary classification of adverbial clauses

According to Badan and Haegeman (2022)'s typology, adverbial clauses can be divided into three categories based on their internal and external syntax: central adverbial clauses that are fully integrated into the structure of the host clause, peripheral adverbial clauses which remains peripheral and are hence more independent from the host clause and non-integrated adverbial clauses which act as a speech event modifier and are syntactically disintegrated from the host clause.³

The difference in syntactic dominance between CACs, PACs and NON-ICs reflects on the scope effects of operators in the host clause. Badan and Haegeman (2022) showed that temporal, aspectual and modal operators in a matrix clause can extend their scope to the CACs but not to the PACs, which in turn shows that CACs are more integrated to the host clause than PACs. Sentences in (7) exemplifies this difference:

- (7) Temporal subordination of CACs and PACs: (Badan and Haegeman 2022: 702)
- a. *While* the hospital is handling the Corona-crisis, it will not be possible to make appointments for routine consultations. (CAC)
 - b. *While* young people usually will be/are able to recover at home, elderly people will need to be hospitalized. (PAC)

The finite verb in (7a), *is*, is in the present tense in the central *while* clause, but it refers to a future event which is encoded in the host clause with the future modal *will*; in (7b), the tense in the peripheral *while* clause is encoded independently with the future modal *will*. If the future tense is switched to present tense in the peripheral *while* clause, the interpretation would also switch. This is not the case for the central *while* clause in (7a).

Badan and Haegeman (2022) claim that central adverbial clauses are within the scope of epistemic adverb such as *probably* in the main clause, whereas peripheral adverbial clauses are not. This is exemplified in the following examples:

- (8) Badan and Haegeman (2022: 703–704)

³Note that Badan and Haegeman (2022) distinguish their non-integrated adverbial clauses from those identified in Frey (2018) and call them “central adverbial clauses recycled as speech event modifiers”.

- a. The thief **probably** entered the house *while* we were all in the garden. (CAC)
- b. The thief entered the house, **probably** *while* we were all in the garden. (CAC)
- c. You are **probably** angry with me *while* you should be grateful instead. (PAC)
- d. * You are angry with me, **probably** *while* you should be grateful instead. (PAC)

The scope of the epistemic adverb *probably* in (8a) extends to the whole situation, in that “it is probably the case that the thief entered ...” (cf. 8b). In (8c), however, the epistemic adverb only modifies the situation in the host clause and the proposition in the adverbial clause is assumed to be assertive, therefore, the epistemic adverb *probably* does not apply there (cf. 8d).

Badan and Haegeman (2022) describe more distinctive features between these two types of adverbial clauses and explained that such differences between them can be accounted for by constituent-command. Originally Haegeman proposed two alternative analyses for central and peripheral adverbial clauses (see Haegeman 2003, 2012, 2010; Badan and Haegeman 2022):

- (9) a. Option 1: Both central and peripheral adverbial clauses are syntactically integrated with the host clause, differing only in the level of adjunction;
- b. Option 2: Central adverbial clauses are syntactically integrated with the host clause and belong to sentence-internal syntax while peripheral adverbial clauses are only integrated at the level of discourse-syntax and are thus only sentence-external constituents (“Orphan account”).

For CACs, they are assumed to be part of TP-internal syntax and thus have access to the information/field of a sentential adverb in the host clause, while PACs belong to sentence-external syntax and are only integrated at the level of discourse-syntax, therefore, they are independent of operators such as tense, aspect and modal in the host clause.

The non-integration analysis of peripheral adverbial clauses, or as Haegeman calls it “Orphan account”, was later challenged by the observation that peripheral adverbial clauses are in fact compatible with embedding in complement clauses which shows their syntactic integration with the host clause.

Regarding non-integrated adverbial clauses, embedding seems impossible and neither can they be first constituent in V2 clauses. According to Frey (2018)’s analysis, strong root phenomena (RP) such as tags, interjection and hanging topics are incompatible with PACs, but a NON-IC may host strong RP. This claim was challenged by Badan and Haegeman (2022) with the observation that argument fronting, a strong RP in English, is incompatible with NON-ICs (cf. 10a and 10b) on the one hand, and is easily compatible with PACs on the other hand (cf. 11a and 11b).

- (10) Argument fronting in NON-ICs (Badan and Haegeman 2022: 731)
 - a. * *While* Robbie we were talking about, his sister called me to say he was in hospital. (speech event related temporal clause)
 - b. * I can contact you later *if* more details you are interested in. (speech event related conditional clause)

- (11) Argument fronting in CACs and PACs (Haegeman 2003: 332)
- a. * Mary listened to the radio *while* the dinner she was preparing. (Central *while*-clause)
 - b. *While* your book they are using in two courses, mine they haven't even ordered for the library. (peripheral *while*-clause)

This observation seems to be borne out in Icelandic examples (cf. 12a and 12b) as well as in judgment data from Faroese (Angantýsson and Jonas 2016: 136–137).

- (12) Argument fronting in central and peripheral adverbial clauses in Icelandic (Angantýsson and Jonas 2016: 133)
- a. * Ég las aðra bókina hennar áður en þá fyrstu kláraði ég. (Central I read.PST second book-the hers *before* the first finish.PST I. temporal AC with argument fronting)
 - b. Stúdentarnir pöntuðu ný einstök á meðan þau gömlu hefðu þeir student-the.PL order.PST new copies *when* those.PL old.PL have.PST they auðveldlega getað notað. (Peripheral AC with argument fronting) easily can.PP use.PP.

If there is indeed a negative relationship between argument fronting and subject-initial V3 order in Icelandic, as indicated in Angantýsson (2011), one might expect that subject-initial V3 order behave differently in different types of adverbial clauses. More precisely, since CACs resist argument fronting while PACs tend to permit it, one might expect that a subject-initial V3 construction gets better judgments in central adverbial clauses than peripheral adverbial clauses. However, the results of a study in Icelandic do not indicate that (Angantýsson and Jonas 2016). The peripheral adverbial clauses from the study received 26.3% positive judgment, compared to an average of 16.3% for central adverbial clauses. It should be kept in mind, however, that the number of sentences examined in the study was relatively low. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that a larger study was needed, where more sentences could be tested, with a slightly different methodology in order to capture the differences between different types of adverbial clauses.

3 Acceptability judgment design for the subject-initial V3 construction

Based on the discussions in section 2, an acceptability judgment test was administered for the subject-initial V3 construction on different sentence types of adverbial clauses in Icelandic, in terms of both semantic categories and syntactic categories in Badan and Haegeman (2022)'s typology.

The semantic category consists of 6 levels: causal clause, concessive clause, conditional clause, purpose clause, result clause and temporal clause. The syntactic category consists of 3

levels, central adverbial clause (CAC), peripheral adverbial clause (PAC) and non-integrated adverbial clause (NON-IC).

Table 1: A 6*3*2 factorial design for the subject-initial V3 construction in adverbial clauses in Icelandic.

sent	semantic	syntactic	order
Dóri litli þóttist vera veikur vegna þess að hann vildi ekki koma með í bátsferð.	causal	CAC	V2
Kötturinn okkar er líklega veikur fyrst hann hefur ekki klárað matinn sinn í nokkra daga.	causal	PAC	V2
Ætlarðu einn í bíó, af því að þú spurðir ekki hvort ég vildi koma með.	causal	NON-IC	V2
Hún ætlar að fara með fjölskylduna á flugvöllinn þó að hún verði ekki með í ferðalaginu.	concessive	PAC	V2
Mótmælin munu halda áfram ef ríkisstjórnin kemur ekki með betra boð.	conditional	CAC	V2
Hún hlýtur að vera veik ef hún kemur ekki á æfingu í dag.	conditional	PAC	V2
Hann pantaði pizzu heim þannig að hann þyrfti ekki að fara út í þessu veðri.	purpose	CAC	V2
Hún fékk far hjá mannum sínum þannig að hún kom ekki of seint í vinnuna.	result	PAC	V2
Kötturinn minn mjálmar og mjálmar þegar hann fær ekki nóg að borða á morgnana.	temporal	CAC	V2
Stebbi er búinn að skrifa drög að ritgerðinni sinni meðan ég hef ekki einu sinni byrjað að safna gögnum fyrir mína.	temporal	PAC	V2
Við þurfum að kaupa nýjan mat handa kettinum okkar af því að hann ekki borðar fisk.	causal	CAC	V3
Stefán hlýtur að vera grænmetisæta vegna þess að hann aldrei vill borða kjöt.	causal	PAC	V3
Hvernig ertu fjárhagslega, af því að ég ekki get borgað leigu í þessum mánuði.	causal	NON-IC	V3
Systir mín ætlar að fara í fjallgöngu þótt hún ekki hafi hreyft sig neitt að ráði í langan tíma.	concessive	PAC	V3
Hann kemur bara á morgun ef hann ekki hefur tíma til þess í dag.	conditional	CAC	V3
Hann verður líklega heima með börnunum sínum ef hann ekki kemur í bíó í kvöld.	conditional	PAC	V3
Haraldur ætlar að stilla vekjaraklukkuna svo að hann ekki vakni of seint fyrir atvinnuviðtalið.	purpose	CAC	V3
Ég faldi bókina svo að hann ekki gat lesið hana.	result	PAC	V3
Börnin mín voru ósátt þegar þau ekki fengu öskudagsbúninga í ár.	temporal	CAC	V3
Á meðan þeir aldrei nota minar bækur í kennslu, nota þeir þínar bækur í tveimur námskeiðum.	temporal	PAC	V3

Furthermore, in order to compare the differences between unmarked V2 order and marked V3 order, the order factor consists of both V2 and V3 levels. Putting all the factors together, we would have a 6*3*2 factorial design with a total of 36 unique conditions. However, result clauses and concessive clauses are only peripheral while purpose clauses are only central, according to the analysis of Haegeman (2012: 163) (See also Angantýsson and Jonas 2016). Non-integrated clauses were only tested in causal clauses in this study. As a result, a total of 20 unique conditions were created for each combination of grammatical factors. Different lexical items were used in different conditions in the study. See table 1 for an example of the 6*3*2 factorial design for the subject-initial V3 construction in adverbial clauses in Icelandic.

For causal clauses, for example, six sentences were created for six conditions: two with central causal clauses (13) of which one for V2 order (13a) and one for V3 order (13b). Similarly, two sentences with peripheral AC (14) and two with non-integrated AC (15). Coding for condition (13a), for example, would be “causal.CAC.V2” and “causal.CAC.V3” for condition (13b).

(13) Central causal clauses

a. V2

Dóri litli þóttist vera veikur vegna þess að hann vildi ekki koma með
 Dóri little pretend.PST be sick because he want.PST NEG come with
 í bátsferð.
 to boat trip.

b. V3

Við þurfum að kaupa nýjan mat handa kettinum okkar af því að hann
 We need to buy new food for cat-the.M our because he

ekki borðar fisk.
NEG eat.3sg fish.

(14) Peripheral causal clauses

a. V2

Kötturinn okkar er líklega veikur *fyrst* hann hefur ekki klárað matinn
cat-the.M our be.3sg likely sick.M *since* he have.3sg NEG finish.PP food
sinn í nokkra daga.
its in few.PL dag.PL.

b. V3

Stefán hlýtur að vera grænmetisæta *vegna þess að* hann aldrei vill borða kjöt.
Stefán must to be vegetarian *because* he never want eat.INF meat.

(15) Non-integrated causal clauses

a. V2

Ætlaðu einn í bíó, *af því að* þú spurðir ekki hvort ég vildi
go.2sg alone to cinema, *because* you ask.2sg.PST NEG wether I want.PST
koma með.
come with.

b. V3

Hvernig ertu fjárhagslega, *af því að* ég ekki get borgað leigu í þessum
how you.2sg financially, *because* I NEG can pay.PP rent in this.M
mánuði.
month.M

Based on the discussion in section 2, one might expect that sentences with unmarked V2 order would generally get better scores than marked V3 order. Furthermore, for the subject-initial V3 construction, sentences with non-integrated adverbial clauses such as (15b) would get worse overall scores than the other two types and that sentences with central adverbial clauses such as (13b) would get better scores than sentences with peripheral adverbial clauses such as (14b).

In order to increase the robustness of the data, six sentences were created for each of the 20 conditions and a total of 120 sentences therefore were tested in the study. Half of them form minimal pairs with the other half. The only difference is the order of sentences, i.e. whether the sentence has a V2 or V3 construction. Furthermore, to decrease the fatigue and lacking of interests due to long questionnaires, these 120 test sentences were further divided into six versions, each of which contained 20 sentences with the 20 unique conditions as shown in table 1, so that the same participant would not see the same condition twice. See Appendix I for a list of the test sentences, their coding as well as their average scores.

3.1 Filler sentences

Filler sentences, sentences which are not part of the factorial design in the study, were added to each version of the questionnaire for multiple reasons. First of all, all the test sentences are

structurally very similar, in that they all contain a subordinate clause which has a finite verb and a negation as adverb. In cases like this, it is recommended that filler sentences should be added to the questionnaire so that participants won't easily uncover the purpose of the study and thus influence the results in unknown ways (see e.g. Sprouse 2018; Schütze and Sprouse 2013; Goodall 2021 for discussions of acceptability judgment design). Secondly, some of the filler sentences can be used to filter out participants who may have given random scores. This was done by adding sentences that are completely normal so that positive scores are expected to be given to them. If a participant has given negative scores for all of the completely normal sentences, then there is a high chance that results from this particular participant are not reliable and thus need to be removed for final analysis. Furthermore, filler sentences can also add to the diversity of sentence types which would in turn increase interests among participants.

The optimal number of filler sentences for acceptability judgment tests is unclear, though a minimum of 1:1 ratio of fillers to the test sentences is recommended in few studies and a common ratio is a 2:1 design of fillers to test sentences (Sprouse 2018; Schütze and Sprouse 2013; Goodall 2021). In this study, a filler to test sentence ratio of 2:1 was chosen and 40 filler sentences were created. The filler sentences contain a variety of sentences with syntactic variations in modern Icelandic language.

The filler sentences contains 4 sentences which are considered to be completely normal, an example of which is the sentence (16a). Sentence (16b) is an example of new passive (or “new impersonal construction”) in Icelandic, in which the expletive *það* takes place as a place holder for the actual subject while the finite verb takes the form of past participle in default the 3rd person singular form. The normal sentence order would be “*Mér var sagt ...*” (e. *I was told ...*). Apart from sentence order, there also seem to be a variation in case agreement from normal passive construction (see detailed discussion of the new impersonal construction in Icelandic in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 1997, 2002; Sigurjónsdóttir and Nowenstein 2016 for example.).

(16) Some of the fillers sentences included in the study:

a. Completely normal sentence

Ég hef aldrei talað við þennan mann.
I have never talk.PP with this man.

b. New passive

Það var sagt mér að skólinn væri lokaður í dag.
it be.3sg.PST say.PP me.DAT that school-the be.3sg.SBJV.PST closed in dag.

c. Nominative/dative substitution

Það var brjálað veður og einn bátur rak upp í fjöru.
it be.3sg.PST crazy.N weather.N and one.NOM boat.NOM drift.3sg.PST up to shore.

Sentence (16c) is an example of nominative substitution, in which a normally oblique subject case (accusative or dative) takes the form of a nominative with an intransitive verb of motion or change of state (see e.g. Jónsson 2003; Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005; Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2019).

4 Method

Based on the results from the Variation in Icelandic Syntax Project (Þráinsson et al. 2015a) and the theory put forward by Badan and Haegeman (2022), it is predicted that a subject-initial V3 construction will receive better judgments in central adverbial clauses than in peripheral adverbial clauses. Moreover, it could be expected that non-integrated adverbial clauses would receive worse judgments than the other two types of adverbial clauses.

The research is based on quantitative methods and data was collected through an online survey where participants evaluate sentences that contain grammatical variables. Statistical analyses were performed to see whether there is any correlation between the variables and whether the differences between them are statistically significant.

The survey was first published as a pre-test on SoSci Survey (Leiner 2019) for one week and formal collection was consequently administered and lasted for two weeks. The participants were chosen at random and the only condition was that the participant had to have Icelandic as their mother tongue. In addition, it was recommended that people with a university education in Icelandic or linguistics not participate. The participation was completely anonymous. In the end, a total of 570 people took part in the survey, of which 407 completed the survey. Therefore, the number of valid participation was a total of 407.

In this section, the design of the survey and data processing will be addressed.

4.1 Survey design

An online survey with acceptability judgment test was designed to obtain an overview over judgment towards the subject-initial V3 construction in different types of adverbial clauses in Icelandic. The main method was to ask the participants to rate sentences according to how natural they think the sentences are, on a 7-point Likert scale from -3 up to $+3$, where 0 is the neutral point (Likert 1932). The scale in the survey was extreme-labeled, meaning that only the lowest and highest points were given a label, i.e. -3 = “Unacceptable (impossible) sentence. I could not say this at all.” and $+3$ = “Completely normal sentence. I can easily say this”.

The survey is divided into three parts: the introduction of the survey, questions about the background of the participants and the judgment test. In the introduction of the survey, it was stated, among other things, that the participation is completely anonymous and the participants have to judge the sentences according to their natural feeling rather than their knowledge of the language. The second section contains six questions regarding age group, gender, mother tongue, place of residence, origin and education. The third part is the main part of the survey and contains 60 sentences to be judged, of which 20 test sentences and 40 filler sentences, in which the test sentences make up 33% of all the sentences. The sentences were randomly ordered and only six sentences were shown on each page. This was done to reduce the likelihood that the participants will be aware of what is being tested.

Each test sentence contains a combination of three grammatical variables, as discussed in the previous section

4.2 Data processing

The data were retrieved in the form of a csv file and processed with the program R (R Core Team 2022). Before starting the analysis, the data were cleaned and the variables were coded.

In Sosci Survey, the script for importing the data into Rstudio was available, where all the questions and answers were already coded except for the type of test sentences. Ratings in the scale are e.g. coded from 1 up to 7. Each of the test sentences was then coded with the grammatical variables mentioned earlier, e.g. “result.PAC.V2” is a coding for result clause, peripheral adverbial clause and V2 construction.

Consequently, an effort was made to filter out answers from participants who might have rated the sentences randomly. This was done by checking whether the participants give a negative rating, i.e. scores lower than 0, for four filler sentences that are completely normal (see previous section for discussions and example of the filler sentences). If a participant has given negative ratings for all four of these sentences, the participant will be eliminated from further analysis. No such responses were found.

4.2.1 Scale bias correction

Individuals may use the 7-point scale in different ways. Some people e.g. never use the extreme points such as -3 or $+3$, while others use points in the middle more often, e.g. -1 or $+1$. Such scale bias can be corrected by calculating a standardized score for each participant. Based on instructions from Sprouse (2018), a standardized score (or *Z-score*) for each participant is calculated using the following formula:

$$Z = (\text{response} - \text{individual mean response}) / \text{individual standard deviation}$$

This was done with the average score of individuals on all sentences. After the calculation, the filler sentences were taken out.

4.2.2 Hypothesis testing

Data collected with a judgment test that uses a Likert scale are usually ordered categorical variables and thus not continuous. With such data, a non-parametric significance test is usually used. But it is also possible to use a parametric significance test with such data if the value of the response variable is transformed in some way, e.g. with a standardized *Z-score* as previously mentioned.

Both parametric and non-parametric tests were tested and it was decided to report the results from non-parametric tests, Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test with Bonferroni correction. The correction was used to prevent false positive results, especially when many variables are checked simultaneously.

5 Results

A total of 407 people participated in the survey and each of them judged 20 test sentences. In total, there were 8,140 measurements of the test sentences. Half of them have sentences with the V2 construction and the other half with the V3 construction. Two grammatical variables besides word order were examined, the semantic classification of adverbial clauses and the syntactic classification of adverbial clauses. Social variables include age group, gender, origin and education. In this section, the results based on these parameters will be reported.

5.1 Overview over the V3 construction in Icelandic adverbial clauses

The results from the survey show that sentences with the V2 construction generally received a more positive judgment from the participants than sentences with the V3 construction (cf. table 2). Sentences with the syntactic categories CAC and PAC with traditional word order (V2) both received a median score of 6 and an average score of around 5. In comparison, non-integrated adverbial clauses (NON-IC) with V2 construction received a negative median score of 3 which corresponds to -1 in the survey. All categories with the V3 construction received negative scores in both mean and median, and the median for all categories is 1, which is the lowest score. Standardized Z-scores tell a similar story, all categories with the V3 construction received negative scores at both mean and median. Non-integrated adverbial clauses, both with traditional word order (V2) and V3 word order, received negative scores.

Table 2: Overview over judgment data on V2 and V3 structures on different syntactic types of Icelandic adverbial clauses.

syntactic	response.mean	response.median	zscore.mean	zscore.median
V2				
CAC	5.24	6	0.462	0.782
PAC	4.98	6	0.361	0.697
NON-IC	3.25	3	-0.327	-0.481
V3				
CAC	2.64	1	-0.566	-0.934
PAC	2.48	1	-0.638	-0.954
NON-IC	2.29	1	-0.735	-0.954

Figure 2 below shows the distribution of participants' judgment of V2 (in red color) and V3 (in blue color) constructions in different syntactic categories. The boxes represent approximately the middle 50% of the values and the horizontal line inside the box represents the median values. The text at the top of the figure shows the significance test used and its results. The text at the bottom stands for a formula for making a comparison between each variable pair (e. *pairwise comparison*) and a method for correcting the p-value. Stars represent significance.

There appears to be a large difference in participants' judgments across the different syntactic categories of adverbial clauses with V2 constructions, as the three boxes do not completely overlap. This difference in the V2 construction is also statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N=8140) = 284, p < 0.001$). With the V3 construction, however, the difference seems to be very small. This is true both between NON-ICs and PACs and between CACs and PACs, where the boxes appear

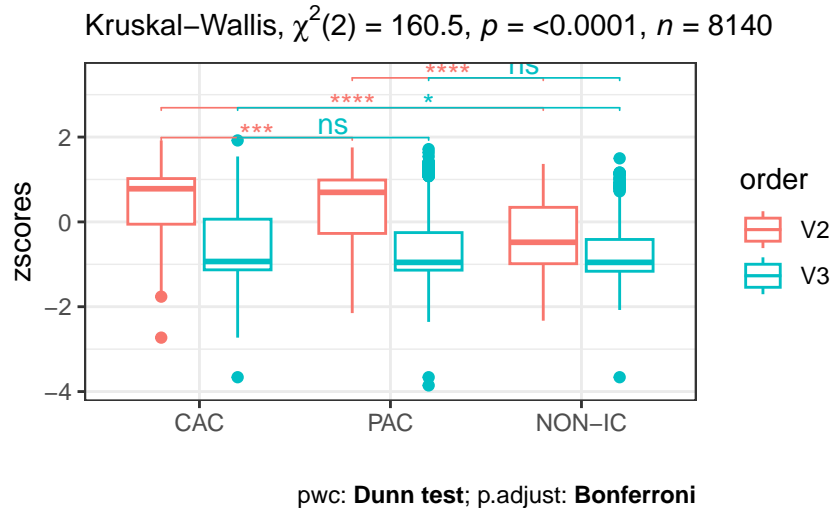


Figure 2: Results from the survey on V2 and V3 structures in Icelandic adverbial clauses according to the syntactic types.

to completely overlap. There seems to be a small difference between CACs and NON-ICs and this difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.0217$).

Looking at the percentage of participants' judgments which gave positive, neutral and negative answers, most participants seem to have a clear tendency to choose between positive (> 0) and negative (< 0) answers and not neutral (0) (cf. table 3).

Table 3: Proportional results on positive and negative judgments on the V3 structure according to the syntactic types.

	Yes	?	No
CAC	0.234	0.042	0.724
PAC	0.205	0.037	0.757
NON-IC	0.150	0.064	0.786

Table 3 shows that the majority, or over 70% of the participants, gave negative answers to sentences with V3 word order in all three syntactic categories. Slightly more people gave positive answers to central adverbial clauses (23.4%) than to peripheral adverbial sentences (20.5%). Non-integrated adverbial clauses tested received 15% positive responses from the participants. Even though the difference is quite small, this result is consistent with our hypothesis, that central adverbial clauses would get better judgment than peripheral adverbial clauses and that non-integrated clauses would get worse judgment than the other two types of ACs in Icelandic.

When looking at the V3 construction in different semantic categories of adverbial clauses, there seems to be a difference between several semantic categories. Although the difference is not great between them, it is statistically significant ($\chi^2(5, N=4070) = 47.47, p < 0.0001$). Figure 3 shows the distribution of participants' judgment in different semantic categories in sentences with the V3 construction. The colors represent different semantic categories of the adverbial clause.

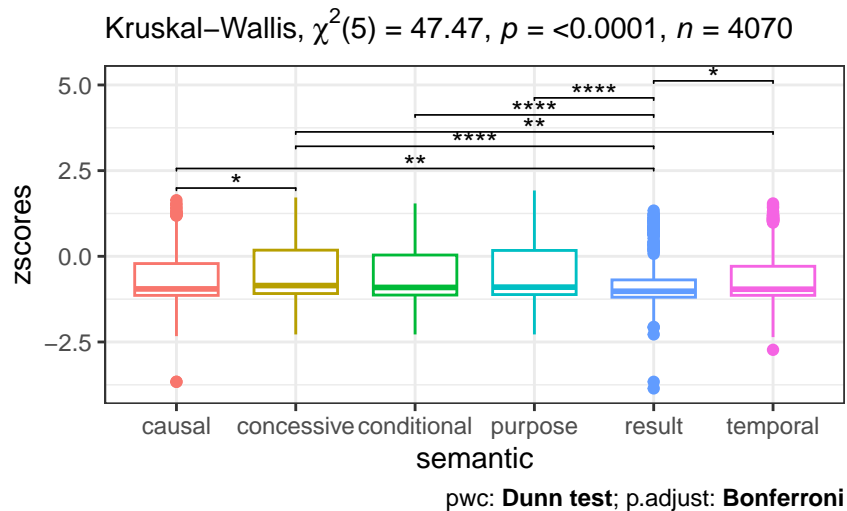


Figure 3: Results from the survey on the V3 structure in Icelandic adverbial clauses according to semantic types.

As can be seen in the figure, the difference between most of the semantic categories is statistically significant according to Dunn’s test. Most semantic categories were given negative responses from the participants with V3 word order, with all boxes and medians below Z-score of 0 (cf. figure 3). The median values of the Z-score are all around -0.9 and with the result clauses it is -1.02 . Looking at the average Z-scores, the purpose and concessive clauses received better average scores, which are -0.531 and -0.495 respectively. These are sentences shown in table 4.

Table 4: Results for purpose and concessive clauses with the V3 construction.

syntactic	sent	mean.response	mean.zscore
Concessive			
PAC	Hún ætlar að fara með fjölskylduna á flugvöllinn þó að hún ekki verði með í ferðalaginu.	1.91	-0.908
PAC	Snorri náði að klára fiskisúpuna þótt honum ekki líki venjulega fiskur.	2.09	-0.809
PAC	Haraldur keyrði norður þrátt fyrir að billinn hans ekki fengi skoðun.	2.88	-0.517
PAC	Mér fannst önnur bókin hennar mjög góð þó að ég ekki næði að klára þá fyrstu.	3.19	-0.237
PAC	Systir mín ætlar að fara í fjallgöngu þótt hún ekki hafi hreyft sig neitt að ráði í langan tíma.	3.20	-0.399
PAC	Anna getur vel lesið skiparnir í kóðun þótt hún ekki kunni að kóða.	3.65	-0.140
Purpose			
CAC	Haraldur ætlar að stilla vekjaralukkuna svo að hann ekki vakni of seint fyrir atvinnuviðtalið.	1.99	-0.889
CAC	Hann pantaði pizzu heim þannig að hann ekki þyrfti að fara út í þessu veðri.	2.03	-0.830
CAC	Hún keypti eigin gönguskíði þannig að hún ekki þurfi að bíða í röð til að leigja þau.	2.22	-0.740
CAC	Andri ætlar að koma heim fyrir helgina svo að hann ekki missi af afmælisveislu dóttur sinnar.	2.77	-0.487
CAC	Við ætlum að bjóða Haraldi heim til okkar þannig að hann ekki verði einn um jólin.	3.46	-0.174
CAC	Við þurfum að takmarka matarneysluna hjá kettinum okkar svo að hann ekki verði of feitur.	3.85	-0.106

For sentences with concessive clauses, three out of six sentences received higher than 3 points in scale rating and lower than -0.3 in standardized z-scores. For sentences with purpose clauses, two out of six received higher than 3 points in scale rating. Examples in (17) show the two sentences which received the highest rating in these two types of adverbial clauses.

- (17) a. Sentence with concessive clauses which received highest rating

Anna getur vel lesið skiparnir í kóðun þótt hún ekki
 Anna can.3sg well read.PP command.PL in coding *even though* she NEG

kunni að kóða.
know.SBJV to code.

- b. Sentence with purpose clauses which received highest rating

Við þurfum að takmarka matarneysluna hjá kettinum okkar svo að hann
we need.1pl to limit food-consumption with cat our.GEN *so that* he
ekki verði of feitur.
NEG become.SBJV too fat.

Overall, sentences with the V2 construction received a more positive evaluation from the participants than sentences with V3, either for sentences in different semantic categories or in different syntactic categories. When looking only at sentences with the subject-initial V3 construction, there seems to be a difference in the participants' evaluations between different semantic categories and syntactic categories, although the difference is not large and is only statistically significant between certain categories. On the other hand, even though the difference between syntactic categories is quite small, the results did show consistency with our hypothesis. Sentences with CACs in V3 order indeed received better judgment than sentences with PACs while sentences with NON-ICs received worse judgment than the other two types.

5.2 Purpose clauses in Icelandic

According to the classification of Haegeman (2012: 163), purpose clauses were classified as central adverbial clauses based on the observation that they disallow argument fronting in English while some permit adjunct fronting. Peripheral adverbial clauses are those that allow both argument and adjunct fronting. While this observation is true based on English, purpose clauses in Icelandic seem to allow argument fronting easily (cf. 18b), therefore, it is possible that they can be classified as peripheral adverbial clauses instead of central adverbial clauses.

- (18) Argument fronting in purpose clauses in Icelandic (Angantýsson and Jonas 2016: 134).

- a. Ég las aðra bókina hennar vandlega svo að ég gæti skilið
I read.PST second book-the hers carefully *so that* I can.PST understand.PP
þá fyrstu almennilega.
the-DEM.PRO first properly.
- b. Ég las aðra bókina hennar vandlega svo að þá fyrstu
I read.PST second book-the hers carefully *so that* the-DEM.PRO first
gæti ég skilið almennilega.
can.PST I understand.PP properly.

Figure 4 below shows the result from data after re-coding the purpose clauses as peripheral adverbial clauses (PAC).

The results from recoding the purpose clauses as peripheral clauses did not seem to make a big difference for the V3 construction, as the difference between central and peripheral adverbial clauses are still very small and statistically not significant (cf. figure 2). However, it can be seen from the figure that sentences with CACs in V3 order still have better ratings than sentences with PACs, which in turn have higher ratings than sentences with NON-ICs.

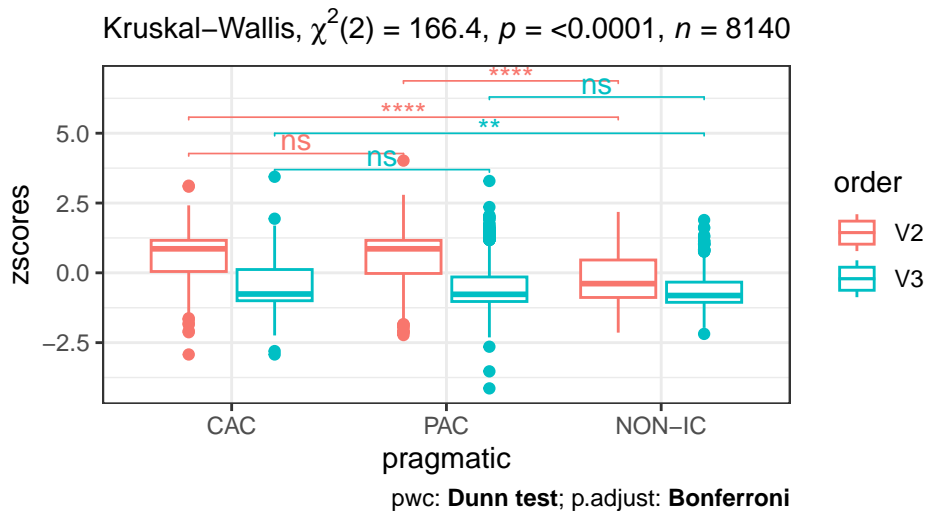


Figure 4: Results from data after re-coding purpose clauses as PAC.

Another perhaps ambiguous aspect related to the purpose clauses in Icelandic is that they are structurally very similar to result clauses. Compare the following examples in (19):

(19) Purpose and result clauses in Icelandic:

- a. Hann pantaði pizzu heim þannig að hann þyrfti ekki að fara út í þessu veðri. (purpose clause)
 he order.PST pizza home so that he need.SBJV.PST NEG to go out in this weather.
- b. Ég faldi bókina svo að hann gat ekki lesið hana. (result clause)
 I hide.PST book.the so that he can.IND.PST NEG read.PP her.

Example in (19a) is a purpose clause and (19b) is a result clause. Apart from different lexical items used, the syntactic structure is almost the same except the mood of the finite verb in the subordinate clauses: the finite verb in the purpose clause (19a) is in subjunctive mood *þyrfti* instead of indicative mood which would be *þurfti*; in (19b), however, the finite verb is in indicative mood *gat* instead of subjunctive *gæti*. This difference is very small and can possibly be overlooked or misinterpreted by participants, which can lead to unexpected scores for these types of sentences.

5.3 Connection with age

Social factors are also examined in relation to the V3 construction in Icelandic adverbial clauses. They are age group, gender, origin and education. The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between social factors except for age group and origin of the participants, although the difference is not very large. Results for the V3 construction in Icelandic adverbial clauses by age groups will be discussed here.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of participants' judgment for sentences with V3 word order by age group. Again, the difference is not great between the different age groups, and negative responses seem to be common in all age groups. The difference is particularly small between the two youngest age groups and also between the next three age groups. A statistical significance test confirms this (no stars between these age groups). But there seems to be a difference between the two youngest groups and the three older groups. Therefore, the p-value in a significance test for the age groups as a whole is very small and the difference is therefore significant ($\chi^2(4, N=4070) = 43.26, p < 0.0001$).

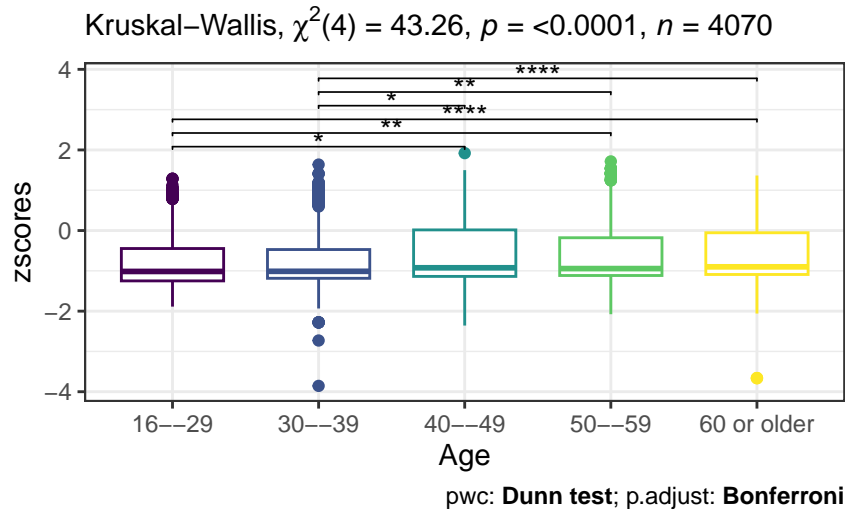


Figure 5: V3 construction in Icelandic adverbial clauses according to age groups

When compared with the results for sentences with the unmarked V2 construction by age group, it can be seen that sentences with V2 were again much better rated by all age groups, with approx. 5 in the average score and 6 in the median score (cf. table 5).

Table 5: Results on sentences with both V2 and V3 constructions according to age groups.

Age	response.mean	response.median	zscore.mean	zscore.median
V2				
16–29	5.39	6	0.459	0.788
30–39	5.11	6	0.365	0.713
40–49	4.90	6	0.307	0.587
50–59	4.77	6	0.281	0.599
60 or older	4.80	6	0.341	0.698
V3				
16–29	2.34	1	-0.750	-1.015
30–39	2.38	1	-0.712	-1.012
40–49	2.63	1	-0.602	-0.925
50–59	2.50	1	-0.602	-0.944
60 or older	2.60	1	-0.562	-0.901

The relationship between the age groups can be again seen in the table, both for sentences with V2 and V3 word order, that the youngest two age groups gave similar scores (just over 5 in average score for sentences with V2 order and around 2.3 for sentences with V3 order). Similarly, the older groups gave similar ratings. The difference is not great, but sentences with

V2 construction seem to have received a higher score in the younger age groups than in the older age groups, and the reverse seems to be the case for sentences with the V3 construction, i.e. the older age groups gave a higher rating than the younger age groups. This difference seems to be consistent with the results from the Variation Project discussed in section 2.1.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The subject of this study is to systematically investigate a relatively uncommon word order phenomena in adverbial clauses in Icelandic, namely the subject-initial V3 (subject – sentence adverb – finite verb). An online survey with a judgment test was given to the participants, containing 20 different sentence types concerning semantic and syntactic classifications of adverbial clauses in Icelandic with both V2 and V3 word orders. Six sentences were created for each sentence type and a total of 120 test sentences were tested. These test sentences were divided into six versions of the survey and each participant took one of them randomly. In this way, a large number of sentences could be tested and at the same time each participant only saw 20 test sentences with unique conditions, as discussed in section 3. In addition to the 20 test sentences, 40 filler sentences were added as well as some questions concerning social factors, such as the age group, gender, origin and education level of the participants. The survey was completely anonymous and was intended for native Icelandic speakers.

First of all, and not surprisingly, the results of the survey show that sentences with the unmarked V2 construction usually received a more positive evaluation from the participants than sentences with the V3 construction, either for sentences in different semantic categories or in different syntactic categories. When looking only at sentences with the V3 construction, there seems to be a difference in the participants' evaluations between different semantic categories and syntactic categories, although the difference is not large and is only statistically significant between certain categories. In the syntactic categories, the difference seems to be only significant between central and non-integrated adverbial clauses. There does not appear to be a significant difference between central and peripheral adverbial clauses, as was expected according to the hypotheses presented in section 2. Non-integrated adverbial clauses were generally given negative scores by participants, even for sentences with the unmarked V2 word order. In different semantic categories, the difference was again not great, but statistically significant between many of them. Purpose and concessive clauses seem to have received better ratings from the participants, while result clauses received worse ratings than other types of adverbial sentences (cf. fig. 3). In terms of social factors, only age group and origin seem to show statistically significant differences between the different groups for adverbial sentences with V3 word order. Participants from the older age groups (40 years and older) gave a slightly higher score than those from the younger age groups (between 16 and 39 years). However, there is again little or no difference between the older age groups and between the younger age groups (cf. figure 5).

Despite these results, a quantitative research method such as the one applied in this study has its limitations, especially in grammatical judgment tests. In these tests, the data only shows the scores each participant gives to a certain sentence, but it is impossible to know how the participants interpret the sentences. A participant could for example give a negative response

to a sentence because of the style or use of specific wordings, i.e. for reasons independent of the grammatical variables that were being tested in the survey design. A further complication is that the purpose clauses and result clauses in Icelandic are very similar in their structure since the only difference is that of the mood of the finite verb in the subordinate clause. In purpose clauses, the finite verbs are in subjunctive mood while in result clauses they are in indicative mood. This difference is very small and can possibly be overlooked or misinterpreted by the participants, which leads to somewhat unexpected scores for these types of sentences. Due to the aforementioned potentially ambiguous judgment, qualitative research such as interviews could possibly resolve these issues.

Last but not least, the survey was designed so that each participant evaluated 20 test sentences, so that the data actually contains repeated measures and the data points are therefore not independent. This could affect the results. It might be useful to use mixed models to analyze the results from the survey data, where more explanatory variables can be taken into account as fixed effects and individual variation can also be accounted for as random effects. But due to the size of the data and number of the variables, this will probably be better looked into in larger projects.

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Appendices

I List of test sentences

TestSent	Coding	Mean response	Mean z-scores
Dóri litli vill vera grænmetisæta vegna þess að hann vill ekki sjá dýr send í sláturshús.	causal.CAC.V2	4.72	0.302
Dóri litli þóttist vera veikur vegna þess að hann vildi ekki koma með í bátsferð.	causal.CAC.V2	6.18	0.760
Hún er þreytt vegna þess að hún gat ekki sofnað alla nóttina.	causal.CAC.V2	3.27	-0.288
Hún þarf að eyða nóttinni í gistiheimili vegna þess að storminn lægir ekki fyrir en eftir morgundaginn.	causal.CAC.V2	3.83	-0.038
Systir mín bað mig um hjálp með verkefnið sitt af því að hún kunni ekki mjög vel stærðfræði.	causal.CAC.V2	3.75	-0.167
Við þurfum að kaupa nýjan mat handa kettinum okkar af því að hann borðar ekki fisk.	causal.CAC.V2	5.34	0.526
Dóri litli vill vera grænmetisæta vegna þess að hann ekki vill sjá dýr send í sláturshús.	causal.CAC.V3	3.18	-0.403
Dóri litli þóttist vera veikur vegna þess að hann vildi koma með í bátsferð.	causal.CAC.V3	3.46	-0.217
Hún er þreytt vegna þess að hún gat ekki sofnað alla nóttina.	causal.CAC.V3	2.69	-0.496
Hún þarf að eyða nóttinni í gistiheimili vegna þess að storminn ekki lægir fyrir en eftir morgundaginn.	causal.CAC.V3	1.52	-0.982
Systir mín bað mig um hjálp með verkefnið sitt af því að hún ekki kunni mjög vel stærðfræði.	causal.CAC.V3	1.78	-0.941
Við þurfum að kaupa nýjan mat handa kettinum okkar af því að hann ekki borðar fisk.	causal.CAC.V3	3.02	-0.485
Af hverju ættum við að fara á fiskveitingastað, af því að hann borðar aldrei fisk.	causal.NON-IC.V2	2.00	-0.793
Hvað ertu að gera í kvöld, af því að ég er ekki með neitt plan.	causal.NON-IC.V2	4.06	0.003
Hvernig er veðrið um helgina, af því að ég vil ekki eyða helgafriinu í að horfa á Netflix.	causal.NON-IC.V2	3.74	-0.032
Hvernig ertu fjárhagslega, af því að ég get ekki borgað leigu í þessum mánuði.	causal.NON-IC.V2	3.31	-0.311
Veist þú hvort það er eitthvað gott í sýningu í leikhúsunum, af því að ég vil ekki keyra til suðurs til einskis.	causal.NON-IC.V2	2.46	-0.701
Ætlaðu einn í bíó, af því að þú spurðir ekki hvort ég vildi koma með.	causal.NON-IC.V2	4.00	-0.102
Af hverju ættum við að fara á fiskveitingastað, af því að hann aldrei borðar fisk.	causal.NON-IC.V3	1.64	-0.942
Hvað ertu að gera í kvöld, af því að ég ekki er með neitt plan.	causal.NON-IC.V3	3.46	-0.299
Hvernig er veðrið um helgina, af því að ég ekki vil eyða helgafriinu í að horfa á Netflix.	causal.NON-IC.V3	2.46	-0.620
Hvernig ertu fjárhagslega, af því að ég ekki get borgað leigu í þessum mánuði.	causal.NON-IC.V3	2.68	-0.624
Veist þú hvort það er eitthvað gott í sýningu í leikhúsunum, af því að ég ekki vil keyra til suðurs til einskis.	causal.NON-IC.V3	1.94	-0.864
Ætlaðu einn í bíó, af því að þú ekki spurðir hvort ég vildi koma með.	causal.NON-IC.V3	1.52	-1.076
Haraldur hefur líklega slitið öllu sambandi við þóru því hann vill ekki tala við hana.	causal.PAC.V2	5.96	0.745
Hún hefur líklega kynnst nýjum kærasta af því að hún kom aldrei til baka.	causal.PAC.V2	4.30	0.165
Kötturinn okkar er líklega veikur fyrst hann hefur ekki klárað matinn sinn í nokkra daga.	causal.PAC.V2	6.18	0.770
Selma hlýtur að vera í uppnámi fyrst hún svaraði ekki símanum sínum allan daginn.	causal.PAC.V2	5.19	0.463
Stefán hlýtur að vera grænmetisæta vegna þess að hann vill aldrei borða kjöt.	causal.PAC.V2	6.03	0.776
Stefán hlýtur að vera lofthæddur af því að hann hefur aldrei farið í flugvél.	causal.PAC.V2	5.65	0.594
Haraldur hefur líklega slitið öllu sambandi við þóru því hann ekki vill tala við hana.	causal.PAC.V3	2.93	-0.403
Hún hefur líklega kynnst nýjum kærasta af því að hún aldrei kom til baka.	causal.PAC.V3	2.11	-0.748
Kötturinn okkar er líklega veikur fyrst hann ekki hefur klárað matinn sinn í nokkra daga.	causal.PAC.V3	3.06	-0.389
Selma hlýtur að vera í uppnámi fyrst hún ekki svaraði símanum sínum allan daginn.	causal.PAC.V3	2.84	-0.509
Stefán hlýtur að vera grænmetisæta vegna þess að hann aldrei vill borða kjöt.	causal.PAC.V3	1.86	-0.917
Stefán hlýtur að vera lofthæddur af því að hann aldrei hefur farið í flugvél.	causal.PAC.V3	2.75	-0.540
Anna getur vel lesið skiparnir í kóðun þótt hún kunni ekki að kóða.	concessive.PAC.V2	5.50	0.664
Haraldur keyrði norður þrátt fyrir að billinn hans fengi ekki skoðun.	concessive.PAC.V2	6.22	0.888
Hún ætlar að fara með fjölskylduna á flugvöllinn þó að hún verði ekki með í ferðalaginu.	concessive.PAC.V2	5.27	0.395
Mér fannst önnur bókin hennar mjög góð þó að ég næði ekki að klára þá fyrstu.	concessive.PAC.V2	5.97	0.761
Snorri náði að klára fiskisúpuna þótt honum líki venjulega ekki fiskur.	concessive.PAC.V2	5.40	0.490
Systir mín ætlar að fara í fjallgöngu þótt hún hafi ekki hreyft sig neitt að ráði í langan tíma.	concessive.PAC.V2	6.38	0.922
Anna getur vel lesið skiparnir í kóðun þótt hún ekki kunni að kóða.	concessive.PAC.V3	3.65	-0.140
Haraldur keyrði norður þrátt fyrir að billinn hans ekki fengi skoðun.	concessive.PAC.V3	2.88	-0.517
Hún ætlar að fara með fjölskylduna á flugvöllinn þó að hún ekki verði með í ferðalaginu.	concessive.PAC.V3	1.91	-0.908
Mér fannst önnur bókin hennar mjög góð þó að ég næði ekki að klára þá fyrstu.	concessive.PAC.V3	3.19	-0.237
Snorri náði að klára fiskisúpuna þótt honum líki venjulega fiskur.	concessive.PAC.V3	2.09	-0.809
Systir mín ætlar að fara í fjallgöngu þótt hún ekki hafi hreyft sig neitt að ráði í langan tíma.	concessive.PAC.V3	3.20	-0.399
Dóttir hennar grætur og grætur ef hún fær ekki að koma með að labba með hundinn.	conditional.CAC.V2	4.49	0.117
Hann kemur bara á morgun ef hann hefur ekki tíma til þess í dag.	conditional.CAC.V2	6.18	0.862
Hún kemur örugglega í bíó í kvöld nema henni takist ekki að ná í miða.	conditional.CAC.V2	5.48	0.549
Hún ætlar í fjallgöngu um helgina nema veðrið verði ekki gott.	conditional.CAC.V2	4.31	0.141
Mótmælin munu halda áfram ef ríkisstjórnin kemur ekki með betra boð.	conditional.CAC.V2	6.59	0.924
Það er ekki hægt að taka ferðamenn í köfunarferð ef þeir kunna ekki að synda.	conditional.CAC.V2	5.78	0.671
Dóttir hennar grætur og grætur ef hún ekki fær að koma með að labba með hundinn.	conditional.CAC.V3	2.85	-0.452
Hann kemur bara á morgun ef hann ekki hefur tíma til þess í dag.	conditional.CAC.V3	3.23	-0.362
Hún kemur örugglega í bíó í kvöld nema henni ekki takist að ná í miða.	conditional.CAC.V3	2.32	-0.734
Hún ætlar í fjallgöngu um helgina nema veðrið ekki verði gott.	conditional.CAC.V3	1.72	-0.915
Mótmælin munu halda áfram ef ríkisstjórnin ekki kemur með betra boð.	conditional.CAC.V3	2.86	-0.463
Það er ekki hægt að taka ferðamenn í köfunarferð ef þeir ekki kunna að synda.	conditional.CAC.V3	2.90	-0.387
Af hverju fer hann í söngvakeppni ef hann kann ekki að syngja?	conditional.PAC.V2	6.03	0.757
Hann fékk líklega nýja vinnu ef hann kemur ekki lengur á kaffihús daglega.	conditional.PAC.V2	2.46	-0.702
Hann kann líklega ekki að synda ef hann fer aldrei í sund.	conditional.PAC.V2	4.51	0.214
Hann verður líklega heima með börnunum sínum ef hann kemur ekki í bíó í kvöld.	conditional.PAC.V2	5.29	0.444
Hann þarf líklega á hjálp að halda ef hann hættir ekki að reykja bráðum.	conditional.PAC.V2	5.71	0.734

(continued)

TestSent	Coding	Mean response	Mean z-scores
Hún hlýtur að vera veik ef hún kemur ekki á æfingu í dag.	conditional.PAC.V2	6.01	0.677
Af hverju fer hann í söngvakeppni ef hann ekki kann að syngja?	conditional.PAC.V3	3.27	-0.229
Hann fékk líklega nýja vinnu ef hann ekki kemur lengur á kaffihús daglega.	conditional.PAC.V3	1.46	-1.059
Hann kann líklega ekki að synda ef hann aldrei fer í sund.	conditional.PAC.V3	3.02	-0.460
Hann verður líklega heima með börnunum sínum ef hann ekki kemur í bíó í kvöld.	conditional.PAC.V3	2.74	-0.590
Hann þarf líklega á hjálp að halda ef hann ekki hættir að reykja bráðum.	conditional.PAC.V3	3.20	-0.346
Hún hlýtur að vera veik ef hún ekki kemur á æfingu í dag.	conditional.PAC.V3	2.66	-0.567
Andri ætlar að koma heim fyrir helgina svo að hann missi ekki af afmælisveislu dóttur sinnar.	purpose.CAC.V2	6.26	0.950
Hann pantaði pizzu heim þannig að hann þyrfti ekki að fara út í þessu veðri.	purpose.CAC.V2	4.89	0.241
Haraldur ætlar að stilla vejaraklukkuna svo að hann vakni ekki of seint fyrir atvinnuviðtalið.	purpose.CAC.V2	6.28	0.904
Hún keypti eigin gönguskiði þannig að hún þurfi ekki að bíða í röð til að leigja þau.	purpose.CAC.V2	4.47	0.140
Við ætlum að bjóða Haraldi heim til okkar þannig að hann verði ekki einn um jólin.	purpose.CAC.V2	5.97	0.750
Við þurfum að takmarka matarneysluna hjá kettinum okkar svo að hann verði ekki of feitur.	purpose.CAC.V2	5.46	0.585
Andri ætlar að koma heim fyrir helgina svo að hann ekki missi af afmælisveislu dóttur sinnar.	purpose.CAC.V3	2.77	-0.487
Hann pantaði pizzu heim þannig að hann ekki þyrfti að fara út í þessu veðri.	purpose.CAC.V3	2.03	-0.830
Haraldur ætlar að stilla vejaraklukkuna svo að hann ekki vakni of seint fyrir atvinnuviðtalið.	purpose.CAC.V3	1.99	-0.889
Hún keypti eigin gönguskiði þannig að hún ekki þurfi að bíða í röð til að leigja þau.	purpose.CAC.V3	2.22	-0.740
Við ætlum að bjóða Haraldi heim til okkar þannig að hann ekki verði einn um jólin.	purpose.CAC.V3	3.46	-0.174
Við þurfum að takmarka matarneysluna hjá kettinum okkar svo að hann ekki verði of feitur.	purpose.CAC.V3	3.85	-0.106
Hann gerði bananabraud með gömlum bönunum þannig að hann þurfti ekki að henda þeim.	result.PAC.V2	4.22	0.029
Hún fékk far hjá mannum sínum þannig að hún kom ekki of seint í vinnuna.	result.PAC.V2	4.94	0.279
Stéfan fékk matareitrun eftir að hafa borðað kjúkling þannig að hann vill aldrei borða svoléiðis mat aftur.	result.PAC.V2	4.99	0.418
Við festum hilluna betur svo að hún datt ekki niður aftur.	result.PAC.V2	2.00	-0.797
Ég faldi bókina svo að hann gat ekki lesið hana.	result.PAC.V2	4.11	0.010
Ég missti samband við menntaskólavini mína svo að ég sá ekki nema suma þeirra aftur.	result.PAC.V2	4.28	0.120
Hann gerði bananabraud með gömlum bönunum þannig að hann ekki þurfti að henda þeim.	result.PAC.V3	2.27	-0.704
Hún fékk far hjá mannum sínum þannig að hún ekki kom of seint í vinnuna.	result.PAC.V3	2.20	-0.789
Stéfan fékk matareitrun eftir að hafa borðað kjúkling þannig að hann aldrei vill borða svoléiðis mat aftur.	result.PAC.V3	1.93	-0.811
Við festum hilluna betur svo að hún ekki datt niður aftur.	result.PAC.V3	1.43	-1.030
Ég faldi bókina svo að hann gat ekki lesið hana.	result.PAC.V3	2.52	-0.667
Ég missti samband við menntaskólavini mína svo að ég ekki sá nema suma þeirra aftur.	result.PAC.V3	2.18	-0.845
Börnin mín voru ósátt þegar þau fengu ekki óskudagsbúninga í ár.	temporal.CAC.V2	5.74	0.674
Hann gafst upp á að keyra eftir að hann stóðst ekki bílprófið í fimmta skipti.	temporal.CAC.V2	5.48	0.555
Hún tók kökuna úr ofninum þegar hún var ekki fullbökud enþá.	temporal.CAC.V2	3.29	-0.260
Kötturinn minn mjálmar og mjálmar þegar hann fær ekki nóg að borða á morgnana.	temporal.CAC.V2	6.32	0.823
Sindri fékk að vinna hjá pabba sínum meðan hann var ekki með fasta vinnu.	temporal.CAC.V2	6.24	0.821
Unga parið átti erfitt með að ná endum saman meðan þau fengu ekki atvinnuleysisbætur.	temporal.CAC.V2	5.70	0.670
Börnin mín voru ósátt þegar þau ekki fengu óskudagsbúninga í ár.	temporal.CAC.V3	2.35	-0.734
Hann gafst upp á að keyra eftir að hann ekki stóðst bílprófið í fimmta skipti.	temporal.CAC.V3	2.21	-0.689
Hún tók kökuna úr ofninum þegar hún ekki var fullbökud enþá.	temporal.CAC.V3	2.10	-0.752
Kötturinn minn mjálmar og mjálmar þegar hann ekki fær nóg að borða á morgnana.	temporal.CAC.V3	2.75	-0.466
Sindri fékk að vinna hjá pabba sínum meðan hann ekki var með fasta vinnu.	temporal.CAC.V3	3.39	-0.309
Unga parið átti erfitt með að ná endum saman meðan þau ekki fengu atvinnuleysisbætur.	temporal.CAC.V3	2.82	-0.538
Sindri hefur farið til Spánar þrisvar meðan ég fékk aldrei að fara til útlanda.	temporal.PAC.V2	5.15	0.408
Stebbi er búinn að skrifa drög að ritgerðinni sinni meðan ég hef ekki einu sinni byrjað að safna gögnum fyrir mína.	temporal.PAC.V2	5.80	0.624
Stúdentarnir pöntuðu ný einstök á meðan þeir sýndu ekki neinn áhuga á að nota þau gömlu.	temporal.PAC.V2	2.69	-0.542
Sóley er búin að prjóna margar peysur þegar ég get ekki einu sinni sett lykkjur á prjóna.	temporal.PAC.V2	3.96	0.020
Á meðan þeir nota aldrei mínar bækur í kennslu, nota þeir þínar bækur í tveimur námskeiðum.	temporal.PAC.V2	3.74	-0.177
Þegar ég gat ekki einu sinni keypt bíl voru allir að kaupa íbúð.	temporal.PAC.V2	5.82	0.755
Sindri hefur farið til Spánar þrisvar meðan ég aldrei fékk að fara til útlanda.	temporal.PAC.V3	2.54	-0.649
Stebbi er búinn að skrifa drög að ritgerðinni sinni meðan ég hef einu sinni byrjað að safna gögnum fyrir mína.	temporal.PAC.V3	2.72	-0.555
Stúdentarnir pöntuðu ný einstök á meðan þeir ekki sýndu neinn áhuga á að nota þau gömlu.	temporal.PAC.V3	1.36	-1.041
Sóley er búin að prjóna margar peysur þegar ég ekki get einu sinni sett lykkjur á prjóna.	temporal.PAC.V3	2.01	-0.775
Á meðan þeir aldrei nota mínar bækur í kennslu, nota þeir þínar bækur í tveimur námskeiðum.	temporal.PAC.V3	1.50	-1.105
Þegar ég ekki gat einu sinni keypt bíl voru allir að kaupa íbúð.	temporal.PAC.V3	2.97	-0.459

II Results from statistical hypothesis testing

Syntactic types

order	.y.	group1	group2	n1	n2	statistic	p	p.adj	p.adj.signif
V2	zscores	CAC	PAC	1221	2442	-0.223	0.824	1.000	ns
V2	zscores	CAC	NON-IC	1221	407	-15.525	0.000	0.000	****
V2	zscores	PAC	NON-IC	2442	407	-16.451	0.000	0.000	****
V3	zscores	CAC	PAC	1221	2442	-1.814	0.070	0.209	ns
V3	zscores	CAC	NON-IC	1221	407	-3.347	0.001	0.002	**
V3	zscores	PAC	NON-IC	2442	407	-2.391	0.017	0.050	ns

Semantic types

.y.	group1	group2	n1	n2	statistic	p	p.adj	p.adj.signif
zscores	causal	concessive	1221	407	3.217	0.001	0.019	*
zscores	causal	conditional	1221	814	2.375	0.018	0.263	ns
zscores	causal	purpose	1221	407	2.006	0.045	0.672	ns
zscores	causal	result	1221	407	-3.847	0.000	0.002	**
zscores	causal	temporal	1221	814	-0.823	0.411	1.000	ns
zscores	concessive	conditional	407	814	-1.262	0.207	1.000	ns
zscores	concessive	purpose	407	407	-0.988	0.323	1.000	ns
zscores	concessive	result	407	407	-5.767	0.000	0.000	****
zscores	concessive	temporal	407	814	-3.646	0.000	0.004	**
zscores	conditional	purpose	814	407	0.121	0.903	1.000	ns
zscores	conditional	result	814	407	-5.397	0.000	0.000	****
zscores	conditional	temporal	814	814	-2.919	0.004	0.053	ns
zscores	purpose	result	407	407	-4.779	0.000	0.000	****
zscores	purpose	temporal	407	814	-2.505	0.012	0.184	ns
zscores	result	temporal	407	814	3.014	0.003	0.039	*

Age

.y.	group1	group2	n1	n2	statistic	p	p.adj	p.adj.signif
zscores	16–29	30–39	270	730	1.106	0.269	1.000	ns
zscores	16–29	40–49	270	910	3.252	0.001	0.011	*
zscores	16–29	50–59	270	860	3.589	0.000	0.003	**
zscores	16–29	60 or older	270	1300	4.887	0.000	0.000	****
zscores	30–39	40–49	730	910	2.950	0.003	0.032	*
zscores	30–39	50–59	730	860	3.409	0.001	0.007	**
zscores	30–39	60 or older	730	1300	5.362	0.000	0.000	****
zscores	40–49	50–59	910	860	0.525	0.600	1.000	ns
zscores	40–49	60 or older	910	1300	2.347	0.019	0.189	ns
zscores	50–59	60 or older	860	1300	1.740	0.082	0.819	ns

Negation on the Move: The Pragmatics of Negative Preposing in Icelandic *

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Abstract

This paper explores the syntactic and pragmatic constraints on Negative Preposing (NP) in Icelandic, with a focus on the preposing of negation in finite clauses with an overt subject. While negation in Icelandic typically appears post-verbally, we show that in specific contexts, negation can be fronted. Through a comparative analysis with other Germanic V2 languages and data from questionnaires, we investigate the environments in which NP is permissible and highlight its higher prevalence in Icelandic. We argue that NP serves two primary functions: as a stylistic device, particularly in conjunct negation and mitigated questions, and as a marker of epistemic certainty, allowing speakers to convey varying degrees of confidence or skepticism in negated propositions. Our findings reveal that NP is not merely a syntactic variation but plays a crucial role in signaling discourse-related meanings, particularly in expressing the speaker's stance toward the truth of a proposition.

1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the syntactic and pragmatic limitations associated with the preposing of the negation in Icelandic, namely, the fronting of the sentential negation to a preverbal position.

In Icelandic, the negative adverb *ekki* ('not') generally follows the finite verb, as illustrated in the examples below:

- (1) Jón las **ekki** bókina.
Jón read not book-the
'Jón did not read the book'
- (2) Jón hefur **ekki** lesið bókina.
Jón has not read book-the
'Jón has not read the book'

Icelandic exhibits symmetrical V2 word order, meaning that the verb appears in the second position in both main clauses and embedded clauses. This contrasts with the asymmetrical V2

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structures found in Mainland Scandinavian languages, which typically enforce V2 word order only in main clauses (for discussions on various exceptions to this main pattern, see Þráinsson (2010)). In Icelandic, negation thus generally follows the finite verb even in subordinate clauses:

- (3) Hann efast um að hún *(hafi) ekki (*hafi) hitt þennan mann.
he doubts about that she has not has met this man
'He doubts that she has not met this man'

Compare with Norwegian, an asymmetric V2 language:

- (4) Han tvilte på at hun *(hadde) ikke *(hadde) møtt denne mannen.
he doubted on that she had not had met this man
'He doubts that she has not met this man'

While Icelandic negation generally surfaces in a postverbal position, there are some contexts in which this may appear preverbally. Examples of sentences with preverbal negation are illustrated in (5)–(8) below. As can be seen from these examples, fronted negation can be found in questions, declaratives, coordinated clauses, subordinate clauses as well as commands:

- (5) **Ekki** býr Haraldur á Akureyri?
not lives Haraldur in Akureyri
'Does Haraldur really live in Akureyri?'
- (6) **Ekki** höfðum við hugmynd um að þetta væri svona alvarlegt.
not had we idea about that this be so serious
'We really had no idea that this was so serious'
- (7) Hann á enga peninga og **ekki** á hann húsnæði.
He has no money and not has he housing
'He has no money and no housing'
- (8) Þingmaðurinn sagði að **ekki** vildi hann gagnrýna fólk fyrir það sem það hefði gert í fjarlægri fortíð.
had done in fjarlægri fortíð
'The PM said that he did not want to criticize people for what they did in the distant past'
- (9) **Ekki** fara!
not go
'Don't go!'

We will refer to the fronting of the negation to clause-initial position as *negative preposing* (NP). Our discussion will be centered around finite clauses with an overt subject, thus excluding examples like (9).

As detailed in Brandtler and Håkansson (2014), there is considerable variation among the Germanic V2 languages regarding the grammaticality of negative preposing. In German, Dutch, Norwegian and Swedish, *nicht*, *niet*, *ikke* and *inte*, can be preposed in certain very specific contexts only (see Jäger (2008) for German, Zeijlstra (2013) for Dutch and Faarlund et al. (1997) for Norwegian). In Danish, fronting of *ikke* is heavily restricted (see Christensen (2003)). At the opposite end of the spectrum is Icelandic, where, to quote Þráinsson (2007:123), “negation can be preposed rather easily”. This observation is corroborated by Callegari and Angantýsson (2023)’s corpus study, which shows that in 28% of Icelandic V2 clauses containing negation, the negation appears preverbally. In embedded V2 clauses, this pattern occurs at roughly half that rate, with 16% of such clauses featuring preposed negation. These rates significantly exceed those reported for Swedish by Brandtler and Håkansson (2014): the authors show that the peak occurrence of clause-initial negation in Swedish was during the Old Swedish period (circa 1225–1526), where it reached a maximum of about 8% of all instances of negation.

In this article, we focus on identifying and describing the specific pragmatic contexts within Icelandic that allow for the positioning of negation clause-initially. We propose that NP serves two main functions: it acts as a marker of epistemic certainty, signaling varying degrees of speaker confidence or skepticism, and it also functions as a stylistic device in certain contexts, such as conjunct negation and mitigated questions.

This article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we present background findings on NP, including a review of previous mentions of NP in the literature on Icelandic syntax. We also examine NP in other North Germanic languages, focusing on the pragmatic contexts identified by Lindström (2007), and provide examples of NP from Icelandic corpora and online texts. Section 3 introduces the results of a questionnaire study conducted with native Icelandic speakers, which investigates the acceptability of NP across different environments. In Section 4, we analyze the findings from our questionnaire, and argue that NP in Icelandic serves two distinct functions. We posit that NP is not only used as a stylistic device in specific contexts like conjunct negation and mitigated questions but also plays a crucial role in conveying epistemic certainty. Through NP, speakers signal varying degrees of confidence or doubt about the truth of a negated proposition, revealing its significance in expressing the speaker’s stance in discourse. Finally, Section 5 summarizes our conclusions and discusses potential directions for future research on NP in Icelandic.

2 Background

In this section, we first provide an overview of Negative Preposing (NP) in North Germanic languages, focusing on Lindström’s (2007) classification of NP functions, including responsive, additive, and interrogative uses; we discuss examples from Swedish and Norwegian to illustrate these

functions. We then turn to mentions of NP in Icelandic literature, highlighting its use in stylistic and pragmatic contexts. Finally, we present examples of NP from Icelandic corpora, emphasizing its role in conveying irony, understatements, and emphatic negation, as well as its occurrence in lexicalized expressions. By establishing this background, we lay the foundation for discussing the specific pragmatic contexts that license NP in Icelandic, which we explore in the following sections.

2.1 Negative Preposing in North-Germanic

Lindström (2007) offers a comprehensive overview of the various functions NPs can serve across different Northern European languages, with a particular focus on North Germanic languages and Finnish. Due to the relevance of his typology to our study, we will briefly review his classification of NP functions. Lindström (2007) identifies three main functions of sentence-initial negation in Northern European languages: *responsive*, *additive* and *interrogative*. Before exploring such possibilities of NP in Icelandic, let us consider some of his examples from (Finland) Swedish and Norwegian.

According to Lindström (2007), NP in a responsive context comments on a previous action within an interactional sequence, rather than initiating a new sequence of actions. Compare his (constructed) examples (2007:13) in (10) and (11).

(10) Det regnar **inte**.
it rains not
'It does not rain'

(11) **Inte** regnar det.
not rains it
'It does not rain (to be sure).'

Example (10) merely states a fact whereas (11) “implies that the speaker had been informed (by someone or by some circumstance) that it would rain; however, the speaker can very well observe that this is not the case and then, by knowing better, contradicts the prior information/ expectation/ presupposition” (Lindström 2007:13).

Another context in which NP can appear is conjunct negation, where negation is applied to multiple attributes or actions within a single sentence, as exemplified in example (12), from Norwegian:

(12) **Ikkje** veit eg kva ho heiter, og **ikkje** hugsar eg telefonnummeret hennar.
not know I what she is-called, and not remember I phone-number-the her
'I don't know what her name is, and I don't remember her telephone number' (? :814)

Lindström (2007) dubs this type of NP “additive” negation.

The third category of NP is *interrogative negation*, where the negation is fronted in questions. An example is given in (13) (Lindström 2007:11):

- (13) **Inte** har du en vinöppnare att låna ut?
NEG have you a wine.opener to lend out
‘You don’t have a wine opener to lend?’

According to Lindström (2007), although interrogative NP is less frequent overall (as questions tend to occur less often than assertions in everyday conversations), it is used systematically in Finland Swedish, and to some extent in Sweden Swedish as well. Structurally, interrogative negation shares the same word order as declaratives with fronted negation, but the key difference lies in the intonation, which marks the construction as a question.

2.2 Mentions of NP in the Literature on Icelandic Syntax

There are some sporadic mentions of NP in Icelandic in the literature, but no systematic overview or analysis of the phenomenon exists to our knowledge. For instance, in their discussion of non-subject initial constructions in Icelandic, Svavarsdóttir and Jónsdóttir (1993) mention the possibility of adverbial fronting, including NP as in (14).

- (14) **EKKI** leika stelpurnar sér að dúkkum.
not play girls-the REFL to dolls
‘The girls don’t play with dolls’ (Svavarsdóttir and Jónsdóttir 1993:86)

Svavarsdóttir and Jónsdóttir (1993) claim that fronting of this type requires an emphasis on the negation; however, they do not elaborate on its pragmatic function.

Jónsson (1996), who argues that sentential negation is the specifier of Spec-NegP in Icelandic, also mentions that the negation can be topicalized. In particular, Jónsson (1996) provides example (15) to illustrate this:

- (15) **EKKI** hefur María stolið smjörinu.
not has María stolen butter-the
‘Mary has not stolen the butter’

Jónsson states that declaratives like (15) are uncommon but “they clearly exist and they have the same interpretation as declaratives with *ekki* inside NegP” (Jónsson 1996:98).

Práinsson (2007), on the other hand, suggests that NP might be associated with differences in meaning with respect to when the negation is realized post-verbally. For example, Práinsson claims that (16) can mean something like ‘I can’t believe that Haraldur has lived in Akureyri’, “given the right intonation” (Práinsson 2007:343):

- (16) **Ekki** hefur Haraldur búið á Akureyri.
not has Haraldur lived in Akureyri
'It doesn't seem that Haraldur has lived in Akureyri'

He also maintains that the fronting of negation often carries a stylistic value.

Based on these insights into NP in Icelandic, one can say that (i) syntactically, NP is definitely an available construction, (ii) prosodically, its availability is possibly associated with certain intonation and stress patterns, and (iii), stylistically, NP might be more widely used or accepted in certain registers. However, not much has been said about the possible pragmatic effects of NP in Icelandic.

2.3 NP in Icelandic Corpora and Texts

To identify the pragmatic contexts and syntactic structures that license NP in Icelandic, we began by extracting instances of NP from various Icelandic texts and corpora. We utilized the Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC), a syntactically annotated collection of Icelandic texts ranging from around 1150 to the present day, covering a variety of genres, including sagas, legal documents, and religious writings.

Based on this initial investigation, as well as insights from a colleague (Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson, p.c.), we identified several uses of NP that may be characteristic of Icelandic, especially as observed in older texts.

For instance, NP can be used to convey ironic interpretations, often through the rhetorical device of litotes, which involves deliberate understatement to achieve an effect Van der Wouden (1996). In the Icelandic sagas, this is a common figure of speech (Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson, p.c., pointed this out to us).

- (17) **Ekki** þótti hann dæll maður.
Not seemed he easy man
'He was not considered an easy person'
(*Grettis saga*, chapter 30)

Example (17) can essentially be paraphrased as "he was NOT considered an easy person", indirectly implying that he was, in fact, regarded as quite difficult. Here, NP adds a layer of irony by underplaying the difficulty, thereby implying the opposite of what is literally stated.

In example (18), the author suggests an interpretation that goes beyond the literal phrasing. Rather than directly stating that Hallgerður killed the servants, the sentence implies that she did not allow them to die of old age:

- (18) **Ekki** lætur Hallgerður verða ellidauða húskarla vora.
Not lets Hallgerður become old-dead servants our

‘Hallgerður does not let our servants die of old age’
(*Brennu-Njáls saga*, chapter 38)

The use of NP in this sentence creates an implicit meaning: Hallgerður actively prevented the servants from dying naturally in their old age, suggesting that she had them killed before they could grow old. The stylistic effect here lies in the understatement created by negating the most natural scenario (dying of old age) to imply a more drastic action (killing them). Although a similar interpretation could be achieved with the negation in the typical post-verbal position, NP here intensifies the irony and makes the implied meaning more striking.

A related context in which NP can be found, not discussed in the literature on Icelandic syntax to our knowledge, involves sentences that convey meanings similar to those triggered by Negative Polarity Items (NPIs). An example of this can be seen in (19):

- (19) **Eigi** var gull eða silfur sparað við spjótin.
Not was gold or silver spared at spears-the
‘No gold or silver was spared on the spears’

In this example, the sentence “Eigi var gull eða silfur sparað við spjótin” uses NP to indicate that no gold or silver was spared when making the spears. The fronting of “eigi”, an archaic form of negation in Icelandic, places strong emphasis on the negation, giving the impression of an absolute or exhaustive negation. This suggests that every possible resource of gold or silver was used, leaving none unutilized.

2.4 Lexicalized expressions

Finally, several commonly used verbs may license NP in Icelandic, but this licensing is generally restricted to contexts where the subject is a first-person pronoun. This phenomenon can be compared to Swedish, as discussed by Brandtler and Håkansson (2014:114), who noted that in Swedish, the phrase *Inte vet jag* (‘I don’t know’) “may occur in any situational context without any apparent trigger, but is limited to the verb *vet* ‘know’ with the subject in the first person singular”.

While NP is restricted to the verb ‘know’ in Swedish, there seem to be other verbs in Icelandic that allow for NP. Examples include the following (items are presented with the corresponding Google hits figure):

- *Ekki veit ég* (= ‘I don’t know’): 85,000 hits
- *Ekki ætla ég* (= ‘I don’t plan on’): 70,400 hits
- *Ekki get ég* (= ‘I can’t’): 32,200 hits
- *Ekki held ég* (= ‘I don’t think’): 12,700 hits
- *Ekki er ég viss um* (= ‘I am not sure about’): 12,600 hits

- *Ekki finnst mér* (= ‘I don’t find something to be *x*’): 9,790 hits

These numbers suggest that expressions of this type, especially involving verbs of saying and believing, are fairly common in Icelandic. However, as we will see in Section 4, our questionnaire results indicate that not all speakers accept certain forms like *Ekki held ég*, suggesting variability in usage and acceptability.

2.5 Interim questions

The overview in this section gives rise to several questions that we will discuss in the following sections. First, we would like to know to what extent the different pragmatic uses of NP mentioned in 2.2 are accepted by native speakers of Icelandic. Could it be, for instance, that there is a difference between the availability and optionality of NP in questions vs. declaratives? Second, to what degree is NP related to formal circumstances or stylistic sophistication? Finally, if a common verb of saying or believing is involved, can NP be more easily allowed in pragmatic contexts that otherwise would restrict such fronting?

3 Questionnaire

To explore the variation among Icelandic speakers regarding the acceptability of negation preposing, we created a 21-item questionnaire, which we distributed to 20 native speakers of Icelandic. All of our respondents were in the 20-35 age group. All participants were affiliated with the Faculty of *Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies* at the University of Iceland and thus had some background in Linguistics. Our respondents consisted of current BA and MA students in Linguistics, students who had recently graduated from a Linguistics program as well as postdoctoral researchers in Linguistics and Language Technology.

Participants were informed that test items would include either short dialogues or individual sentences representing different ways to express a thought. While some test items involved exchanges between two unspecified individuals referred to as “A” and “B”, others presented alternate ways of conveying the same statement or sentiment. Participants were instructed to mark all options they found natural or appropriate based on ordinary spoken language. This allowed them to select more than one option if they deemed multiple responses acceptable. Participants were given the option to add comments if they had any insights or reasons for why they made, or did not make, a specific selection.

Below is an example of a test item:

(20) **A:** [Sþyrill í spurningakeppni]: Nú er spurt, hvert var móðurmál Astrid Lindgren?

A: [Quizmaster]: Now the question is, what was Astrid Lindgren’s native language?

B: [Keppandi]: Danska?

B: [Contestant]: Danish?

A: Nei, það var ekki danska. A: No, it was not Danish.

A: Nei, ekki var það danska. A: No, not was it Danish.

A: Nei, danska var það ekki. A: No, Danish was it not.

Athugasemd ef við á: *Comment, if applicable:*

Example (20) illustrates a short dialogue between a quizmaster (A) and a contestant (B). The quizmaster asks about Astrid Lindgren's native language, and the contestant guesses "Danish". Three different options are then given as response that the quizmaster could use to indicate that the contestant's answer is incorrect: neutral word order (first option), negative preposing (second option), and topicalization of "Danska" (third option). Participants could select one, two or all three options depending on which structure they deemed acceptable given the specific preceding context presented.

Þráinsson et al. (2013) discuss the possible drawbacks of using relative judgments of this type as opposed to absolute judgments, i.e. where the participants evaluate one variant at a time. For instance, it turned out that the subjects in their study were generally reluctant to select two or more alternatives, even though they would accept such variants in an absolute judgment task. According to Þráinsson et al, this means that "non-selection of a given variant does not in fact present negative information of the sort obtained when speakers explicitly reject an example that they are evaluating in an absolute judgement task" (Þráinsson et al. 2013:66). In our study, we decided to resort to this method despite this possible drawback, since we were interested in the direct comparison of alternatives, with the participation of subjects who are (to a varying degree) aware of linguistic variation in general. In fact, this method and selection of participants yielded some valuable and insightful comments regarding the pragmatics, syntax and prosody of NP in Icelandic.

The 21 items we included in the questionnaire sampled a variety of different contexts in which NP might be possible. These included different types of *yes/no* questions and different types of declarative statements. The full list of test items is provided in the Appendices.

3.1 Overall NP Acceptability and Inter-Participant Variation

For each test item, we looked at the overall percentage of participants that selected the NP option as either a) one of the acceptable options, or b) the only possible option given the specific preceding context. This was meant to show i) the average percentage of participants that accept NP for a given item, ii) the average degree of variation in the acceptability of NP items -i.e. what is the highest and what is the lowest percentage of respondents that accept the NP test option-, and iii) which test items show the highest and lowest degree of acceptability for the NP option.

Concerning (i), we see that on average, participants marked the negative-preposing option as acceptable 46.8% of the time. Within this 46.8%, however, we observe considerable variation. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Figure 1 displays the number of examples corresponding to different ranges of participant acceptance percentages for the NP option. The y-axis represents the percentage ranges of participants who accepted the NP option, segmented into 10% increments from 0-10% up to 90-100%. The x-axis indicates the number of examples for each percentage range.

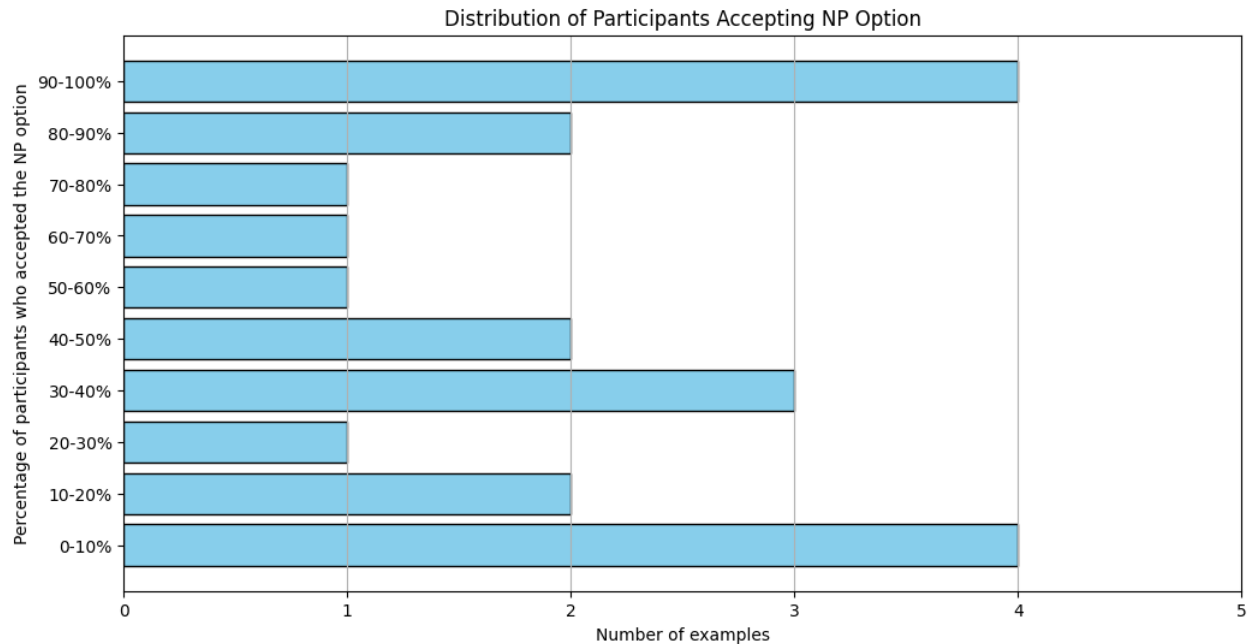


Figure 1: Histogram of Participants Accepting NP Option

As can be seen in Figure 1, there are 4 examples where 0-10% of participants accepted the NP option, indicating a strong consensus that these items were not acceptable. Similarly, there are 4 examples where 90-100% of participants accepted the NP option, suggesting a strong consensus that these items were acceptable. Ranges like 20-30%, 40-50%, 50-60%, 60-70%, 70-80% on the other hand have fewer examples, indicating lower frequency of these specific levels of agreement. Overall, the chart provides a visualization of how often different proportions of participants accepted the NP option across various examples. It highlights that the most frequent levels of agreement are at the extremes (0-10% and 90-100%), with some peaks at intermediate agreement levels. This distribution suggests that participants tended to either strongly agree or strongly disagree on the acceptability of the NP option for some examples, with fewer instances of moderate agreement.

Another measurement we were interested in was the rate of inter-participant agreement, i.e. how often different participants selected the same response or set of responses given an identical test item. Since our participants could select multiple options for each of the 21 test items, we could

not rely on traditional methods for calculating inter-annotator agreement such as Cohen’s Kappa or Fleiss’ Kappa. To calculate agreement, we thus followed Marchal et al. (2022), who specifically deal with linguistic questionnaires where annotators can select multiple options.

To obtain a measure of agreement in our participants’ responses, we calculated the observed agreement by comparing the intersection of labels for each item between all pairs of annotators. Our analysis revealed an *Observed Agreement* of 0.72698. The observed agreement of 0.73 indicates that annotators agreed on their grammaticality judgments about 73% of the time. This level of agreement suggests that while there is substantial consensus among annotators, there is also room for variation.

Figure 2 provides an overview of which options (preverbal negation sentence, postverbal negation sentence, both preverbal and postverbal negation) were marked as acceptable by how many participants for each of the 21 test items. In Figure 2, the different labels represent different types of sentence structures: PreV (preverbal negation), PostV (postverbal negation), and PostV-PreV (both preverbal and postverbal negation). The vertical axis indicates the frequency, i.e., how many participants selected each option for a given test item, while the horizontal axis lists the test items from 1 to 21.

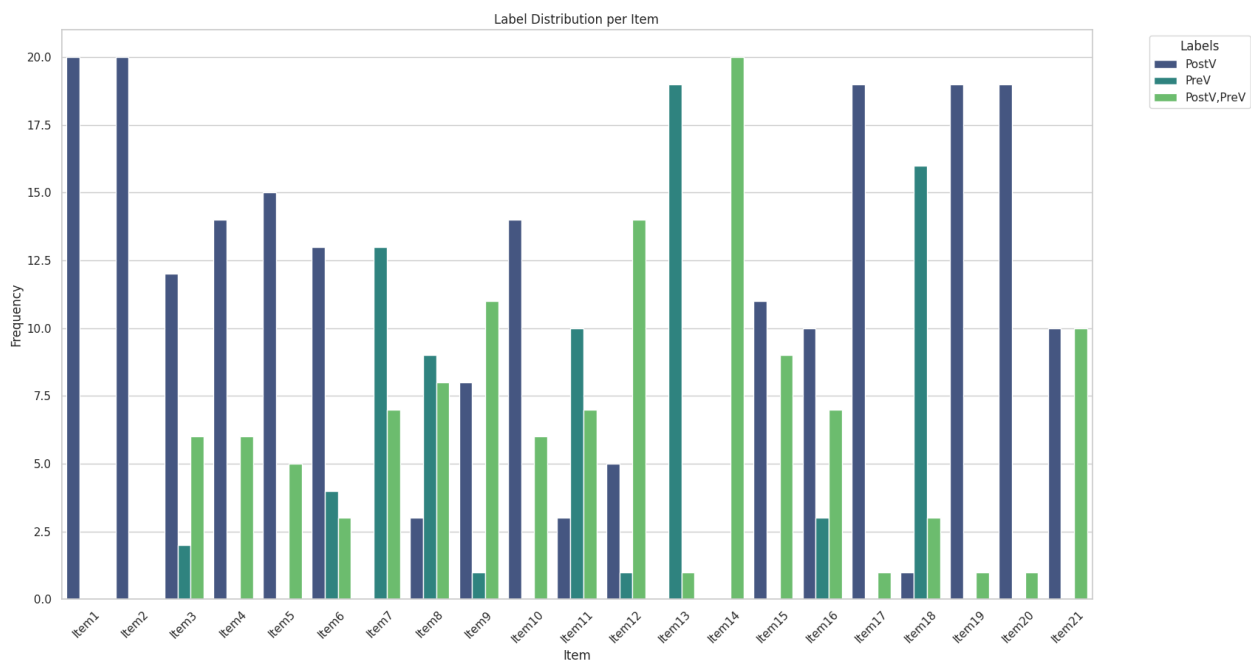


Figure 2: Label Selection Across Different Items

Those test items with the highest number of bars correspond to those items for which we observe higher inter-participant variation. For example, for test item (8), all three possible combinations of labels were selected by at least one participant. In contrast, items like (1) and (2) exhibit no variation, with participants unanimously selecting PostV, reflecting a strong consensus favoring

postverbal negation.

Overall, the figure highlights the varying degrees of agreement among participants, with some items showing clear preferences for a particular negation structure, while others —such as item 8— demonstrate greater diversity in participant judgments.

3.2 Zooming In on Acceptable and Unacceptable Test Items

Let us now zoom in on the specific test items to show which examples exhibit the highest acceptability rate for NP, and which the lowest.

Table 1 illustrates acceptability rates for those test items that displayed the highest acceptability rate for NP, as well as the corresponding rate of inter-participant agreement. The column “Post” (= *Post-Verbal Negation*) presents the percentage of participants who selected the post-verbal negation option as acceptable, while the “Pre” (= *Pre-Verbal Negation*) column shows the percentage of participants who marked the pre-verbal negation option as acceptable. Note that the acceptability rate results reported in Table 1 are aggregated: for test item (21), for instance, the table states that 35% of participants marked the post-verbal negation option as acceptable, and 100% marked the pre-verbal negation option as acceptable. The total amounts to more than 100% because some participants marked as acceptable both the pre-verbal and the post-verbal negation option.

Also note that for easier interpretation of these results, items where participants had to choose from three options (a total of three test items) were aggregated. Specifically, the two post-verbal options were combined into one.

Table 1: Test Items with the Highest Acceptability Rate for NP

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	35%	100%	0.7
(21) A: þetta er frábærlega skrifað hjá Laxness! this is excellently written by Laxness 'This is excellently written by Laxness!' B: Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta? not has he written this 'Has he really written this?' B': Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta? he has not written this 'He has not written this?'			
	15%	100%	0.91
(22) A: [Þjónn á veitingastað]: Get ég aðstoðað? waiter at restaurant: can I assist '[Waiter at a restaurant]: Can I help you?' B: Ekki áttu meira brauð? not have-you more bread 'Do you have more bread, by any chance?' B': Áttu ekki meira brauð? have-you not more bread 'Don't you have more bread?'			
	20%	90%	0.68
(23) A: Niðurstöðurnar úr rannsókninni virtust results.the from study.the seemed ekki koma læknum á óvart. not come doctors.DAT on surprise 'The results of the research did not seem to surprise the doctors.' B: Ekki vissu þeir að þetta væri svona not knew they that this was so alvarlegt? serious 'Did they really know the situation was this serious?' B': Vissu þeir ekki að þetta væri svona knew they not that this was so alvarlegt? serious 'Didn't they know that this was so serious?'			

Continued on next page

Table 1: – continued from previous page

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	95%	90%	0.95
<p>(24) A: (Situr við skrifborð þegar B kemur inn) sits by desk when B comes in '(Sits at the desk when B comes in)' B: Hefur þú séð Guðmund í dag? have you seen Guðmundur in day 'Have you seen Guðmundur today?' B': Ekki hefur þú séð Guðmund í not have you seen Guðmundur in dag? day 'Have you seen Guðmundur today by any chance?' B'': Hefur þú ekki séð Guðmund í have you not seen Guðmundur in dag? day 'Haven't you seen Guðmundur today?'</p>			
	55%	85%	0.56
<p>(25) A: Jón er nú ekki mjög myndarlegur og Jón is now not very handsome and hann er ekki skemmtilegur! he is not entertaining 'Jón is not very handsome and he is not entertaining!' A': Jón er nú ekki mjög myndarlegur og Jón is now not very handsome and ekki er hann skemmtilegur! not is he entertaining 'Jón is not very handsome and he is not entertaining!'</p>			

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Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	55%	85%	0.55
<p>(26) A: [Horfir út um gluggann]. Það er nú looks out the window. it is now meira hvað þeim gengur illa að grafa more what them goes poorly to dig þennan skurð. this ditch ‘[Looks out the window]. It is really something how poorly they are doing dig- ging this ditch.’</p> <p>B: Og ekki hafa þeir gert mikið í dag. and not have they done much in day ‘And they have not done much today.’</p> <p>B’: Og þeir hafa ekki gert mikið í dag. and they have not done much in day ‘And they have not done much today.’</p>			
	95%	70%	0.67
<p>(27) A: [Spyrill í spurningakeppni]: Nú er quizmaster in quiz-competition now is spurt, hvert var móðurmál Astrid asked what was mother-tongue Astrid Lindgren? Lindgren ‘[Quizmaster in a quiz competition]: Now the question is, what was Astrid Lindgren’s mother tongue?’</p> <p>B: [Keppandi]: Danska? contestant Danish ‘[Contestant]: Danish?’</p> <p>A: Nei, það var ekki danska. no it was not Danish ‘No, it was not Danish.’</p> <p>A’: Nei, ekki var það danska. no not was it Danish ‘No, it was not Danish.’</p> <p>A’’: Nei, danska var það ekki. no Danish was it not ‘No, Danish it was not.’</p>			

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Table 1: – continued from previous page

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	95%	60%	0.67
<p>(28) A: Málið rann í gegnum þingið issue-the ran in through parliament-the og ekki heyrðist múkk frá and not heard a-peep from stjórnarandstöðunni. opposition-the ‘The issue passed through the parliament and not a peep was heard from the oppo- sition.’</p> <p>A’: Málið rann í gegnum issue-the ran in through þingið og það heyrðist ekki parliament-the and it heard not múkk frá stjórnarandstöðunni. a-peep from opposition-the ‘The issue passed through parliament and not a peep was heard from the opposi- tion.’</p>			
	90%	40%	0.58
<p>(29) A: Eru Jón og Haraldur tvíburar? are Jón and Haraldur twins ‘Are Jón and Haraldur twins?’</p> <p>B: Já. yes ‘Yes.’</p> <p>A: Ekki eru þeir líkir. not are they alike ‘They do not look similar (at all).’</p> <p>A’: Þeir eru ekki líkir. they are not alike ‘They do not look similar (at all).’</p>			

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Table 1: – continued from previous page

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	90%	45%	0.54
<p>(30) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum I was to talk with Haraldur. him virðist líka vel fyrir norðan. seems like well for north 'I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the north.'</p> <p>B: Ekki býr hann á Akureyri? not lives he in Akureyri 'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'</p> <p>B': Býr hann ekki á Akureyri? lives he not in Akureyri 'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'</p>			
	100%	50%	0.59
<p>(31) A: Þessi gjöf er ómerkt. Gæti hún verið this gift is unmarked could it be frá Haraldí frænda á Akureyri? from Haraldur uncle in Akureyri 'This gift is unmarked. Could it be from Uncle Haraldur in Akureyri?'</p> <p>B: Nei, hún getur ekki verið frá honum. no it can not be from him Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel he knows not to wrap so well inn. in</p> <p>B': Nei, ekki getur hún verið frá honum. no not can it be from him Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel he knows not to wrap so well inn. in</p> <p>B'': Nei, frá honum getur hún ekki verið. no from him can it not be Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel he knows not to wrap so well inn. in 'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'</p>			

Let us now look at those test items that displayed the lowest acceptability for the NP option.

Table 2 illustrates acceptability rates for the five items that were rated the lowest, together with the corresponding rate of inter-participant agreement.

Table 2: Examples with the Lowest Acceptability Rate for NP

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
<p>(32) A: Viltu sígarettu? do-you.want cigarette 'Do you want a cigarette?'</p> <p>B: Nei takk, ég reyki ekki. no thanks, I smoke not 'No thanks, I don't smoke.'</p> <p>B': Nei takk, ekki reyki ég. no thanks, not smoke I 'No thanks, I don't smoke.'</p>	100%	0%	1.0
<p>(33) A: Á að rigna á morgun? is to rain tomorrow 'Is it going to rain tomorrow?'</p> <p>B: Ekki held ég það. not think I that 'I don't think so.'</p> <p>B': Það held ég ekki. that think I not 'I don't think so.'</p>	100%	0%	1.0
<p>(34) A: Hún hefur drepið manninn sinn. she has killed her-husband 'She has killed her husband.'</p> <p>B: Hún gerði það ekki. she did it not 'She did not do it.'</p> <p>B': Ekki gerði hún það. not did she it 'She did not do it.'</p>	100%	5%	0.91

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Table 2: – continued from previous page

Example	Post	Pre	Agreement
	100%	10%	0.91
(35) [Hundurinn er í yfirvigt og A sakar B um að hafa gefið honum mat þrátt fyrir samkomulag um annað.] [‘The dog is overweight and A accuses B of having fed him food despite a different agreement.’] A: Þú gafst hundinum! you gave the-dog ‘You fed the dog!’ B: Nei, ekki gerði ég það! no, not did I it ‘No, I did not!’ B’: Nei, ég gerði það ekki! no, I did it not ‘No, I did not do it!’			
	95%	15%	0.66
(36) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum virðist I was to talk with Haraldur. him seems líka vel fyrir sunnan. like well for south ‘I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the South.’ B: Býr hann ekki á Akureyri? lives he not in Akureyri ‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’ B’: Ekki býr hann á Akureyri? not lives he in Akureyri ‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’			

Note that we included both test items (32) and (33) in the questionnaire, despite them exhibiting very similar structures—in both items, Speaker A asks a neutral polarity question, and Speaker B responds with a neutral, information-focused answer. The reason for including (33) is the presence of the lexically frequent verb *að halda* (=‘to think’), allowing us to examine whether the lexical frequency of the main verb affects the acceptability of the noun phrase (NP). Both items showed a 0% acceptability rate for the NP and perfect inter-participant agreement (1.0), indicating that the NP is unacceptable in neutral answers to polarity questions, regardless of the frequency of the main verb. Recall that in Section 2, we observed that verbs like *að halda* appear relatively frequently in constructions with NP based on Google hits, suggesting that this usage is not uncommon in Icelandic. One possible explanation for the discrepancy observed in our questionnaire

results could be a generational difference. All of our questionnaire participants were younger than 35, which raises the possibility that the acceptance of NP with verbs like *að halda* may be declining among younger speakers.

It is also interesting to note that test items 36 and 30 are structurally nearly identical, yet the acceptability rates for NP differ significantly. The NP option in 30 was accepted by 40% of participants, while only 15% accepted the NP option in (36). This disparity is due to a subtle but crucial difference in the preceding context: in (36), Speaker A mentions that Haraldur seems to enjoy living in the South of Iceland, whereas in (30), the same Speaker mentions that Haraldur seems to enjoy living in the *North* of Iceland. Speaker B then utters the very same two propositions as possible responses in both test items. The rate of inter-participant agreement is medium for both examples: 0.54 for (30) and 0.66 for (36).

In Section 4, we examine these test items in greater detail and propose an explanation for the varying degrees of acceptability of the NP option.

4 Negative Preposing: A Composite Phenomenon

We have seen that NP is not equally acceptable in all environments. For example, it seems to be completely out in neutral responses to polarity questions, as we have seen in examples (32) and (33).

One possible explanation for the varying acceptability of NP in different environments in Icelandic could be to suggest that NP represents an instance of *polarity focus*, and that only a specified set of pragmatic types of foci are licensed to give rise to NP.

Not all types of polarity foci are identical: even when something as standard as a nominal phrase is in focus, there are several different pragmatic imports such a constituent may be associated with. As a matter of fact, although the semantics of the focalized expression always remains constant (with the introduction in the discourse of a set of alternatives to the focalized constituent, as in standard Roothian focus semantics (Rooth 1985, 1992)), the relation between such a set of alternatives and the asserted focus may vary. We follow Callegari (2018) in taking the specific relation between the focus and such a set of alternatives to be what licenses a specific pragmatic reading on the focus. In the pragmatically most neutral case, the asserted focus alternative (our constituent in focus) will simply be interpreted as the most appropriate, truth-conditionally adequate alternative given a specific world and context. This type of focus is standardly known as *information focus* or *Ifoc* (Kiss 1998). A typical environment that licenses the presence of an Ifoc is the answer to a wh-question (Halliday 1967; Schwarzschild 1999; Krifka 2001; Reich 2002):

(37) A: What did Usman buy?

B: Usman bought *The Financial Times*.

A focalized constituent may also be interpreted as an overt correction to a previously uttered alternative, alternative which the speaker considers to be incorrect. In this case, a corrective focus (Van Leusen 2004; Bianchi et al. 2012) will obtain:

(38) A: Espen married Tom.

B: Espen married **ANTON**, not Tom!

The focalized constituent might also be contrasted to some other (generally explicitly stated) alternative: this is the case in example (39), where *yesterday* is contrasted with *today*. In (39), we then have a *contrastive* focus:

(39) A: When did you see Tom?

B: I saw him *yesterday*, but I only talked to him *today*.

Arguably, all corrective foci are contrastive, but the opposite entailment does not hold. Finally, a constituent can also be miratively focused (Cruschina 2012; Bianchi et al. 2015, 2016). A focus has a mirative import if the asserted focus alternative is deemed surprising, or anyway unexpected given the speaker's knowledge of the world, or given the situation at hand. In (40), the DP "a giraffe" is miratively focused by virtue of giraffes being an extremely unlikely pet one could get:

(40) Annemieke just bought A GIRAFFE! Can you believe it?!

We follow Bianchi et al. (2015, 2016) in assuming that a mirative reading of the constituent in focus is only licensed if there is at least one focus alternative in the focus value which is deemed to be more likely to lead to a true sentence than the actual asserted content. Likelihood is a relative notion: Bianchi et al. (2015, 2016) take this to be calculated with respect to a relevant modal base, and according to a stereotypical ordering source (see in particular Kratzer (2012); see also Grosz (2012) for an alternative proposal). The mirative import of the DP object in (40) is then licensed because there are several other animals that are intuitively more likely for Annemieke to have gotten as pets.

NP appears to be strongly dispreferred in environments involving corrective polarity focus, as evidenced by the low acceptability of the NP option in examples such as (34) and (35), where Speaker B explicitly corrects the polarity of Speaker A's proposition. This could lead one to hypothesize that NP is restricted to polarity-focus environments that are not corrective-focus environments.

At the same time, an explanation of the acceptability of NP that is grounded on different pragmatic readings of polarity focus cannot be the whole story, as it becomes evident if we compare examples like (32) to examples like (31). Both examples are repeated below as (41) and (42):

- (41) A: Viltu sígarettu?
do-you.want cigarette
'Do you want a cigarette?'
- B: Nei takk, ég reyki ekki.
no thanks, I smoke not
'No thanks, I don't smoke.'
- B': Nei takk, ekki reyki ég.
no thanks, not smoke I
'No thanks, I don't smoke.'
- (42) A: Þessi gjöf er ómerkt. Gæti hún verið frá Haraldí frænda á Akureyri?
this gift is unmarked. could it be from Haraldur uncle in Akureyri
'This gift is unmarked. Could it be from Uncle Haraldur in Akureyri?'
- B: Nei, hún getur ekki verið frá honum. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
no, it can not be from him. he knows not to wrap so well in
'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'
- B': Nei, ekki getur hún verið frá honum. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
no, not can it be from him. he knows not to wrap so well in
'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'

Both (41) and (42) can be described as information-focus polarity environments: in both examples, A asks a polarity question, and B answers the polarity question with a negative statement. However, while NP is completely out in (41), at least 50% of participants found NP acceptable in (42).

Since we reject the analysis of NP as simply a form of polarity focus, it becomes necessary to explore an alternative explanation. NP appears in a variety of environments, and treating it as a phenomenon with a single trigger fails to capture the diversity of its occurrences. Instead, we propose that NP represents a composite, complex phenomenon in Icelandic, with different instances of NP arising from distinct triggers. Specifically, we distinguish between two main categories of NP triggers: *epistemic certainty triggers* and *stylistic triggers*. The former trigger is still active and compositionally transparent, contributing directly to the speaker's modal or epistemic stance regarding the truth of the proposition. The latter trigger serves primarily stylistic or pragmatic functions, and is often linked to discourse effects like emphasis, politeness, or cohesion. While these stylistic uses may have diachronic roots in earlier stages of Icelandic, they remain synchronically relevant as conventionalized forms for particular discourse strategies.

4.1 Category A: Stylistic Triggers

We identify two primary subcategories within the stylistic-trigger category of fronted negation: *mitigated negative questions* and *conjunct negation*.

Mitigated Negative Questions Example (43) illustrates what we term “mitigated negative questions”. These are questions where the negation is used not to convey a literal negative meaning but to soften the inquiry, introducing a tone of politeness and tentativeness that makes the interaction feel less direct and more respectful (see also Þráinsson (2007) and Fasold (1990)):

- (43) A: (Situr við skrifborð þegar B kemur inn)
sits by desk when B comes in
'(Sits at the desk when B comes in)'
B: Ekki hefur þú séð Guðmund í dag?
not have you seen Guðmundur in day
'Have you seen Guðmundur today by any chance?'

In structures like (43), the negation *ekki* does not act as true negation; instead, it plays a pragmatic role, introducing politeness or modesty. It adds a sense of uncertainty or tentativeness, softening the tone of the question. Rather than directly seeking an answer, the speaker uses negation to signal that they are not assuming the listener’s knowledge of Guðmundur’s whereabouts, making the question less direct and more respectful. In this context, negation functions as a marker of deference rather than as a literal negation. It serves as a conversational strategy to make the interaction more courteous, helping to create a tone of respect and consideration. This use of negation is driven by discourse, reflecting the speaker’s intention to maintain a polite and tentative approach.

In Example (43), the use of negation in Icelandic mirrors similar constructions in English, such as the question “You would not happen to have a pen, would you?” (see also Koike (1994) for a similar use of negation in Spanish). Here, negation functions pragmatically rather than literally, introducing uncertainty and politeness. By framing the request negatively, the speaker softens the imposition, implying they do not expect the listener to have a pen. This indirect approach allows the listener to decline without feeling pressured, making the request less direct and more considerate.

Note that this use of NP is not exclusive to Icelandic: it is also observed in Swedish, as pointed out by Brandtler and Håkansson (2014) (see also the main etymological dictionary of Swedish, Svenska Akademiens Ordbok (SAOB) (Teleman et al. 1999))¹

- (44) a. Inte har du sett Hedlund?
not have you seen Hedlund

¹Johan Brandtler (p.c.) however notes that this use of Negative Preposing is no longer particularly productive in contemporary Swedish.

‘You haven’t seen Hedlund by any chance?’

- b. Mánne har du sett Hedlund?
wonder have you seen Hedlund

‘You haven’t seen Hedlund by any chance?’

According to the SAOB, the fronting of the negation in such cases is used to make modest or humble requests. The negation in these sentences can be paraphrased with expressions like *mánne* ‘wonder’, as in (b) (Teleman et al. 1999). This suggests that, in both Icelandic and Swedish, NP can be used to convey a polite, tentative tone rather than a literal denial. The following examples illustrate this further.

- (45) a. Har du bröd?
have you bread
‘Do you have bread?’

- b. Har du inte bröd?
have you not bread
‘Don’t you have bread?’

- c. Inte har du bröd?
not have you bread
‘Do you have some bread by any chance?’

Our Swedish consultant, (Martin Ringmar, p.c.), tells us that (45a) is relatively neutral in terms of politeness while (45b) is impolite under most circumstances and (45c) is the most polite way of asking a question of this type.

In a broader linguistic context, this use of negation reflects the difference between *polarity-based* languages like Icelandic and *agree/disagree* systems found in other languages (see Holmberg (2016)). For example, in Icelandic, a regular *yes/no*-question with postverbal negation conveys an expectation that the negative alternative is true (*Drekkur Jón ekki kaffi?* ‘Does John not drink coffee?’) and a corresponding question with NP has the same semantic interpretation (*Ekki drekkur Jón kaffi?* ‘Does John not drink coffee?’). In a conversation in Icelandic, the negative answer particle *nei* ‘no’ would be used to confirm that the negative alternative is true (*Nei = hann drekkur ekki kaffi* ‘No = he does not drink coffee’). This means that Icelandic belongs to so-called polarity-based or positive/negative system of languages as opposed to the agree/disagree system in which the positive answer particle would be used (Yes = he does not drink coffee) (Holmberg 2016: 5). According to Holmberg (2016), this difference depends on the scope of the negation. In Icelandic and most European languages, the negation has a wide scope (sentential scope) while in languages like Cantonese and most East-Asian languages the negation has a narrow scope, maybe only over the predicate. Furthermore, Icelandic behaves like Swedish, for instance, in that if the speaker wants

to disconfirm the negative alternative posed by a negative question, the positive answer particle *já* ‘yes’ cannot be used. Instead, a particular polarity reversing affirmative particle *jú* ‘yes-REV’ (*Jú = hann drekkur kaffi* ‘Yes-REV = he drinks coffee’) is used to contradict the expectation conveyed in the negative yes/no-question that the negative alternative is true (see also Holmberg (2016)). The important issue for our purposes here is that the negation presumably has a wide scope in Icelandic, whether it appears clause-initially or in its (usual) clause-medial position.

Conjunct Negation Example (25), repeated below as (46) illustrates an instance of conjunct negation:

(46)

- A: Jón er nú ekki mjög myndarlegur og ekki er hann skemmtilegur!
Jón is now not very handsome and not is he entertaining
‘Jón is not very handsome and he is not entertaining!’

We propose that the fronting of negation here carries primarily a stylistic function, without changing the propositional meaning. The sentence conveys the same content as a structure where the negation remains post-verbal. The use of NP in this conjunct negation creates a rhythmic or emphatic effect, linking the negative properties associated with Jón stylistically rather than adding any new semantic dimension.

Conjunct negation in Icelandic shows some parallels to Negative Inversion (NI) in English. In NI constructions, negative phrases are fronted to the beginning of a clause, triggering subject-auxiliary inversion, as seen in examples like:

(47) Not until the next day did he realize he had lost his wallet.

(48) Nowhere does he mention my article.

In such cases, the inversion occurs only with negative expressions. Phrases that are not negative, such as *somewhere*, do not trigger inversion, as demonstrated by Buring (2005):

- (49) a. Nowhere does he mention my book.
b. *Somewhere does he mention my book.
c. Somewhere, he mentions my book.

In Sobin (2003), the author posits that Negative Inversion (NI) serves a discourse-related function by introducing new or emphasized information. The marked nature of NI makes it a stylistic device typically used in formal or rhetorical contexts, where the inversion foregrounds the negative assertion for greater impact. NI contributes to the rhetorical flow of the sentence, providing emphasis without altering the core meaning.

Similarly, the Icelandic NP seen in conjunct negation shares this stylistic purpose. Much like in English, the fronted negation in Icelandic emphasizes the negative evaluation across both propositions, enhancing the sentence's cohesiveness and rhythm, but without introducing any new semantic content. This suggests that, in these cases, the fronting of the negation in both languages operates more on a stylistic level than as a reflection of deeper semantic distinctions.

While direct historical evidence for conjunct negation and mitigated negative questions in earlier stages of Icelandic is lacking, we hypothesize that these constructions have evolved through processes similar to those observed in related languages. Comparative evidence from modern Scandinavian languages like Swedish, where fronted negation also serves pragmatic functions such as politeness, suggests that NP in Icelandic may have developed as part of a broader North Germanic pattern. Similarly, the parallels to English Negative Inversion, where negation fronting is primarily a stylistic device, indicate that these fronting operations may have originally served syntactic or semantic purposes but have now become stylistic markers. We tentatively speculate that their persistence in modern Icelandic is due to their presence in earlier stages of the language, where they likely fulfilled more central grammatical roles.

4.2 Category B: Expression of Degrees of Certainty

In both conjunct negation and mitigated negative questions, NP primarily serves a stylistic function rather than altering the core meaning or adding new semantic content. Its purpose lies in creating a discourse effect, such as emphasizing and enhancing the cohesion between two separate negative attributes. In these cases, the fronting of negation contributes to the rhythm or emphasis of the sentence, without changing its propositional meaning.

In other instances, on the other hand, we argue that NP in Icelandic is tied directly to the expression of epistemic certainty. In such cases, the use of NP transcends a mere discourse-pragmatic choice, as it is used to convey the speaker's degree of confidence in the negated proposition, resulting in a shift in meaning compared to sentences where the negation remains post-verbal.

Epistemic certainty relates to the degree of confidence a speaker has regarding the truth of a proposition. Epistemic modality refers to the use of linguistic expressions to indicate a speaker's assessment of the truth or likelihood of a proposition Palmer (2001). This modality is typically expressed through modal verbs, which signal different degrees of epistemic certainty. Beyond modal verbs, epistemic certainty is also conveyed through adverbs such as “possibly”, “probably”, “certainly”, and “definitely”. These expressions modify the degree of certainty attributed to the proposition (Lyons 1977). Epistemic certainty is often represented on a scale, categorizing expressions based on the strength of certainty they convey (Lyons 1977; Nuyts 2001). For example:

- Possibility: indicates a low level of certainty (e.g., “possibly”, “might”).

- Likelihood: indicates a moderate level of certainty (e.g., “likely”, “may”).
- Probability: a higher level of certainty (e.g., “probably”, “should”).
- Certainty: a very high level of certainty (e.g., “certainly”, “must”).
- Definiteness: absolute certainty (e.g., “definitely”, “will”).

The expression of epistemic certainty varies across languages. Some languages may rely heavily on modal verbs, while others might use adverbs, particles, or specific syntactic constructions to convey different degrees of certainty (Palmer 2001). We speculate in particular that Icelandic and other Scandinavian languages make use of NP as a tool to express the degree of epistemic certainty in the truth of a negated proposition.

This hypothesis is partially supported by the translations of different NP examples in various Nordic languages that are found in the literature. Consider for instance the following example by Holmer (2006:76–77), which illustrates NP in Swedish. As also noted by Lindström (2007), Holmer chooses to provide a translation of the preposed negation ‘inte’ example by using the epistemic adverb ‘certainly’ in English:

- (50) Inte köpte Josefin några böcker.
 not bought Josefin some books
 ‘Josefin certainly didn’t buy any books’

This translation choice suggest a link between NP and the expression of epistemic certainty.

How does epistemic certainty factor in NP structures? Let us assume a scale of epistemic certainty values such as (51):

- (51) Possibly < Likely < Probably < Most Likely < Certainly < Definitely

When a sentence like (50) is uttered, the interpretation follows the epistemic certainty scale:

- (52) not, Possibly < Likely < Probably < Certainly < Definitely

In (50), the speaker asserts the highest degree of the scale, which is “definitely” or something equally strong. This use of NP indicates that the speaker has a high degree of confidence in the negated proposition, thus reinforcing the certainty and making it salient in the discourse. The preposing of *ekki* thus signals that the speaker is not merely negating the proposition but is also expressing a strong epistemic stance regarding its truth value.

This analysis helps account for the environments in which NP is possible and for the patterns of acceptability judgments observed. Consider for instance example (17), repeated below as (53). This example was first introduced in Section 2 to illustrate how NP may be used to convey an ironic interpretation. Example (17) can essentially be paraphrased as “he was NOT considered an easy person”, indirectly implying that he was, in fact, regarded as quite difficult.

- (53) Ekki þótti hann dæll maður.
not seemed he easy person
'He didn't seem an easy person.'

This sentence can be interpreted along the scale of epistemic certainty as follows:

- (54) Possibly not an easy person < Likely not an easy person < Probably not an easy person < Definitely not an easy person

In this instance, the preposing of *ekki* indicates that the speaker is asserting a high degree of certainty that the person in question is not easy to deal with. The speaker uses a strong negation (“definitely not an easy person”) to imply the opposite quality (“very difficult person”). The irony is detected because the assertion of high certainty (definitely not easy) contrasts sharply with the speaker’s actual intent (to emphasize the difficulty of the person).

We can identify different structures within the epistemic certainty NP category, which vary depending on the illocutionary force of the NP construction and the preceding context, specifically Speaker A’s triggering statement.

Yes/No Questions Incorporating Epistemic Modality NP can be used in polarity questions. When this is the case, the question is interpreted as involving an additional layer of inquiry into the certainty, truth, or authenticity of the proposition being questioned. The fronted negation in such structures indicates the speaker’s doubt, surprise, or need for verification regarding an assertion made by Speaker A that they find difficult to believe. This use of negation is equivalent to the use of “really” in English, adding a sense of skepticism or incredulity to the question. For example:

- (55) Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta?
not has he written this
'Has he really written this?'
- (56) Ekki vissu þeir að þetta væri svona alvarlegt?
not knew they that this was so serious
'Did they really know things were this serious?'

As evidenced by the translations in these examples, although the Icelandic originals contain a negation, a more appropriate English translation would render these as ‘Has he really written this?’ and ‘Did they really know things were this serious?’, where the negation is entirely omitted and instead replaced by the epistemic adverb *really*. This suggests that, in such cases, the function of negation in Icelandic may align more closely with conveying degrees of epistemic certainty rather than expressing a literal negative meaning.

In these examples, the fronted negation ‘ekki’ thus emphasizes the speaker’s doubt about the proposition being uttered. The speaker is not merely seeking information but is questioning the truthfulness or likelihood of what has been asserted by their interlocutor. This construction can introduce a subtle challenge to the prior statement, implying that the speaker finds it improbable or surprising.

Note that our analysis of NP as being tied to epistemic certainty also captures the difference in acceptability of NP between items (36) and (30), repeated below as examples (57) and (58). Only 15% of our participants accepted the NP option in 57, contra 45% in 58:

(57) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum virðist líka vel fyrir sunnan.
I was to talk with Haraldur. him seems like well for south
‘I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the South.’

B: Býr hann ekki á Akureyri?
lives he not in Akureyri
‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’

B’: Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?
not lives he in Akureyri
‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’

(58) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum virðist líka vel fyrir norðan.
I was to talk with Haraldur. him seems like well for north
‘I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the north.’

B: Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?
not lives he in Akureyri
‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’

B’: Býr hann ekki á Akureyri?
lives he not in Akureyri
‘Doesn’t he live in Akureyri?’

The difference in acceptability of NP between these two examples can be explained by the contextual compatibility between the speaker’s statement and the implied proposition in the NP question.

In (57), Speaker A states that Haraldur seems to like the South. However, this information is incompatible with the implied assumption that Haraldur might live in Akureyri, which is located in the North. For the NP question, “Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?” (Does he really live in Akureyri?), to make sense, Speaker A’s statement would need to be compatible with the possibility that Haraldur lives in Akureyri. Since liking the South does not align with the assumption that Haraldur lives in the North, the NP construction seems pragmatically odd in this context, resulting in low acceptability.

In contrast, in (58), Speaker A mentions that Haraldur seems to like the North, which is compatible with the possibility that Haraldur lives in Akureyri, a northern city. Here, the NP question “Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?” expresses doubt or surprise in a context that aligns with the speaker’s knowledge. This creates the right conditions for NP, making the construction pragmatically appropriate and leading to much higher acceptability.

Thus, the acceptability of NP depends on the epistemic alignment between the interlocutor’s statement and the proposition implied by the NP question. If the interlocutor’s statement sets up a context compatible with the implied proposition, NP is acceptable because it serves to express doubt or surprise. If the context is incompatible, NP feels out of place, as it introduces unwarranted epistemic force.

Assertions in Response to Yes/No Questions NP can also feature in statements that are uttered in response to polarity questions. In these cases, NP is used as if the sentence contains an implicit epistemic modal element, expressing the speaker’s high degree of certainty or confidence about the truth of the negated proposition. Here, the negation does more than simply negate the action or state; it conveys a strong assertion of certainty. For instance:

- (59) Ekki getur hún verið frá honum. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
not can it be from him. he knows not to wrap so well in
‘It’s definitely not from him. He cannot wrap gifts so well.’

In this example, the fronted negation indicates a high level of epistemic certainty. The speaker is not merely stating that the proposition is false but is asserting with confidence that it cannot be true. The use of fronted negation in this context signals a definitive stance, strengthening the assertion.

Assertions in Response to Assertions These also involve the use of fronted negation to express the speaker’s certainty in their assertion. In such cases, the speaker again uses NP to emphasize the strength of their negation, as seen in:

- (60) Ekki eru þeir líkir.
not are they alike
‘They definitely do not look alike.’

In this instance, “definitely not similar” effectively conveys the meaning of “not similar at all”. The fronted negation here does not just negate the assertion but adds a layer of emphasis to indicate a strong degree of certainty or contrast with what might have been expected. The relevant scale here pertains to degrees of similarity rather than degrees of certainty, yet the function of fronted negation remains consistent in conveying a high degree of emphasis or contrast.

This use of NP can also express meanings akin to negative polarity items (NPIs), such as “not at all”. For example:

- (61) Eigi var gull eða silfur sparað við spjótin.
not was gold or silver spared with spears
‘Gold and silver were definitely not spared’ → ‘No gold and silver (at all) was spared / Not a single bit of gold or silver was spared.’

In this context, NP signals an emphatic negation that conveys totality, indicating that no gold or silver was spared at all. It serves to reinforce the negation by expressing an extreme or exhaustive denial, aligning with meanings typically associated with NPIs.

Through these structures, we see that NP in Icelandic can be a powerful tool for conveying epistemic certainty, allowing speakers to express varying degrees of doubt, confidence, or emphasis in their assertions and inquiries.

Not Possible: Assertions Directly Contradicting Existing Assertions (Corrective Focus) Fronted negation is notably absent in direct contradictions/ corrective polarity focus statements in Icelandic. We suggest that this absence might be attributed to the primary function of corrective polarity statements, which is to challenge and directly contradict an existing proposition by proposing an alternative polarity value. The emphasis in such statements is placed on the act of correction itself, rather than on expressing a degree of epistemic certainty.

In corrective focus, the speaker’s goal is to reject a previously stated proposition outright, typically using “NOT” to emphasize the negation of that assertion. For instance, consider the following type of corrective response:

- (62) Eigi var gull eða silfur sparað við spjótin.
not was gold or silver spared with spears
‘Gold and silver were definitely not spared’ → ‘No gold and silver (at all) was spared / Not a single bit of gold or silver was spared.’

In this example, the focus is on correcting the previous statement by asserting the opposite. The negation ‘ekki’ directly challenges the validity of the prior claim, but fronted negation would be inappropriate here because the primary goal is to refute rather than to express the speaker’s degree of certainty.

By contrast, in yes/no questions and assertions that incorporate epistemic modality, the focus is on providing information or conveying the speaker’s belief. In these contexts, degrees of certainty are highly relevant, and the use of fronted negation can enhance the salience of the speaker’s confidence or doubt. The speaker employs fronted negation to express nuances in their stance, indicating how certain or skeptical they are about the proposition in question.

However, in corrective contexts, the pragmatic objective shifts. The speaker's main concern is to directly negate a specific claim made by the interlocutor. Here, the emphasis is on challenging the proposition's validity, leaving little room for the expression of epistemic certainty. The act of correction is about rejecting the previous statement outright, and fronted negation, which typically adds a layer of epistemic meaning, does not serve this immediate corrective purpose.

Therefore, the absence of fronted negation in corrective statements highlights its primary role in expressing degrees of certainty rather than in directly contradicting assertions. The structure of NP is thus more aligned with contexts where the speaker aims to express or question certainty, rather than to correct or refute a proposition.

Note that our analysis explains the contrast between the examples below. While for example (63), the acceptability of NP is 100%, for example (64), only 35% of participants found the NP option to be acceptable:

(63) A: A [Les upp mjög enskuskotinn texta]: Þetta er frábærlega skrifað hjá Laxness!
A [Reads out very English-influenced text]: This is excellently written by Laxness!
Laxness!
'This is excellently written by Laxness!'

B1: Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta?
not has he written this
'Has he really written this?'

B2: Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta?
he has not written this
'Has he not written this?'

(64) A: A [Les upp mjög enskuskotinn texta]: Þetta er frábærlega skrifað hjá Laxness!
A [Reads out very English-influenced text]: This is excellently written by Laxness!
Laxness!
'This is excellently written by Laxness!'

B1: Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta!
not has he written this
'He didn't write this!'

B2: Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta!
he has not written this
'He didn't write this!'

In example (63), Speaker A makes an assertion about the quality of a text, attributing it to Laxness. Speaker B's response in both variants, especially with fronted negation in "Ekki hefur hann

skrifað þetta?” (Has he really written this?), implies doubt or surprise regarding the authorship. The use of fronted negation in this context introduces an epistemic layer, expressing skepticism about the proposition. This usage aligns with our analysis of fronted negation in questions incorporating epistemic modality, where it reflects the speaker’s doubt or need for confirmation. This subtle challenge to the proposition makes the use of fronted negation highly acceptable, as it effectively communicates the speaker’s uncertainty or disbelief.

In contrast, example (64) features a different context and response type. Here, Speaker B’s responses are assertive statements rather than questions. The fronted negation in "Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta!" (He didn’t write this!) is now being used in a context where a direct correction or refutation is being made. However, according to our analysis, fronted negation is less suitable in corrective focus contexts, as the primary goal is to negate the previous statement outright, focusing on correction rather than expressing degrees of certainty. In these cases, a straightforward negation without fronting (“Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta!”) is more pragmatically appropriate and thus more acceptable to speakers.

In order to prevent misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that we are not claiming that there is a direct mapping between the different degrees of epistemic certainty proposed here and the relative order or hierarchy of adverbial functional projections discussed in Cinque (1999). Thus, we are not arguing that the negation or adverbs like *örugglega* ‘definitely’ are necessarily base-generated above adverbs like *sennilega* ‘probably’ that would in turn be base-generated above adverbs like *hugsanlega* ‘possibly’, for instance. Actually, there is independent evidence for assuming that epistemic adverbs like *probably* generally and cross-linguistically precede adverbs like *possibly* (Cinque 1999:106), but the residency and potential movements of the sentential negation in languages like Icelandic is a much more complicated and controversial issue. Thus, the details of where exactly in a Cinquean hierarchy of functional projections *ekki* ‘not’ should be located is beyond the scope of this paper.

5 Conclusion

This study has examined the phenomenon of Negative Preposing (NP) in Icelandic, arguing it is a complex, multi-faceted construction with varying functions depending on the context. We have identified two primary categories in which NP operates: stylistic triggers and expressions of epistemic certainty.

In the first category, stylistic triggers, NP serves a role that is more rhetorical or conventional rather than compositional. Instances such as polite questions and conjunct negation employ fronted negation for stylistic or pragmatic effects, allowing for less forceful inquiries or creating cohesive negative constructions. This usage aligns with patterns observed cross-linguistically, where nega-

tion can be employed to add nuance or politeness to discourse.

The second category, the expression of epistemic certainty, is where NP showcases its more intricate function in Icelandic. Here, fronted negation serves to convey varying degrees of the speaker's certainty about the negated proposition. In yes/no questions incorporating epistemic modality, NP allows speakers to express doubt or surprise about a previously stated proposition. In assertions, it introduces an implicit modal element that underscores the speaker's high confidence or strong stance. This use of negation is indicative of Icelandic's ability to encode subtle epistemic distinctions through syntactic means.

Furthermore, we have outlined the contexts where NP is not applicable, particularly in direct contradictions or corrective focus statements. We have suggested that the absence of fronted negation in these instances underscores the specific function of NP in expressing degrees of certainty rather than in performing direct refutation or correction. Corrective statements are primarily concerned with challenging an existing proposition, leaving less room for the expression of epistemic stances that NP typically conveys.

Further research could delve into the cross-linguistic patterns of NP and similar negation strategies, examining how different languages leverage these structures to encode pragmatic and modal subtleties. A diachronic study of NP in Icelandic would also provide valuable insights into how its expressive functions have evolved, offering a window into the broader relationship between negation, modality, and language change.

6 Appendices

Full list of test items below.

- (I) A: Viltu sígarettu?
do-you.want cigarette
'Do you want a cigarette?'
- B: Nei takk, ég reyki ekki.
no thanks, I smoke not
'No thanks, I don't smoke.'
- B': Nei takk, ekki reyki ég.
no thanks, not smoke I
'No thanks, I don't smoke.'
- (II) A: Á að rigna á morgun?
is to rain tomorrow
'Is it going to rain tomorrow?'
- B: Ekki held ég það.
not think I that

‘I don’t think so.’

B’: Það held ég ekki.
that think I not
‘I don’t think so.’

(III) A: Eru Jón og Haraldur tvíburar?
are Jón and Haraldur twins
‘Are Jón and Haraldur twins?’

B: Já.
yes
‘Yes.’

A: Ekki eru þeir líkir.
not are they alike
‘They do not look similar (at all).’

A’: Þeir eru ekki líkir.
they are not alike
‘They do not look similar (at all).’

(IV) A: Það er verið að auglýsa djasstónleika í kvöld.
it is being to advertise jazz-concert in night
‘A jazz concert is being advertised for tonight.’

B: Ég ætla ekki að fara.
I intend not to go
‘I am not going to go.’

B’: Ekki ætla ég að fara.
not intend I to go
‘I am not going to go.’

(V) A: Þetta er frábærlega skrifað hjá Laxness!
This is excellently written by Laxness
‘This is excellently written by Laxness!’

B: Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta!
not has he written this
‘He has not written this!’

B’: Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta!
he has not written this
‘He has not written this!’

(VI) [Athugið að hér á svar B að vera spurning þótt viðkomandi finnst ólíklegt að Laxness sé höfundurinn]. [Note that here B’s response should be a question, even if the person finds it unlikely that Laxness is the author].

- A: Þetta er frábærlega skrifað hjá Laxness!
this is excellently written by Laxness
'This is excellently written by Laxness!'
- B: Ekki hefur hann skrifað þetta?
not has he written this
'Has he not written this?'
- B': Hann hefur ekki skrifað þetta?
he has not written this
'Has he not written this?'
- (VII) A: Jón er nú ekki mjög myndarlegur og hann er ekki skemmtilegur!
Jón is now not very handsome and he is not entertaining
'Jón is not very handsome and he is not entertaining!'
- A': Jón er nú ekki mjög myndarlegur og ekki er hann skemmtilegur!
Jón is now not very handsome and not is he entertaining
'Jón is not very handsome and he is not entertaining!'
- (VIII) A: Málið rann í gegnum þingið og ekki heyrðist múkk frá stjórnarandstöðunni.
the-issue ran in through parliament and not heard a-peep from the-opposition
'The issue passed through parliament and not a peep was heard from the opposition.'
- A': Málið rann í gegnum þingið og það heyrðist ekki múkk frá stjórnarandstöðunni.
the-issue ran in through parliament and it heard not a-peep from the-opposition
'The issue passed through parliament and not a peep was heard from the opposition.'
- (IX) A: Sjúkdómurinn er víst ólæknandi.
the-disease is apparently incurable
'The disease is apparently incurable.'
- B: Ég vissi ekki að þetta væri svona alvarlegt.
I knew not that this was so serious
'I did not know that this was so serious.'
- B': Ekki vissi ég að þetta væri svona alvarlegt.
not knew I that this was so serious
'I did not know that this was so serious.'
- (X) A: [Horfir út um gluggann]. Það er nú meira hvað þeim gengur illa að grafa þennan skurð.
looks out the window. it is now more what them goes poorly to dig this ditch
'[Looks out the window]. It is really something how poorly they are doing digging this ditch.'
- B: Og ekki hafa þeir gert mikið í dag.
and not have they done much in day
'And they have not done much today.'
- B': Og þeir hafa ekki gert mikið í dag.
and they have not done much in day
'And they have not done much today.'

- (XI) A: [Spyrill í spurningakeppni]: Nú er spurt, hvert var móðurmál Astrid Lindgren?
quizmaster in quiz-competition: now is asked, what was mother-tongue Astrid Lindgren
‘[Quizmaster in a quiz competition]: Now the question is, what was Astrid Lindgren’s mother tongue?’
- B: [Keppandi]: Danska?
contestant: Danish
‘[Contestant]: Danish?’
- A: Nei, það var ekki danska.
no, it was not Danish
‘No, it was not Danish.’
- A’: Nei, ekki var það danska.
no, not was it Danish
‘No, it was not Danish.’
- A’’: Nei, danska var það ekki.
no, Danish was it not
‘No, Danish it was not.’
- (XII) A: [Þjónn á veitingastað]: Get ég aðstoðað?
Waiter at restaurant: can I assist
‘[Waiter at a restaurant]: Can I help you?’
- B: Ekki áttu meira brauð?
not have-you more bread
‘Don’t you have more bread?’
- B’: Áttu ekki meira brauð?
have-you not more bread
‘Don’t you have more bread?’
- (XIII) A: *(Situr við skrifborð þegar B kemur inn)*
‘(Sits at the desk when B comes in)’
- B: Hefur þú séð Guðmund í dag?
have you seen Guðmundur in day
‘Have you seen Guðmundur today?’
- B’: Ekki hefur þú séð Guðmund í dag?
not have you seen Guðmundur in day
‘Haven’t you seen Guðmundur today?’
- B’’: Hefur þú ekki séð Guðmund í dag?
have you not seen Guðmundur in day
‘Have you not seen Guðmundur today?’
- (XIV) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum virðist líka vel fyrir sunnan.
I was to talk with Haraldur. him seems like well for south
‘I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the South.’

- B: Býr hann ekki á Akureyri?
lives he not in Akureyri
'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'
- B': Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?
not lives he in Akureyri
'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'
- (XV) A: Ég var að tala við Harald. Honum virðist líka vel fyrir norðan.
I was to talk with Haraldur.him seems like well for north
'I was talking to Haraldur. He seems to like it well in the north.'
- B: Ekki býr hann á Akureyri?
not lives he in Akureyri
'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'
- B': Býr hann ekki á Akureyri?
lives he not in Akureyri
'Doesn't he live in Akureyri?'
- (XVI) A: Niðurstöðurnar úr rannsókninni komu læknum mjög á óvart.
results.the from study.the came doctors.DAT very on surprise
'The results of the research surprised the doctors very much.'
- B: Vissu þeir ekki að þetta væri svona alvarlegt?
knew they not that this was so serious
'Didn't they know that this was so serious?'
- B': Ekki vissu þeir að þetta væri svona alvarlegt?
not knew they that this was so serious
'Didn't they know that this was so serious?'
- (XVII) A: Niðurstöðurnar úr rannsókninni virtust ekki koma læknum á óvart.
results.the from study.the seemed not come doctors.DAT on surprise
'The results of the research did not seem to surprise the doctors.'
- B: Ekki vissu þeir að þetta væri svona alvarlegt?
not knew they that this was so serious
'Didn't they know that this was so serious?'
- B': Vissu þeir ekki að þetta væri svona alvarlegt?
knew they not that this was so serious
'Didn't they know that this was so serious?'
- (XVIII) [Hundurinn er í yfirvigt og A sakar B um að hafa gefið honum mat þrátt fyrir samkomulag um annað] ["The dog is overweight, and A accuses B of having given him food despite an agreement to the contrary."]
- A: Þú gafst hundinum!
you gave the-dog
'You fed the dog!'

- B: Nei, ekki gerði ég það!
no, not did I it
'No, I did not!'
- B': Nei, ég gerði það ekki!
no, I did it not
'No, I did not do it!'
- (XIX) A: Hún hefur drepið manninn sinn.
she has killed her-husband
'She has killed her husband.'
- B: Hún gerði það ekki.
she did it not
'She did not do it.'
- B': Ekki gerði hún það.
not did she it
'She did not do it.'
- (XX) A: Þessi gjöf er ómerkt. Gæti hún verið frá Haraldi frænda á Akureyri?
this gift is unmarked. could it be from Harald uncle in Akureyri
'This gift is unmarked. Could it be from Uncle Harald in Akureyri?'
- B: Nei, hún getur ekki verið frá honum. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
no, it can not be from him. he knows not to wrap so well in
'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'
- B': Nei, ekki getur hún verið frá honum. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
no, not can it be from him. he knows not to wrap so well in
'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'
- B'': Nei, frá honum getur hún ekki verið. Hann kann ekki að pakka svona vel inn.
no, from him can it not be. he knows not to wrap so well in
'No, it can't be from him. He doesn't know how to wrap so well.'

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Ditransitive passives in Faroese and the role of case

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Abstract Passives of ditransitive verbs in Faroese have been widely discussed in the literature (see Barnes 1986, Henriksen 2000:69, Eypórssón 2012, Thráinsson et al. 2012:269–273, Galbraith 2018 and Petersen 2020:223–225). To this date, the discussion has only involved ditransitives of the type DAT-ACC, which is by far the most common case pattern for ditransitive verbs in Faroese. The regular passive of DAT-ACC verbs is a passive where the theme undergoes NP-movement to subject position and the dative recipient stays in situ. However, there are two other classes of ditransitive verbs that need to be taken into account to get a full picture of ditransitive passives in Faroese: ACC-ACC verbs and DAT-DAT verbs. The DAT-DAT class shows a preference for theme-passives (NOM-DAT) whereas the ACC-ACC clearly favors recipient-passives where the unmoved theme retains accusative case (NOM-ACC). In both cases, the argument moved by NP-movement loses its case and gets nominative instead, just as in passives of DAT-ACC verbs. The overall conclusion is that NP-movement in Faroese passives is driven by the need for nominative case in Spec,T. This is different from Icelandic where dative is always preserved under NP-movement and nominative can be assigned to objects. Hence, locality conditions dictate that the higher object will always undergo NP-movement in Icelandic passives.

1 Introduction

Passives of ditransitive verbs in Faroese have been widely discussed in the literature (see Barnes 1986, Henriksen 2011:69, Eypórssón 2012, Thráinsson et al. 2012:269–273, Galbraith 2018 and Petersen 2020:223–225) but the discussion so far has been limited to DAT-ACC verbs, which is by far the biggest class of ditransitive verbs in Faroese.¹ There are two other classes of ditransitive verbs, DAT-DAT verbs and ACC-ACC verbs, and they need to be examined to get a full picture of ditransitive passives in Faroese. My informant work shows that the former class patterns with DAT-ACC verbs in that theme-passives are the preferred option, whereas ACC-ACC verbs show a strong preference for recipient-passives. In all cases, the argument that moves to subject position in the regular passive gets nominative case but the argument in situ preserves the case of the corresponding active. Thus, I will argue here that NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Faroese is driven by the need for nominative case in Spec,T.

Ditransitive passives in Faroese are interesting from a cross-linguistic perspective because they present a clear example of case-driven NP-movement, consistent with the traditional view of NP-movement within generative syntax (Chomsky 1981). However, it is also well-known that this view is problematic for a language like Icelandic, where the association between nominative case and Spec,T is obscured by the presence of non-nominative subjects as well

¹ I wish to thank Annika Simonsen, Gunvør Brimnes Hoydal, Hjalmar Petersen, Lena Reinert and Sanna Andrassdóttir Dahl for indispensable help with the Faroese data.

as nominative objects. Hence, it can be argued that NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Icelandic is determined by locality rather than case.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the basic facts about the three classes of ditransitive verbs in Faroese. Section 3 discusses ditransitive passives in Faroese, focusing on NP-movement to subject position and case preservation of the argument in situ. Section 4 examines some comparative data from ditransitive passives in Icelandic, showing that locality conditions rather than case determine NP-movement in such passives. The paper ends with some concluding remarks in section 5.

2 Ditransitive verbs in Faroese

Faroese has a number of ditransitive verbs in the DAT-ACC class. These include *bjóða* ‘invite, offer’, *læna* ‘loan’, *sýta* ‘deny’ and *vísa* ‘show’, as shown by the following examples from Thráinsson et al. (2012:261–263):

- (1a) Hann beyð henni starv
 he offered her.DAT job.ACC
 ‘He offered her a job.’
- (1b) Pápin lænti soninum bilin
 father.the lent son.the.DAT car.the.ACC
 ‘The father lent the car to his son.’
- (1c) Hon vildi sýta barninum mat
 she wanted deny child.the.DAT food.ACC
 ‘She wanted to deprive the child of food.’
- (1d) Hann vísti henni húsini
 he showed her.DAT house.the.ACC
 ‘He showed her the house.’

The regular order of two objects in Faroese is indirect object before the direct object. As shown in (2), reversing this order is not possible (Thráinsson et al. 2012:237 and Petersen 2020:176):²

- (2a) Eg gav Hjalvari tað
 I gave Hjalmar.DAT it.ACC
 ‘I gave it to Hjalmar.’
- (2b) *Eg gav tað Hjalvari
 I gave it.ACC Hjalmar.DAT
 ‘I gave it to Hjalmar.’

This observation is important for the analysis of NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Faroese because it suggests that theme-passives are not derived from an order where the theme

² Faroese allows prepositional datives to some extent (Fiebig 2012 and Ussery & Petersen 2023), but this construction will not concern us here since it does not create any issues for passive NP-movement.

precedes the recipient. This is in clear contrast to Icelandic, where theme-passives can be argued to arise from an inverted order of recipient and theme (see section 4).

A vast majority of ditransitive verbs in Faroese belongs to the DAT-ACC class exemplified in (1) but a handful of verbs take two accusative objects, as in the following examples from Thráinsson et al. (2012:263):

- (3a) Kann eg biðja teg eina bøn?
 can I ask you.ACC a favor.ACC
 ‘Can I ask you a favor?’
- (3b) Hann kysti hana ein søtan koss
 he kissed her.ACC a sweet kiss.ACC
 ‘He kissed her a sweet kiss.’
- (3c) Hon lærði meg stev
 she taught me.ACC refrains.ACC
 ‘She taught me refrains.’
- (3d) Tey spurdu meg ein spurning
 they asked me.ACC a question.ACC
 ‘They asked me a question.’

One may wonder if the second objects in (3a), (3b) and (3d) are true arguments. As shown in 3.3 below, the second object of *spyrja* (as well as *læra*) behaves like an argument with respect to passive NP-movement and that is sufficient for our purposes in this paper.

In addition to DAT-ACC verbs and ACC-ACC verbs, Faroese has a very small class of verbs taking two dative objects. This class, which has been overlooked in previous literature on Faroese, includes at least the verbs *bjarga* ‘save’, *hýsa* ‘house’ and *svara* ‘reply, answer’:

- (4a) Hann bjargaði tær lívinum (teldni.fo)
 he saved you.DAT life.the.DAT
 ‘He saved your life.’
- (4b) Vinarliga hýsið mær hesum lesarabrævi (teldni.fo)
 kindly house me.DAT this reader.letter.DAT
 ‘Kindly do me the favor of publishing this opinion piece.’
- (4c) Dugir tú at svara mær hesum spurningi? (teldni.fo)
 can you to answer me.DAT this question.DAT
 ‘Can you answer this question from me?’

This is a rather marginal class because all the verbs in this class are rarely used as ditransitives. Moreover, many speakers prefer DAT-ACC with *bjarga* rather than DAT-DAT. The latter variant seems to be more common than the former variant in the Faroese Text Corpus (<http://teldni.fo/tekstasavn>) but less common on Google. I suspect that the double dative with *bjarga* may be an older variant that is gradually giving way to DAT-ACC, which is the most common case pattern in Faroese. In spite of all this, DAT-DAT verbs are important for our

purposes because they provide a valuable insight into the workings of NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Faroese.

3 NP-movement in ditransitive passives

This section focuses on NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Faroese. I will argue below that the crucial factor for NP-movement is case. The object that loses its case in passives is forced to move to subject position to get nominative case, and this holds across the three classes of ditransitive verbs discussed above.

3.1 DAT-ACC verbs

According to Thráinsson et al. (2012:269–273) and Petersen (2020:224–225), the standard passive of DAT-ACC verbs in Faroese is a passive where the theme argument undergoes NP-movement and the recipient argument stays in situ.³ Recipient-passives, by contrast, are marginal, at least in colloquial Faroese. The contrast between theme-passives and recipient-passives is illustrated in (5), from Thráinsson et al. (2012:269–270):

- (5a) Kúgvín varð seld bóndanum
cow.the.NOM became sold farmer.the.DAT
‘The cow was sold to the farmer.’
- (5b) ??Bóndanum varð seld kúgvín
farmer.the.DAT became sold cow.the.NOM
‘The farmer was sold the cow.’
- (5c) ?Bóndanum varð seld ein kúgv
farmer.the.DAT became sold a cow.NOM
‘The farmer was sold a cow.’

Theme-passives like (5a) are known to create problems for locality conditions on movement since the dative recipient is structurally higher than the theme and would thus might be expected to block NP-movement of the theme. The issue is taken up briefly in 3.4 below; for important discussion of locality and theme-passives in various languages, see McGinnis (1998), Anagnostopoulou (2003), Bacovcin (2017:85–97) and Haddican & Holmberg (2019) among others.

The contrast between (5b) and (5c) shows that an indefinite theme is preferred to a definite theme in recipient-passives. This is consistent with my search results for ditransitive passives with the verb *geva* ‘give’ in the Faroese Text Corpus where nearly all recipient-passives feature definite recipients and indefinite themes.

³ Passives of DAT-ACC verbs in Faroese have also been discussed by Barnes (1986), Henriksen (2011:69), Eypórsson (2012), Malmsten (2015:219–225), Sigurðsson (2017:81–82, 387–391) and Galbraith (2018:99–116).

Assuming that the recipients in (5b-c) have been NP-moved to subject position is unproblematic since Faroese has dative subjects. This has been shown by using tests familiar from the literature on Icelandic (see Barnes 1986 and Jónsson 2009a), even if dative subjects are now primarily found with some experiencer verbs in Modern Faroese (Barnes 1986, Petersen 2002, Jónsson & Eypórsson 2005 and Thráinsson et al. 2012:252–257). With most other predicates, the dative has been replaced by nominative.

The main problem with recipient-passives in Faroese is the nominative object since nominative objects have been replaced by accusative in active clauses (Thráinsson et al. 2012:228–229 and Árnadóttir 2021:37–41). Thus, it is natural to assume that T cannot assign nominative case to objects in Faroese and this is what rules out recipient-passives. This is in clear contrast to Icelandic, where nominative objects are productively used with dative subjects in both active and passive clauses. Since nominative is available inside vP, the loss of accusative in Icelandic passives does not create any problems for case assignment and this means that NP-movement in ditransitive passives is not triggered by the need for nominative case. Rather, it can be argued that locality conditions determine which object will move to subject position in Icelandic (see section 4 below).

The problem with nominative objects in recipient-passives cannot be solved by using accusative instead (Barnes 1986 and Petersen 2020). This is shown in (6) (from Thráinsson et al. 2012:271):

- (6) *Bóndanum varð selt eina kúgv
 farmer.the.DAT became sold a cow.ACC
 ‘The farmer was sold a cow.’

Interestingly, this is in contrast to Eypórsson (2012), who reports that accusative is preferred to nominative in some recipient-passives in Faroese.⁴

- (7a) Gentuni bleiv givið eina teldu (36,3%)
 girl.the.DAT became given.NEUT a computer.ACC.FEM
 ‘The girl was given a computer.’

- (7b) Gentuni bleiv givin ein telda (28,2%)
 girl.the.DAT became given.FEM a computer.NOM.FEM
 ‘The girl was given a computer.’

As can be seen here, more speakers judged the accusative in (7a) acceptable than the nominative in (7b) even though the acceptance rate for the recipient-passive was rather low in both cases.⁵ On the other hand, Eypórsson (2012) also found that recipient-passives with a definite nominative object were judged to be much worse than with an indefinite nominative object, as in (7b), and this is consistent with the claims of Thráinsson et al. (2012), exemplified

⁴ Eypórsson (2012) tested passives with the auxiliary *blíva*, which is less formal than the passive auxiliary *verða*, and this may have effected the outcome of the study.

⁵ The participants in this study were asked to rate these examples as acceptable, dubious or ungrammatical. The percentages shown in the brackets in (7a-b) were calculated by including all those who chose the first option and half of those who found these examples dubious. The same applies to the acceptability rates from my own informant work reported here.

in (5b) and (5c). Be that as it may, I will have nothing further to say about passives like (7a) because I suspect that they are hardly ever used by native speakers. Presumably, they show up in judgment data because they sound more natural to some speakers than recipient-passives with nominative objects. The same may apply to non-standard passives where dative themes remain in situ (Sigurðsson 2017:78–81) but this requires further investigation.

My own informant work indicates that recipient-passives of DAT-ACC verbs are most acceptable in Faroese if the theme is neuter singular.⁶ In this case, neither the morphological form of the theme nor the passive participle distinguish between a nominative theme (triggering agreement with the passive participle, as in (7b)) and an accusative theme (not triggering agreement, as in (7a)). This means that native speakers can analyze such examples in two different ways. This is exemplified (8), where the acceptance rate for each example is shown in brackets:

- (8a) *Hetta navnið varð givið honum, tá hann kom til Babel*
 this name.the.NOM/ACC became given him.DAT when he came to Babel
 ‘This name was given to him when he came to Babel.’ (90,6%)
- (8b) *Honum varð givið hetta navnið, tá hann kom til Babel*
 him.DAT became given this name.the.NOM/ACC when he came to Babel
 ‘He was given this name when he came to Babel.’ (93,8%)

As can be seen here, both examples received a very high acceptance rate and this is rather surprising for the theme-passive in (8a). The most likely reason for this is the theme *hetta navnið*, which is morphologically ambiguous between nominative and accusative, even if the theme in (8b) is definite, in violation of the information-structural constraints on recipient-passives in Faroese that we have discussed. Thus, it appears that morphology outweighs information structure in recipient-passives.

It should be noted at this juncture that almost all the examples of DAT-ACC verbs that I tested with native speakers involved *geva* ‘give’, the most common ditransitive verb in Faroese. To compensate for that, I searched for ditransitive passives of the DAT-ACC verb *handa* ‘pass, award’ in the Faroese Text Corpus.⁷ The result was that I found 77 theme-passives but only one recipient-passive. By contrast, searching for ditransitive passives with *geva* with the participial forms *givin* (fem.sg.) and *givnir* (masc.pl.) yielded 48 theme-passives and 34 recipient-passives. This is a striking difference suggesting that the use of recipient-passives in Faroese is highly sensitive to verb frequency. This need not come as a surprise, though, since recipient-passives in Modern Faroese are remnants of an older grammatical system that is gradually disappearing and this means that verbs of high frequency are more likely to preserve these passives than less frequent verbs.

Dative recipients in Faroese always preserve their case in passives, irrespective of NP-movement (Thráinsson et al. 2012:269–274 and Sigurðsson 2017:81–82). In particular, dative cannot be replaced by nominative in recipient-passives. As discussed in 3.4 below, this

⁶ This work was carried out in the Faroes in October 2019 and included 16 native speakers.

⁷ I searched for all the nominative participial forms of this verb (*handaður*, *handað*, *handaðir*, *handaðar*) but the number 77 includes only the first 200 results for the most common participial form (*handað*).

suggests that recipients are assigned dative case in a way that is unaffected by passive morphology. The preservation of dative case with recipients in situ is not only seen in theme-passives but also in recipient-passives with a clausal theme. In such examples, themes cannot undergo NP-movement and NP-movement of dative recipients is optional.⁸ This is shown by examples where the dative recipient stays in situ and follows the passive participle:⁹

- (9a) tað varð álagt okkum at ganga í grønum búnum (Google)
 it became required us.DAT to walk in green uniforms
 ‘We were required to wear green uniforms.’
- (9b) tað varð bannað honum at brúka tað (Google)
 it became prohibited him.DAT to use it
 ‘He was prohibited from using it.’
- (9c) tað verður loyvt teimum at taka lut í vaksnamannadeildini (Google)
 it becomes allowed them.DAT to take part in adult.league.the
 ‘They will be allowed to participate in the adult league.’

The alternative, which is associated with a rather formal register, is to move the dative recipient to subject position, as in (10) below:

- (10a) Okkum varð álagt at ansa væl eftir (teldni.fo)
 us.DAT became ordered to look well after
 ‘We were ordered to pay close attention.’
- (10b) Jøðum varð bannað at koma saman (teldni.fo)
 Jews.DAT became prohibited to come together
 ‘The Jews were not allowed to congregate.’
- (10c) og føroyskum skipum verður loyvt at gera keypsavtalu (teldni.fo)
 and Faroese ships.DAT becomes allowed to do contract
 ‘and Faroese ships will be allowed to sign a contract’

To summarize, the overall conclusion for DAT-ACC verbs is that theme-passives are the norm but recipient-passives are still used to some extent in formal registers.

3.2 DAT-DAT verbs

Since there are only a handful of DAT-DAT in Faroese, I have been unable to find any naturalistic examples of a passivized verb in this class that has both recipient and theme as DPs. However, I have found plenty of passives with *svara* ‘reply’ where the recipient is missing, as in (11a), and at least one recipient-passive with this verb and a clausal theme, as in (11b):

⁸ As far as I am aware, this is a novel observation.

⁹ These examples look like examples of the so called New Passive (or New Impersonal Construction) in Icelandic. However, as discussed by Eyþórsson (2008), Faroese only allows New Passives with dative arguments.

- (11a) Hesin spurningurin varð ikki svaraður tað kvøldið (teldni.fo)
 this question.the.NOM became not answered that evening.the
 ‘That question was not answered that evening.’
- (11b) Teimum varð svarað, at teir vóru vælkomnir (Google)
 them.DAT became answered that they were welcome
 ‘They got the reply that they were welcome.’

To test NP-movement in passives of DAT-DAT verbs, it is necessary to examine examples where both recipient and theme are DPs. Apparently, the only DAT-DAT verb that is possible in such passives is *svara* ‘reply’. This is shown in the following examples that I asked native speakers to evaluate:

- (12a) Hesin spurningur varð ikki svaraður henni (84,4%)
 this question.NOM became not answered her.DAT
 ‘She did not get an answer to this question.’
- (12b) Henni varð ikki svarað hesum spurningi (65,5%)
 her.DAT was not answered this question.DAT
 ‘She did not get an answer to this question.’
- (12c) Hon varð ikki svarað hesum spurningi (21,9%)
 she.NOM was not answered this question.DAT
 ‘She did not get an answer to this question.’

As the numbers show, the theme-passive in (12a) was accepted by a great majority of the speakers but the recipient-passive in (12b) with dative preserved on both arguments was accepted by roughly two-thirds of the participants. The worst option is clearly (12c), a recipient-passive where the recipient loses dative case and gets nominative instead. I did not test recipient-passives with DAT-NOM, as in (13) below, because dative themes in situ have a strong preference for case preservation in Faroese passives:¹⁰

- (13) *Henni varð ikki svaraður hesin spurningur
 her.DAT was not answered this question.NOM
 ‘She did not get an answer to this question.’

On the basis of the evidence presented above, we can conclude that theme-passives are preferred over recipient-passives with DAT-DAT verbs, just as with DAT-ACC verbs. In both cases, this can be ascribed to the fact that the direct object is deprived of case in situ whereas the dative recipient retains its dative in passives (see further in section 4).

¹⁰ The ungrammaticality of (13) has been confirmed by native speakers I have consulted although they do not get much of a difference between (13) and (12b-c).

3.3 ACC-ACC verbs

There are at least two verbs that can be used to test ditransitive passives of ACC-ACC verbs in Faroese, *læra* ‘learn’ and *spyrja* ‘ask’. Passives with *læra* where the theme is clausal and the recipient undergoes NP-movement are quite common, as in (14a). The theme is NP-moved if there is no recipient, as in (14b), but examples of this kind seem to be rare:

(14a) Næmingarnir verða lærdir at busta tenn (teldni.fo)
 students.the.NOM become taught to brush teeth
 ‘The students will be taught to brush their teeth.’

(14b) í skúlanum verða einans høvuðsmálini lærd (teldni.fo)
 in school.the become only main.languages.the.NOM taught
 ‘in school, only the main languages are taught’

In both cases, the NP-moved argument loses its accusative case and gets nominative instead and this puts the recipient of *læra* in clear contrast to the recipients of DAT-ACC and DAT-DAT verbs, which retain their dative case marking in passives. The examples in (14a-b) do not involve passivization with two DP objects but this is shown in the following examples that were constructed to test this structure:

(15a) Rói varð lærdur góða siðmenning í skúlanum (87,5%)
 Rói.NOM became taught good manners.ACC in school.the
 ‘Rói was taught good manners in (the) school.’

(15b) Støddfrøði skal verða lærd hvønn næming (12,5%)
 mathematics.NOM shall become taught every student.ACC
 ‘Mathematics should be taught to every student.’

(15c) Støddfrøði skal verða lærd hvørjum næmingi (56,3%)
 mathematics.NOM shall become taught every student.DAT
 ‘Mathematics should be taught to every student.’

The results here show that the recipient-passive in (15a) has a much higher acceptance rate than the theme-passives in (15b-c). Interestingly, there is also a clear preference for a dative recipient in theme-passives, as shown by the contrast between (15b) and (15c). Presumably, this is because the NOM-DAT pattern of (15c) is known from the much more common theme-passives of DAT-ACC verbs.

The other ACC-ACC verb to consider here is *spyrja*. It is easy to find examples of this verb where the recipient undergoes passive NP-movement and the theme is either absent or clausal, as in (16a). Examples with a DP theme are much less frequent. Importantly, a DP theme is moved to subject position in the absence of a recipient, as in (16b), showing that it is not excluded in principle from undergoing NP-movement. However, when both recipient and theme are DPs, the recipient undergoes NP-movement and the theme stays in situ, preserving the accusative case of the corresponding active, just as with *læra*. This is shown in (16c):

- (16a) Eisini vórðu næmingarnir spurdir, um teir íðka ítrótt
 also became students.the.NOM asked if they do sports
 ‘The students were also asked if they do sports.’ (teldni.fo)
- (16b) hin seinni spurningurin varð spurður av einari bulmiklari kvinnu
 the later question.the.NOM became asked by a bulky woman
 ‘The later question was asked by a bulky woman.’ (teldni.fo)
- (16c) Um eg verði spurður spurningin, sum stendur í greinini
 if I.NOM become asked question.the.ACC which stands in article.the
 ‘if I will be asked the question that is in the article’ (teldni.fo)

The behavior of ACC-ACC verbs in Faroese passives is replicated in German where verbs of this class form recipient-passives and the unmoved theme preserves accusative (see Lee-Schoenfeld & Diewald 2017 for examples). The issue is more complicated in Icelandic due to the lack of undisputed ditransitive verbs where both accusative objects are true arguments (see Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985 and Jónsson 2000 for discussion). The best option is probably to examine the verb *spyrja* ‘ask’, traditionally an ACC-GEN verb, since it is sometimes used with two accusatives, as in (17a). In the corresponding passives, the theme object stays in situ and retains its accusative case, as in (17b). Using nominative instead, as in (17c), is excluded.

- (17a) ?Eihver spurði mig eina spurningu
 someone asked me.ACC one question.ACC
 ‘Someone asked me one question.’
- (17b) ?Ég var spurður eina spurningu
 I.NOM was asked one question.ACC
 ‘I was asked one question.’
- (17c) *Ég var spurður ein spurning
 I.NOM was asked one question.NOM

Despite the similarities between Faroese and Icelandic with respect to passives of ACC-ACC verbs, the recipient-passive in (17b) is determined by locality restrictions on NP-movement rather than case (see further in section 4 below).

3.4 Case assignment in passives

In view of the data we have examined in previous sections, there are various facts about case assignment in regular ditransitive passives in Faroese that call for an explanation. The facts to be discussed here are summarized in (18) below:

- (18a) Dative recipients preserve their case in passives (cf. DAT-ACC verbs and DAT-DAT verbs).
- (18b) Accusative recipients lose their case in passives (cf. ACC-ACC verbs).
- (18c) Accusative themes preserve their case in the ACC-ACC class.
- (18d) Dative themes lose their case in passives (cf. DAT-DAT verbs).
- (18e) Accusative themes lose their case in passives in the DAT-ACC class.

The discussion here will be rather brief as I will sidestep various theoretical issues. Starting with dative recipients, a fairly straightforward way to explain their case preservation in passives is to assume that they occupy the specifier position of a designated projection for recipients where they are assigned dative case by the head of the projection, e.g. Appl (Sigurðsson 2017:81–82) or PPHAVE (Haddican & Holmberg 2019). For concreteness, I will assume that the relevant projection is ApplP, dominated by vP and taking VP as its complement. This structure is sketched in (19) above (where the dative recipient and the Appl head are boldfaced for emphasis):

- (19) [v-passP [V+v-pass [ApplP **DAT** [**Appl** [VP [<V> NOM]]]]]]

The dative recipient is unaffected by passive morphology in this configuration because passives are differentiated from active clauses through v-pass(ive), which takes ApplP as its complement. As a result, passives do not interfere with the assignment of dative to recipients. This means that case assignment is not conditioned by an Agree relation between a case assigner (probe) and a DP (goal), but may also occur in a spec-head configuration (Sigurðsson 2017).

As we have seen, regular passives of DAT-ACC verbs in Faroese require the theme to move to subject position because its accusative case is absorbed and nominative cannot be assigned by T to an object. This raises the question why NP-movement of the theme is not blocked by the intervening dative recipient. The answer is not straightforward because dative recipients do indeed block NP-movement of the theme in Icelandic ditransitive passives, as shown by DAT-DAT and DAT-GEN verbs (see examples in section 4 below). Presumably, the difference between the two languages lies in status of dative recipients. It is e.g. reasonable to assume that dative recipients are PPs in Faroese since they often stay in situ in ditransitive passives when the theme is clausal, as exemplified in (9a-c). Alternatively, dative case in Faroese may be inert in the sense of McGinnis (1998) and therefore irrelevant for NP-movement of the theme.

For accusative recipients in the ACC-ACC class, the null hypothesis is that they occupy Spec,Appl, just like dative recipients, because verbs like *læra* ‘teach’ and *spyrja* ‘ask’ seem to have the same basic semantics as ditransitive verbs in the DAT-ACC class. However, accusative recipients differ from their dative counterparts in that they get their case from a v head that takes ApplP as its complement; see the structure in (19). As a result, the accusative is absorbed in passives, just like all accusatives dependent on the properties of v, and the recipient must undergo NP-movement to get nominative case in Spec,T.

Accusative themes in the ACC-ACC class retain their case in passives and stay in situ, suggesting that the relevant case assigner is not v. This leaves us with two other possible case assigners, considering the structure in (19), Appl or V. The first option would make it possible to link accusative case assignment by Appl to the absence of dative case in Spec,Appl, on the

plausible assumption that Appl can only assign case to one argument per clause. On the other hand, there is nothing obviously wrong with the second option even though this would entail that V can only assign accusative case with a handful of verbs in the ACC-ACC class. Importantly, this type of case assignment is independent of passive even though V ends up moving to v-passive, as shown in (19).

As a general fact of Faroese, dative themes lose their case in passives and undergo NP-movement (Thráinsson et al. 2012:266–274), as we have already seen with the DAT-DAT class of ditransitive verbs. In fact, dative is typically absorbed in Faroese passives whatever theta-role the direct object may have (Sigurðsson 2017:78–81). One possible explanation is that dative case assignment to a direct object requires a case-active v even if this head assigns accusative. More specifically, a main verb selecting dative case on its complement must raise to such a v head for dative case assignment to be possible. This suggestion adds an extra layer of complexity to dative case assignment and thus might help explain the fact that dative direct objects have been losing ground in Faroese for quite some time, being replaced by accusative (Jónsson 2009b, Thráinsson et al. 2012:429–430 and Petersen 2017).

Finally, accusative themes in the DAT-ACC class get case from v in active clauses, even if it is structurally higher than the Appl assigning dative to the recipient in Spec,Appl. The accusative is absorbed in passives because v-passive does not assign case. Thus, the accusative is crucially dependent on the properties of v-passive rather than Appl or V as in the ACC-ACC class discussed above.

4 Ditransitive passives in Icelandic

Icelandic provides an interesting point of comparison to Faroese with respect to ditransitive passives. I have argued above that NP-movement in such passives is case-driven in Faroese, but as discussed in more detail below, the crucial factor in Icelandic is locality. The central facts about ditransitive passives in Icelandic have already been reviewed by Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson (1985), but a few points will be added here to highlight important points in the discussion.

Icelandic has at least five different classes of ditransitive verbs. The biggest by far is DAT-ACC, as in Faroese, but the other classes are DAT-DAT, DAT-GEN, ACC-DAT and ACC-GEN. Thus, the most striking difference compared to Faroese is the existence of two classes in Icelandic with genitive direct objects.¹¹ Examples from the five classes are shown in (20) below:

(20a) Hann býður konunni þennan samning (DAT-ACC)
 he offers woman.the.DAT this contract.ACC
 ‘He will offer the woman this contract.’

(20b) Ég skilaði Jóni bókinni (DAT-DAT)
 I returned John.DAT book.the.DAT
 ‘I returned the book to John.’

¹¹ Genitive objects (of verbs) have been replaced by accusative (or dative) in Modern Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2012:431–434).

- (20c) Allir óska henni góðs gengis (DAT-GEN)
 everybody wish her.DAT good luck.GEN
 ‘Everybody wishes her good luck.’
- (20d) Hún hafði leynt Eirík sannleikanum (ACC-DAT)
 she had hidden Eric.ACC truth.the.DAT
 ‘She had hidden the truth from Eric.’
- (20e) Lögreglan spurði hinn grunaða margra spurninga (ACC-GEN)
 police.the asked the suspected.ACC many questions.GEN
 ‘The police asked the suspect many questions.’

It is possible to form recipient-passives with all these classes, as in (21) below. In contrast to Faroese, dative is always preserved in Icelandic passives, whatever theta-role the object has and whether it moves by NP-movement, as in (21a), or stays in situ, as in (21b) and (21d).¹²

- (21a) Konunni verður boðinn þessi samningur
 woman.the.DAT will.be offered this contract.NOM
 ‘The woman will be offered this contract.’
- (21b) Jóni var skilað bókinni
 John.DAT was returned book.the.DAT
 ‘The book was returned to John.’
- (21c) Henni er óskað góðs gengis
 her.DAT is wished good luck.GEN
 ‘She is wished good luck.’
- (21d) Eiríkur hafði verið leyndur sannleikanum
 Eric.NOM had been hidden truth.the.DAT
 ‘The truth had been hidden from Eric.’
- (21e) Hinn grunaði var spurður margra spurninga
 the suspected.NOM was asked many questions.GEN
 ‘The suspect was asked many questions.’

By contrast, theme-passives are only acceptable with the DAT-ACC class, as illustrated in (22) below:

- (22a) Þessi samningur verður boðinn konunni
 this contract.NOM becomes offered woman.the.DAT
 ‘The woman will be offered this contract.’

¹² This is true for standard passives in Icelandic but the dative may be absorbed in non-standard passives (Benediktsdóttir 2023).

- (22b) ??Bókinni var skilað Jóni
book.the.DAT was returned John.DAT
'The book was returned to John.'
- (22c) *Góðs gengis er óskað henni
good luck.GEN is wished her.DAT
'She is wished good luck.'
- (22d) *Sannleikanum hafði verið leyndur Eiríkur
truth.the.DAT had been hidden Eric.NOM
'The truth had been hidden from Eric.'
- (22e) *Margra spurninga var spurt hinn grunaða
many questions.GEN was asked the suspected.ACC
'The suspect was asked many questions.'

Importantly, there is no impediment to moving the theme to Spec,T in passives if there is no intervening recipient (Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985).¹³ This is shown in (23):

- (23a) Bókinni var skilað
book.the.DAT was returned
'The book was returned.'
- (23b) Sannleikanum hafði verið leynt
truth.the.DAT had been hidden
'The truth had been hidden.'
- (23c) Margra spurninga var spurt
many questions.GEN was asked
'Many questions were asked.'

The possibility of theme-passives with DAT-ACC verbs is often explained by the fact that these verbs allow inversion of the two objects in active clauses, unlike other ditransitive verbs in Icelandic (Collins & Thráinsson 1996, Maling 2002:58–59, Thráinsson 2007:136).¹⁴ Inversion with the DAT-ACC class is exemplified in (24):

- (24a) Ég gaf Hjálmari það
I gave Hjalmar.DAT it.ACC
'I gave it to Hjalmar.'
- (24b) Ég gaf það Hjálmari
I gave it.ACC Hjalmar.DAT
'I gave it to Hjalmar.'

¹³ Admittedly, it sounds rather strange to say *Góðs gengis er óskað* 'Good luck is wished' with NP-movement of the theme in the absence of a recipient, but it is still better than (22c).

¹⁴ Note, however, that Harðarson (2023) argues that DAT-DAT are not very different from DAT-ACC verbs with respect to inversion of the two objects in active clauses..

I have chosen an example of inversion where the theme is an unstressed pronoun and the recipient is a full DP because examples of this kind sound the most natural to me. As discussed by Jónsson (2020), the theme is phonologically lighter than the recipient in approximately 90% of all cases of inversion in the Risamálheild Corpus. There are also restrictions on inversion relating to information structure (Jónsson 2020) but they will not concern us here.¹⁵

In view of examples like (24b), it can be argued that theme-passives like (22a) are derived from an order where the theme precedes the recipient (and is structurally higher), in which case the recipient cannot block NP-movement of the theme. By contrast, theme-passives with verbs outside the DAT-ACC class will inevitably violate locality restrictions on NP-movement because the recipient is structurally closer than the theme to the subject position.

5 Conclusions

I have argued in this paper that NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Faroese is determined by case and this becomes apparent when the three classes of ditransitive verbs in Faroese (DAT-ACC, DAT-DAT and ACC-ACC) are examined. Thus, theme-passives are the regular passives when the theme loses its case due to passive morphology (with DAT-ACC and DAT-DAT verbs) but recipient-passives are used when the recipient has its case absorbed (with ACC-ACC verbs). In contrast to Faroese, NP-movement in ditransitive passives in Icelandic is determined by locality. This means that the object that is structurally closer to the subject position will undergo NP-movement. This is the recipient object unless the two objects are inverted, which is only possible with DAT-ACC verbs.

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¹⁵ We will also ignore the issue whether inversion is base-generated or derived by leftward movement of the theme; see Jónsson (2022) for arguments for the latter analysis.

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